



NEWSLETTER 2016

Dear fellow citizens, dear partners and friends of Switzerland

For more than a year already, I have had the honor and pleasure to represent Switzerland in Georgia. From the very first day of my arrival in Georgia, I have appreciated the openness, the ambitions and the potential of this country and its people, which is a fertile basis for developing Swiss-Georgian relations in all relevant fields.

2016 was an excellent year for Swiss-Georgian relations, with a number of high-level bilateral visits, the signing of an EFTA-Georgia Free Trade Agreement, the continuous strengthening of economic ties, the ongoing close cooperation aimed at facilitating relations between Georgia and the Russian Federation, the successful continuation and recalibration of Switzerland's cooperation program in the South Caucasus, several academic research conferences with a regional scope and various cultural events. You will find more information about some of those activities in this newsletter.



You can also expect customer-friendly consular services from our Embassy. Swiss nationals residing abroad have now access to a new online desk for consular services – please read the article below and make use of this innovative tool!

Switzerland enjoys an excellent reputation in Georgia, and you, as citizens or partners of Switzerland, contribute in many ways to developing bilateral relations. I take this opportunity to present to you my sincere thanks for your respective activities and efforts. On behalf of the whole Embassy and Swiss Cooperation Office staff, I wish you a joyful Holiday Season and a healthy and prosperous New Year. We look forward to continue meeting and working with you!

Yours

*Lukas Beglinger
Ambassador*

News for Swiss nationals residing abroad

The new Federal Act on Swiss Nationals and Institutions Abroad (Swiss Abroad Act), which came into force on 1st November 2015, is based on the **principle of personal responsibility**, which applies to the Confederation's relations with individuals to whom it guarantees rights or can provide assistance. The Confederation expects that every Swiss citizen assumes personal responsibility when planning and undertaking a period abroad, act in a risk-appropriate manner, and try to overcome any difficulties on his or her own.



According to this new Act, Swiss citizens who are not domiciled in Switzerland must register within 90 days with a representation abroad (embassy, consulate-general). Their data are entered in the Register of the Swiss Abroad, subsequently simplifying the provision of consular services, including consular protection.

With the **new online desk for consular services** you can also enter your own data yourself at any time and place.

With the online desk you can also order other consular services and pay for them by credit card via ePayment. You can access the online desk on the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs' website (www.eda.admin.ch) under "Online desk", as well as on the Swiss representations' websites.

You can register with the online desk in two ways:

- a) with a two-factor-authentication via SMS to a mobile telephone number;
- b) with a digital identity card (Suisse ID, see www.suisseid.ch).

For any question related to consular matters, please do not hesitate to contact either our Embassy or the **Federal Department of Foreign Affairs' Helpline**, which is **available 24/7** (e-mail: helpline@eda.admin.ch / tel. +41 800 24-7-365 / +41 58 465 33 33).

Are your personal data still up-to-date?

Please take a moment to access the online desk and check whether your personal data (especially your telephone number and your e-mail address) are still up-to-date. This will allow us, in particular, to contact you quickly in case of emergency.

Promoting Swiss values and diversity through culture

In 2016, various cultural events were organized or sponsored by the Swiss Embassy in cooperation with its international and Georgian partners.

As usual, the month of March was dedicated to the Francophonie. In this context, the Swiss movie **"Confusion"** (2015) by Laurent Nègre, which tells the fate of an ex-detainee from Guantanamo who is granted asylum in Switzerland, was screened in Tbilisi. Éditions Agora presented to the public the Georgian translation of the novel **"Derborence"** of the Swiss author Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz (1878-1947), which is based on the true story of a rockslide that devastated the hamlet of Derborence in 1714. A concert of the Swiss band **Junior Tshaka**, winner of the 2009 European Reggae Contest, took place in Tbilisi. And, last but not least, many learning activities and contests related to the French language were carried out in schools.

In May, during the Month of the German Language, the Swiss Embassy screened in Tbilisi and Batumi the Swiss movie **"Heidi"** (2015), by Alain Gsponer, which is the latest adaptation of Johanna Spyri's classic novel, originally published in 1880.

In October, on the occasion of the International Italian Language Week, the documentary film **"Il fiume ha sempre ragione"** (2016) by Silvio Soldini, winner of the Audience Award at Biografilm in Bologna, was screened in Tbilisi.



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra
Ambasciata di Svizzera in Georgia

IL FIUME HA SEMPRE RAGIONE

DI SILVIO SOLDINI

FILM NELL'AMBITO DELLA SETTIMANA DELLA LINGUA ITALIANA NEL MONDO

მდინარე ყოველთვის
სიბეროთლის მებურებელია
სილვიო სოლდინი

ფილმი ნარმოცხანელია იხალისებენ მის მსოფლიო კვირეულის ფარგლებში

2016 წლის 19 ოქტომბერი 18:00	19 OTTOBRE 2016 18:00
დასწრება უფასოა	ENTRATA GRATUITA
კინო ამირანი, დარბაზი 3 თბილისი, მერაბ კოსტავას ქ. 36/1	Cinema Amirani, sala 3 Tbilisi, 36/1 Merab Kostava Str.



In addition, the Embassy was involved in various events starring Swiss artists throughout the country. Most notably, the folk musicians **Nidwaldner Huismusig** performed at the 4th Tskaltubo Art Festival, and the yodel quartet **Nagelfluh** participated in the first Black See International Folk Festival in Ozurgeti and Shekviteli.

Analogous events are planned for 2017, especially in March, May and October in relation with the promotion of the Swiss national languages.

Enhancing Swiss-Georgian economic relations

2016 will be remembered as a milestone in the economic cooperation between Switzerland and Georgia. Indeed, the two countries, as well as the other EFTA Member States Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, signed on 27 June 2016 in Bern an **EFTA-Georgia Free Trade Agreement**. This comprehensive and ambitious agreement covers trade in goods and in services, right of establishment, protection of intellectual property rights, government procurement, competition, as well as sustainable development. In practice, it shall aim at promoting the trade between the participating States, notably by abolishing customs duties on a large array of - mostly industrial - products. The agreement is now in the process of ratification; its entry into force is expected for the second half of 2017 at the earliest.



In parallel to this improvement of framework conditions for bilateral trade and investment, the private sector also registered important developments in 2016.



*In March, **Blauenstein Georgia** presented its activity report. On this occasion, Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili thanked the founders of the company, Max Blauenstein and Irakli Kervalishvili, for their successful efforts and noted that the Government fully supports further development of this project. Blauenstein Georgia, which is one of the leading companies in terms of cattle breeding, is engaged in the production of high-quality products that comply with European standards. It plans to establish 20 additional farms, several shops and to develop dairy production in the coming years.*

In November, members of the Georgian-Swiss Business Association, including Ambassador Beglinger, visited the Blauenstein Georgia farm and slaughterhouse in Racha.



On 25 May, a purchase agreement worth EUR 39,8 million was signed by Peter Spuhler, founder of Swiss train manufacturer **Stadler Rail**, and Mamuka Bakhtadze, General Director of Georgian Railway. Since July, this agreement allows Georgian passengers to travel to Batumi and other Black Sea resorts directly from Tbilisi in brand new Swiss double-decker trains.



In October and December, the **Georgian Cement Company**, in partnership with the **Franco-Swiss Lafarge-Holcim group**, established itself as a new player in the Georgian market by inaugurating new cement and concrete production facilities in Poti and Tbilisi, in presence of representatives of the Georgian government and the Swiss Ambassador.



Strengthening bilateral political ties

Three major bilateral events at political level took place in 2016. In June, the **President of the Swiss Confederation Johann Schneider-Ammann** received in Bern the **Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili** for an official working visit. Bilateral talks focused on efforts to promote peace in the South Caucasus and Switzerland's cooperation strategy for the region. The parties discussed economic development and employment, public services and human security. President Schneider-Ammann explained that Switzerland would continue its involvement in the South Caucasus beyond the Cooperation Programme 2013-2016. He also stressed that Switzerland was ready to support Georgia's efforts for better relations with Russia.



At parliamentary level, the **Georgia-Switzerland Friendship Group** of the Georgian Parliament visited Switzerland in April and held meetings with their counterparts as well as other Swiss officials.

In September, the **President of the National Council Christa Markwalder** paid an official visit to Georgia and met with the President of Georgia, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Parliament Speaker as well as other dignitaries.

Closure of SDC's Humanitarian Aid Unit

Partners, stakeholders, friends, beneficiaries and colleagues bid goodbye to the SDC's Humanitarian Aid Unit after a 27-years presence in the South Caucasus Region.

Switzerland came to aid of Armenia in 1988 in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in Spitak that claimed thousands of lives and left more than 250'000 people without a shelter. Swiss intervention also followed the armed conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh during 1991-1994, when there emerged a need to open the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Offices in the South Caucasus with a regional office in Tbilisi.



Through its partners or direct implementation, the Humanitarian Aid Unit contributed to improving living conditions of internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, returnees, natural disaster victims and socially vulnerable population by offering income-generation opportunities and easing their access to repaired community infrastructure facilities. In Georgia, SDC's Humanitarian Aid Unit established the first national rescue base and a training center, while in Armenia it improved the quality and coverage of rescue operations of the Ministry of Emergency Situations (MES) to the level required by international standards (INSARAG). The introduction of social housing, hazard mapping, cost-benefit analysis, bio-engineering and river-engineering is also the legacy of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit in Georgia.

The closure of the Humanitarian Office, marked with an exhibition of an Abkhazia-born painter, was a great opportunity to thank the local and international partners, including ICRC and various UN agencies, and the Government of Georgia for their unwavering support during these years.

Swiss Cooperation Office launches Cooperation Strategy 2017-2020

While Switzerland's Humanitarian Aid is phasing out, the Swiss Cooperation Office (SCO) for the South Caucasus continues its activities beyond 2016.

In January 2017, Switzerland will roll out its new Cooperation Strategy 2017-2020, which will be a common strategy of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and the Human Security Division (HSD).

Having started in 1988 as an emergency effort after the devastating earthquake in Spitak (Armenia) and expanding its operations in 1999 throughout the South Caucasus, Switzerland has been one of the first countries to invest in rural economic development, local governance reforms, disaster risk reduction and affordable housing in the region.

While gender equality, good governance and conflict sensitivity will continue to serve as transversal themes of the future programme, the 2017-2020 Strategy will have two cornerstones complemented by the involved Swiss government entities: (1) agriculture-based economic development through agricultural value chains, improvement of the business enabling environment and fostering access to finance for SMEs, and (2) capacity-building of local authorities to promote local economic development and public finance management, climate change adaptation and integrated risk management, promotion of dialogue and confidence-building for the conflicts in the region. The promotion of Arts and Culture in the three South Caucasus countries will also be an important pillar of Switzerland's engagement in the region.

Thus, the Strategy is centered around the two thematic domains: 1) Inclusive and sustainable economic development, and 2) Effective democratic institutions, human safety and security.

The new Strategy 2017-2020 will also attempt to tap new opportunities for strengthening regional cooperation by implementing regional programmes.

More about the Strategy 2017-2020 you will learn in January 2017, when the Strategy document is publicized.

... and much more!

In addition to the above listed activities, Switzerland was involved in numerous and varied undertakings in Georgia in 2016.

A "Swiss trail" was inaugurated in Tbilisi National Park... The closing conference of the Academic Swiss Caucasus Net program took place... More than 400 persons attended the Swiss National Day celebration on 1st of August, and around 25 kilograms of Raclette cheese were eaten at the Swiss stand during this year's Winter Fair where the Swiss Embassy and its sponsors ranked third in terms of money collected...

*Find out more about these and other activities by consulting our **websites**:*

www.eda.admin.ch/tbilisi (Embassy / SCO)

*And you can follow us on **Facebook**:*

www.facebook.com/SwissCooperationSouthCaucasus