

Joint Statement of the U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission Working Group on Democracy and Governance (November 12)

The U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission's (SPC) Democracy and Governance Working Group met on November 12 in Washington to review progress on goals set at the Working Group's previous meeting in 2014 in Tbilisi. The meeting built on a plenary session of the SPC hosted in Washington by Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Assistant Secretary Victoria Nuland during the visit of Vice Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Georgia Giorgi Kvirikashvili. Both sides agreed on the importance of a fair, level, and competitive playing field for political parties and candidates in the lead-up to the October 2016 parliamentary elections, as well as an open, pluralistic, and independent space for political, media, and civil society voices.

The United States appreciated developments with regard to Rustavi 2 that will allow the appeals processes to move forward and preserve media pluralism in Georgia. Both sides affirmed the importance of a strong and independent judiciary. The United States commended Georgia's implemented and ongoing reforms of the judiciary, Prosecutor General's Office, and the Ministry of Interior, and encouraged that these efforts continue, and go deeper and broader both in law and in practice. The United States praised Georgia for its plans to establish a pre-trial services office, and looked forward to its expeditious implementation. Both sides noted Georgia's achievements in reforming law enforcement and security services, administrative and pre-trial detention, and the corrections system. Both sides agreed that implementation of these and additional reforms will remain important to Georgia's democratic development, further strengthen Georgia's democracy, and contribute to Georgia's achievement of its European and Euro-Atlantic integration goals. The United States pledged its continued support and assistance in achieving these goals.

Both sides recognized the importance of civil society. The United States commended Georgia's efforts to include civil society in decision making bodies, and both sides agreed on the importance of continued progress in fostering an environment conducive to civil society. The United States welcomed Georgia's recent legislation improving the independence of the civil service. The Working Group also recognized Georgia's efforts to build an inclusive society that respects the rights of all, including members of minority populations, its regional leadership in the empowerment of women and promotion of women in public life, and its efforts to combat human trafficking.

The Georgian delegation was led by co-chairs First Deputy Foreign Minister Mikheil Janelidze and First Deputy Minister of Justice Alexander Baramidze, and included a broad interagency delegation.

The U.S. delegation was led by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Bridget Brink, USAID Deputy Assistant Administrator for Europe and Eurasia Jonathan Katz, and Department of Justice Regional Director for Eurasia Catherine Newcombe. The delegation included broad U.S. government representation.