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AMBASSADOR'S WELCOME



Dear Swiss Friends,
Dear Friends of Switzerland,

The Swiss Embassy started this year with a positive dynamic. But we had to switch into crisis management mode rapidly due to the pandemic. The scheduled visit of the Georgian President to Switzerland in spring had to be transformed into a phone conversation, several political consultations took place in the online format, we adapted our cooperation programs to the COVID 19 situation and many cultural and social events had to be postponed. It was a priority for us to focus our efforts on providing consular services for our compatriots and their protection and repatriation and support the operations of our companies in Georgia. In the framework of the Russian and Georgian power protection mandates, we saw a more frequent need for consular and diplomatic assistance. We facilitated the repatriation of Russian citizens to Russia from Georgia, and from Armenia through the territory of Georgia. I am proud of the team of the Embassy, which showed strong resilience in this time of crisis and let me assure you, we continue to be here for you.

Multiple challenges and uncertainties remain for all of us. We are dealing at the same time with a health crisis, a socio-economic crisis, an internal political crisis and a regional security crisis. I am convinced, our solidarity with Georgia in this difficult time will bring the two countries closer together. We stay the course adapting to the less predictable environment. We will continue to work for peace and security in the region, support our Swiss companies in Georgia, contribute to a sustainable development of the country and explore the new opportunities of digitalization for our projects.



Dear Friends, our thoughts go firstly to those of you who are or were infected by the virus. Let me once again assure you that the Swiss Embassy is fully committed to assist you. In this context, I am most happy to count on the support of our new Consul, Ms. Anne-Chantal Aeby, who joined us on the 1st November and to whom I wish a good start in spite of the circumstances.

Let me sincerely wish you a Merry Christmas and a healthy and prosperous New Year. Stay safe. I very much look forward to seeing you in 2021!

With my kindest regards and best wishes,

Patric Franzen,
Ambassador of Switzerland to Georgia

POLITICAL COOPERATION

Phone conversation between the presidents



The highlight of 2020 was supposed to be the first official visit of the Georgian President to Switzerland. Unfortunately, the visit, initially scheduled for the spring and then postponed on many occasions, could not take place this year.

On April 23, the two presidents had a telephone conversation, in which they accentuated on the solid cooperation and friendship between Georgia and Switzerland.

President Sommaruga tweeted in Georgian also in a bid to reach out to the Georgian population and express genuine support in these hard times.

President Simonetta Sommaruga's [tweet](#).

Political consultations

Political consultations were held on December 4, 2020, between Ms. Krystyna Marty Lang, Swiss State Secretary a.i., and Mr. Lasha Darsalia, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. Such consultations are normally held on a yearly basis and give the possibility to exchange on a vast array of topics at high level. The parties most notably discussed the implementation of the mandate on the protection of Russian interests, which proved very important in 2020, particularly in assisting individuals in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Swiss side further confirmed its readiness to assist Georgia on many levels, including with development cooperation and peace promotion projects.

31 October Parliamentary Elections in Georgia

Code of Conduct for political parties



On September 14, the ruling Georgian Dream and the opposition parties signed the Code of Conduct of Political Parties for October 31 parliamentary elections. According to the Code of Conduct, political parties agree on various principles, including on fair and dignified competition, on respecting the voters' rights and on its execution and monitoring.

On this occasion, the Embassy of Switzerland in Georgia issued the following statement:

“Switzerland congratulates political parties in Georgia which have already signed the Code of Conduct for free, fair and peaceful 2020 parliamentary elections, and encourages all parties to join. We call the parties to abide to the Code of Conduct, which has been facilitated by the Georgian Central Election Commission with the support of Switzerland and the International Republican Institute (IRI), to promote a constructive election environment, ensuring mutual respect and diversity.

Switzerland is proud to contribute to facilitating political dialogue and strengthening democracy in Georgia, which is part of its strategy for supporting democratic processes and conflict prevention worldwide.”

The Code was initiated by the Central Election Commission with the support of Switzerland, USAID and International Republican Institute. It's part of a wider cooperation which helps to strengthen democratization with a mid-term perspective.

Participation in the EuroDiploWatch mission

The Embassy joined other European partners and deployed five teams of observers on October 31. The EuroDiploWatch was an act of support the democratic process in Georgia and complementary to OSCE/ODIHR election monitoring mission. Four out of five Swiss teams were deployed in the regions of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, where Switzerland is very active within the framework of its cooperation program.



In addition to the observation mission, H.E. Patric Franzen held a brief meeting with the chairperson of the Central Election Commission, Tamar Zhvania, to get updated on the election's progress. The Ambassador also met with the heads of local NGOs, namely ISFED, TI Georgia, GYLA & PMMG. All the four organizations were mandated to observe the elections on polling stations across Georgia. Based on the inputs from field teams, ISFED was conducting parallel vote counting based on PVT methodology. The methodology was presented to the Ambassador by ISFED's Elene Nizharadze.



UN celebrates 75th Anniversary



In October, the UN representation in Georgia marked 75th Anniversary of the United Nations. The jubilee was celebrated by UN partners, including the diplomatic corps and civil society representatives.

As pointed out the Ambassador Patric Franzen: “The world needs a strong UN more than ever”.

Switzerland is a member and a long-standing partner of the UN. Among others, Switzerland is committed to the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable Development and implements myriad projects with various UN agencies operating in Georgia.

Conflict Prevention and Transformation



On Georgian controlled territory, particular attention was paid to the situation of ethnic and religious minorities, where challenges concerning the access to information were exacerbated by the pandemic, and later with the escalation in and around Nagorno-Karabakh.

With regard to Georgia’s breakaway regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Switzerland continued its support to confidence building and cooperation across the conflict lines for the benefit of the conflict-affected population. Due to the pandemic, most

dialogue activities were transferred to online discussions.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Opening of a community center in a mountainous village



The year started positively with an opening of a new community center in the Chrebalo village in the Ambrolauri municipality. Around 3’000 local residents, including from 7 nearby villages, enjoy direct access to over 200 public and private services.

The community center was opened on 13 January by then Minister of Justice Tea Tsulukiani, Deputy Regional Director Werner Thut and the manager of the project “Fostering Regional and Local Development in Georgia”, Tinatin Tkeshelashvili.

Read the related article [here](#).

More information about the project [here](#).

Opening of the Goderdzi Alpine Garden



The coastal city of Batumi has one more treasure to offer to its visitors – Swiss Ambassador Patric Franzen and the Chairperson of Ajara Autonomous Republic Tornike Rizhvadze officially opened the Goderdzi Alpine Garden on 5 August.

Located at 2’000 m., the garden is a place where eco-friendly tourism and agriculture meet and force each other for the benefit of rural settlers of the region.

Switzerland responds to the pandemic

As the pandemic stroke in Georgia and with the first lockdown announced by the Government in March, SDC's projects were compelled to adapt plans and reorient efforts in order to respond to emerging needs. The SDC's efforts include but are not limited to the actions listed below:



The first immediate grant was provided to the Georgia Red Cross Society (GRCS) to equip its volunteers with personal protection equipment (masks, gloves, face shields, etc.) and to provide food to the self-isolated, elders and persons with specific needs in the regions. The grant was also donated to ensure quality training to volunteers and the GRCS staff in local branches.



Locally produced 23'000 face shields were purchased and distributed to 23 municipalities of Georgia within the project "Fostering Regional and Local Development in Georgia".

More information about the project [here](#).



Eleven Georgian Milk Mark dairies collected and distributed cheese to the Infectious Diseases and AIDS Center in Tbilisi to support medical staff during the outbreak. Dozens of kg of cheese were also donated to the Abastumani Lung Center and the hotel 'Chateau Mere' which hosted isolated people.

All the eleven enterprises are beneficiaries of the Swiss-funded Alliances Caucasus Programme (ALCP).

More information about the project [here](#).

On how SDC project beneficiaries coped with the pandemic, please read the articles below.

[Women vis-à-vis the pandemic](#)

[When a pandemic strikes, just play along](#)

Launching "Global Quality and Standards Programme in Georgia" project



The «Global Quality and Standards Programme in Georgia» is yet another project kicked off by SECO this year in partnership with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). This two-year project will help Georgia strengthen the capacity of its laboratories and facilitate international market access of Georgian fruits and vegetables.

The project was launched online on 27 July.

Learn more about the project [here](#).

Launching Forestry project

Despite the coronavirus and with modification of activities and events caused by it, the SDC continued to follow its plan.



On 3 September, the SDC, GIZ, Green Climate Fund, and the Government of Georgia announced the launch of its joint 7-year project.

The project “Enabling Implementation of Forest Sector Reform in Georgia to Reduce GHG Emissions from Forest Degradation” will support Georgia in carrying out the forest sector reform in a socially just fashion. Switzerland will bring to the project its technical know-how and a vast experience in the forest government.

International Equal Pay Day celebrated online



September 18th marked the first ever International Equal Pay Day. Due to the pandemic, the planned visit of the Director of the Swiss Federal Office for Gender Equality, Sylvie Durrer, was cancelled and the entire event took place online. On this day, Georgia officially declared its intention to join the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC).

The high-profile event was attended by the representatives of the governments of Georgia and Armenia, international and non-governmental organizations, as well as diplomatic missions accredited in Georgia.

The event was organized by the UN Women within the frames of the SDC and ADA funded project “Women’s Economic Empowerment in Georgia”.

Read the article about the Equal Pay and the event [here](#).

More information about the project [here](#).

Additional support to VET colleges



Additional USD 400'00 was allocated by the SDC to help vocational colleges recover in the post-crisis period. The additional funds will allow the colleges to provide short-term trainings for farmers, to prepare colleges to accommodate double number of students and to bridge the funding gap during the crisis. Within the frame of the supplementary support, five colleges in Batumi, Mestia, Poti, Jvari and Senaki received tractors and other agricultural equipment for the benefit of 100 students enrolled in agriculture and forestry.



In addition, in 2020, the VET project started to facilitate the exchange between the Swiss College Plantahof and the Swiss-Georgian agrarian school “Caucasus”. The school will officially be opened in 2021 and serve as a model training facility for cattle breeding and dairy farming. As a result of this partnership, short-term and modular courses, as means of flexible teaching, will be developed and embedded in VET colleges.

SDC kicks off projects in Abkhazia



The SDC launched two projects in Abkhazia. More specifically, the project “Small-scale Dairy Production” targets women dairy producers in Abkhazia and the Samegrelo region and aims at improving their knowledge of dairy production. By and large, the project aims at economic empowerment of women in the given regions. The project is implemented by UN FAO and UN Women.

On 4 December, the SDC signed a cooperation agreement with UNICEF on the implementation of the “WASH” project. The said project will work towards better water, sanitation and hygiene conditions in schools benefitting children in Abkhazia. The project reinforces the Swiss engagement in Abkhazia that started this summer with the above-mentioned dairy project. The “WASH” project will be implemented by UNICEF and UNHCR.

ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Georgian Government to attract more Swiss investment



On 4 August, the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, Natia Turnava met with the CEO of Stadler Rail, Peter Spuhler and the Swiss Ambassador to Georgia, H.E. Patric Franzen.

As mentioned by the Minister, talks are ongoing about the opening of a plant in Georgia that will produce metro and railway trains.

Swiss Seedstars for successful Georgian start-ups



On 3 October, ten Tbilisi startups were invited to the pitching stage to compete for a place in the Regional Online Seedstars event coming up in winter 2021, where 20 winning startups will then advance to the Grand Finale for a shot at USD 500K in equity investment.

The competition revealed the Georgian winner – Payze – who will compete from Georgia in the upcoming regional event. The startup is a software platform for internet businesses and sets a new standard in online payments.

Seedstars is a Swiss-based private company which organizes yearly global pitch competitions for promising tech startups in emerging markets.

“Ragusa” to be stuffed with Georgian nuts



The famous Swiss chocolate producer Camille Bloch enters the Georgian market bringing innovative technology and a plan to employ the local population. The announcement was made by the company’s representatives during their visit to Georgia in November 2020.

CULTURE

Italian Language Week



Due to the pandemic, most cultural activities in which the Embassy usually takes part - such as *Francophonie* and *Monat der deutschen Sprache* - did not take place in 2020. Nevertheless, slightly relaxed restrictions made it possible to mark the Italian language week in October, limited to an art competition for children followed by an award ceremony for winners, as well as for professors and students of the Italian language. The prizes were handed over by the Ambassador of Switzerland, H.E. Patric Franzen together with the Italian Ambassador, H.E. Enrico Valvo.

CinéDOC



The International Documentary Film Festival CinéDOC took place from 30 August to 30 September, mostly online. This year, a special section "Swiss DOX" allowed the Georgian public to discover a selection of the latest Swiss documentary productions.

"All Cats are Grey in the Dark" by Lasse Linder was one of the seven documentaries film-lovers could watch online for free during 23-30 September. "In a Wisper" by Patricia Perez and Heidi Hassan is a movie about motherhood, love of film, friendship and freedom. "All Inclusive" by Carolina Schwingruber explores the challenges ship companies face in attracting clients and their attempts to offer as more flamboyant entertainment programs as possible. "The Journey – a Story of Love" by Fanny Brauning is about a husband and his paralyzed wife who spend their precious time together travelling across the world in a camper van.



One documentary "Heidy at the Foley Artist" and three animated movies were aired for children online as well on the screen in Sagarejo, Kakheti.

All the movies were available on the website: cinedoc-tbilisi.com.

CONSULAR

New Head of Consular Services



It is a pleasure to introduce myself through our annual newsletter. I have taken up my new functions at the Swiss Embassy in Tbilisi on October 1st, 2020, as a Head of the Consular services. I have joined the Ministry of Foreign affairs some 35 years ago and this is my first opportunity to work in this region. I have been posted to Berlin, Montréal, Brasilia, to name a few, the last one being Madrid. I am very happy to be part of the staff of this Embassy and am looking forward to being in contact with you.

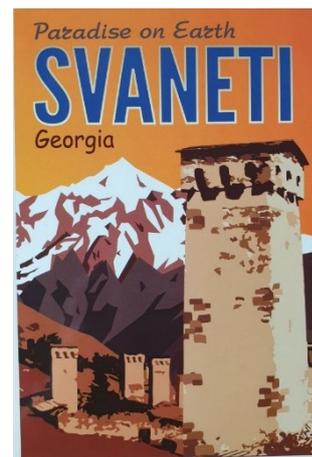
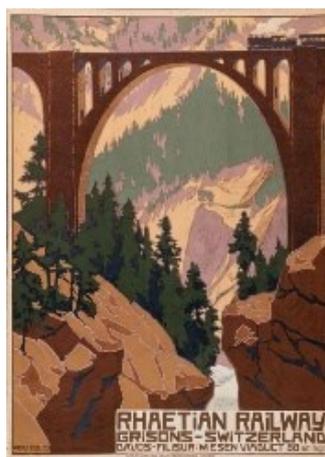
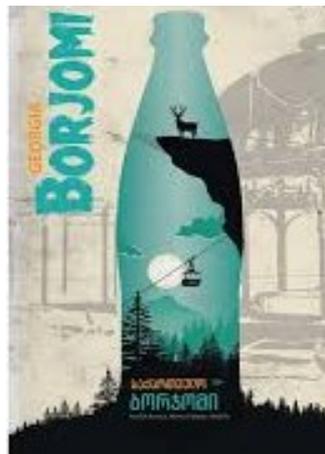
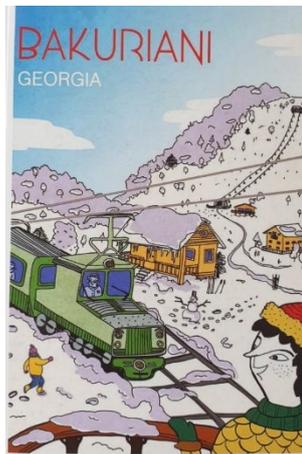
In these difficult times of COVID-19, we can assure you that our consular services remain open and we will do our utmost to provide you with pertinent information through our website (www.eda.admin.ch/tbilisi). You will find topics on how we can be of assistance in case of need as well as gain access to our consular services. Remember to inform us of any changes (address/civil status, etc.) and to share your e-mail address so that we can communicate quickly and keep in touch.

Swiss National Day

The Swiss National Day was unusual this year. Like many other activities, the day was celebrated online with a video address of Ambassador Patric Franzen.

Watch the video [here](#).

Below please see the collection of ancient Swiss and modern Georgian posters, which you can also find abundantly used in the video.



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