



Greetings from the Swiss Ambassador

Dear fellow citizens, partners and friends

In March 2017, Switzerland and Georgia celebrated 25 years of diplomatic relations. In fact, Swiss-Georgian relations date back to the 19th century – in this newsletter, we shed light on some pioneers and protagonists of that time. We also point to major developments and highlights of Swiss-Georgian relations during the first semester of 2017: visa liberalization for Georgian citizens, launch of an updated Cooperation Strategy for the period 2017-2020, new Swiss investments in Georgia. Find more information and “like” us on our brand-new Facebook page [Swiss Embassy in Georgia!](#)



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Kind regards

Lukas Beglinger

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NEWS

25 years of solid diplomatic relations



On March 23, Georgia and Switzerland celebrated the 25th anniversary of the establishment of their diplomatic relations. Swiss-Georgian relations are excellent and characterized by close, trustful cooperation and fruitful exchanges – not only at the political level, but in numerous other fields such as economy, culture, science and education. Whereas Georgia established its Embassy in Switzerland in 1997, the Swiss Embassy in Tbilisi was opened in 2001. For two decades, Switzerland has supported Georgia's development through the Swiss Cooperation Office which was established in Tbilisi in 1999. Since March 2009, Switzerland represents Georgian interests in Russia and Russian interests in Georgia.

In order to mark the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, the President of the Swiss Confederation, Ms. Doris Leuthard, plans to pay an official visit to Tbilisi in December 2017.

Relations between Georgia and Switzerland date back to the 19th century. Switzerland opened a consulate in Tbilisi in 1883 and maintained it until 1922. One of the first documented contacts was the scientific expedition launched in 1831 by the Swiss archeologist Frédéric Dubois de Montpéroux with a view to exploring Georgia's rich cultural heritage. In the second half of the 19th century, numerous Swiss nationals settled in Georgia. Some were active in the raw materials sector (oil, manganese) while others worked as cheese producers, thus helping to develop the local dairy industry, which again benefits from Swiss support today. In 1888, Swiss alpinists were part of an expedition group that conquered Mount Ushba in Svaneti.



Askana castle, Georgia. F. Dubois

On the other hand, some notable Georgians came to Switzerland in the 19th century. In 1868, the writer and pro-Western enlightener Niko Nikoladze was the first Georgian to receive a doctorate from a European university, namely in Zurich. Noe Zhordania, one of the protagonists of Georgia's independence after World War I and head of the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia from 1918 to 1921, found shelter in Geneva in 1983. In 1910, the pro-independence Georgian review "Tavisupali Sakartvelo" was published in this Swiss town.

Switzerland launches Cooperation Strategy 2017-2020

Swiss Cooperation Strategy
South Caucasus
2017-2020



Swiss Cooperation Strategy 2017-2020.
©SDC/SECO/DP

The Swiss government has launched its updated Cooperation Strategy for the South Caucasus for the period of 2017-2020. The strategy covers crucial sectors of the economy (with a focus on agriculture), governance, human security, as well as disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. Throughout the four-year period, cooperation between South Caucasus countries will be strengthened through the support for regional programmes in cross-border trade and disaster risk reduction. Women's economic empowerment will also be in the focus.

The strategy is structured around two key domains: "Inclusive and sustainable economic development" and "Effective democratic institutions, human safety and security". Gender equality and good governance will continue to be addressed in a transversal way in all activity areas. Support to developing arts and culture in the South Caucasus region will be continued.

[Swiss Cooperation Strategy South Caucasus 2017-2020](#)

Swiss-Georgian conference on vocational education



Ambassador Lukas Beglinger opens the conference. ©Swiss Embassy in Georgia

On June 7, 2017, the Embassy of Switzerland in Georgia and the Georgian-Swiss Business Association organized a conference on vocational education and training (VET) at the 6th Authorized School in Tbilisi. There were three presentations on VET as an asset for the national economy and the employers, followed by a panel discussion on "how to generalize VET in Georgia". The importance of organizing an interactive debate on this key priority of the Georgian government subject was confirmed by the interest shown by the numerous persons who attended the event.

In this context, Mr. Alexandre Jejelava, Minister of Education and Science and Deputy Prime Minister of Georgia, intends to pay an official visit to Switzerland in August 2017.

At the VET conference, Swiss expert Marc Bloch demonstrated the superior performance outcomes of Switzerland's dual system in terms of youth employment and economic competitiveness. He pointed out that countries with a dual education and training system have by far the lowest rates of youth unemployment in Europe. He added that the private sector, i.e. branch associations, and not the government, should be responsible for developing the vocational curricula and carrying out exams, because they have the necessary expertise and knowledge of sector-specific labor market requirements. As a consequence, in Switzerland, the private sector bears 60% of the overall cost of VET, whereas the government's share is only 40%. He emphasized that in Switzerland, compared to Georgia and many other countries, VET is highly appreciated and is not considered an "inferior" type of education; in fact, two thirds of Swiss youth choose this path rather than an academic education, but they retain the option of obtaining an academic degree or other higher education diplomas during their professional career (permeability of the system).

Successful companies putting VET into practice in Georgia were presented by Irakli Kervalishvili, co-founder of Blauenstein Georgia, and by Tinatin Makharadze, from Margebeli Group.

The panel discussion, which was moderated by ISET President Eric Livny, mostly focused on the need for a higher involvement of the private sector and for a better cooperation between the latter and the authorities. It was generally admitted that the development of an effective and sustainable VET system in Georgia would take at least ten years.

Finally, the participants insisted on the "image" problem of VET in Georgia where it is not considered a first choice. In this context, a major challenge consists in reforming the education system and adapt it to the labor market's needs and requirements. Switzerland is ready to assist Georgia in this important endeavor.

For more information please visit our [website](#) or the [Facebook page](#).



Swiss expert Marc Bloch presents the Swiss model of vocational education ©Swiss Embassy in Georgia



Panel discussion ©Swiss Embassy in Georgia

Like us on our Facebook page!

Facebook is the market leader with as many as 1.97 billion monthly active users. In Georgia, out of 3.7 million people, more than 600'000 are registered Facebook users. The Swiss Embassy in Georgia has lots to share about Swiss-Georgian relations and partnership. With this in mind, the Embassy recently launched its official Facebook page to share news, inform about Switzerland and promote its actions in Georgia. Stay tuned!

[Swiss Embassy in Georgia](#)



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Switzerland in
Georgia 
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ECONOMY

Ratification of the EFTA-Georgia Free Trade Agreement

The ratification process of the EFTA-Georgia Free Trade Agreement signed in June 2016 is moving forward.

In Georgia, the agreement was approved by the Parliament on March 23. The agreement will enter into force on 30 September 2017 for Georgia, Iceland and Norway. In Switzerland, the Council of States, the upper house of the Parliament, unanimously approved it on June 14. The National Council will be seized with this matter at its session in September 2017. Once approved and ratified by Switzerland, the agreement will enter into force after a three-month period, possibly at the end of 2017 or at the very beginning of 2018.

Stadler Rail AG expands its activities in Georgia

In parallel to the improvement of framework conditions for bilateral trade and investment, Swiss-Georgian business relations recorded important developments in the first half of 2017. In February, Georgian Railway announced that two more Stadler Rail trains were to be delivered to Georgia for fast services from Tbilisi to the Black Sea resorts of Batumi, Kobuleti and Ureki.

On 30 June, Swiss Stadler Rail AG, a leader in manufacturing railway rolling stock, represented by its CEO Peter Spuhler, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Georgian Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, Mr. Giorgi Gakharia. The MoU expresses the intention of the company to invest in Georgia, namely to establish a joint venture in Georgia for the maintenance of trains. The plant might also manufacture new wagons in the future.

Opening of a new venture in the Guria region

On 24 June, a new industrial venture was opened in the village of Nabeghlavi, Guria, in presence of the Prime Minister and several ministers. What started as a Swiss-supported company, "Healthy Water", producing the mineral waters Nabeghlavi and Bakhmaro, has now expanded attracting a €40 mln. investment. The new factory produces natural juices, lemonades and iced tea from local fruits harvested on 70 ha of orchards; thus, it allows to process fruits grown in Georgia and to export high-quality beverages to countries of the wider region. The modern plant with highest standards uses renewable energy to operate its cooling and heating system, herewith ensuring an ecologically clean production.

The project was implemented with Swiss and Austrian partners and supported by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). This is a perfect example of remarkable results and achievements based on Swiss-Georgian cooperation.



Natural juices from Nabeghlavi ©Swiss Embassy in Georgia



Swiss-Georgian undertaking has attracted an investment worth €40 mln. ©Swiss Embassy in Georgia

HIGH-LEVEL MEETINGS

On March 7, a round of political consultations was held in Tbilisi between Georgian and Swiss delegations headed respectively by David Dondua, Deputy Foreign Minister, and Krystyna Marty Lang, Deputy State Secretary of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The talks covered a broad spectrum of topics and focused on present and future co-operation in such areas as politics, economy and development assistance. The sides also spoke about new possibilities of partnership in tourism, science, culture and education.



H.E. Elisabeth von Capeller's visit to Georgia and Armenia ©SCO South Caucasus

On 28-30 June, a Swiss delegation headed by Ambassador Elisabeth von Capeller, Head of Eastern Cooperation of SDC, visited a number of projects funded by the Swiss Government in Armenia and Georgia.

In Georgia, the intensive programme included a visit of the kindergarten in Marneuli that was initiated by the local community.

Further project visits around Marneuli concerned a new wool collection facility which complies with food safety and hygiene requirements; the bio security points that were constructed to control livestock diseases on the transhumance route; and an integrated village milk collection and processing plant. In addition, high-ranking meetings took place with the Ministers of Agriculture and of Education and Science and with the State Secretary for Reconciliation and Civic Equality. The parties discussed the Swiss development assistance in the areas of agriculture, vocational education and conflict transformation.

[Swiss delegation's visit to Georgia on our Facebook page](#)

CULTURE

La Francophonie

March 2017, the traditional month of *Francophonie*, was the occasion to present Switzerland as a home of the French language and culture. The Swiss film "Sweet Girls" by Jean-Paul Cardinaux and Xavier Ruiz opened the film program. The movie, which tells the story of two teenage girls cloistered in a commuter town and struggling with the lack of opportunities for the future, was screened in Tbilisi. For the first time, the Swiss Embassy called for a competition among students, who were invited to introduce Switzerland to their fellow Georgians through a short movie. The high level of interest and participation surpassed expectations. The brilliant winner of the competition was 17-year old Salome Parjani with her movie "La Suisse". Please visit our website to watch the [movie](#).

A wine and cheese tasting workshop held in cooperation with other participating Embassies offered practical insight into Georgian-Swiss wine-making cooperation. See the article on [hvino.com](#).

Drei Länder eine Sprache

In May, the Swiss Embassy joined the celebration of the *Month of the German Language*. Several events were organized to promote Swiss culture and the German language itself. The Swiss author Annette Lory was in Georgia to read to the audience excerpts from her novel "Vom Fliegen ausser Atem". The reading was pleasant and the storyline fascinating! It is expected that her novel will be soon translated into Georgian. Two public lectures by Prof. Levan Tsagareli and Dr. Maia Panjikidze were dedicated to the two "monuments" of classic Swiss literature: Friedrich Dürrenmatt's "Der Besuch der alten Dame" and Max Frisch's "Stiller", respectively. The latter is being translated into Georgian by Dr. Panjikidze. In another category of poetry, the Swiss "slam poet" Lisa Christ travelled to Georgia and animated various "poetry slam" workshops for German language students. For film aficionados, the movie "Der grosse Sommer" ("Big & Little" in Eng.) by Stefan Jäger was screened in Tbilisi. It tells the fate of a former champion of Swiss wrestling who lives in a suburb of Bern as a grouchy recluse and who gradually rediscovers the joy of living; eventually, he succeeds in overcoming his loneliness after taking his virgin trip outside of Switzerland.

Contemporary dance festival

Within the framework of its Regional Art and Culture program, the Swiss Cooperation Office for the South Caucasus supported the performance "More Than One Species" by Takako Suzuki. Through the joint performance, the dancers and musicians from traditional, as well as experimental dance and music scene tried to explore the perception of the human body, its freedoms and constraints throughout Georgia's last decades.

Enjoy the photos from the performance [here!](#)

In September, the program plans to present "GALA" by Jérôme Bel (FR) and Supra4Ever by Salome Schneebeili (CH). Follow us on [Facebook](#) and get updated on our planned events!

CONSULAR MATTERS

Visa liberalization

Starting from March 28, 2017, Georgian citizens are exempted from the visa requirement when travelling to the Schengen area for a short stay of not more than 90 days within a 180-day period.

The visa waiver applies only to holders of biometric passports.

The obligation to hold a visa with regard to exercising gainful occupation persists (also for an occupation not exceeding 8 days within a calendar year).

For additional information please refer to Frequently Asked Questions ([FAQ](#)) on the webpage of our Embassy. The document is available in English, Georgian and German languages.

95th Congress of the Swiss Abroad: register now!

The 95th Congress of the Swiss Abroad will take place in Basel from 18 to 20 August 2017.

Organized by the Organization of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), the Congress of the Swiss Abroad is the annual meeting of the Swiss citizen living all around the world. During this meeting, they have the opportunity to renew with the Swiss current information, to discuss special themes and to exchange in a friendly atmosphere their own experiences. The Congress is held in German and French.

The Congress takes place every year in a different region of Switzerland and some 400 compatriots from the whole world usually attend this event. Visits, entertainments, meetings with the authorities and local population are also part of the program.

You will find additional information concerning the congress and the registration on the [ASO website](#).

“together” - the new integration app from the SRG SSR



Living in Switzerland – this is the theme of the SRG SSR's integration app "together". Users can find out about life in Switzerland in a fun way with a quiz, discover the ins and outs and stay up to date with the latest information thanks to a news feed – choose between German, French, Italian, English, Spanish, Portuguese or Arabic versions.

[Read more](#)

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