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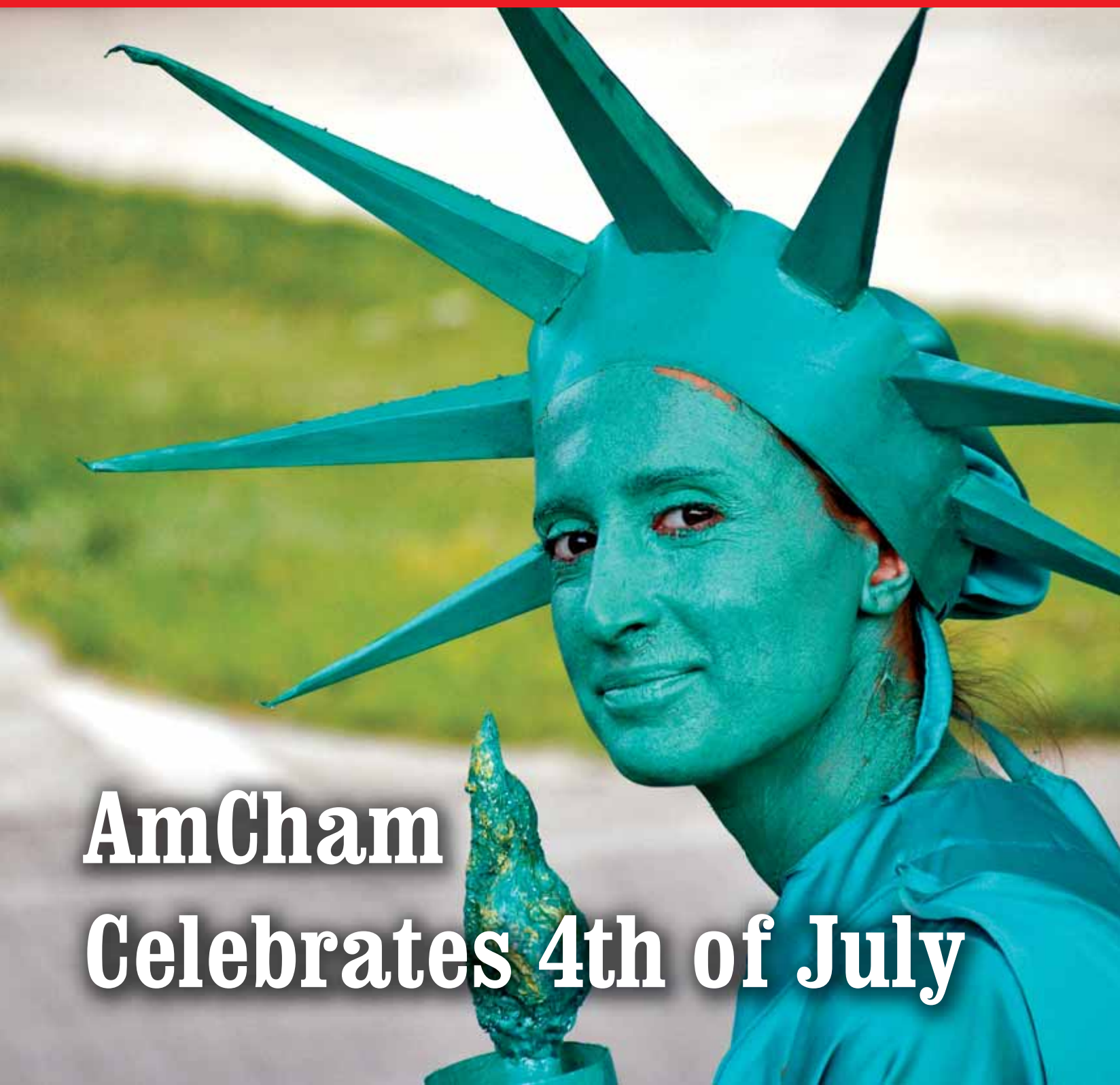

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Azerbaijan Economy Weathers Falling Oil Prices, Weakened Currency

AZERBAIJAN IS ONE OF GEORGIA'S BIGGEST EXPORT MARKETS AND A MAJOR SOURCE OF FDI. IN FEBRUARY THE GOVERNMENT ALLOWED THE MANAT TO LOSE NEARLY 34 PERCENT OF ITS VALUE. *INVESTOR.GE* SPOKE WITH THE ECONOMIST INTELLIGENCE UNIT'S ALEX NICE ABOUT THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY SIX MONTHS LATER.

Consumer spending and public spending on the first European Games in Baku buoyed the Azerbaijani economy, which grew slightly over five percent in the first quarter of the year despite the manat devaluation, according to a report published by Galt & Taggart's research team.

But the drop in international oil prices, as well as the manat devaluation, will impact the Azerbaijan economy, noted Alex Nice, an economist with the Economist Intelligence Unit.

"The devaluation of the manat, like the fall of currencies over the region, will push up inflation," he said, noting that this will cut into the country's growth rate.

In its Regional Economic Outlook Update for the Caucasus and Central Asia report, the IMF predicted just 0.6 percent growth for the Azerbaijani economy in 2015, compared to 2.8 percent in 2014.

The Galt & Taggart report forecasted that the growth in the first quarter was "mainly the result of one-off factors."

The report noted, however, that "these factors will probably subside" in later this year.

A weaker Azerbaijani economy could impat Georgia: Azerbaijan is a major market for Georgian exports: in 2014, Georgia exported $544 million worth of goods to the country, mostly cars, iron re-bar, live cattle, medicine, construction materials and beverages.

Azerbaijan is also a large investor in Georgia, with FDI reaching $302 million in 2014, as well as significan publish investment like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway.

FALLING OIL REVENUE

The low international oil prices are also influencing the Azerbaijani economy.

Galt & Taggart reported in December 2014 that oil production in Azerbaijan has decreased from 50.8 million tons in 2010 to 43.5 million tons.

From 2011 to 2013, high oil prices made up the difference. The new, lower international oil price has cut into the country's revenues, however. The government forecast oil at $90 to the barrel for the 2015 budget, the report noted.

"Fiscal breakeven prices have risen in CCA [Caucasus and Central Asia] oil exporters in recent years, and countries such as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan cannot cover government spending at oil prices below $58, as is currently projected for 2015," the IMF stated in the regional economic outlook report.

Nice agreed that the lower oil prices

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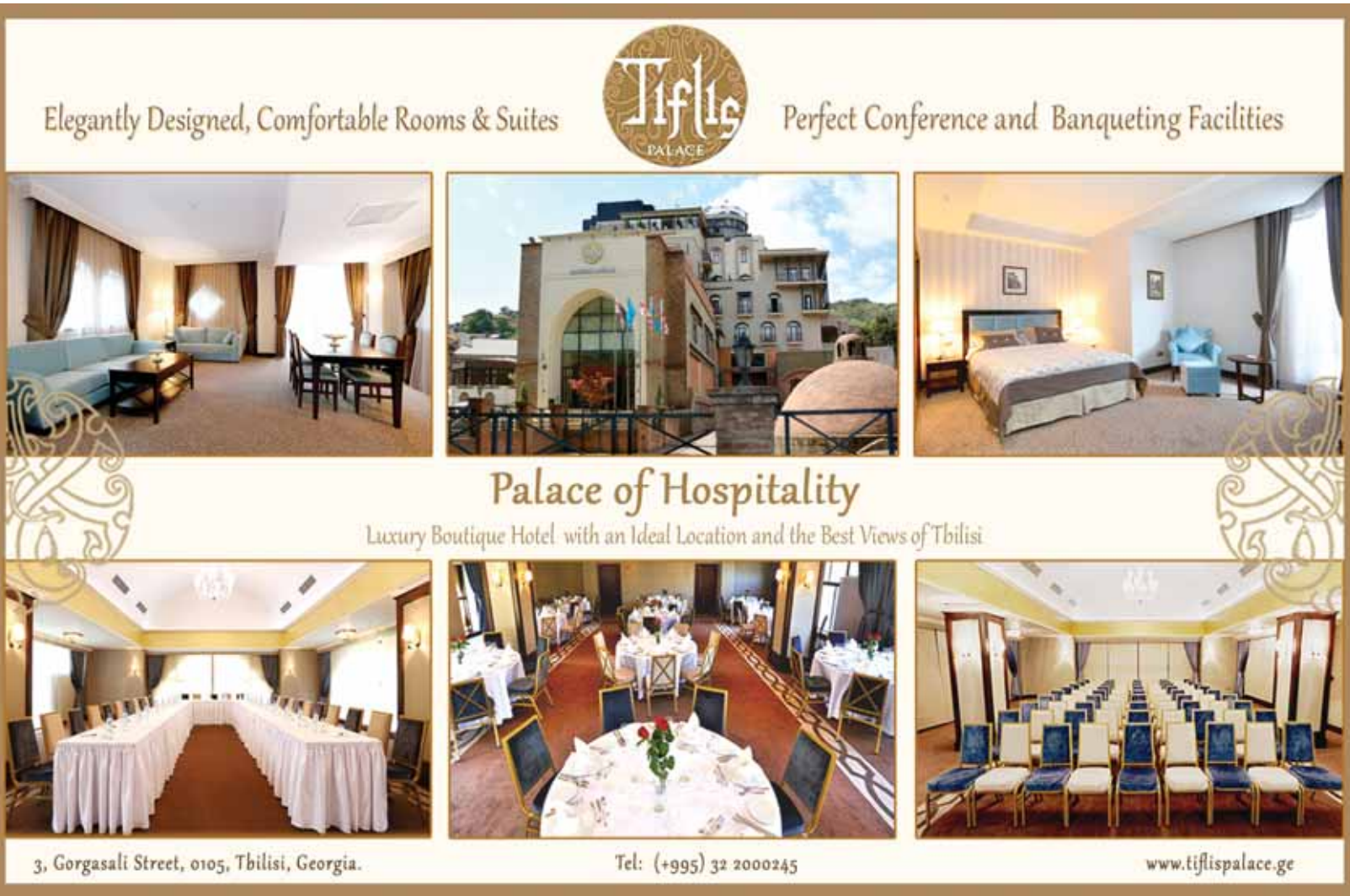

will likely cause the government to cut public spending.

"The fall in oil prices in the second half of the year is currently going to hit public revenues hard. Oil revenue is about 65% of government revenue. As a result, the fiscal deficit will widen this year," he said.

Nice said that there is an expectation that the Shah Deniz II project will increase gas exports once it goes online, which is expected to occur in late 2018.

But the increase in gas exports will not make up for the country's falling oil sales, he said.

DIVERSIFYING ECONOMY

Nice noted, however, that the Azerbaijan "government is aware that it needs to diversify." In a report published in March 2014, Galt & Taggart's research team noted that diversification is "high on the agenda" for the government. "Non-oil sectors have been experiencing a boom in recent years, growing 9% on average annually from 2010 to 2012," the report said. Non-oil exports doubled from 2006 to 2012, and grew an additional 13 percent in 2013, according to the report.

After the Flood, Tbilisi Rebuilds

THE TBILISI FLOOD CREATED WAVES OF DESTRUCTION, KILLING 22 PEOPLE AND DECIMATING THE ZOO AND THE HIGHWAY, AS WELL AS SCORES OF HOMES AND BUSINESSES. AS THE CITY REBUILDS, A NEW DEBATE OVER THE FATE OF VERA RAVINE HAS BEGUN.

LIKA JORJOLIANI

RECONSTRUCTION, REHABILITATION

Tbilisi is focused on rebuilding after the flood, Deputy Mayor Irakli Lekvinadze told *Investor.ge*.

Major challenges facing the city include compensating families who lost homes or need temporary housing while their homes are being repaired; rebuilding the highway that ran through the central districts of Vake and Saburtalo; restoring roads linking Tbilisi and neighboring villages; and relocating the zoo.

There were also several businesses harmed by the flood, including a private dog shelter.

The most pressing is, of course, housing. The latest statistics show 160 families suffered property losses due tothe flood.

In July, the city government created a two-part compensation package for citizens who lost housing need to rebuild homes following the flood, based both on the number of people who were living in the lost houses and the market value of the properties. People applying for assistance can opt for either model. Lekvinadze said that 40 families have already lodged a claim, and, based on the government's assessment, they collectively suffered damages worth 10 million lari ($4.5 million).

Total damages from the flood, including city infrastructure, are reported to be over 100 million lari ($45 million).

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THE DEBATED VALLEY

At the heart of the recovery plans is the debate about the future of the Vera River valley.

Many urban planners and environmentalists have come out against allowing development to return to the valley in the aftermath of the flood.

The director of the NGO "City Institute of Georgia," Mamuka Salukvadze,told *Investor.ge* that the city plan never included building the Vake-Saburtalo highway in the valley; it was considered a recreational zone until 2009.

The construction of the highway cost 100 million lari when it was built; it will cost half that to "rehabilitate" the area and turn it into a modern city park.

Salukvadze was also against any commercial development in the valley, a process that had started prior to the flood. But the head of the Business Chamber of Georgia, Emzar Jgerenaia, has proposedbuilding a "Georgian Manhattan" in the valley.

"The essence of the project is to create a small, beautiful Manhattan in Tbilisi with its own recreational zone, dam, etc. The "Manhattan" project includes the restoration of the recreational zone, creating a park with sport grounds, hotels, business centers and buildings," he told *Investor.ge*.

The project is estimated to cost $1.4 million and, according to Jgerenaia, there is already initial interest from investors.

"Businesspeople have expressed serious readiness to fund great amounts in this project. We must change the vision. The Vera Valley mustn't represent a place of disaster but a place of the future," he said.

The most pressing is, of course, housing. The latest statistics show 160 families suffered property loss due tothe flood.

Tbilisi Mayor Davit Narmania has not ruled out either option for the valley, and was quoted in an article published in the July issue of *Liberali* magazine as saying that if the Manhattan project provided maximum security, it would be possible to develop a business center there.

Regardless of the ultimate future of the valley, the Vake-Saburtalo highway will definitely be rebuilt, the mayor has repeatedly said, promising it will be ready – with a safer, flood-ready design – by this autumn.

The city has pledged to follow through with long-shelved plans to build a new zoo on a 40 hectare plot near the Tbilisi Sea.

PLANS FOR A NEWZOO

The future of the zoo has already been determined as well: the city has pledged to follow through with long-shelved plans to build a new zoo on a 40 hectare plot near the Tbilisi Sea.

Narmania told journalists that preliminary work on the zoo will begin in the autumn and construction will be underway by the spring of 2016.

Zoo Director Zurab Gurielidze told *Investor.ge* the priority is building a modern zoo that is affordable for everyone.

He noted that they are studying the experiences of several countries.

"Israeli and American projects are comparatively cheap…but they aren't as great as English and German projects," he said.

What is left of the existing zoo, about half of the original 600-animal population, will be open for visitors in September, according to the zoo administration.

The total cost for the new zoo is currently unknown.

FUNDS MOBILIZED

Tbilisi Deputy Mayor Lekvinadze said that, in total, the government has received 24 million lari for flood relief, half of which has come from the country's budget. There have been 10 million lari in donations from the public and business community.

In addition, there have been large donations from abroad and from charity organizations at home, including from former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili.

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I want to thank U.S. Ambassador Richard Norland for his strong support of AmCham and of American business interests in George during his tenure here. Since his arrival in 2012, he has been an unwavering advocate for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic ambitions and for the democratic reforms that are vital for the country's success. We wish Ambassador Norland and his wife, Mary Hartnett, the very best. Respectfully yours,

Sarah Williamson

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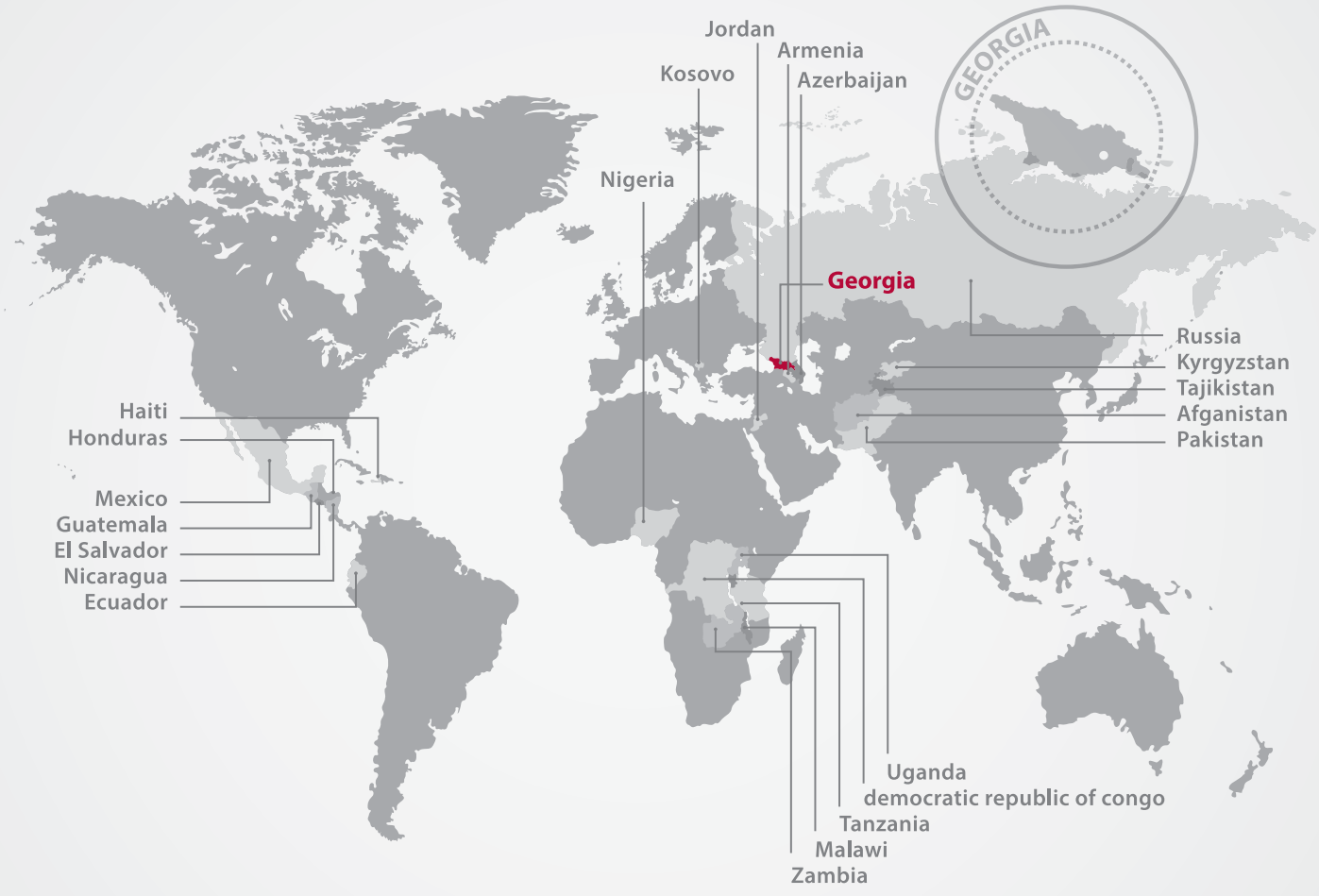

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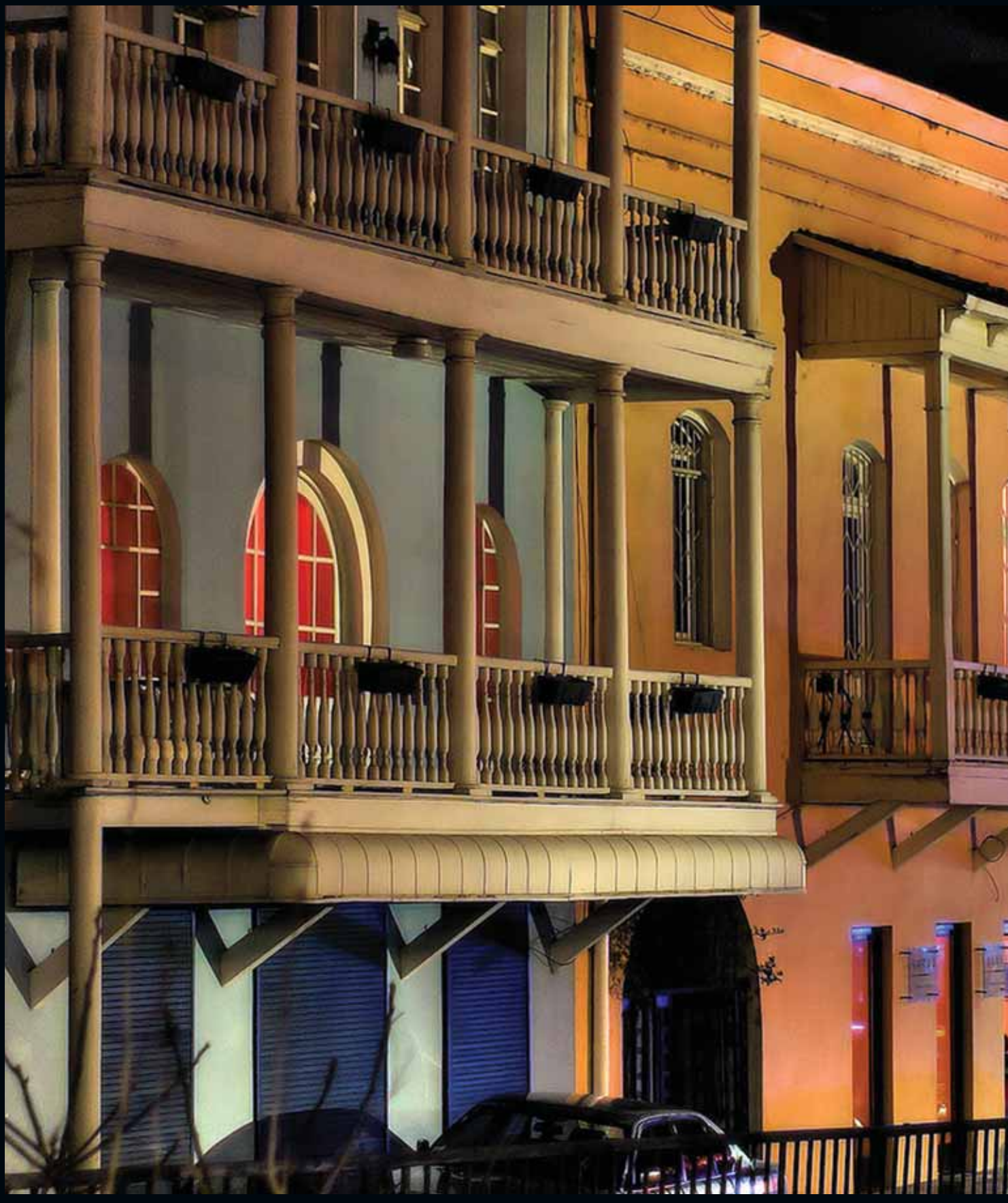

SUMMERING IN GEORGIA:

Taxi Apps, A New Campaign for Locals, and Unexplored Tbilisi

NEED A RIDE? Use Your Smartphone: Taxify Georgia

TBILISI IS AWASH IN TAXIS – FROM PRIVATELY OWNED FLEET CARS TO UNLICENSED CABS. BUT A NEW START-UP IS TAPPING INTO GEORGIA'S LOVE OF ALL THINGS SMARTPHONE TO MAKE ORDERING A CAB JUST A CLICK AWAY.

HEATHER YUNDT

As smartphones grow in popularity around the world, a Tbilisi-based startup is revolutionizing how the city's residents catch taxis.

Instead of waving down a taxi on the street or calling a taxi company, Taxify Georgia's free smartphone app lets customers book a taxi based on its proximity to them, the type of car and the driver's customer rating. The fares are based on distance and trip duration as calculated by the meter built into the driver's version of the app — not negotiation.

The Tbilisi-based Infinite Management Consulting Group (Infinite MCG) partnered with Taxify, an Estonian tech company, to operate the Taxify app in Georgia. Beso Papiashvili, Taxify Georgia's COO, says Taxify has transported thousands of customers in Tbilisi since it launched a year ago.

Papiashvili says drivers are vetted for reliability and the condition of their car and trained before working for Taxify Georgia. User ratings allow the company to ensure good service. More than 300 drivers are currently working for the company.

It's a significant change from the current system. Since there are no laws regulating taxis in Georgia, anybody can put a taxi sign on their car and start picking

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up customers. While that means no shortage of taxis, customers have few means of evaluating the trustworthiness of the driver before hopping in.

Prices are also up for negotiation — a difficult task for expats in particular.

Amber Morison, an American chiropractor living and working in Tbilisi, said it's not uncommon for taxi drivers to charge her higher prices. She recently paid 7 GEL to go from the Tbilisi Concert Hall to her home in Saburtalo, a few GEL more than the usual fare.

"I know better and should say 'blah blah street, X GEL' when I hail a cab," she said. "But at 12 am, I wasn't caring so much to do that."

Not only are Taxify's prices more consistent, they are often cheaper — sometimes shockingly so.

"On my first ride from the airport to Vazha-Pshavela station, it only cost 8 lari!" Tyler Young, an American teaching English in Georgia, told *Investor.ge*. "The taxi driver was shocked and I was extremely happy."

Melissa Stonehill, an American living in Tbilisi, says the Taxify app also allows her to avoid waiting outside in bad weather and makes it easier for her to get around the city given her limited Georgian-language skills.

Taxify is now working on expanding its services. Though users usually pay the drivers in cash, corporate clients can charge rides directly to a company account, which can be viewed online. Taxify has also recently brought in an online button that hotels can use to quickly call taxis for their visitors.

"There are more important things to do than talk to a dispatcher," Papiashvili said.

There are, however, challenges to implementing an app-based business in Georgia.

Not only must drivers have a smartphone, Taxify also requires drivers to have a bank account so they can be paid for trips involving corporate clients, a condition that prevents many drivers from joining their team.

Taxi apps are sprouting up all over the globe, following the success of the American startup Uber. However, unlike Uber, which has been banned in cities around the world, Taxify also works with taxi companies, who, for a fee, can use the Taxify software to increase their clientele. Papiashvili stresses that Taxify is open to everyone.

"If you are an individual driver, you are welcome. If you are a taxi company that would like to optimize your company, you are also welcome."

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Government Campaigns for Georgians to Travel at Home

THE GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT IS WORKING HARD TO INSPIRE A NEW TRADITION IN GEORGIA: TRAVELING AT HOME. HISTORICALLY, GEORGIANS HAVE TRAVELED TO THE SEA IN THE SUMMER AND THE MOUNTAINS IN THE WINTER – MISSING OUT ON ALL THE OTHER NATURAL WONDERS AND GREAT PLACES THAT FOREIGN TOURISTS SEE DURING THEIR TRIPS TO THE COUNTRY.

MAIA EDILASHVILI

The ancient stone towers and dramatic landscapes of Georgia's remote mountain regions have long drawn tourists from all over the world – except Georgians.

For years, Georgians travelled a well-worn route – Black Sea resorts in the summer and ski resorts in the winter – ignoring the villages and mountain vistas that have made Georgia a popular destination for foreign tourists.

"GET TO KNOW GEORGIA"

To break that cycle, the state tourism body, the Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNTA), has tapped local celebrities and public figures to record their adventures around the country as part of a new campaign, "Get to Know Georgia" (გაიცანი საქართველო).

There are also new media tours for local journalists to Georgia's many national parks, canyons and other tourist destinations in the country.

"It has been less than two months since we started this promo project, and we have already seen a better outcome than we had expected," Giorgi Chogovadze, head of GNTA, told *Investor.ge* in an interview. He noted that celebrities are lining up to participate, Tand V channels are airing GNTA's videos for free and voluntarily broadcasting reports on Georgia's tourism destinations.

The result? Selfies taken in front of Okatse and Gachedili Canyons in western Georgia have overwhelmed news feeds of Georgian users of Facebook recently.

GNTA noted that Georgians are already taking an increased interest in locations off the beaten beach/skipath: areas in western Samegrelo, such as Gvalashara Gorge and Toba of Kalashi, are emerging as fresh new destinations.

"We arranged a festival at Tobavarchkhili Lake (only accessible by foot or horse after a several-day trip) and 100 volunteers joined," Chogovadze said.

He added that local tour agencies are also picking up on the new trend, and helping to organize trips to local destinations.

The drive to encourage more Georgians to travel at home is part of GNTA's new strategy to increase both domestic and international tourism in Georgia.

A NEW GENERATION OF TRAVELERS

Tour agencies are already noticing a change.

Niko Tsivilashvili founded "Walk around Georgia" (მოიარე საქართველო) tourism agency in June last

year. He notes that over the past 12 months, the number of travelers using the agency has doubled.

"I had been hiking every weekend and it was not always easy to find co-hikers. And on many occasions I ended up alone. Then I started this agency," Tsivilashvili said, and added that now he sees it as a business, not just a hobby. In his recent tour to Shatili, Khevsureti, 85 people joined.

There are still some hiccups: Levan Lomsianidze, a founder of "My Georgia is Here" (ჩემი საქართველო აქ არის), noted that local tourism – especially hiking and camping – is limited since the country lacks well-marked trails and routes in many areas.

"Currently, protected territories are only exceptions in which have marked routes. So for the rest of the areas, we – the trip organizers – have to go through the planned routes using maps and GPS alone before bringing our clients there," he said.

Chogovadze told *Investor.ge* that the agency is working on create more marked trails and tourist routes throughout the country.

"In order to develop hiking routes throughout Georgia, research and fieldwork are underway in five Georgian regions – Samtskhe-Javakheti, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Samegrelo, Racha-Lechkhumi, Upper and Lower Svaneti– and we plan to do the same in the remaining regions as well next year. As a result, within two or three years, Georgia will have a unified system of hiking routes, which is pretty big and demanding job," Chogovadze explained.

The routes will target not only professional hikers. Close to tourist landmarks, GNTA will mark short walking paths and longer, one-day routes.

Last year, GNTA completed marking five routes in Kakheti, including those for hiking, jeep touring, and cycling, in Dedoplistskaro municipality. Works are now close to being completed in Bakuriani and Gudauri for creating cycling routes.

Ekaterine Shakulashvili, an economist, is an early convert. "When I see all these beautiful places, it makes me proud that I was born here," she said.

Every month she travels to new places in Georgia, using tour companies.

After returning from the $83/190 lari trip to Tusheti – "the most unforgettable one" – she said it seems like more Georgians are taking advantage of domestic travel.

"My friends are traveling more frequently, and what I love most of all is that I see that whole families are participating," she told *Investor.ge*.

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Abanotubani/Leghvtakhevi, a district in the Old City beyond the Sulphur baths.

Things to Do if You Are Stuck in Tbilisi This Summer

GEORGIA IS A GREAT COUNTRY TO TRAVEL IN – SMALL, VIBRANT AND PACKED FULL OF FASCINATING PLACES TO SEE. BUT WHAT IF YOU ARE STUCK IN THE CAPITAL ALL SUMMER? INVESTOR.GE HAS SOUGHT ADVICE FROM EXPATS, LOCALS AND TOURISTS ABOUT TBILISI'S MUST-SEES TO HELP YOU FIND ADVENTURE AND ENJOYMENT FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY JUST BLOCKS FROM YOUR HOUSE. ADDRESSES AND WEBSITES, WHEN AVAILABLE, FOR THE LOCATIONS MENTIONED ARE LISTED AT INVESTOR.GE.

1 Museum madness.There are so many museums in Tbilisi, it is impossible to list them all. As an extra bonus, they are very inexpensive. While not all boast of state-of-the-art exhibits, there are plenty of high-quality shows and exhibitions on at any time in the city. Highlights include the Georgian National Museum (and its Museum of Occupation); the Georgian State Museum of Theatre, Music, Cinema and Choreography; the Ethnographic Museum near Turtle Lake (Kus Tba); the Tbilisi History Museum; the Giorgi Leonidze State Museum of Literature; the Georgian National Gallery; and the Museum of Modern Art. There are also a plethora of great studios and galleries, especially in the Shardin/Old Tbilisi area. The gallery downstairs at the Tbilisi Marriott is also a reader favorite.

2 Don't forget the parks. Yes, every city has parks. But the key to a great outing is knowing which parks are worth the bug spray. Luckily, Tbilisi has plenty to choose from. From its historic Botanical Gardens – which include a waterfall, walking paths, and a great play area for kids – to the more modern Mtatsminda Park, there is enough diversity to fill your afternoons with fresh-ish air and nature. Highlights include Mushtaid Park, a 19th-century gem on the city's right bank that boasts two train rides for children and much, much more; Vera Park, famous for its splash fountains and public chess boards; and Rike Park, with a life-size chess board, splash pools, colored fountains and direct access to one of Tbilisi's cable cars.

3 Tbilisi by foot and in the air. This city loves its parks so much it makes some of them accessible by scenic walking paths and lofty cable cars. The cable car at Rike Park leads neatly to the Botanical Gardens, Narikala ▸▸

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Ananuri/Zhinvali reservoir

Fortress and – for those who don't mind a walk – to the Mother of Georgia statue. A funicular, reportedly one of the steepest in Europe, runs up to Mtatsminda Park. The park can also be reached by a walking path from near Betsy's Hotel or from historic Mama Daviti Church.

4 *Chame, ganatsvale* (Eat, dear). Eating is a national pastime you can really get behind in Tbilisi. There are so many great places to eat – whether you want to dig in to some of the truly delicious Georgian cuisine or you are in the mood for something else – the awesome Culinary Backstreets website has introduced a special column about the city, written by Tbilisi local and *Investor.ge* contributor, Paul Rimple. You have got your traditional *dukani* (tavern), your cooler-than-thou Vake drinking holes, the hip art-cafe scene, and so many tasty bakeries you might actually forget you are not in France. Plus there is the wine. Lots and lots and lots of great wine. It would take the rest of the magazine to list all the best places to go, but we would be remiss if we didn't give you a bit of direction. For ideas and inspiration, check out Culinarybackstreets.com or Paste Magazine's write-up on Tbilisi's art cafes at http://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2015/02/10-art-cafes-changing-georgian-identity.html?a=1

5 Old city, the local's tour. If you hate research, a good place to start eating (and whiling away a lazy summer day) is in Tbilisi's much heralded Old City. For long-term residents, locals and expats it may seem passé. But really, when was the last time you headed down to Kote Apkhazi Street (Leselidze), turned right (or left) and just wandered around? The Old City is full of great finds for tourists, expat and local alike. Just don't limit yourself to the Apkhazi/Meidani/Shardeni run. Check out Sololaki, especially if you are a sucker for great architecture, and the climb to Betania and Kala neighborhoods are worth the effort. While you are there, the sulfur baths in Abanotubani are so great that Alexandre Dumas and Pushkin wrote about them. The city has also invested in major renovations, to mixed reviews, that include a charming path around the tributary leading to the baths. If you drift down toward Sioni Cathedral and the Georgian History Museum, and continue over to Erekli II Street, you can either cross the city's infamous Peace Bridge into Rike Park or you can head west, pass through the serene garden behind the Patriarchate, the residence of the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church, and end up at Anchiskhati Basilica of St. Mary, the oldest church in Tbilisi. Continue along Shavteli

Narikala Fortress

Street, especially if it is around noon on a Saturday, to see the Rezo Gabriadze Theater's very special coo-coo clock. Every hour an angel emerges to strike the time, but at 12 p.m. on Saturday, onlookers can enjoy a mini-show.

6 Take a dip. Tbilisi is defined, in part, by the Mtkvari River that flows through it. While scenic, with lovely bridges (we are partial to Marjanishvili Bridge), it is not for swimming. Luckily, the city is full of pools, at a variety of locales and rates. Hotels, especially Betsy's Hotel, Holiday Inn and the Radisson Blu Iveria, have pools that are open to non-guests for a fee. Privately owned pools are also available, although some require purchasing a multi-visit pass. In addition to the swimming pools, there are splash pools and fountains at parks around the city (see Don't forget the parks, above), the Tbilisi Sea, Lisi Lake and Turtle Lake.

7 The sea and the lakes. If lounging by a pool is not your thing, there is also the Tbilisi Sea, Lisi Lake and Turtle Lake, where you can swim, sunbathe, picnic and, in some cases, even boat. The Tbilisi Sea is located at the northern edge of the city, and is a reservoir, not a sea, but if you close your eyes, and squint at the marina, you can pretend you are miles away at the seaside. Lisi Lake is in Saburtalo, to the west of the city center. Recently renovated, there are lounge chairs for rent and plenty of grassy patches for a picnic. Turtle Lake has traditionally been the queen bee of Tbilisi summer life, and anyone who is anyone in the city runs/walks there in the morning and sunbathes there in the afternoon. There is a small beach area for children, and plenty of tracks off the beaten path into the surrounding woods.

8 Ice is nice! At the risk of providing some promotion for local eateries, this list would not be complete without a nod to the city's budding ice cream scene. Georgians have a phobia about eating ice cream – or anything cold – during the winter months. But they shake off that fear with abandon in the summer. While there is no artisan homemade ice cream movement à la Brooklyn in Tbilisi yet, Luca Polara, a local chain, makes its own ice cream. The city also boasts a second local chain that offers Italian ice cream, Entrée, and the American chain Wendy's (as well as McDonalds and Burger King), for soft ▸▸

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Mtatsminda's Funicular restaurant

serve. There is also a plethora of great Georgian brands of ice cream that are available, well, just about everywhere. If you want a more traditional treat, try the creamy, delicious frozen *matsoni* (Georgian yogurt), honey, and nut mixture that can be had at most Georgian restaurants.

9 Out in the 'burbs, aka life for the denizens of the non-Vake/Vera neighborhoods. With all the attention to Tbilisi's central neighborhoods, a visitor – or expat – can be forgiven for thinking the city stops at the Vake border. But that is so, so not true. From rock climbing (https://www.facebook.com/esca.lucky?fref=ts) and tennis to shopping and theater shows, there is a lot to do in Tbilisi's 'burbs. On the right side of the Mtkvari River, on the renovated Aghmashenebeli Avenue, there are plenty of shops, Turkish restaurants and parks. During the theater season, it is a great place to catch children-oriented shows at the Nodar Dumbadze Children's Theater and the Second Home Theater, where children star in all the productions. The city's historic Apollo Theater building is also in the neighborhood, along with some great museums. Red Park off of Kazbegi Street (in Saburtalo) offers tennis courts, a rustic Soviet-era park with its own great fountain and lots of trails into the wooded areas that separate it from the bustle of the city.

10 A bit of a retail therapy. Tbilisi's suburbs are also good for a bit of shopping. Didi Dighomi, home to the Tbilisi Mall and a large, Georgian hypermarket, Goodwill, has become a retail hot spot. But for those looking for something more unique to Tbilisi, the Dry Bridge is long-standing favorite for souvenir shopping, as is the Gold Market near Tbilisi Central (the central train station and a small shopping center). The city has lost many of its neighborhood bazaars and markets over the years, but the *bazroba*, several city blocks teeming with humanity, is worth a visit if you like to haggle. Fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, fish and cheese are all available there, as are clothes, electronics, books and just about anything else you might need.

Pekin Street in Saburtalo has also become a byword for retail shopping if you are looking for brand names but don't have time to travel to the mall. Several great bookstores have popped up around the city over the past few years.

11 Further afield. So you have exhausted our list and are itching to travel beyond the city walls. There is plenty – plenty – to see outside of Tbilisi. But if you time is limited to day trips, favorite destinations include Uplistsikhe (near Gori); Gori (home of the Stalin Museum); Mtskheta; Ananuri; Sighnaghi; and Davit Garegi.

Riding down the Funicular at Mtatsminda

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BITFURY: GEORGIA'S TICKET TO THE WORLD'S "TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION MAP"

BITFURY, A PROMINENT BITCOIN MINING COMPANY, IS PUTTING GEORGIA AT THE CENTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL BITCOIN MOVEMENT WITH ITS LATEST INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY – A TECHNOLOGY PARK IN TBILISI.

MAIA EDILASHVILI

Over the past year, Georgia has become a player in the international world of bitcoin, the world's most prominent virtual currency. BitFury, a bitcoin mining company, opened one center in Gori in 2014 and is planning a new investment in Tbilisi this year.

While the bitcoin industry is still developing, investors hope Georgia's role as a mining center will help create a name for the country as a destination for high tech companies.

HOW DOES IT WORK

Bitcoin limits the availability of its currency by requiring new currency generators to run complex algorithms. Processing the algorithms, or "mining" costs money, principally in electricity to run and cool the computers which need extremely fast and powerful processors. If the ultimate value of the bitcoins produced is greater than the electricity running costs, then bitcoin mining is profitable. Georgia is, therefore, attractive to this sector as it has relatively cheap electricity and an open regulatory environment.

GEORGIA'S TICKET TO HIGH-TECH INNOVATION

"Having one of the world's leading fully integrated Bitcoin Blockchain infrastructure providers and transaction processing companies base its operations in Georgia puts the country on the world's 'technology and innovation' map," Tinatin Odilavadze, the head of public relations at the Georgian Co-Investment Fund, told Investor.ge.

The fund is one of the investors in the project.

"We believe this will certainly bring in goodwill and awareness that may in turn translate into additional investments and jobs creation, which is the top priority of the country's leadership," Odilavadze said.

BitFury is among the world's leading providers of semiconductors, servers and data-center solutions for bitcoin and cryptocurrency processing, which is known in the industry as "mining."

Unlike conventional currencies like the lari, the dollar, and the euro, which are supplied by central banks, anybody may produce their own bitcoins.

To prevent inflation and devaluation, there are special rules to create or "mine" a new bitcoin. Companies like BitFury handle the complicated and expensive computations necessary to mine bitcoin.

When BitFury picked Gori, about a one-hour drive from Tbilisi, as a location for its new 20MW data center, the Georgian Co-Investment Fund underwrote a $10 million convertible note issued by the company for the project.

In total, the Georgian Co-Investment Fundinvested $15 million in BitFury's Gori project.

Eprem Urumashvili, who represents BitFury Group in Georgia as a client of his law firm, Nodia, Urumashvili & Partners, told *Investor.ge* in an email interview that the company is enthusiastic about being in Georgia.

"We, together with many prominent investors and venture capitalists, believe Bitcoin is the next internet and we are still in the early stages...the future is bright and this technology holds great promise," Urumashvili said.

BitFury chose Georgia for its low energy costs and because a large percent of Georgia's electricity comes from renewable resources, namely hydropower, he said, adding that the competitive labor market, attractive investment climate, and ease of conducting business also played a role. "Georgia has an efficient ▸▸

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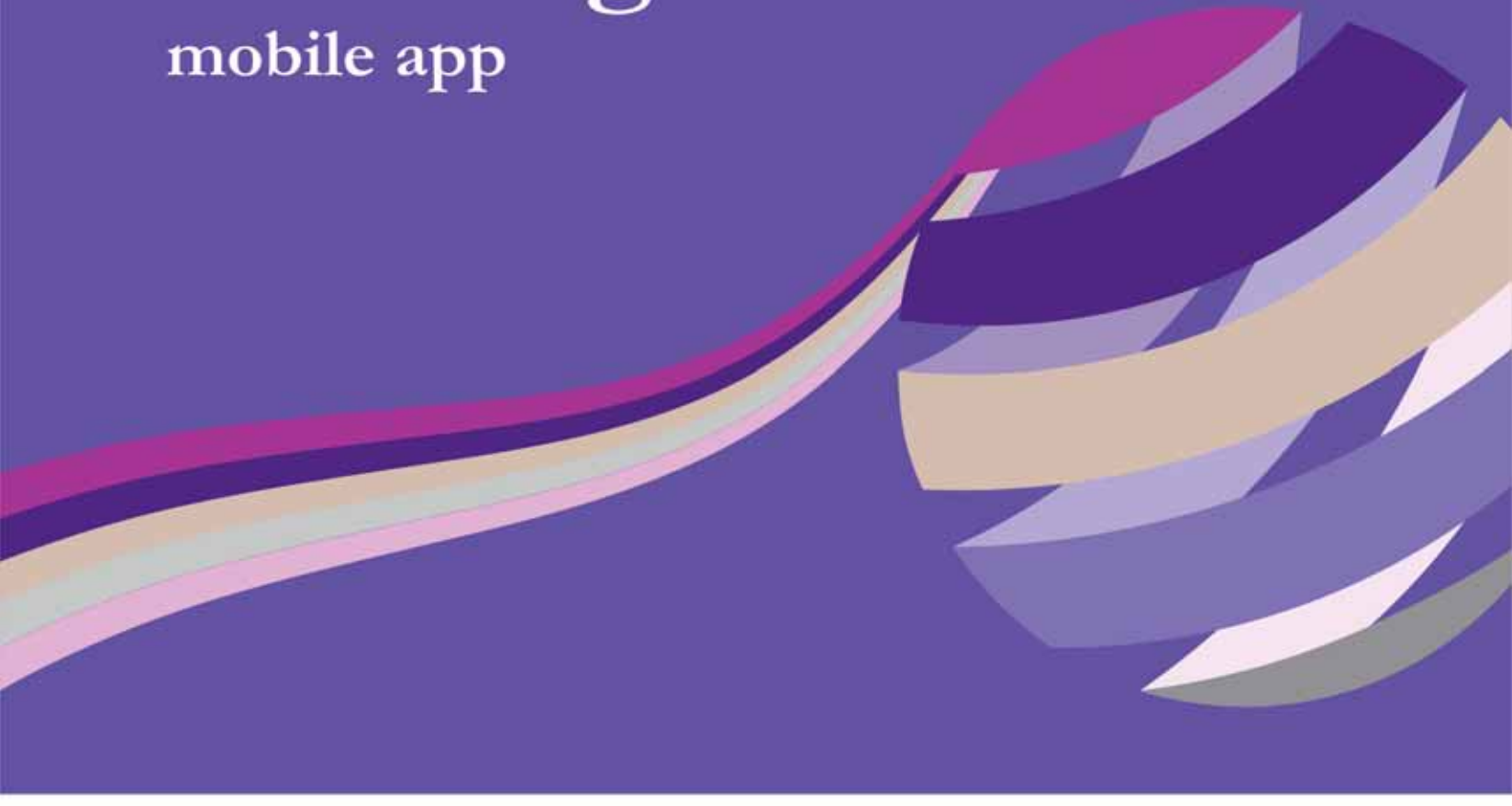

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regulatory system, simplified tax regulations and no corruption," Urumashvili said.

In addition, BitFury has personal links with Georgia: the vice chairman of the board, Giorgi Kikvadze, is the fund's managing director.

Bitfury currently employs 25 Georgians in the Gori facility and plans to double this amount once the company expands to Tbilisi.

For its new project, BitFury acquired a 185,000 sq. meter plot of land located in Tbilisi's Gldani District.

The company will be the first tenant in the Georgian Technology Park, where it will build a mega data center with up to 100 MW energy capacity to process transactions using its latest generation 28-nanometer and the upcoming, next-generation 16-nanometer bitcoin mining ASIC chips.

Construction on the technology park will begin in August 2015.

CURRENCY OF THE FUTURE?

In Georgia,bitcoins are available through Liberty Bank EMoney.

"Soon we believe there will be the option to buy bitcoins via bitcoin ATMs in Georgia," Urumashvili noted.

Since its commencement, around $860 million of venture funding has been channeled into the industryworldwide. There are over 4,500 bitcoin-driven startups around the world.

There are 9 million bitcoin users now, up from 3 million a year ago, and over 100,000 merchants accept bitcoin today, an increase from 5,000 a year ago. Hundreds of retailers accept bitcoin as payment for goods and services, including such large merchants and websites as Overstock.com, Dell, Wikipedia, Virgin Galactic, Expedia, Newegg, Bloomberg, OkCupid, CheapAir.com and Reddit.

"There are hundreds of local coffee shops, retail stores and restaurants all over the world that accept it [bitcoin]," Urumashvili said. "It is popular because the transaction fees charged to retailers are much less than that with Visa or MasterCard. We believe bitcoin adoption will continue its upward trajectory."

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2000-2015: GEORGIA AT THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION (WTO)

LAURIE KELLEHER

June 2015 marks the 15th anniversary of Georgia's accession to the WTO as its 137th member. How has this multilateral organization evolved since 2000? Has it become more transparent and directly relevant to companies? What are Georgia's current priorities in the WTO and what role can smaller trading countries such as Georgia play in ongoing negotiations there? *Investor.ge* examines these issues with Keith Rockwell, Director for Informational and External Relations at the WTO in Geneva, Switzerland, and Genadi Arveladze, Trade Attaché responsible for the WTO at Georgia's Mission to International Organizations, also in Geneva.

NEW WTO MEMBERS, NEW DYNAMICS

The WTO is now an organization with 161 members and includes the major players in the global economy as well as countries with a wide range of development levels. China's accession to the WTO in 2001, the Russian Federation's accession in 2012, and the rise of Brazil, India, and several other developing countries as influential traders has added to the complex negotiating dynamics at the WTO. The accession since 2000 of Georgia's regional trading partners such as Armenia, Ukraine, Russia, and Moldova means that WTO rules form a significant part of the common legal basis for Georgia's bilateral trade with these countries. Not surprisingly, Georgia is also an active participant in the ongoing negotiations with trading partners such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Belarus regarding their accession to the WTO.

NEW ROLE FOR THE WTO: BULWARK AGAINST PROTECTIONISM

In 2008, the WTO assumed a new role – global protectionism monitor – in response to fears that the global financial crisis would spin out of control if countries resorted to a 1930s-type of trade protectionism. In cooperation with the G20 and the OECD, the WTO Secretariat initiated tracking reports and required WTO Members to defend policies that could potentially be trade distorting. Rockwell explains that this "collective transparency deterrent" helped to dial back many emerging policies before they could potentially damage global trade.

The WTO also started to put greater stress on the key WTO requirement that members should notify new trade laws and regulations.

Notification is essential so that other WTO members can examine new policies for compliance with WTO rules. Notification also provides members and their companies forewarning that requirements are going to change and an opportunity to weigh in on new policies before they go into effect.

A MORE ACCESSIBLE AND BUSINESS-RELEVANT WTO

Since 2000, the WTO has made many negotiations and committee meetings more publicly available through internet reports and event podcasts, explains Rockwell. The WTO also took some of the vast trade data that had been primarily used for internal analysis by WTO Members and the WTO Secretariat and created publicly available databases that traders can use to find tariff rates, technical regulations, government procurement opportunities, and soon, customs procedures, as well.

Rockwell stresses that businesses also should not underestimate the importance of the everyday work at the WTO. WTO committees, for example, oversee members' real-time implementation of the WTO agreements.

"There are ongoing important negotiations all the time in basic committees, such as the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Committee, which are defining outcomes for international trade," he says. Arveladze agrees that WTO committee work is critical for a country such as Georgia because it provides Georgia with a greater understanding of emerging trade developments and a chance to hear other countries' reactions to them.

GEORGIA'S CURRENT WTO PRIORITIES

Georgia is currently preparing for a review of its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the European Union at the WTO's Committee on Regional Trade Agreements this summer. It is working alongside other WTO Members to try to reach an agreement on a work program for a global deal on agriculture, industrial goods, and services at the end of July.

Georgia is also preparing for a comprehensive review of its trade and investment regime by other WTO Members as ▸▸

part of a Trade Policy Review, which is scheduled for 2016.

THE WTO TRADE FACILITATION AGREEMENT

Georgia's major current activity, however, is work on internal procedures to ratify and implement the landmark WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). Concluded in 2013, the TFA will enter into force once two thirds of WTO Members ratify it. Among its provisions, the TFA establishes new rules to expedite the movement, release and clearance of goods, including goods in transit. Governments have to publish procedures on the internet for importation, exportation, and transit (including port, airport, and other entry-point procedures), and required forms and documents. There are new requirements for governments to provide advance rulings, new procedures for appeal and review of customs procedures, new disciplines on fees and charges, and increased use of measures such as single window, authorized economic operators, coordination with neighboring customs authorities, and expedited release of perishable goods.

International business groups such as U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the International Chamber of Commerce, and various European chambers of commerce widely hail the TFA as one of the most important actions governments can take to energize globalized production and trade and to help SME exporters. According to the OECD, the estimated effect of trade facilitation improvements is a 15.5% reduction of total trade costs for lower-middle- income countries. Implementing TFA helps Georgian companies by easing their access to inputs and their ability to export out of Georgia while also streamlining customs and transit procedures in the countries to which they seek to export.

Arveladze asserts that Georgia is

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already a leader on trade facilitation procedures in the Caucasus region. According to the OECD, Georgia's strongest performance on trade facilitation in general "is in the areas of simplification and harmonization of documents, automation and internal border agency co-operation, while it performs less well in the areas of advance rulings." (http://compareyourcountry.org/trade-facilitation)

USING GEORGIA'S SEAT AT THE TABLE

GivenTFA implementation, daily WTO committee meetings, an intense effort to reach an outcome on a global goods and services deal, WTO accession negotiations, etc., how does a small diplomatic mission manage to cover all of these issues and best use its seat at the WTO table? "You get out of the WTO system what you put into it," stresses Rockwell. He acknowledges that smaller countries do face resource and human capacity constraints in tackling WTO work, but that many of them pool their resources and project a louder voice by teaming up with likeminded countries on specific issues.

This is a strategy that Georgia has followed at the WTO, says Arveladze, by aligning itself with the Recently Acceded Members group in some negotiations. Further, he explains, despite the fact that Georgia has been a WTO Member for some time,it still takes advantage of technical assistance provided by the WTO Secretariat to train experts on specific WTO trade areas and procedures to build its human capacity to deal with WTO work and negotiations.

Laurie Kelleher is an international trade advisor based in Tbilisi.

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UNITED STATES RENEWS DUTY-FREE TREATMENT FOR MORE THAN 3,500 PRODUCTS FROM GEORGIA AND OTHER BENEFICIARY COUNTRIES

On June 29th, President Barack Obama signed the Trade Preferences Act of 2015, which authorizes the United States' Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program effective from July 29, 2015 through December 31, 2017 and makes GSP benefits retroactive to July 31, 2013. The GSP program allows duty-free entry to the U.S. market of approximately 3,500 different products from designated beneficiary countries such as Georgia. By eliminating certain import duties, many Georgian products enjoy up to an 18 percent cost advantage over comparable goods from non-GSP countries, increasing their competitiveness in the U.S. market.

TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE GEORGIAN EXPORTERS USED GSP IN THE PAST?

Georgian companies exported $124 million in GSP-eligible products to the United States in 2012, including ferrosilicone manganese, mineral waters, fruit juices, sauces, and cast steel. In the first half of 2013 when the GSP program was still in effect, Georgia was the 14th top beneficiary of the program with $71 million in GSP-eligible exports for the first six months of that year.

HOW CAN MORE GEORGIAN PRODUCTS BE EXPORTED TO THE UNITED STATES USING GSP BENEFITS AND OTHER DUTY-FREE OPTIONS?

Georgian exporters traditionally have been effective in using the duty free preferences offered by the United States' GSP program. However, much more could be done to expand the volume of those successful exports and the range of additional Georgian products that could benefit from the tariff preferences.

The U.S. Trade Representative's Office, which administers the GSP program, suggests that Georgian exporters target products that they already successfully export to other countries and which are now eligible for duty-free status in the United States. Georgian exporters should also cite Georgian goods' duty-free status under GSP as part of their marketing to U.S. importers, who may not be aware of this status.

The GSP program covers most manufactured goods; many types of chemicals, minerals, and building stone; certain agricultural and fishery products; as well as handicraft items like jewelry; many types of carpets and rugs; wood items and wall hangings, paintings, and sculptures. The full list of agricultural and industrial goods that are covered by the GSP program can be found at the USTR.gov website.

HOW DOES AN IMPORT FROM GEORGIA RECEIVE GSP DUTY-FREE TREATMENT?

According to USTR's guide for Georgia, a GSP-eligible product must meet the following requirements:

• It must be included on the list of GSP-eligible articles;

• It must be imported into the United States directly from Georgia, without entering the commerce of a third country;

• The U.S. importer must claim GSP duty-free treatment by placing an "A" in front of the U.S. tariff line number that identifies the imported article on U.S. Customs and Border Protection entry documentation;

• It must be the growth, product, or manufacture of Georgia, with the cost of the Georgian materials plus the cost of processing equal to at least 35 percent of the appraised value of the article at the time of entry into the United States.

Further, producers and exporters should keep records that describe the production process and costs of production of each good exported under GSP. U.S. Customs and Border Protection has the authority to ask an importer or producer to provide records to prove that the export is eligible for GSP duty-free treatment.

Full links to documents that provide more detailed information about the GPS program are available in the electronic version of this article, published on Investor.ge.

Supporting Georgia and Moldova to Effectively Manage EU Integration Process

PMCG RECENTLY HOSTED A HIGH-LEVEL, TWO-DAY KNOWLEDGE-SHARING WORKSHOP IN TBILISI WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL VISEGRAD FUND TO BRING TOGETHER GEORGIAN AND MOLDOVAN BUSINESSES AND GOVERNMENTS TO DISCUSS THE POTENTIAL COSTS AND BENEFITS OF THE EU INTEGRATION PROCESS. PMCG INVITED PRACTITIONERS AND BUSINESS-SECTOR REPRESENTATIVES FROM POLAND, HUNGARY, SLOVAKIA AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC TO HEAR ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES AND RECEIVE ADVICE ABOUT THE PROCESS. THE EVENT PARTICULARLY FOCUSED ON THE DEEP AND COMPREHENSIVE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT (DCFTA), WHICH REPRESENTS THE MOST CHALLENGING PART OF THE ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT FOR GEORGIA AND MOLDOVA.

NINO SAMVELIDZE,
EU PROGRAMS MANAGER AT PMCG

The Georgian and Moldovan governments have agreed to harmonize their legislation with that of the Single European Market – an obligation that requires meeting various rules and standards.

While the DCFTA will bring many benefits for Georgia and Moldova, dialogue between the public and private sectors is crucial to ensure the efficient and timely implementation of the agreement.

In particular, SMEs (small and medium enterprises) are one of the most vulnerable groups in this process since they have to adapt to a new environment and have to adopt standards that match those in the EU. In the long-term, this will be beneficial. But the transition may also prove costly for SMEs if not carefully analyzed and well thought out.

Based on the discussions during the workshop, Georgia and Moldova need to focus on three key areas in order to fully benefit from the DCFTA:

1. Coordination with the Private Sector in the implementation process. Experience shows that some pieces of legislation are adopted in a hurried manner without proper consultation and engagementwith the private sector, which leads to negative consequences for businesses. Therefore, the public and private sectors have to be in constant coordination to adopt legislation suitable and relevant to the current business climate.

2. Strengthen knowledge and awareness of the EU law approximation process. It is often understood that Georgia and/or Moldova have to copy EU member states' legislation and completely re-write their respective national laws. This is incorrect; in reality, the national legislation of the EU member states varies in each sector but complies with EU general principles and directives. That means there is a need to empower public and private sectors in the process of meeting EU approximation in order to ensure legal harmonization that willprevent misinterpretation and negative impacts.

3. Prevent overregulation. It is essential to consider local trends and the business climate when harmonizing regulations. But the overregulating of any sector, without proper analysis of local needs, might harm business development in the country – and bankrupt the very SMEs that play a crucial role in countries' economic and sustainable development.

While considering Slovakia's example, one can see that recent liberal economic reforms in this country resulted in fast development and the modernization of industries. For example, Slovakia is currently one of the frontrunners in the automotive industry. In contrast, the example of the Czech Republic showed that a lack of proper public-private dialogue decreased business confidence and the country could not fully utilize free-market principles. When it comes to Poland, frequent changes in the law and excessive regulations have become the main obstacles for SMEs in its EU integration process. Hungary's experience demonstrated the need to support SMEs to be competitive on a new market.

The following participants shared their views on the event and the broader issue of the path of EU integration for Georgia and Moldova. "From our experience, we would highly encourage/recommend intensive formal and informal dialoge and communication between the government and public in general, including dialog with representatives of employers, employees, NGOs and others," Ivan Mikloš, former Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of Slovakia, said.

"The EU Association Agreement offers the opportunity to have a transformative impact on the Georgian economy…[I]t is essential that the implementation of this agreement does not have the unintended effect of making it harder to do business in Georgia.

"Knowledge sharing with other countries provides essential insights about the problems to look out for, and how to proactively engage with the government in order to avoid them," George Welton, President of AmCham in Georgia, said.

It was widely acknowledged during the workshop that Georgia is a frontrunner among Eastern Partnership [EaP]countries when it comes to economic and business-enabling reforms. PMCG is actively involved in the EU approximation agenda of EaP countries and is sharingits expertise and successful institutional reforms in the region. Follow-up events will be held in Chisinău, Moldova, on October 21-23, 2015 as well as in Minsk, Belarus in October 24-26, 2015. The workshops are part of the International Visegrad Fund project "Sharing Experience of Public-Private Dialogue in EU Integration Process for Moldova and Georgia," implemented by PMCG.

Aurelia Shrenker

TSUTISOPELI, CREATING A VIRTUAL VILLAGE TO PRESERVE LOCAL CULTURE

SABA GVETADZE

I came across tsutisopeli.com one morning when I got an e-mail from Aurelia Shrenker, who created the site as part of a five-year project to document the songs and stories of ordinary Georgian people. The site provides links to stories and songs performed by singers across Georgia. These recordings are connected to a map of the country.

The site is an escape to the old and myth-like land of rural Georgia where luck and misfortune walk hand in hand. The songs are in Georgian and in five other languages (Bats, Udi, Chechen, Svan, and Megrelian), along with translations of the lyrics in English.

"Tsutisopeli" (which translates as"little village") is not just a collection of Georgian songs, but rather a union of forgotten cultures.They say nostalgia is just a prolonged sadness. But Tsutisopeli.com reconnects us with our heritage that is still alive. "You never feel like you have enough time, and you often feel like you've arrived too late," Aurelia said.

A PASSPORT TO A DIFFERENT LAND

I was 10 when I fell in love with Georgian folklore. I used to attend Sunday school and learn simple folk songs. I listened to the only mix-tape of many Georgian bedtime songs I had for hours. And then I would dream about wandering through the humble cottages and battling with the giants.

Around that time, young Aurelia arrived in Georgia at the Village Harmony summer camp and fell in love with the same music. She spread her love of Georgian folk music among her family. Both of her younger siblings learned to sing Georgian songs with her playing panduri (a three-stringed Georgian lute).

Perhaps it's the lifelike simplicity of Georgian folk songs that fascinated us both when we were children. Perhaps it's the mystical, unearthly world that those songs describe…

Aurelia became fascinated by the isolated areas of Georgia during her studies at UCLA, with their wild landscapes where peasant traditions are still alive. While studying ethnomusicology she decided to teach herself ballads from eastern Georgia, because they were songs ▸▸

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- Coordination and consultation for request of classification decisions for import of unassembled or disassembled goods;
- Cargo placement on customs bonded warehouse;
- Organization of cargo terminal handling at the railway stations and terminals;
- Cargo inspection and survey services;

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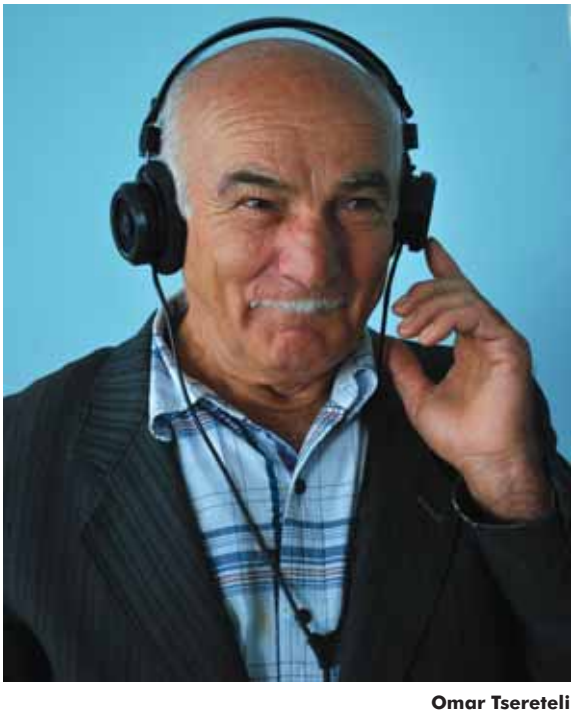
Mariam Gogochuri

she could sing by herself, while other Georgian songs are mostly polyphonic. In 2011, Aurelia received a Fulbright Award from the Institute of International Education's Fulbright Program, which enabled her to work on the project.

She spent next four years in researching, hiking, finding and recording songs.

Collecting songs and stories was not the easiest objective for the English-speaking team. And they tried to collect as much as possible since the musicians are getting older: five of the recorded musicians of the project have passed away in the last several years. "You never feel like you have enough time, and you often feel like you've arrived too late," Aurelia said.

Tsutisopeli aims to preserve and reconnect with our world's heritages that are still alive before they also pass.



Omar Tsereteli

If she finds sufficient funding, Aurelia would love to continue putting unknown singers and their stories on a map. However, their songs were just one of the many things Georgians shared." They took us to visit their family members' graves; they told us stories of lost children and war; they walked with us to their places of prayer, including us in their rituals; they mended our torn shirts and taught us to make bread in their clay ovens; they fed us day after day, everything that they had, never asking anything in return.

They gave us the gift of their world – a gift that was never intended just for us, but rather to be shared with you," Aurelia said.

For more information about the project, please visit tsutisopeli.com.

Alika Rondeli: A Lost Paradise

BLOOMBERG JOURNALIST HELENA BEDWELL RECALLS ONE OF GEORGIA'S GREATEST POLITICAL SCIENTISTS, DR. ALEXANDER RONDELI, WHO PASSED AWAY IN JUNE.

HELENA BEDWELL

A tall, athletic young man in a suit cuts a very sad and lonely figure at the public funeral of great Georgian intellectual Alexander Rondeli. He is sitting in the corner quietly, with moist eyes, his long legs crossed. It's Lawrence Sheets, the author of the book "Eight Pieces of Empire" and, for nearly a decade, the Caucasus region bureau chief for Reuters, as well as a Knight Journalism Fellow at Stanford University. After their first lunch together in 1992, today the two friends are seeing each other for the last time. Goodbye, Alika.

Alexander Rondeli, who was 73 when he died on June 12, was by far the most popular Georgian political scientist and one of the country's leading specialists in international affairs.

A Georgian political scientist, policy advisor, commentator, and founder of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, Rondeli was famous as the man who explained the country's complicated politics to outsiders, a natural-born teacher who could make even the most novice foreign correspondent or analyst feel like a seasoned expert.

But to me, he was a sweet, gray man, with an amazing sense of humor, using the most perfected speech, explaining all in several sentences. Stories about his wisdom and witty humor were all around us.

It was Lawrence who first recommended I meet Rondeli.

I was writing an article for the local English Language newspaper and was looking for a good, solid quote regarding Russian-Georgian relations which, at that time, were not so tense. "Hey," Lawrence told me,"you have to go and speak to a man who looks like the man from the movie 'Naked Gun'."

The first time I met Rondeli, I was greeted first by a giant poster of the Naked Gun's Leslie Nielsen staring at me near his office. I smiled as soon as I walked through the door and saw a man, with the kindest grin on his face, who bore an uncanny resemblance to the actor.

We became friends on that day and I cannot remember any major event, any big or minor ideas, any articles or television reports, written by me or any of my colleagues, that did not feature Alika (as we all called him) or have a direct or indirect connection with him.

The day he died, social media was awash with condolences and memories from his friends, colleagues, journalists, politicians and students. Many of his students became – and are destined to become – well-known politicians and game changers. Men and women who differ in political views and ambitions but share one common denominator: Alika Rondeli.

The posts and stories about their late mentor were sad but also funny. Stories about a man who looks like the actor from "The Naked Gun," a man as funny as Leslie himself.

The proud son of a well-acclaimed movie director father, Davit Rondeli, he shared his father's gift of capturing ▸▸

Georgia's ironies.

Davit Rondeli's film "Lost Paradise" has to be the most popular amongst Georgians, a movie that somehow perfectly describes the characteristics of Georgian society, including its problems and dark side, with astonishing wit.

The movie is about two snobbish brothers who have nothing left but the old pride of being nobles. They despise work and spend their entire lives at parties, hunting for rich brides. The movie was made at a very tough time for Georgia – in 1938, when the country was part of the Soviet Union.

Alika, one of Georgia's staunchest supporters of Euro-Atlantic integration, hated those times very much. He often told us to remind ourselves – and Russia – every day that the Russians were occupants.

Alika is a Lost Paradise today for all us.

From the earliest days of independence, he became known as Georgia's calling card, the outward face of the country for its foreign guests. It was in his office that a parade of journalists, analysts, and policy makers from all corners of the globe gained a clearer insight into Georgia.

I know fellow foreign correspondents – and even just friends of Georgia – included a visit to him when they traveled to the country. No trip to Tbilisi was complete without seeing him.

Nino Ivanishvili, a veteran of foreign journalism in Georgia who worked as a television producer for Reuters, says that Rondeli was a unique person– not just for the role he played in her professional life– but also for the all post-Soviet journalism, as she told me after his funeral in Tbilisi. He was a guide to Georgia's history and believed in its future.

A generator of huge ideas, he was one of very few people who could put all the small details in a very large picture.

"He was the most quoted person on Reuters TV and print – no one needed to reintroduce him," Ivanishvili said.

Despite the fact that he fought an illness for years, I never thought of one day losing him. I called him almost every other day, pretending to ask him an opinion or a quote, but in fact I just wanted to hear his voice and simply learn something new that day.

My close friend Betsy Haskell, who also had a long friendship with him, and I often shared stories and solutions about Georgia's future, as seen by this amazing man.

He predicted crises and failures, lies and disappointments, in every political event, including war, elections, rallies and government reshufflings. He was right all the time.

His last days were the hardest. I called Betsy a month ago to take her with me to see Alika in intensive care. She gathered some beautiful flowers from her garden and we went. The nurse told us to leave the flowers behind, but Alika smiled from his bed, saying "Take a picture and show me what kind of flowers you are giving me."

This was the last time I saw and hugged him.

Rondeli was always orientated toward people and worried about their vulnerability. He hated political "dirty tricks," which could hurt Georgia's reputation abroad and destabilize the situation at home.

"If this results in turmoil, only Russia will win," he used to say, adding, "and we will lose everything we have gained in the last few years."

Emzar Jgerenaia, a professor at Ilia University in Tbilisi, said to me that Rondeli is an irreplaceable loss for Georgia.

But, he added, the knowledge, wisdom, experience, inspiration and enlightened young minds he left behind will always stay with us forever.

TEDx Tbilisi: Georgian Innovation in 18 Minutes or Less

WILLIAM DUNBAR

Tbilisi often seems like a city of visiting experts. Politicians, economists, pop stars: dignitaries of all sorts fly in, offer their words of wisdom and fly away again. While one of this city's greatest strengths is its openness to people and ideas from all over the world, there is another, often overlooked strength of Tbilisi, and that is the experts that are already here: the people with the talent, vision and grit, changing things for the better.

It's that strength of Tbilisi we hears less about: the individuals coming up with ways to solve problems, from preserving the city's green spaces to making it an easier place to be accepted as a member of a sexual minority. The people critically analyzing Georgian fairy tales and the people finding a new model for journalism. It's these people, and their ideas, that we sought to celebrate and publicize as part of TEDx Tbilisi 2015.

TEDx events are independently organized conferences licensed by TED, the global brand behind the internet phenomenon of the "TED Talk." These talks, 18 minutes or less, are mini-lectures designed to be powerful and insightful, and dedicated to "ideas worth spreading," the motto of the organization. At TEDx Tbilisi, in 2012, 2013 and again this year, it has been the organization's mission to spread worthwhile ideas in the city we call home.

After a lengthy nomination, audition and training process, the volunteer team behind TEDx Tbilisi selected eight speakers to address this year's event, which was held on June 20 in the auditorium of the Free University/Agricultural University. We tried to select speakers from a variety of fields, aiming for a sample of the best, most innovative thinkers from Georgia, as well as foreigners who call Tbilisi home.

There were some well-known faces among the speakers. Natalia Antelava, an award-winning Georgian journalist familiar to anyone who watches, reads or listens to the BBC, spoke about how modern technology can help us reimagine what journalism is, about how stories can be told in more informative, in-depth ways, and about what she and her colleagues are planning to do to achieve that.

Cultural commentator Lasha Bakradze, director of the State Literature Museum, turned to the crucial topic of how Georgia should deal with its past—specifically what to do with the Stalin Museum in Gori. He argued it should become a museum of a museum, a constant reminder of how totalitarians try to falsely shape our memory.

On the theme of using technology to change our world for the better, Jonne Catshoek, founder and director of the ▸▸

Georgian NGO Elva, which now works around the world, explained how giving communities the ability to transmit data directly to governments and donors generates better outcomes for everyone—something Elva first demonstrated in the South Ossetian conflict zone in the aftermath of the 2008 Russian-Georgian war.

Andres Torres, the director of the American Academy, spoke about what he'd learned from his study of the Japanese martial art of kendo, and how that had helped to bring him back to Georgia; Keti Zazanashvili, winner of this year's "Georgia's Got Talent" told us how she discovered her passion for wheelchair dancing and changed her view of disability in the process.

Another educator, Sandro Jejelava, formerly an executive at TBC Bank and now the director of the Management Academy, spoke about Georgian fairy tales. "Do you realize," he asked, "'that Natsarkekia, the lazy liar who gets ahead, or Komble, the thuggish shepherd, are poisoning your children's minds?" Judging by the huge applause he received, the audience had not realized, and were happy for the advice.

The final two speakers exemplified the power of "ideas worth spreading," as well as the brave, talented and dedicated people working to make life in Tbilisi better. Natia Gvianishvili, a women's rights advocate, spoke of her experience, her "privilege," of coming out as a lesbian. She used her personal story to explain the almost impossibly difficult situation many LBGT individuals face in Georgia, and what we can all do to become allies.

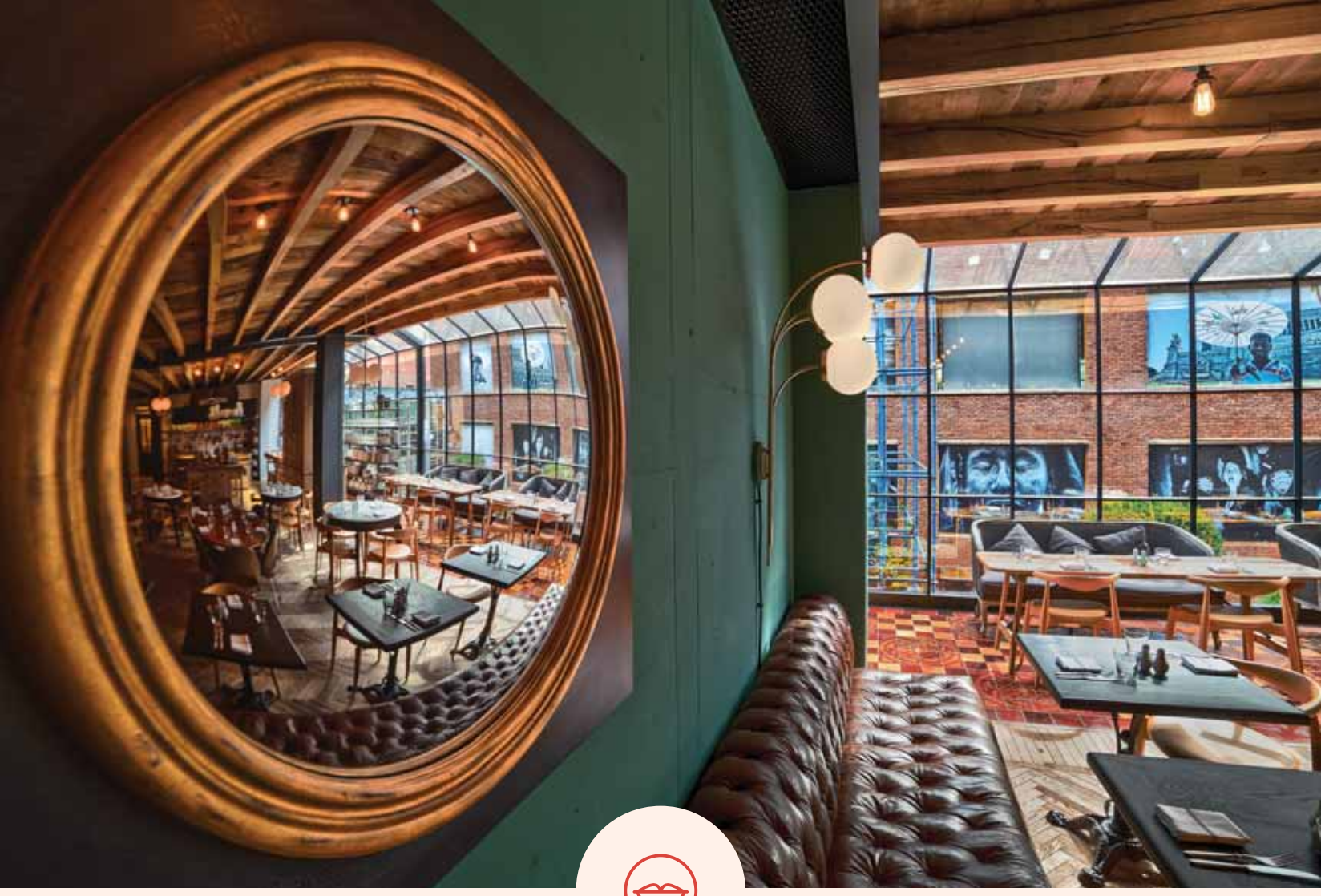
Nick Davitashvili, a member of Tbilisi's Guerrilla Gardeners, explained the threats that unplanned and illegal property development is placing our city under. He argued that without action being taken, we will bestow a legacy of respiratory ailments and civic alienation on our children. More than that though, he explained exactly how he and his friends have been fighting—and winning—in the courts, in city hall, and in the streets.

But the point of TEDx Tbilisi is not to get 300 people together in a room to listen to some talks. The point is to make sure that the ideas shared in that room get out to a wider audience. Videos of this year's talks will soon be on YouTube, on the TEDx channel, and on our own TEDx Tbilisi channel, together with the talks from 2012 and 2013. We are hoping that volunteers will be able to translate the talks into Georgian as part of TED's translation effort, and we hope that the ideas shared and the bonds forged at the event will bear fruit in the future.

Also, as a voluntary organization, we are looking for people to help us with next year's event, and for potential speakers. There are no formal qualifications, you just have to have an idea, and a willingness to share it. Get in touch with TEDxTbilisi at www.tedxtbilisi.com.

William Dunbar is a board member of the TEDx Tbilisi team and was the host of this year's event

Photographs by Nata Abashidze-Romanovskaya



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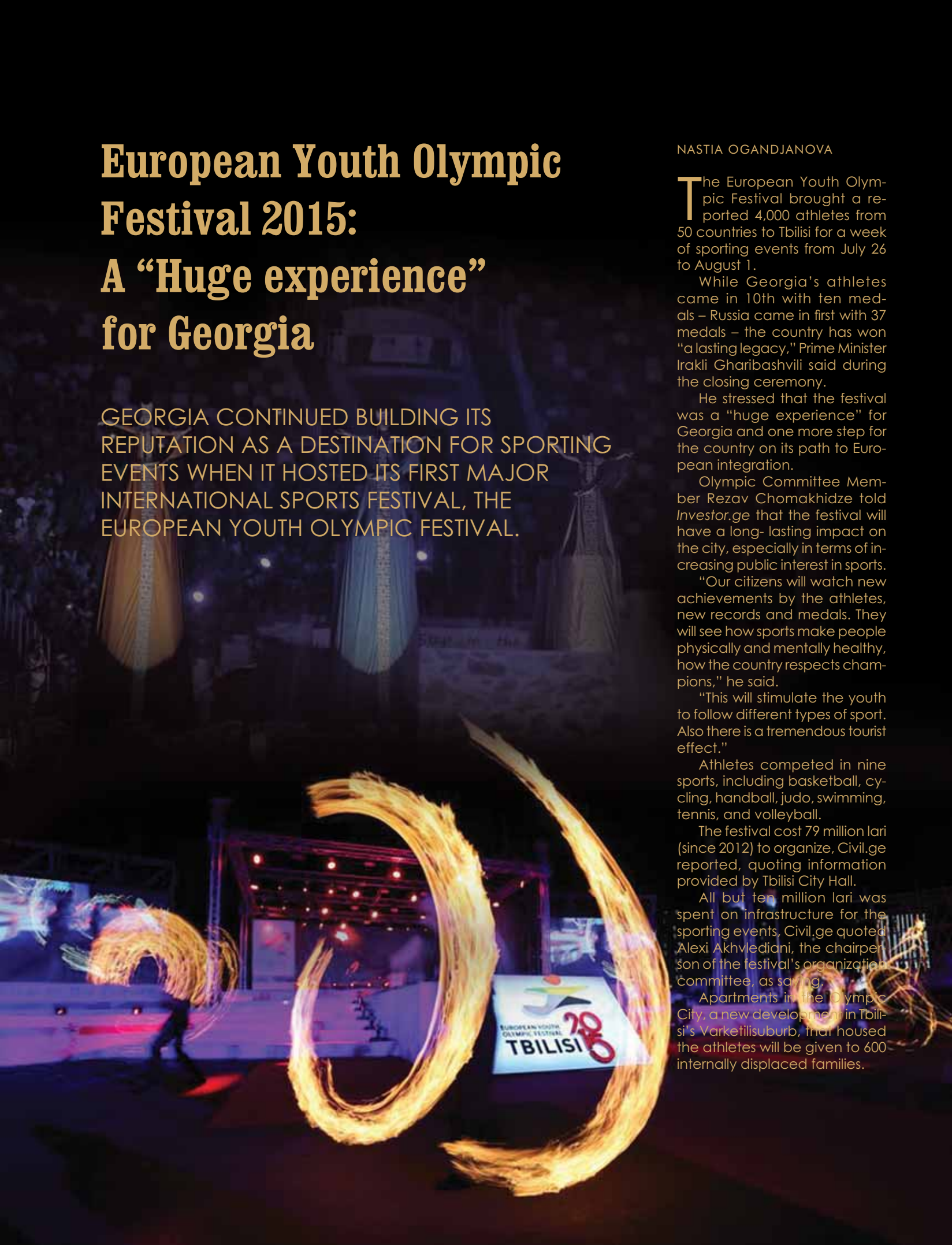
European Youth Olympic Festival 2015: A "Huge experience" for Georgia

GEORGIA CONTINUED BUILDING ITS REPUTATION AS A DESTINATION FOR SPORTING EVENTS WHEN IT HOSTED ITS FIRST MAJOR INTERNATIONAL SPORTS FESTIVAL, THE EUROPEAN YOUTH OLYMPIC FESTIVAL.



NASTIA OGANDJANOVA

The European Youth Olympic Festival brought a reported 4,000 athletes from 50 countries to Tbilisi for a week of sporting events from July 26 to August 1.

While Georgia's athletes came in 10th with ten medals – Russia came in first with 37 medals – the country has won "a lasting legacy," Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili said during the closing ceremony.

He stressed that the festival was a "huge experience" for Georgia and one more step for the country on its path to European integration.

Olympic Committee Member Rezav Chomakhidze told *Investor.ge* that the festival will have a long- lasting impact on the city, especially in terms of increasing public interest in sports.

"Our citizens will watch new achievements by the athletes, new records and medals. They will see how sports make people physically and mentally healthy, how the country respects champions," he said.

"This will stimulate the youth to follow different types of sport. Also there is a tremendous tourist effect."

Athletes competed in nine sports, including basketball, cycling, handball, judo, swimming, tennis, and volleyball.

The festival cost 79 million lari (since 2012) to organize, Civil.ge reported, quoting information provided by Tbilisi City Hall.

All but ten million lari was spent on infrastructure for the sporting events, Civil.ge quoted Alexi Akhvlediani, the chairperson of the festival's organizational committee, as saying.

Apartments in the Olympic City, a new development in Tbilisi's Varketilisuburb, that housed the athletes will be given to 600 internally displaced families.

BLC
Law Office

Counsel you can trust

BLC LAW OFFICE HOSTED THE LARGEST INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FORUM EVER HELD IN GEORGIA

In June BLC Law Office hosted the inaugural, 10th anniversary of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia (ECA) legal Forum.

The forum was attended by over 150 leading lawyers from Central and Eastern Europe as well as by the lawyers from the international law firms, such as: Baker & McKenzie, Clifford Chance, Freshfields, White & Case, Linklaters, Shearman & Sterling, etc. Partners of the large foreign and international legal practices from London, Paris, Frankfurt, Rome, Warsaw, Kiev, Moscow and other offices gathered together to discuss the legal challenges and exchange professional experience.

"The purpose of the conference is to establish the dialogue between local legal community and the invited delegates from different countries. Never before has Georgia hosted the legal Forum of this caliber!"- Partner of BLC law Office, Mr. Alexander Bolkvadze stated.

Inhouse counsels of the multinational companies, such as: Walt Disney Company, Hewlett Packard, Johnson & Johnson, Abott Laboratories and others also joined the conference to explore our country's legal framework and the investment potential.

Previous 9 forums, held in Kiev, Baku, St. Petersburg, Minsk, Almaty, Yerevan and Vienna demonstrated the further need for exchanging opinions and experience among lawyers from various jurisdictions.

Apart from practicing lawyers, public and private officials and heads of international professional organizations spoke at the forum. Chairman of the International Bar Association gave an inspiring speech, along with the Deputy Minister of Economic and Sustainable Development - Ms. Keti Bochorishvili, Deputy Minister of Justice – Mr. Gocha Lortkipanidze, the Chairman of the Bar Association - Mr. Zaza Khatiashvili, Professor of Law – Giorgi Jugeli. The speakers drew attention at the legal novelties, as well as the specifics of Georgian legal and business environment, investment potential, etc.

"We do hope that as a result of the forum more lawyers worldwide have better knowledge of the Georgian legal environment, it was a very successful event where Georgia was viewed by legal professionals from many positive angles. We are proud and fortunate for hosting the landmark event in the professional history of Georgia" – underlined the partner of BLC Ketti Kvartskhava.

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AMCHAM

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US AMBASSADOR OUTLINES CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES FOR GEORGIA

US Ambassador Richard Norland-spoke about the challenges and opportunities that Georgia faces in the future during the monthly AmCham roundtable for members on July 15 at the Radisson Blu Iveria Hotel.

TheAmCham board of directors presented the ambassador with a plaque as a sign of appreciation for his support.

Ambassador Norland was followed by Giorgi Pertaia, the head of the Georgian National Investment Agency (GNIA). Pertaia reviewed recent changes in roles and functions of the GNIA. He also spoke about the agency's plans to prioritize research and monitoring investments. Pertaia also provided a brief outline of future major investment opportunities.

The meeting was followed by an engaging Q&A session and several new members were introduced.

AMCHAM MEMBERS-ONLY LUNCHEON MEETING

THURSDAY, JUNE 25, 2015

Mr. Azim Sadikov, IMF Resident Representative in Georgia, spoke with AmCham members on June 25 at a luncheon at the Holiday Inn. Mr. Sadikov presented the IMF's latest regional assessment.

He explained the complex forces shaping economies in the region and compared the monetary policies of Central Asian and Caucasian countries. Mr. Sadikov discussed strategies set by National Banks in the region and gave comparative analysis of currency depreciation in the region.

AMCHAM: POLITICAL REVIEW FROM US EMBASSY

Nicholas Berliner, Deputy Chief of Mission from Embassy of the United States in Georgia, provided AmCham members with an engaging political, legislative and economic environment review during the monthly roundtable meeting at Courtyard Marriott Hotel on June 10. Mr. Berliner was followed by Milo Stevanovich, Chief of Party of Governing for Growth (G4G) in Georgia. Mr. Stevanovich reviewed the project and informed attending members about the work of G4G to help develop effective public - private dialogue. He also spoke about the importance and strength of a unified voice of business and civil society. Mr. Stevanovich underlined that coordinated efforts would be needed to engage on a wide range of upcoming legislative changes.

AMCHAM TOURISM COMMITTEE SUPPORTS CREATION OF CONVENTION BUREAU

The tourism committee has been meeting intensively in recent months with the Georgian National Tourism Agency (GNTA). This process has taken place in order for the committee to identify elements in the recently published Georgian National Tourism Strategy (GNTS) 2025 where the committee can work with the government. The committee has identified a range of priority areas, including working with the GNTA on training and tourism services development.

The number one priority for the committee is to work with the GNTA on the development of a Convention Bureau. The Bureau will work with tourism service providers in order to help identify opportunties and pool resources to help Georgia to bid for large international events, like the EBRD event that was very successfully conducted in Tbilisi earlier this year. This is seen as a huge opportunity for the country and essential for long-term tourism growth.

"Events like the EBRD annual meeting are incredibly good for Georgia. They provide significant employment in tourism and related services, but also help to promote Georgia's reputation around the world.

"Georgia has the facilities to provide Grade A event services, but no single company in the country is big enough to provide services for large international events that host thousands of people. A National Convention Bureau would help companies to coordinate to ensure that the country takes advantage of this huge opportunity," said George Welton, Executive Director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Georgia.

CSR Committee Meets Tanadgoma and CSR Club

The AmCham CSR committee met on June 18 and hosted representatives of the cultural center for disabled people, Tanadgoma, and Zviad Devdariani, the executive director of CiDA and a founder of CSR Club on June 18.

Tanadgoma is an organization which aims to rehabilitate people with disabilities and integrate them in social life.

Devdariani spoke about the work of the CSR Club, which unites representatives of business companies, civil society organization, public institutions and media. Areas where the AmCham CSR committee and CSR club can cooperate were actively discussed by committee members.

Presentations were followed with agreement on next steps to be taken by the entire Committee.

Energy, Mining & Utilities Committee Discusses Eminent Domain Law, VAT

On June 30th, the Energy and Mining Utilities Committee members met to discuss legislative proposals on the eminent domain law and VAT. A draft set of amendments was discussed and will be finalized and presented to the government in the fall.

AMCHAMHOSTS MONTHLY COCKTAIL RECEPTION

ON JULY 31ST, AMCHAM GEORGIA HOSTED A COCKTAIL RECEPTION AND NETWORKING EVENT IN APPRECIATION OF OUR GENEROUS SPONSORS FOR THE 4TH OF JULY PICNIC! THE EVENT WAS HELD AT THE OUTDOOR TERRACE OF BETSY'S HOTEL.

CARE International in the Caucasus: Empowering the poor through sustainable development

INVESTOR.GE SPOKE WITH CARE INTERNATIONAL IN THE CAUCASUS ABOUT THEIR WORK TO CREATE PROGRAMS THAT PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE CHANGE THAT IMPROVES THE LIVELIHOODS OF FAMILIES IN RURAL GEORGIA.

CARE International in the Caucasus (CIC) exists to empower poor and vulnerable rural populations to achieve social justice, economic viability and security across the South Caucasus region.

To do so, CIC developed a business model which aims to facilitate social change through the identification and investment in social entrepreneurs who develop sustainable initiatives that contribute to greater equality and justice for the rural poor across the region.

Along with our partners, we find social entrepreneurs with innovative ideas that can bring about positive social change.

We select the most promising candidates and either directly invest in them or introduce them to potential investors. To give each initiative a greater chance of success, CIC also supports entrepreneurs manage their businesses and package their ideas for potential investors, in addition to actively advocating for the removal of policy barriers that negatively impact them.

Second, we act as an honest broker between social entrepreneurs, community organizations, donors, investors and other stakeholders.

Third, we provide capacity building and consultancy to local actors such as NGO's or community organizations and make them more effective in addressing poverty, inequality and to improve the life of people.

Fourth, we provide consultancy to companies and organizations that want to be active in rural Georgia and attach importance to the social impact of their business. A priority in our work is women empowerment, which we have been focusing on for years.Empowering women has shown to significantly deliver social change and economic improvement.

CREATING SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

The key to ensuring self sustainability is not only to focus on the project lifetime but instead to focus on how the social enterprise or organization will function once the project is over.

In order to do this, an important part of our work focuses on ensuring the financial sustainability of our partners whether it's a community based organization, a business or a social enterprise.

A good example of this is co-financing establishment of greenhouses owned by small scale farmers in conflict affected area.

This model has already been replicated by other farmers and more greenhouses have been established in the area. In addition, they are committing up to 20% of their profit for the reconstruction of a kindergarten in their village. So through this we created income, additional employment for people, potential to grow and invest in community projects.

WHAT IS CIC WORKING ON NOW?

We are very proud of our current European Neighborhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development ENPARD project we do in cooperation with the EU. The goal of this project is to reinvigorate the agriculture sector in Georgia through promoting farmers' cooperation in close collaboration with government, civil society and farmers.

We are currently creating and facilitating at least 60 operational and sustainable business-oriented smallholder farmers' cooperatives in 7 municipalities of Georgia: Senaki, Abasha, Khobi, Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti,Chokhatauri and Tsageri. Out of this, about 40 cooperatives will also be co-financed through recoverable grant scheme.

Another project is our own program on social entrepreneurship, for which we have identified and vetted more than 60 potential social entrepreneurs.

A new upcoming project is based on improving the participatory rural development in Georgia, for which CARE is piloting a project in Lagodekhi.

The project is funded by the European Commission and Austrian Development Agency.

The project promotes and uses an integrated approach to socio-economic development.

This takes into account not only the creation of employment and income-generation opportunities, but also factors such as community relations and development, human development, preservation of natural resources, cultural cooperation, civic integration etc.

All these factors influence economic development and poverty reduction, even if indirectly, and are essential for the long-term sustainable development of the territory.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

We are more than happy to hear from companies if they want more information to cooperate and are ready find sustainable solutions for improving lives defending dignity fighting poverty.

We are working to create alliances with companies to address poverty and improve people's life and we believe this works best if it can be integrated in the core business of the company itself.

We are open to any Georgian and international company and investor to explore how we can combine CSR and work together to improve the lives of Georgian in a way that has a long term impact.

პროფესიული განათლება
ეკონომიკის განვითარებისთვის
INDUSTRY-LED SKILLS AND
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

NEW GRANT COMPETITION SEEKS INNOVATIVE PROPOSALS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE VOCATIONAL TRAINING

THE INDUSTRY-LED SKILLS AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT (ISWD) HAS LAUNCHED ITS COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM TO FUND INNOVATIVE PROPOSALS THAT WILL CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN THE DEMANDS OF THE LABOR MARKET FOR SKILLED PERSONNEL AND THE AVAILABILITY OF WORKERS WITH REQUIRED TECHNICAL SKILLS.
THE PROJECT, KNOWN AS PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT COMPETITIVE GRANTS (PICG), AIMS TO INVEST IN PROPOSALS THAT FOCUS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TRAINING COURSES, AND SUPPORT THE EXPANSION OF SUCH COURSES, THAT WILL PREPARE GEORGIANS TO MEET CURRENT INDUSTRY DEMANDS, PARTICULARLY IN HIGHER-LEVEL STEM AREAS, AGRICULTURE AND TOURISM.

WHAT IS ISWD LOOKING FOR IN THE GRANT PROPOSALS?

The grant proposals should clearly demonstrate how they are serving needs of the industry and propose innovative models and practice, which will lead to accredited/authorized certification under the Georgian national qualification framework. The proposals have to be soundly justified and persuade an independent evaluation panel that the proposed training programs respond to labour-market needs.

The outcome of the project has to ensure higher employability of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) graduates, leading to a higher proportion of employed graduates with higher incomes.

Grantees will be required to demonstrate industry support for their proposals, including an element of co-funding. Proposals have to provide convincing evidence of the involvement of the business, local and international companies in all stages of the project design, management and implementation. The past investments in the TVET field were primarily focused on infrastructural improvements.

While infrastructural improvements and supply of equipment are possible under the PICG, the focus is on the involvement of the industry representatives in the development of the training programs, training of teachers in TVET and providing possibilities of practical training of TVET students within the company facilities. Currently companies have to invest considerable resources for the training of their newly employed staff and the grant scheme offers obvious benefits to businesses in partnering with TVET providers.

The development of a new course is not just the production of the new curriculum paper. It should also entail a range of other activities to ensure that the project results are of highest quality and sustainable, such as development and production of teaching aids, assessment tools, recruitment and training of new teachers, bringing in international expertise, rehabilitating the premises needed for the new program, providing the training equipment, meeting the MCA-Georgia standards and requirements.

WHAT FUNDING IS AVAILABLE?

TVET providers in Georgia have different capacities, so there is a wide range of funding available, ranging from $300,000 to $3 million per grant. Full involvement of the international TVET provider and/or company is required for proposals seeking grant support of $1 million and above.

We expect state-of-the-art TVET provisions that can set leading examples for the TVET reform process in the country. Such partnerships have to demonstrate that they will continue to be effective beyond the duration of the individual project and indeed, Georgia's second Millennium Challenge Compact and make vocational education more attractive to young people, female students, unemployed and people with special needs. The projects must meet international standards in environmental and social protection, occupational health and safety, and social and gender integration.Particular emphasis should be put on greater integration of female students, socially vulnerable, minority representatives and IDPs in vocational education.

HOW WILL WINNERS BE SELECTED?

The proposals will be evaluated in accordance with the methodology, which is published as part of the concept paper template. An independent evaluation panel will evaluate the proposals as to their relevance to the PICG objectives, proposed approach for achieving the results, and cost-effectiveness of the proposal. The Request for Proposals, application documents and evaluation criteria are available at the MCA-Georgia website: www.mcageorgia.ge. The application process consists of two stages: submission of concept paper followed by a full application form for short-listed applicants. The deadline for submitting concept papers is September 14, 2015. Depending on the number and quality of proposals, short-listed candidates from the concept paper stage will be invited to submit full proposals at the end of September. Winning proposals should be known and publicly announced in February 2016. The projects will have between 12 and 24 months to be implemented.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Industry-led Skills and Workforce Development (ISWD) is a $16 million project of the Millennium Challenge Account-Georgia funded under the second $140 million Compact between the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the Government of Georgia. It is implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. ISWD started in September, 2014 and will continue until March, 2019. ISWD project is managed by a consortium led by PEM GmbH, a consulting company based in Germany.

HÔTELS & PRÉFÉRENCE
HUALING TBILISI
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ჰუალინგ თბილისი

A NEW DISTRICT FOR LEISURE AND LUXURY: HÔTELS & PRÉFÉRENCE HUALING TBILISI

Chinese Hualing Group's latest investment in Georgia's hospitality sector is a new luxury hotel, Hotels & Preference Hualing Tbilisi – a part of the French international Hotels & Preference hotel chain.

The hotel joins Hualing Group's $500 million investment portfolio in Georgia, which already includes Tbilisi Sea Plaza Mall, Basis Bank, two three star hotels in Tbilisi and Kutaisi, the Olympic Village on the Tbilisi Sea and other properties.

"Georgia is a rapidly growing tourism destination, offering terrific potential for tourism and business travel development," Mr. Petter Lillvik, General Manager for Hotels & Preference Hualing Tbilisi, told Investor.ge in an email interview.

"Hotels & Preference Hualing Tbilisi is a new opportunity for tourists, MICE or business travelers and different targets to explore contemporary, rapidly developing country and share the tremendous French values and services, which appears a great advantage for the hotel."

Tbilisi Sea District

Part of the hotel's draw, Lillvik said, is its location – near the airport but close to nature and far from the noise of the central districts.

"Hotels & Preference Hualing Tbilisi considers its location as an advantage: Located on a new prestigious district, the hotel is just few minutes away from Tbilisi International Airport and Tbilisi Sea," he said.

"What's most important – being little away from city center gives hotel's guests an opportunity to avoid city rush and enjoy the beauty of Tbilisi nature with fresh air.

The hotel also includes a 3D golf simulator for golf aficionados to practice their swing – as well as Tbilisi's largest ballroom (800 square meters). The 246 room hotel also has the largest indoor swimming pool in Georgia, Lillvik said.

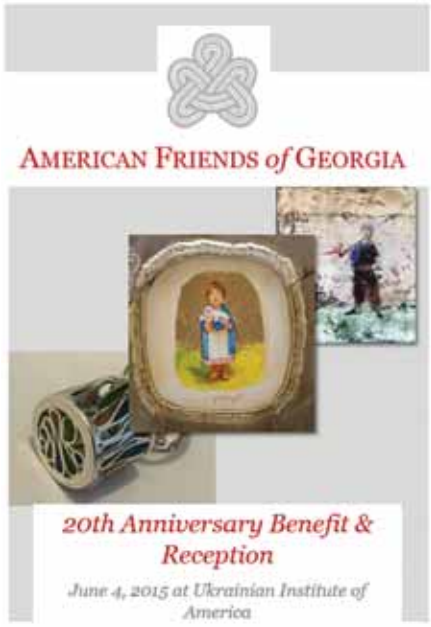
Cuisine as a calling card

Hotels & Preference Hualing Tbilisi is also adding a new dimension to Tbilisi fine dining.

In addition to Georgian cuisine, the hotel has a Chinese restaurant, Ensemble, where a team of ten Chinese chefs prepare authentic Chinese dishes.

The western-style restaurant Be CHIC, with award-winning Maltese Executive Chef, Roger Friggieri, will offer an international menu.

www.hotelspreference.ge



American Friends of Georgia Celebrates Its 20th Anniversary

For the past two decades, the American Friends of Georgia (AFG) has been promoting philanthropy in Georgia. On June 4, AFG celebrated its milestone with an extraordinary evening held at the Ukrainian Institute of Ameria.

The event included a silent auction of art from Georgia by well-known Georgian artists, including Levan Margiani, Gia Gugushvili, Kate Matabeli, and Lado Pesvianidze, as well as traditional Georgian head scarfs/khabalaki by Transfiguration Convent, and a musical performance by talented and International award winning Georgian pianist, Ketevan Kartvelishvili

Proceeds from this event will benefit AFG's humanitarian aid projects in Georgia.

In May, AFG also participated in a program organized by the New York Landmarks Conservancy and the Friends of Upper East Side as part of AFG's continued "Cultural Preservation Program."

The event, "Exporting Preservation from NY to Tbilisi," was held at the General Mechanics Society Library.

Conservancy President Peg Breen and Friends Executive Director Tara Kelly discussed architectural preservation as an economic development tool and urging Georgia to protect that country's unique cultural and architectural heritage.

The Salvation Army Marks 150th Anniversary

In July this year, The Salvation Army held an international celebration in London to mark the 150th anniversary of the commencement of its work. London was a fitting location for this event as it was in the East End of this great city that William and Catherine Booth founded this world-wide movement in 1865.

In those 150 years, the work of The Salvation Army has spread to 127 countries and fittingly the celebration was a colourful, noisy expression of the variety of cultures within which The Salvation Army works today. It was a real privilege for ten members of The Salvation Army in Georgia to take part in this international celebration.

The need which confronted the Booths in London all those years ago still exists and today many will know this movement as a Christian church, rolling its sleeves up and doing all it can to alleviate human suffering, bringing hope to people and endeavouring to enable them to be all that they can be.

The work of The Salvation Army is as varied as the contexts within which it works. From its vibrant church services in Africa, to the amazing state of the art Kroc Centres in the USA. From being the government's provider of anti-human trafficking services in the UK to providing daily food to people affected by the current economic crisis in Greece, The Salvation Army is truly a world-wide movement.

KhsnisArmia arrived in Georgia in November 1992. In its early days it distributed humanitarian aid to the many people in Tbilisi who were in desperate need at that time. Much of this humanitarian aid continues today as The Salvation Army seeks to serve the most vulnerable people in Georgia.

Recently appointed Regional Leaders for Georgia, Majors Gillian Jackson and Steve Dutfield, arrived in Tbilisi having worked at The Salvation Army College in London for the previous 11 years. Their role involves overseeing The Salvation Army in eight locations across Georgia.

The work here in Georgia is a microcosm of the work of The Salvation Army around the world.Each Sunday you will find a group of people spending time in Christian worship, remembering that the basis for all that they do is founded on the Bible and the teachings of Jesus.

During the week various activities take place in its each of its centres. Across Georgia 'After School' clubs give children a safe place to continue their learning as well as benefitting from a nutritious meal. People at the opposite end of the age spectrum are provided with an opportunity to spend time with other'mature'adults as they learn and share food together. Others are helped through such diverse activities as laundry and bath projects.

The Salvation Army is aware of the need to keep up with the times: in some of its centres computer classes are held, allowing children to be helped with their homework as well as giving older people an opportunity to understand something of what fascinates the younger generation.

Throughout its history The Salvation Army has been on hand during times of disaster. Whilst we hope and pray that disaster never hits, the reality is that Georgia has had frequent tragedies over the years. In the immediate aftermath of the recent Tbilisi floods local Salvation Army personnel were on hand distributing food and water to those involved in the rescue effort. Subsequently The Salvation Army has been helping those whose homes had been badly damaged, supporting them in practical ways,assisting their return home.

The Salvation Army continues to strive to support people and is grateful for the assistance it receives from a number of organisations. For example, every year we are thankful for the response to the Angel Tree initiative, something which helps children receive a Christmas gift they would not otherwise receive.

Here in Georgia we are pleased to be part of the varied work of The Salvation Army and are continually seeking out new ways of serving our community.

So as we continue to serve the people of Georgia we give thanks to all who show an interest in our work and seek to support what we do, as we simply endeavour to put our 'Faith in Action'.

NEW MEMBERS

Georgian Logistic Group Ltd.
CORP A

Georgian Logistic Group Ltd provides international logistics services. It offers to its clients and agents a complete package of international forwarding and logistics services worldwide. The company provides the customer with a rentable/payable packet service guarantee for any place of delivery and offers clients transportation of cargo along optimal routes along the transportation chain.

glg.ge

Agro Trading Georgia Ltd.
CORP B

Agro Trading Georgia has been successfully operating in Georgian market since 2009. Its purpose is to provide small and medium range farmers' animals and poultry with the highest quality feed, feed additives and support with modern feeding methods as well. The consumers of Agro Trading Georgia are small-, medium- and large-range farmers. The company offers farmers compound feeds, as well as the best quality premixes and concentrates for growing poultry and cattle for effective agricultural purposes. Farmers also have the opportunity to receive free consultations in order to improve their productivity. Agro Trading Georgia is constantly striving to maintain close contact with the young people, who are in the field in the veterinary field or zootechnical field in order to help them acquire knowledge, assist them to find their own niche, and to maximize their own potential.

agrotrading.ge

Geo Steel LLC
CORP B

Geo Steel LLC is one of the largest direct foreign industrial investments in Georgia. It is a joint venture of JSW Steel Netherlands BV (wholly owned by JSW, India) and Georgian Steel Group Holding Ltd (GS-GHL). JSW is a trusted name in global steel manufacturing, having interests in mining, energy, cement, infrastructure, building-systems and logistics. Geo Steel has enhanced the ability of customers to source reinforcement bars locally, thus increasing their efficiency. Furthermore, it has taken an initiative to rejuvenate Georgia`s metallurgical industry and boost its economy by using its local scrap metal for the production of construction materials. The company aspires to be the industry leader in whole Caucasus region. The state-of-the-art technology in the form of completely automated oxygen plant, electric arc furnace, ladle refining facilities, continuous caster machine, modern laboratory facilities, and precision control rolling mill has enabled the company to provide construction materials for many important projects, such as the Parliament of Georgia in Kutaisi.

geosteel.com.ge

Georgian Integrated Systems
CORP B

GiS is a solutions provider in the field of audio-visual systems and in other related technologies, based in Tbilisi, Georgia, and having partners regionally and internationally. GiS represents world leading brands as: DIS, Bose, Cisco, Shure, Crestron, Avaya, ElementOne, NEC, Dzine, Barco, Projecta, Optoma, KINDERMANN, QOMO, Chief, Audipack, ClearOne, Extron, Fog Screen, Locatel, U-Touch, Lava, Wolfvision, Polyvision, Listen Technology, Kramer, etc. Today, GiS Offers: Videoconferencing & Telepresence Systems, Unified Communication Solutions, Digital Conference Simultaneous Translation & Congress Systems, Parliamentary and Interactive Voting Systems, Wireless Microphones for Corporate and Music Events, Professional Displays & Video Walls, Projection Solutions & Interactive Boards, Professional & Industrial Audio Systems, Smart House Systems & Home Automation, Hotel Television & Hospitality Applications, Digital Signage & Room Booking Systems, Outdoor Visualization & Public Displays, Customized Solutions, Mounting solutions & other accessories.

gis.ge

NEW MEMBERS

Hotels and Preference Hualing Tbilisi
CORP B

Hôtels & Préférence Hualing Tbilisi is a 5-star Hotel with French touch located on the shorelines of the famous Tbilisi Sea, a perfect gateway to clean, fresh air, relaxing atmosphere and an exceptional panoramic view of Tbilisi hills. The Hotel is mainly created for business and leisure purposes, offering remarkable services in Georgia. Designed to impress, the Hotel's 247 rooms provide you with a natural, comfortable and elegant stay. In addition to the rooms, the Hotel comprises various Dining Outlets with Asian, European and local cuisine, Recreation Center with indoor swimming pool, gym, aerobic & yoga spaces and unique Meeting Facilities with 1 Grand Ball Room (800 m. sq.) and 3 conference halls. The Hotel's objective is to provide luxury services in Leisure, Corporate and MICE hospitality industry and continue to approach products in a very authentic, contemporary and innovative style.

hotelspreference.ge

LeavingStone
CORP B

LeavingStone is a Georgia based full-service digital agency operating since 2008. The company provides digital marketing and application development services to companies operating in the Caucasus region. Besides commercial projects, LeavingStone has a challenge to bring social good using new technologies to the society and thus it is involved in various social and non-profit projects. The company believes that technological advances can make life more valuable and can bring happiness and prosperity to everyone. The company team is willing to be a part of a global technological movement and disrupt old systems via new technologies that will influence Georgia and whole world for the good.

leavingstone.com

Rixos Hotel Borjomi
CORP B

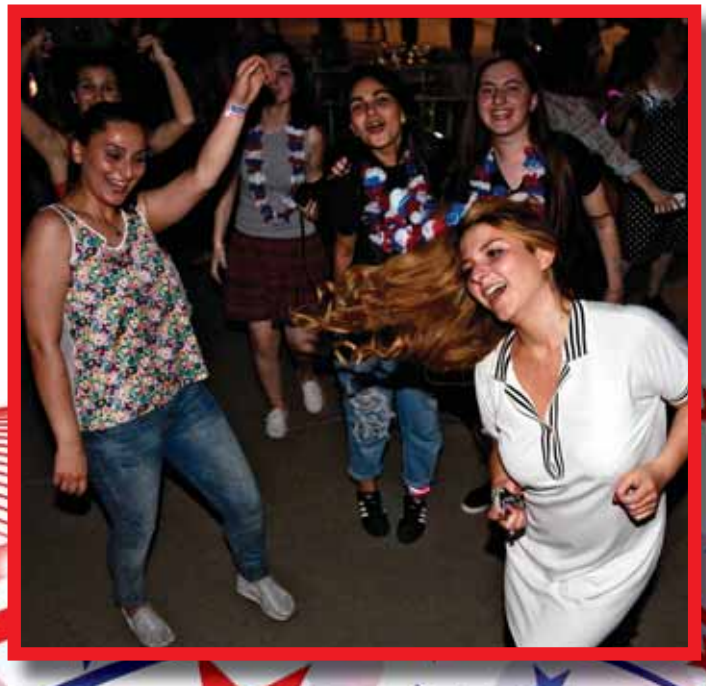
Rixos Borjomi resides in the beautiful pre-alpine area, carrying the name of the well-known mineral waters of Georgia. The hotel is located only 90 minutes' drive from the airport in the capital city of Tbilisi. The hotel has 151 deluxe rooms and design suites, with stupendous view of the surroundings. There are two restaurants, bar, 3 well-appointed spacious meeting rooms, the hotel can cater for up to 500 corporate guests or for weddings. State of the art audio-video systems are available. The "Anjana Spa" offers unique purification and revitalization programmes combined with traditional Turkish Hammam, three sauna rooms and eight well appointed Massage rooms for various therapies. The Wellness & Health Center also offers a wide variety of services, based on the healing capabilities of Borjomi's waters. Rixy Club, located outdoors, in the vicinity of the Hotel, takes care of the small VIP on daily basis offering hourly activities and childcare.

borjomi.rixos.com

13th Amcham US Independence Day Picnic

AMCHAM GEORGIA, TOGETHER WITH THE U.S. EMBASSY IN GEORGIA, HOSTED A FAMILY PICNIC CELEBRATING THE 239TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIGNING OF THE U.S. DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE ON JULY 4TH. OVER 1,100 AMERICAN, GEORGIAN AND INTERNATIONAL GUESTS ENJOYED AN AMERICAN-STYLE PICNIC WITH A GIANT BARBEQUE, LIVE BANDS, AND TOYS FOR CHILDREN.
THE PICNIC ALSO FEATURED A LARGE VARIETY OF FAMILY FUN ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING FACE-PAINTING, CLOWNS, ICE-CREAM AND A PHOTO BOOTH. ENTERTAINMENT WAS PROVIDED BY A COUNTRY AND WESTERN BAND, A ROCK-AND-ROLL BAND AND A TROOP OF GEORGIAN BREAKDANCERS.
U.S. AMBASSADOR TO GEORGIA RICHARD NORLAND, SENATOR PETER ROSKAM AND AMCHAM GEORGIA VICE-PRESIDENT MICHAEL COWGILL WELCOMED THE GUESTS, FOLLOWED BY A SINGING OF THE AMERICAN NATIONAL ANTHEM. THE EVENT CLOSED WITH A BRILLIANT DISPLAY OF FIREWORKS.

DOWN
SPEED LIMIT
10 MPH
15 KMH



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TBILISI 2015

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