

UK Suspends 'Wardrop Dialogue' Ministerial Talks Over Georgian Government's Actions

By Liza Mchedlidze

The British Ambassador to Georgia, Gareth Ward, has voiced serious concerns regarding the Georgian ruling party's "democratic backsliding and anti-Western rhetoric." In an interview with Interpressnews, Ward announced the UK's decision to freeze the bilateral ministerial talks, known as the Wardrop Dialogue, for the first time in its ten-year history. Additionally, plans for Defense Staff talks have been suspended, and a new cybersecurity program has been put on hold.

Ambassador Ward, who was optimistic about Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations before his appointment in July, stated that he has had to reassess his views due to the Georgian government's recent actions. "In my first months in Tbilisi, I have focused on making clear our concerns about democratic backsliding and anti-Western rhetoric," he explained. He expressed hope for a change in the government's approach that would allow for a return to a more positive outlook.

UK-Georgian relations, according to Ward, have deteriorated, mirroring Georgia's strained ties with other Western partners. The ambassador expressed his concerns over the



ruling party's decision to pass the controversial Foreign Agents Law despite widespread opposition. He also voiced shock at the Georgian Dream party's manifesto advocating a ban on opposition parties, as well as disappointment over conspiracy theories suggesting that Western partners are undermining Geor-

gia. "Because of these issues, we have decided to freeze the Wardrop Dialogue, halt our planned Defense Staff talks, and pause new cybersecurity initiatives," he emphasized. Ward stressed the importance of rebuilding trust and re-establishing a close partnership following

the upcoming elections.

On Georgia's aspirations to join NATO, Ward reiterated the UK's support but pointed out that NATO membership requires a commitment to democratic principles. "NATO is a political as well as military alliance," he noted, underscoring that Georgia must demonstrate

its dedication to an independent judiciary, free media, and human rights. He recalled concerns expressed by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg regarding the Foreign Influence Law earlier this year, stating, "A trajectory towards NATO is not compatible with measures which undermine democracy and human rights."

As the country approaches its parliamentary elections, Ward emphasized the importance of free and fair electoral processes. "The Georgian people should have the right to choose their government in free, fair, and competitive elections," he said. The UK is sending 50 observers to support the OSCE/ODIHR election monitoring mission and several local NGOs to ensure that the elections are transparent.

Lastly, the ambassador addressed recent legislative initiatives by the Georgian Dream party, reiterating his concerns about the Foreign Agents Law, which he believes undermines NGOs and stifles free speech. He also criticized the proposed Anti-LGBTQ+ propaganda law as discriminatory and contrary to Georgia's reputation as a tolerant society. "These laws go against our common European values," Ward concluded.

Human Rights Council Adopts Resolution on Human Rights Violations in Russian-Occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia

By Liza Mchedlidze

At the Fifty-Seventh Session of the Human Rights Council, held from September 9 to October 11, 2024, a draft resolution addressing the cooperation with Georgia was introduced under Agenda Item 10. The resolution, supported by numerous nations, calls attention to the ongoing human rights violations in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which remain under Russian control following the 2008 war. The resolution reaffirms Georgia's sovereignty, condemns Russia's illegal actions in these territories, and highlights the urgent need for international monitoring and humanitarian assistance to protect the rights of the affected Georgian population.

The draft resolution emphasizes the principles of the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and various international human rights instruments, including the European Convention on Human Rights. It underscores a number of significant judgments from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which have established the Russian Federation's responsibility for widespread human rights violations in Georgia, particularly

following the Russo-Georgian war of August 2008.

The resolution condemns the illegal military presence of the Russian Federation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as attempts to legitimize this occupation through the organization of unlawful elections, and the signing of so-called treaties aimed at integrating these regions further into Russian control. It also highlights the seizure of Georgian lands, such as the transfer of the Sokhumi Airport and the Bichvinta Resort, both in Abkhazia, to the Russian Federation.

Further, the resolution condemns the continuous process of borderization, where barbed wire fences and other artificial barriers along the administrative boundary lines are extended. This practice has severely impacted the socioeconomic conditions of the local Georgian population by restricting freedom of movement, access to property, and the ability to farm, worship, or bury their dead. The human cost has been devastating, with several documented medical evacuations being delayed or denied, resulting in preventable deaths.

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.7274; Euro - 2.9742; GBP - 3.5688; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.8052; Swiss Franc - 3.1655

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Ethnic discrimination, particularly against Georgians, remains rampant in these regions. The resolution draws attention to torture, inhuman treatment, arbitrary detentions, kidnappings, and systematic obstruction of humanitarian ac-

cess. Furthermore, the ongoing destruction of Georgian cultural heritage sites in Abkhazia and South Ossetia is seen as part of an attempt to erase Georgian identity in these regions.

The resolution underscores the urgent need for access to the occupied regions by international human rights monitors and

United Nations personnel. Despite ongoing efforts by the international community, access has been repeatedly denied, preventing adequate monitoring of the human rights situation on the ground. The draft resolution urges the Russian Federation to cease its obstruction of humanitarian and human rights opera-

tions.

Recognizing the role of Geneva International Discussions and Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) in Gali and Ergneti as essential tools for conflict resolution, the resolution stresses the need for their immediate and unconditional resumption to facilitate dialogue on security and humanitarian issues.

The resolution echoes prior calls for accountability and justice for victims of war crimes, particularly those highlighted by the International Criminal Court's 2022 investigation into the Russo-Georgian war, which led to arrest warrants for individuals involved in war crimes

against ethnic Georgians. It highlights continued impunity, with no meaningful efforts made by Russian or local authorities to hold perpetrators accountable for the killings of Georgians, such as the deaths of Tamaz Ginturi and Temur Karbaia, killed by Russian-backed forces.

The resolution recognizes the critical role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, who has continuously provided technical assistance through its Tbilisi office, issuing regular reports on the deteriorating situation in Georgia. The draft resolution calls for further reports and updates on the implementation of the provisions outlined.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Kremlin Accuses West of Interfering in Georgian Elections, Denies Russian Involvement



In a recent statement, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov accused Western countries of attempting to exert influence over the ongoing Georgian election campaign while emphasizing

ing that Russia is maintaining a policy of non-interference in Georgia's internal affairs.

During a press briefing, Peskov criticized the West's alleged "blatant attempts" to pressure Georgia's current leadership, describing it as "direct, undisguised influence" on the

"As for the elections, it is none of our business. We see blatant attempts by Western countries to put pressure on the current Georgian authorities and to exert direct, undisguised influence on the course of the election campaign," Peskov stated. "We do not and will not interfere in Georgia's internal affairs in any way."

The comments were published by Russian state-controlled media outlet TASS, although the report made no mention of any detailed instances of Western interference cited by Peskov.

Peskov also addressed the current state of relations between Georgia and Russia, acknowledging that there are "complications" but underscoring that the development of humanitarian and people-to-people ties remains positive.

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze Responds to German Ambassador Peter Fischer

Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Kobakhidze, responded to German Ambassador Peter

Fischer on October 15. Speaking from Zugdidi, Kobakhidze addressed Fischer's recent remarks, asserting that both Georgian and foreign supporters of the "collective national movement" would be defeated in the elections

completely unacceptable for the collective national movement to return to power and any receive support for this."

Kobakhidze's comments follow the German ambassador's social media post. On October 14,



scheduled for October 26.

"I want to tell him [Fischer] that on October 26, Kakha Kaladze will win another Champions League with the whole team, and, of course, all those people who support the collective national movement, whether Georgian or foreign, will be defeated," Kobakhidze said. "It is

Fischer wrote on social network X, "Someone scored an own goal today." It was interpreted as a response to Kaladze's controversial comment, where the mayor referred to Germany's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Anna Lührmann, as "Kubilius in a dress," in reference to Lithuanian MEP Andrius Kubilius.

Tower rehabilitation project from Georgia wins Grand Prix of European Heritage Award

Weather

Wednesday, October 16

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 22°C

Night Cloudy
Low: 13°C

Thursday, October 17

Day Rain
High: 16°C

Night Rain
Low: 10°C

On 7 October, the European Heritage Awards/Europa Nostra



Awards announced the laureates of the five Grand Prix and the

Public Choice Award selected from this year's 26 winners. These projects were revealed at the European Heritage Summit in Bucharest.

The 'Citizens' Rehabilitation of the Tsiskarauli Tower, Akhieli, Georgia', became one of the Grand Prix winners of the prestigious European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award 2024. This award, Europe's most prestigious heritage prize, is co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.

The Georgian project won the

prize in the category of "Citizens' Involvement and Awareness Raising" for the works to save Tsiskarauli Tower in Khevsureti, which was damaged by a Russian missile.

Over three years, 46 Georgian and international citizens worked alongside technical experts and traditional craftspeople to restore the Tsiskarauli Tower. The project raised awareness of the value of Georgian heritage within Europe's heritage.

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