

# Friendship and partnership

By H.E. SOPHIE KATSARAVA MBE

AMABASSADOR OF GEORGIA TO THE COURT OF ST JAMES'S



**SOPHIE KATSARAVA** has been the Ambassador of Georgia to the Court of St James's since 2020. Prior to this she was a Georgian Dream member of the Parliament of Georgia, from 2016 to 2019, and from 2005 to 2016 she worked at the British Embassy in Tbilisi, where her roles included Project Manager, Head of Press and Public Relations, and Political Secretary. In 2016 she was appointed as Honorary Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE), in recognition of her outstanding contribution to strengthening relations between Georgia and the United Kingdom in the education sector. She holds a degree in English Language and Literature from Tbilisi's Ilia Chavchavadze State University of Language and Culture.

The 30th Anniversary of the Restoration of Georgia's Independence is not only an occasion marking the hard-fought freedom of the Georgian people but it is also a reminder of the enduring support from the international community that culminated in the birth of the Democratic Republic of Georgia on May 26, 1918. The United Kingdom has always been a steadfast friend to Georgia - relations between the two countries have been remarkable on every level. The short period of Georgia's independence (1918-1921), when Sir Oliver Wardrop was appointed as the first British Chief Commissioner to the Caucasus, launched the extraordinary connections between British and Georgian diplomats, politicians, journalists writers, poets, and scholars.

The Wardrop Collection of Georgian Books and Manuscripts housed at the Bodleian Libraries in Oxford narrate fascinating stories of the diplomatic, political and cultural dynamics as well as infinite friendships. Chronicling UK assistance at the 1907 Hague International Conference where they supported the development of a petition calling for the autonomy and rights for the Georgian people and the 4000 British women who addressed the Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey asking him to uphold Britain's support for Georgians struggle for independence – as a response to a petition of 150 Georgian women raising their voices against Russian oppression featured in the June 1906 issues of Daily Chronicle, The Daily News, The Tribune, and The Times. The great relationship between the two countries, fostered so long ago has endured in the 30 years since Georgia finally regained its independence from Russia in 1991.

In 2008 when Russia once again invaded Georgian territory, this small Black Sea country attracted a world-wide international attention. What gets less attention, is how in the thirty years since regaining Independence, despite its challenging geographical location and on-going aggression from Russia, Georgia has succeeded in building a modern economy, a consolidated democracy, and an important player on the international stage (as one of the largest contributors to NATO and UN peacekeeping operations). Modern Georgia is an advocate for international law, democratic principles and human

rights with a firm attachment with the West.

Today, we highly value the United Kingdom's unwavering support for Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as its strong voice on the growing fundamental human rights violations Russia is committing against the Georgian people living in our Russian occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali.

Georgia is a proud ally of the United Kingdom as a like-minded partner in the face of common malign influences. In January 2021 the Georgia-UK Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Agreement came into force engineering a post-Brexit collaboration framework. Georgia became one of the first countries to sign a comprehensive agreement of this kind with the United Kingdom that demonstrates continued dialogue and engagement between two partner states. Amidst an ever-changing and challenging international setting, the strategic partnership between Georgia and the United Kingdom is more pertinent than ever before.

This landmark Agreement gives impetus to drive forward and enhance our existing patterns of collaboration in: defence and security, conflict resolution, Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration, free trade, energy, tourism, environment, education, science and culture. As Ambassador of Georgia to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, I am humbled to work towards reinforcing longstanding bonds, enhancing the scope for greater cooperation and nurturing people-to-people contact.

In 2022 we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Georgia and the UK. I am happy to continue to work with my counterpart, British Ambassador to Georgia, Mark Clayton, on strengthening and promoting our bilateral ties in 2022 and beyond. *"Who seeks not a friend is his own foe"* reads Marjory Wardrop's translation of The Knight in the Panther's Skin – a medieval Georgian epic poem by Shota Rustaveli that stands as a reference for the deep rooted ethos of the Georgian people - friendship, love, equality and the struggle for freedom. We cherish our friendship and partnership with the United Kingdom that has translated into sharing the common values that underpin democratic societies and taking joint efforts in the international arena over the years. I look forward to the next thirty years of friendship and many more to come.

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