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'The main challenge is to increase the inflow of tourists, as this will create new jobs, bring more money into the country'

An interview with Giorgi Chogovadze, head of the Georgian National Tourism Administration

What challenges does the GNTA face this summer season? How do visitor numbers compare with last year? How has the season been so far and which countries are the tourists expected to come from?

The main challenge is to increase the inflow of tourists, as this will create new jobs, bring more money into the country, help develop the regions, etc. Tourism is one of the most important parts of any country's economy; out of every 11 jobs anywhere in the world, 1 is in the tourism sector. Tourism also accounts for 6% of the world's exports.

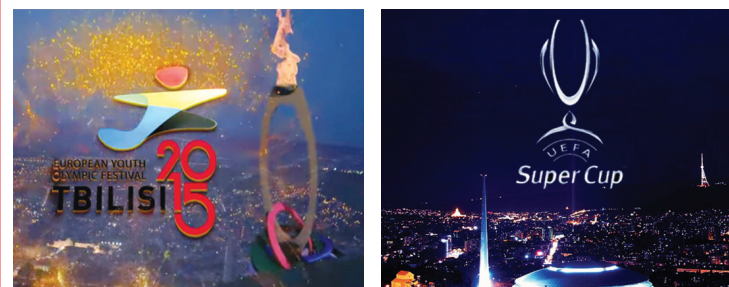


More People Visited Georgia in May and June



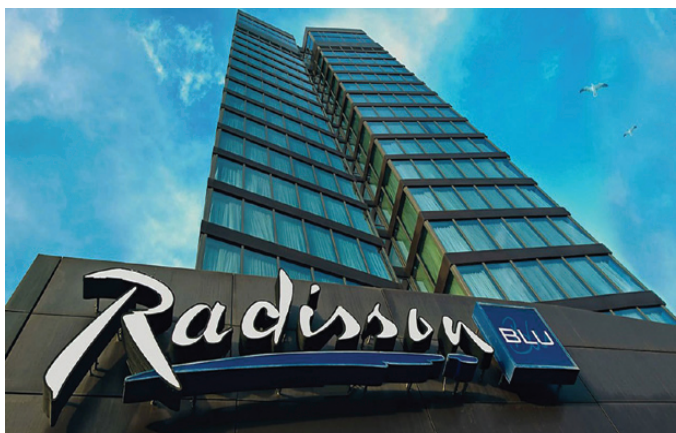
The Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNTA) continues to undertake international marketing programmes and more tourists are expected to come to Georgia in the coming months.

Research conducted by the Georgian National Tourism Administration shows that the number of international visitors who entered Georgia in May and June was significantly greater than in the same two months of last year. Despite economic shocks, the depreciation of the Georgian Lari and the Tbilisi Flood in Tbilisi the tourist index keeps increasing thanks to the hard work and various promotional events organised by the Georgian National Tourism Administration.



Super Cup and European Youth Olympic Festival - New Tourism Opportunities for Georgia

Radisson Blu Iveria Nominated for "Tourism Oscar"



Radisson Blu Iveria has been nominated for the World Travel Awards™ "Best Business Hotel in Europe" award. This is the first time a Georgian hotel has been nominated for this award. In addition, its sister hotel Radisson Blu Batumi has been nominated for the "Best Hotel in Georgia" award.

The voting process will last from 4 March to 26 July. The other nominees for Best Business Hotel in Europe include such famous hotels as the Hôtel Fouquet's Barrière and L'Hotel du Collectionneur in France and the Hotel Adlon Kempinski in Germany.

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PARLIAMENT SPEAKER ON GEORGIA'S NATO INTEGRATION



Georgian Parliament Speaker Davit Usupashvili (left) and NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow (right) at a meeting of NATO-Georgia Commission in Brussels.

Parliament speaker Davit Usupashvili said that Georgia wants more from NATO to speed up country's integration into the Alliance.

He made the remarks on July 22 after meeting with NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow in Brussels, where he also addressed diplomats from the Alliance member states in frames of the NATO-Georgia Commission.

"I told our partners very clearly, unequivocally that Georgia is ready for more and that Georgia believes more is needed to be done," Usupashvili said in an interview with the Georgian public broadcaster on July 22.

"On this issue we work both individually with NATO-member states and with NATO as a whole. Many NATO-member states are willing to make more clear steps – be it towards MAP [Membership Action Plan] or even more, and there are states, which need more arguments and with whom more work is needed in order to make them believe that speeding up of Georgia's NATO integration poses no threat to stability in the region and to their security," he said.

"We need serious work in this regard... and we should continue it; it requires work, instead of vocal statements and irresponsible actions – that's the only policy, which is in line with NATO," Usupashvili said.

He also said that NATO diplomats encouraged Tbilisi to keep format of direct dialogue with Moscow involving meetings between Georgian PM's special representatives for relations with Russia Zurab Abashidze and Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin; opposition UNM and Free Democrats (FD) parties are calling the government to scrap this format; UNM says that this format creates "false impression" of normalization of bilateral relations with Russia and FD says the format has "exhausted itself".

"One of the issues I was asked [by NATO diplomats at a meeting of NATO-Georgia Commission] was whether the Georgian government really plans to scrap Abashidze-Karasin format – they hear such statements from Georgian politicians; they believe that if it happens and if the government cuts this small, not so efficient, but necessary link of relation with Russia, our efforts in respect of joining NATO and gaining MAP will become more difficult, because Georgia's NATO membership as well as granting Georgia MAP is not design by the member states for entering into new conflict with Russia – that's not the case," Usupashvili said.

"Georgia should maintain what has been achieved in recent years, when we managed moving forward towards our strategic goal without creating additional problems to our own country and when others create additional problems to us, we try to solve it through the same means which is our strategic goal – with the support of our international organizations and our partners," he said.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg is expected to visit Georgia next month.

"In a meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission, Allied ambassadors welcomed good progress on the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package, which aims to help Georgia strengthen and develop its forces and defence ministry," NATO said in a press release on July 22.

"Allies thanked Tbilisi for its major contributions to NATO missions and operations, which have further developed Georgia's ability to work seamlessly alongside Allied forces. Georgia is currently the second largest contributor to the Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan," it said.

"The Deputy Secretary General and Allied ambassadors commended Georgia for its considerable reforms, and encouraged the country to continue its efforts. Given recent developments on the Administrative Boundary Lines of the South Ossetia region of Georgia, Ambassador Vershbow further made clear that Allies fully support Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally-recognized borders," NATO said.

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REGULATOR OKS GAS-FIRED POWER TARIFF INCREASE, BUT SHORT OF HIKE SOUGHT BY COMPANIES

The Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission has approved to increase tariff on electricity generated by gas-fired power plants, operated by three companies two of which are also largest electricity distributors in Georgia.

But the new tariff, set by the regulator on July 22, is far short of increase requested by the companies, which seek higher fees to offset their surging expenses on purchasing of natural gas caused by depreciation of the Georgian currency lari.

Thermal power accounted for up to 19% of total electricity generation in Georgia in 2014.

The three companies, which have asked the regulator earlier this year for the increase of tariff for which they sell generated electricity to distributor companies, are: gPower, Mtkvari Energy and Georgian International Energy Corporation (GIEC).

gPower is a subsidiary of Energo-Pro Georgia, the largest electricity distributor in the country with 63% of market share. gPower operates 110-megawatt gas turbine power station lo-



cated in Gardabani. Energo-Pro Georgia, which is part of the private Czech group Energo-Pro, also operates twelve hydro power plants in Georgia and distributes electricity to over a million customers outside Tbilisi.

Mtkvari Energy is owned by the Russia's state-controlled power trader Inter RAO, which holds 75.1% of shares in Telasi, an electricity distributor company in Tbilisi. Telasi is the second largest distributor of electricity in Georgia with 32.5% market share. Mtkvari Energy operates thermal power plant with the installed capacity of 300-megawatt, which is also located in Gardabani.

Georgian International Energy Corporation (GIEC) is a daughter company of one of the country's largest industrial holdings, Georgian Industrial Group (GIG); it operates thermal power plant located also in Gardabani.

All three buy gas to operate their thermal power plants from the Azerbaijani state-owned SOCAR for USD 143 per 1,000 cubic meters, according to filings submitted by the companies to the regulator agency.

The regulator authorized gPower to increase its tariff only by 1.8% to 7.534 tetri (without VAT) for one kwh of electricity.

Mtkvari Energy was requesting increase of its tariff from current 7.17 to 12.75 tetri for one kWh, but the regulator approved tariff raise to only 10.871 tetri.

GIEC wanted its tariff to be increased from current 7.319 to 13.98 tetri, but the regulator ruled to increase it up to 10.194 tetri for one kWh.

Zurab Gelenidze, chief financial officer of GIG, a parent company of GIEC, said that "the sustainability of the entire system will become questionable" as a result of regulator agency's refusal to approve tariff hike at the level requested by the companies; he added that it would also discourage further investments in the electricity generation sector.

Mikheil Botsvadze, a senior executive of Energo-Pro Georgia, said during regulator's session that without increase of tariffs distributor company will no longer be able to secure round-the-clock supply of electricity in November-December.

Deputy Energy Minister, Mariam Valishvili, dismissed such concerns.

She told the Georgian public broadcaster: "I do not think that the tariff set [by the regulator] is either low or high – that's exactly what it should be defined by a relevant methodology. Therefore this is the price, which guarantees that there will be no problems with electricity supply."

Regulator's July 22 session was also attended by representatives of several small non-parliamentary opposition parties, who slammed the decision to increase tariffs and called for "disbanding" of the regulator.

On July 23 the Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission is expected to rule on a separate request by the Energo-Pro Georgia, which seeks increase of electricity tariff to its consumers, citing depreciation of lari.

Electricity tariffs for some category of households were reduced in 2013, which was one of the pre-election campaign promises of the Georgian Dream coalition.

When signs of possible electricity tariff hike first emerged several months ago amid depreciation of lari, Energy Minister Kakha Kaladze said in May that the government will consider "targeted subsidizing" if electricity bills go up.

In May the Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission rejected a request by the water supply company in Tbilisi to increase the tariff.

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ELECTRICITY TARIFF HIKE IN REGIONS

Over one million customers of Energo-Pro Georgia power distributor company will see electricity tariff increase by 3.95 tetri (about 1.75 U.S. cents) per kWh starting from August 1, prompting the government to consider subsidies for socially vulnerable households.

Energo-Pro Georgia, which is part of the private Czech group Energo-Pro, is the largest electricity distributor in the country with 63% of market share, supplying electricity to customers in the regions, except of Kakheti.

The Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission approved tariff hike for Energo-Pro at a session on July 23, but the new tariff falls short of the increase requested by the company, which was citing its surging expenses caused by depreciation of the Georgian currency lari.

A Tbilisi electricity distributor Telasi, in which Russia's state-controlled power trader Inter RAO holds 75.1% of shares, has followed suit and filed a request with the regulator on July 23 also asking for a tariff increase for its customers in the capital city. It too has cited the depreciation of the GEL as the need for the hike. The GEL has lost over 28% of its value against U.S. dollar since November, 2014.



A three-step electricity tariff scheme is in force in Georgia and rates depend on how much electricity is consumed by customers per month.

Georgia's electricity tariff was last revised in January, 2013, when the rate for some category of households were reduced, which was one of the pre-election campaign promises of the Georgian Dream ruling coalition.

After the energy regulator agency's July 23 decision, the first-step tariff for Energo-Pro customers, applying to households which consume less than 101 kWh electricity per month, will go up from current 9 tetri (about 4 U.S. cents as of July 23) to 12.95 tetri (about 5.75 cents). This first-step tariff also applies to those households, who have no individual meters and are connected to common electricity meters. With this increase the first-step tariff will now go back to its pre-2013 level when it stood at 12.98 tetri.

The second-step tariff, applying to customers who consume between 101 and 301 kWh electricity per month, will be 16.93 tetri per kWh instead of current 12.98 tetri. The increased tariff is slightly more than pre-2013 tariff of 16.52 tetri.

The third-step tariff, applying to customers who consume more than 301 kWh of electricity per month, will increase from current 17.5 to 21.45 tetri per kWh. Tariff decrease did not apply to this category of consumers in 2013.

"This is a fair tariff, which will guarantee uninterrupted and reliable electricity supply to customers," said Irina Milorava, chairperson of the Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission.

She added that the tariff increase was caused by a hike in distributor company's expenses for purchasing imported electricity and electricity generated by gas-fired power station, attributed to depreciation of lari.

In a separate decision on July 22, the regulatory commission authorized tariff increase on electricity generated by gas-fired power plants, operated by three companies, one of which is Energo-Pro's subsidiary. Energo-Pro Georgia also operates about dozen of small and medium-sized hydro power plants.

Speaking at a government session earlier on July 23, PM Irakli Garibashvili said: "If the tariff is changed and increased, the government will do everything in order to ease burden for the people and there definitely will be subsidies for socially vulnerable families, for those who need it most."

The government has yet to elaborate a detailed scheme on how the increased tariff will be subsidized and how much funding it will require from the state budget.

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Customers' idea about ideal lottery

-  There must be a wide variety of prizes;
-  It would be good to win several times;
-  Receive the prize the moment you win;
-  The rules must be easy;
-  In case of cash prizes, decide myself what to buy.

Having taken into consideration your wishes
“Aversi” **grand lottery** has begun!

The prizes are



The lottery will be held on the 20th of November 2015 in the broadcast of “Rustavi-2”,
after “Kurier” 18:00.

EU'S TUSK HAILS TBILISI'S 'RESPONSIBLE REACTION' TO RUSSIA'S 'PROVOCATIONS'



European Council President Donald Tusk looks through binoculars while visiting breakaway South Ossetian boundary line as observers from the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) brief him about situation on the ground, July 21, 2015. Photo: European Council

President of the European Council Donald Tusk said he appreciates the "responsible reaction" by the Georgian government to Russia's "clear provocation", involving putting "separation infrastructure" along the administrative boundary line with the breakaway South Ossetia.

Tusk made the remarks after meeting with Georgian PM Irakli Garibashvili on July 21, following his trip to the South Ossetian administrative boundary earlier the same day, where new demarcation signposts have been placed recently by the Russian troops in the close vicinity of Georgia's major east-west highway and in the area where mile-long section of the BP-operated Baku-Supsa oil pipeline runs.

"I have seen how the infrastructure of separation continues to be put in place along the boundary," Tusk said after the meeting with the Georgian PM.

He reiterated his earlier remarks made after the meeting with President Giorgi Margvelashvili on July 20 that the recent installation of new demarcation signposts is "a clear provocation", which does not contribute to efforts to stabilize the situation.

"Let me say Mr. Prime Minister that I really appreciate your very responsible reaction; I think it's very important not only for Georgia, but for the whole region and whole Europe to manage this problem responsibly and with cold blood," Tusk said.

Tusk suggested that the goal of those "provocations" is to trigger an "overreacted" response from Georgia.

"It is very important for us to be tough, but also very responsible," he added.

PM Garibashvili expressed "concern" over the recent developments along the administrative boundary and described it as "a provocation."

"The Georgian government met it firmly, but calmly," he said. "Our goal is not to yield to these provocations and not to give anyone any pretext for escalation."

The European Council President said that Georgian domestic politics were also discussed at the meeting with the Prime Minister.

"I have stressed that all parties must do their utmost to avoid politics of extremes. Legal process should be free from political motivation; this matters first place for Georgia, but also for our relations."

Tusk, who met representatives of the opposition UNM and Free Democrats parties in Tbilisi on July 21, also noted the importance of making reform processes "as inclusive as possible."

On visa liberalization with the EU, Tusk said after the meeting with the PM that Georgia made good progress and "if this progress continues" and if the next technical report by the European Commission before the end of this year is positive "I think you will be able to successfully finalize this process in the near future."

"Successful completion of visa liberalization dialogue with the EU is very important for us," PM Garibashvili said. "I told Mr. Tusk that the Georgian government is fully motivated to fulfill all the commitments undertaken under the Visa Liberalization Action Plan," Garibashvili said, adding that implementation of this plan is carried out with "success, without any delays."

"We have actually fulfilled all the commitments in respect of VLAP [Visa Liberalization Action Plan] and we expect that by the end of this year there will be positive political decision in this regard by the European Union," the Georgia PM said.

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GEORGIAN PARLIAMENT SPEAKER VISITS NATO HQ

Georgian parliament speaker Davit Usupashvili will address diplomats from the NATO member states in Brussels in frames of the NATO-Georgia Commission on July 22.

During his visit to the NATO headquarters, Usupashvili will also meet NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow.

"We will talk about all those issues that represent area of our interest in respect of NATO – what we are interested in is speeding up of our integration into NATO and strengthening of our very

specific defense capabilities from the political point of view and from other point of views," Usupashvili told journalists in Tbilisi on July 20

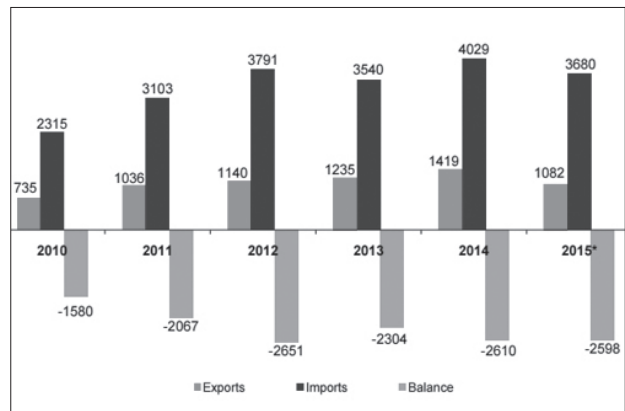
He also said that he views this visit "to some extent as a follow up" of his address to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly session in Budapest in May 2015.

In that address Usupashvili said that Georgia is now as ready for NATO membership as some of its members were at the time they were invited and NATO should either give Georgia a Membership Action Plan (MAP) during the next NATO summit in Warsaw in 2016 or declare that MAP is no longer a precursor to eventual full membership.

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GEORGIA'S FOREIGN TRADE IN H1'15

Georgia's foreign trade turnover declined 12.6% year-on-year in the first half of 2015 to USD 4.76 billion and the trade gap decreased by 0.4% y/y in the same period to USD 2.6 billion, according to the state statistics office.



Imports were down by 8.6% y/y in January-June to USD 3.68 billion.

Exports from Georgia declined by 23.8% in the first half of 2015, compared to the same period of last year, to slightly over USD 1 billion, caused mainly by reduced re-export of vehicles to Azerbaijan and falling exports of wine and mineral waters to Russia.

Georgia's trade turnover with the EU-member states reached USD 1.43 billion in the first half of 2015, a 1.8% increase compared to the same period of last year.

Exports to the EU-member states were down by 2% y/y in January-June 2015 to USD 293 million, accounting for 27% of Georgia's total exports, and imports were up by 3% y/y to USD 1.14 billion, accounting for 31% of country's total imports.

Trade turnover with Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) declined by 21% y/y in the first half of 2015 to USD 1.35 billion.

Georgia's exports to CIS member states declined by 45% y/y to USD 417 million, accounting for 39% of country's total exports, and imports were down by 2% y/y to USD 939 million, accounting for 26% of Georgia's total imports.

Turkey remains Georgia's largest trading partner with the turnover reaching USD 755.7 million in the first half of 2015. Georgian exports to Turkey declined by 2.6% y/y to USD 109.3 million and imports were down by 22% compared to the same period of last year at USD 646.3 million.

Turkey is followed by Azerbaijan with trade turnover of USD 408.6 million in the first half. Georgian exports to Azerbaijan declined by 54.9% y/y to USD 130.7 million, mostly due to decline in re-export of vehicles from USD 147.5 million in January-June of 2014 to USD 41.8 million in the same period of 2015. Imports from Azerbaijan were down by 5.6% y/y to USD 277.8 million.

China was the third largest trading partner with the turnover of USD 370.5 million in the first half of 2015. Export to China increased by 81.3% y/y to USD 55.5 million in the first six months of 2015, mainly because of more than two-fold increase in export of copper ores and concentrates to USD 44 million. Imports from China declined by 10% y/y to USD 315 million in the first half of 2015.

China is followed by Russia with the trade turnover of USD 336.7 million; exports to Russia suffered almost two-fold decline compared to the first six months of last year to USD 70.6 million in the first half of 2015. Imports from Russia increased by 16% y/y to USD 266 million.

Russia is followed by Ukraine with the trade turnover of USD 257.6 million; Germany – USD 239.2 million; Armenia – USD 191.6 million; the United States – USD 181.8 million; Bulgaria – USD 173.6 million; Ireland – USD 146.6 million (this figure is made almost entirely of imports from Ireland as export to the country from Georgia was only at USD 118,600 in the first half of 2015).

Re-export of vehicles no longer leads the pack in Georgia's total exports, which has suffered almost three-fold decline in the first half of 2015 compared to the same period of last year to USD 99.4 million.

Copper ores and concentrates were on top of the list of exports in the first six months of 2015 with USD 129.6 million, 5.8% y/y decline; followed by ferroalloys – USD 110.4 million (31.3% y/y decline); Georgia exported hazelnut worth of USD 73.6 million in the first half of 2015, which is 2.6-fold increase over the same period of last year; medicines – USD 64.5 million (68.4% y/y increase); nitrogen fertilizers – USD 50.3 million (31.8% y/y decline); mineral waters – USD 45.6 million (37.1% y/y decline); wine – USD 39.8 million (53% y/y decline); crude oil – USD 33.5 million (99.1% y/y increase); raw or semi-processed gold – USD 28.8 million (79.6% y/y increase).

Oil products were on top of the list of imports in the first half of 2015 with USD 305.2 million (26.8% y/y decline); followed by medicines – USD 297.8 million (almost two-fold increase compared to the same period of last year); vehicles – USD 244.1 million (26.4% y/y decline); hydrocarbons – USD 221.9 million (21.9% y/y increase); copper ores and concentrates – USD 109.5 million (17% y/y increase); mobile and other wireless phones – USD 68.1 million (19.6% decline); cigarettes – USD 48.6 million (9.7% y/y increase); wheat – USD 47.6 million (1% y/y increase); non-denatured ethyl alcohol and spirits – USD 30.7 million (25.9% y/y increase); bars and rods of iron and steel – USD 30 million (6.5% y/y increase).

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PARLIAMENT CONFIRMS HEAD OF STATE SECURITY SERVICE



Vakhtang Gomelauri in the Parliament chamber in Kutaisi, July 22, 2015. Photo: parlamenta's press office

Parliament confirmed on July 22 Vakhtang Gomelauri for a six-year term as head of the State Security Service, which will be established from August 1 as a result of decoupling intelligence and security agencies from the Interior Ministry.

Gomelauri, 39, who served in security detail of ex-PM Bidzina Ivanishvili before becoming deputy interior minister in spring 2013, held Interior Minister's post since January, 2015.

PM Irakli Garibashvili has yet to name who will replace Gomelauri as the Interior Minister.

Opposition lawmakers from UNM party criticized Gomelauri's candidacy. Referring to his background as Ivanishvili's bodyguard, they were claiming that Gomelauri would be accountable before the ex-PM, not before the Parliament.

"All those claims that the security agencies are being depoliticized are farce and appointment of [Gomelauri], who is loyal to Ivanishvili, proves it," UNM MP Chiora Taktakishvili said.

In his speech MP Zurab Abashidze of the Free Democrats, opposition party which up until November 2014 was part of the GD ruling coalition, neither criticizing nor expressed support towards the nomination. MP Abashidze said that he had "no reason to question reputation" of Gomelauri and also added that the head of the State Security Service should "act based on state interests not based on interests of a single person."

Before the nomination was discussed at a parliamentary session, Gomelauri was heard by a group of lawmakers at a joint session of parliamentary committees on human rights and defense earlier on July 22.

During the committee hearing, which lasted for about an hour, Gomelauri named among the priorities counter-intelligence and prevention of infiltration of "foreign countries' special services" to the Georgian state institutions, as well as "prevention of radicalization of our citizens" by extremist and terrorist groups, in particular by the Islamic State group.

Opposition UNM lawmakers criticized Gomelauri for not even mentioning Russia as a threat while presenting his priorities during the committee hearing.

Responding to this criticism, Gomelauri said: "Whether it is Russia or our other neighbors, strategic partner countries – it does not matter, special services work on all the directions and one of them might be Russia, but Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia are our neighbors – our partner countries, but our counter-intelligence works on all the directions"

On placing of new demarcation signposts along the breakaway South Ossetian administrative boundary line, Gomelauri said that Georgia should respond to these "provocations" "cool-headedly." "We know what happened to us by yielding to provocations in 2008," he said, referring to the war with Russia.

Committee hearing was briefly interrupted by verbal insults between some GD and UNM lawmakers. Most of the UNM MPs walked out of the committee meeting after that. GD MP Zaza Papuashvili, a theater actor, said of UNM lawmakers: "One should be breaking their heads day and night."

At the parliamentary session GD ruling coalition MPs were praising Gomelauri and the reform through which the security and intelligence agencies were decoupled from the Interior Ministry.

"I know him [Gomelauri] for a long time already; we were together in the opposition, then we came into power together and I know him as a very principled person with iron nerves," GD MP from the National Forum party, Gubaz Sanikidze, said.

MP Davit Saganelidze, the leader of GD parliamentary majority group, praised Gomelauri as "patriot, honest" person "loyal to his country" and dismissed opposition lawmakers' criticism as "demagoguery."

Gomelauri's nomination was confirmed with 83 votes to 0; UNM and Free Democrats lawmakers were not in the chamber during the vote.

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Radisson Blu Iveria Nominated for "Tourism Oscar"

Radisson Blu Iveria has been nominated for the World Travel Awards™ "Best Business Hotel in Europe" award. This is the first time a Georgian hotel has been nominated for this award. In addition, its sister hotel Radisson Blu Batumi has been nominated for the "Best Hotel in Georgia" award.

The voting process will last from 4 March to 26 July. The other nominees for Best Business Hotel in Europe include such famous hotels as the Hôtel Fouquet's Barrière and L'Hotel du Collectionneur in France and the Hotel Adlon Kempinski in Germany.

"On behalf of my team I am very proud to represent the first Georgian hotel to be nominated for such a prestigious international award. I consider the nomination to reflect a growing trend in the Georgian tourism industry, as domestic hotels do indeed offer their customers international level service and experience," said John Losasso, General Manager of Radisson Blu Iveria.

The World Travel Awards™ were founded in 1993 and reward outstanding operators in all spheres of tourism. The in-

ternational jury presents a range of awards in different categories to hotels, airlines, tourist agencies and car service companies. The World Travel Awards™ are now recognised as the most prestigious tourism awards in the world and an assurance of the highest quality. The Wall Street Journal describes them as the "Oscars" of the tourism industry.

Radisson Blu Iveria offers an ideal combination of convenience and elegance, providing customers with a very comfortable and sophisticated home from home. It has 249 rooms with contemporary designs and superior services such as plasma LCD TVs, individual climate controls and high speed wi-fi. Guests may enjoy its Italian and Asian restaurants, the terrace, the Anne Semonin Spa service, the bar and outdoor and indoor swimming pools and visit the high class Casino Iveria. Radisson Blu Iveria also offers 9 conference halls and meeting rooms.

The hotel's E-commerce Manager, Eka Lolashvili, told us:

"We always do our best to make the time each guest spends here pleasant and memorable.



With regard to the nomination for the "Tourism Oscar", this is very important for Georgia as well as our hotel because this is the first time any Georgian hotel has been nominated for a Europe-wide

award. This success will have a positive impact on Georgian tourism, as the fact that we have a recognised world class hotel here is very important for the image of our country.

"I should also mention that we are continually supported by the Georgian National Tourism Administration. We have provided them with press releases about the nomination for

the "Oscar" and various marketing materials. The GNTA is conducting an active PR campaign about this nomination and we are very grateful for such support."

PARLIAMENT ADOPTS AMENDMENTS TO 2015 STATE BUDGET

Parliament confirmed on Friday with 78 votes to 18 amendments to the 2015 state budget cutting economic growth forecast from 5% to 2% and reducing initially targeted GEL 7.6 billion in tax revenues by GEL 200 million.

Funding cut in an amount of total of about GEL 160 million will affect most of the ministries. But the overall budgetary expenditures set for this year remain unchanged at slightly over GEL 8 billion as the government plans to offset reduced tax revenues by raising GEL 185m in foreign loans and over GEL 40m in budgetary support grants from donors. Government also expects additional GEL 150 million this year from mobile operators in license fees for spectrum used to provide 4G services.

Part of the funds, cut from the ministries, according to the government, will be redirected to various infrastructure projects and to cover part of the damage caused by deadly flood in Tbilisi on June 12-14.

Deputy Finance Minister, Giorgi Kakauridze, said that these changes will allow to prevent increase of budget deficit to 3.7% of GDP and to keep it at 3%.

He told lawmakers on July 17 that deficit might be even less than 3% as revised economic growth of 2% is a conservative estimation and the growth can actually reach 3%.

Initially estimated state debt of GEL 11.8 billion is now increasing to GEL 13.78 billion, attributed mostly to depreciation of the Georgian currency lari. It pushed state debt-to-GDP ratio up to 45%, which exceeds target limit of 40%, set by government's long-term economic strategy paper.

Back in December, when the Parliament was discussing the 2015 state budget, lawmakers from the opposition UNM party were warning the government that neither the 5% economic growth forecast nor target of GEL 7.6 billion tax revenue were realistic. During the debates on budgetary amendments on July 17, UNM lawmakers were reminding Deputy Finance Minister about their warnings, saying that at the time decline of external earnings in the form of reduced exports and remittances had been in place for several months already. But Kakauridze was responding that government's initial projections were in line with those of IMF.

Breakdown of spending cut per ministries is as follows:

- Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development funding declines by GEL 54.5 million to GEL 945.5 million; decline is mostly attributed to a failure to implement number of infrastructure projects, which were planned for this year;
- Ministry of Agriculture funding is reduced by GEL 25.5 million to GEL 267.45 million;
- Education Ministry funding is down by GEL 13.1 million to GEL 340.8 million;
- Energy Ministry funding is reduced by GEL 10.7 million to GEL 114.3 million;

- Foreign Ministry funding is down by GEL 10.5 million to GEL 89.5 million, mostly at the expense of funds, which were originally aimed at purchasing buildings for Georgian embassies abroad;

- Interior Ministry funding declines by GEL 10 million; GEL 36 million from the ministry' budget will be relocate to fund planned State Security Agency, which will be established from August 1 after decoupling security and intelligence agencies from the Interior Ministry and as a result the latter's 2015 budget will stand at GEL 591.65 million;

- Finance Ministry funding goes down by GEL 9 million to GEL 91 million;

- Defense Ministry funding is reduced by GEL 6.1 million; but because Delta military industrial complex was transferred from the Economy Ministry back to the MoD, the latter's total 2015 budget increases to GEL 667.3 million; mainly for the same reason, related to transfer of Delta, funding of Economy Ministry is reduced from GEL 120 million to GEL 85.3 million;

- Prison system ministry funding declines by GEL 4.5 million to GEL 150.5 million;

- Justice Ministry funding goes down by GEL 3.6 million to GEL 66.1 million;

- Ministry of Environment Protection funding declines by GEL 2.4 million to GEL 36.57 million;

- Ministry of Culture funding is reduced by GEL 1 million to GEL 94 million;

- Ministry of Sports funding goes down by GEL 200,000 to GEL 69.8 million;

- Funding of the Parliament is reduced by GEL 6 million to GEL 46 million and of the Intelligence Service by GEL 1.6 million to GEL 12.4 million.

Government's discretionary reserve fund is increased by GEL 20 million to GEL 70 million and GEL 1 million is added to the Special State Protection Service (SSPS), increasing the latter's funding to GEL 54 million.

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DEFENSE MINISTER: 'RUSSIA TESTS OUR PATIENCE'

Defense Minister, Tina Khidasheli, visiting Agile Spirit 2015 multinational military exercises at the Vaziani military base outside Tbilisi, July 19, 2015. Photo: Georgian MoD

Placing of demarcation signposts along the breakaway South Ossetian administrative boundary line is part of Russia's provocations through which it is "testing our patience," Georgia's Defense Minister Tina Khidasheli said on July 19.

"The goal is not to make the country victim of provocations, which Russia is permanently undertaking against us," she said.

"By doing this they are testing our patience on the daily basis, trying to provoke and engage us in the conflict, which, I can assure you, Georgia's current authorities will not let happen," she told journalists at the Vaziani military base outside Tbilisi, where Agile Spirit 2015 drills are held with

participation of Georgian, U.S., Bulgarian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Romanian troops.

Signposts marking "South Ossetian border" were placed on July 10 close to the villages of Tsitlubani and Orchosani in the short distance from Georgia's main east-west highway and in the area where a mile-long portion of the BP-operated Baku-Supsa oil pipeline runs.

Series of protest rallies by activists and journalists, who were arriving in the area from Tbilisi followed, with one of the signposts being torn down. Some locals were complaining that those protests were exacerbating situation, affecting further negatively on the local population living in an immediate vicinity of the administrative border. Police restricted access to the area on July 17 for non-local residents. A protest rally, organized by some media outlets and civil society organizations, was held in Tbilisi on July 18, criticizing government's policies towards Russia and accusing the authorities of not doing enough to prevent Russia's "creeping occupation."

After the August, 2008 war and following recognition of South Ossetia's "independence" by Moscow, Russian forces in the breakaway region started building demarcation line mostly along southwestern, south and southeastern portions of the administrative border. The line mostly follows the Soviet-old administrative borders of former Autonomous District of South Ossetia

The process, referred as "borderization", involved placing of border markers, erecting of fences and putting barbed wires, cutting farmlands and in some cases dividing villages.

In September, 2010 when one of the early instances of borderization affected farmlands close to the villages of Kvemo Nikozi, Zemo Nikozi, Ditsi, Arbo and Kordi, the Georgian authorities initially started vocal protest, but toned down rhetoric shortly afterwards.

Borderization process was stepped up in the course of 2013 with the dividing fences reaching the length of roughly 45 kilometers by the end of that year.

Currently there are about 200 "border" signposts along the administrative boundary line, according to EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM), whose unarmed monitors observe situation on the ground since the 2008 war; but they have no access to breakaway South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Head of the EUMM, Lithuanian diplomat Kestutis Jankauskas, said in an interview with the Georgian public broadcaster on July 16 that this year "we have not seen much borderization activities."

He said that the recent installation of demarcation signposts were made in close vicinity of strategic infrastructure, including Georgia's main east-west highway, and "in these issues there are lots of emotions"

"In terms of perceptions these signs for the local population mark the areas where they can or where they cannot go, so for them the boundaries have moved and that's why it's so emotional," he said.

A meeting of Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) has been scheduled for July 20 to address recent developments. IPRM represents meetings with EUMM facilitation between Georgian and South Ossetian representatives, as well as representatives of the Russian troops on the ground.

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Giorgi Chogovadze: The main challenge is to increase the inflow of tourists, as this will create new jobs, bring more money into the country

An interview with Giorgi Chogovadze, head of the Georgian National Tourism Administration

What challenges does the GNTA face this summer season? How do visitor numbers compare with last year? How has the season been so far and which countries are the tourists expected to come from?

The main challenge is to increase the inflow of tourists, as this will create new jobs, bring more money into the country, help develop the regions, etc. Tourism is one of the most important parts of any country's economy; out of every 11 jobs anywhere in the world, 1 is in the tourism sector. Tourism also accounts for 6% of the world's exports.

We have a clear vision of the importance of tourism and do our best to increase the number of visitors to Georgia. This year we have undertaken various international activities and I am pleased to say that, as a result, visitor numbers have risen.

There were 496,758 visitors to Georgia in June, a 9.3% increase on June last year. The number of tourists who spent at least 24 hours in Georgia in June also rose, by 3.4%, compared with last June. This followed a 14.7% increase in visitor numbers in May compared with May 2014.

Most of the June visitors were from neighboring countries. The number of visitors from Russia rose by 47% and the number from Armenia by 33%. We are also seeing more visitors from such countries as Israel (26%), Kazakhstan (40%), Belarus (56%) and others. Furthermore, more are coming from EU countries.

This growth tendency, driven by the activities undertaken by the Georgian National Tourism Administration and the Ministry of Economy, encourages us to project that this year

will be significantly more successful than the previous one.

What does the GNTA intend to do to increase Georgia's tourism potential?

We work on this constantly, and we will soon be getting ready for the winter season and undertaking new marketing campaigns.

We do a number of things to attract more visitors: we are developing the small tourism infrastructure, increasing awareness of Georgia, marketing to the domestic and international markets, developing new tourism products, etc. The Georgian aviation market has good potential, and this also contributes to the development of the tourism sector in Georgia.

We are also working on developing domestic tourism. The "Discover Georgia" company has been established, special video commercials have been prepared and press tours are frequently organised in order to popularise Georgia's splendid attractions. These activities will encourage a lot of our own citizens to explore the beauty of their own country.

How successful have your marketing campaigns been?

Our successful campaigns have brought significant results. Let me remind you that at the beginning of 2015 there was no tourism growth because of external shocks like the Russian-Ukrainian war and the currency depreciations in the countries most of our tourists come from (Turkey, Ukraine, Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia). As soon as the decrease in the inflow of tourists was fixed, we analysed the causes of it and outlined possible ways to ensure it stays fixed. We changed our plan of action in accordance with the new reality, and set

new strategic objectives due to the need to diversify our marketing.

We focused on activities which would bring in tourists from new markets and improve the situation in the existing ones. These included:

- Beginning new campaigns in our target markets (9 countries)

- Accessing international mass media sources (CNN, EURONEWS)

- Inviting more than 200 journalists to visit Georgia

- Holding a media forum, which attracted 48 leading journalists from 6 countries

- Negotiating to establish new direct flights to Georgia and increase the frequency of the existing ones

As a result of these activities, we saw a gradual improvement of the situation in April. Visitor numbers only increased by 0.4% in that month, but in May there was the 14.7% increase I have mentioned.

How did the Tbilisi flood and the images of it influence the inflow of tourists?

Of course the tragedy on the night of 13 June, and in particular the images of it broadcast on the global media, had a certain impact on the inflow of tourists. Some groups did cancel their reservations, but despite this, we had 9.3% more international visitors in June compared to the previous June.

On the day after the disaster we began working to ensure that the planned tourists still came to Georgia. We held individual negotiations with tourism companies and our international partners and organised several press tours, which gave journalists the opportunity to see that the government had mitigated the results of the di-



Giorgi Chogovadze, head of the Georgian National Tourism Administration

saster in quite a short period of time, and that travelling to Georgia, and particularly Tbilisi, is safe.

How positively will such important global events as the UEFA Super Cup and the European Youth Olympic Festival influence the development of tourism in Georgia?

Both these events, which are being held this summer, are of great importance in popularising and increasing awareness of our country. The Georgian National Tourism Administration supports both events and, within the framework of our competency, takes an active part in them. We are publicizing the UEFA Super Cup and European Youth Olympic Festival to our target markets. There is also

a special subpage on our website, which provides guests at these events with the opportunity to choose one of several available Georgian tours and explore Georgia.

We are also holding training courses for volunteers at these events. It should be mentioned that 120 volunteers of the European Youth Olympic Festival have already received our special "Service Skills" training.

What do you expect from the GEM FEST electronic music festival which will be held in Anaklia? How important are similar festivals for attracting tourists?

The GNTA actively supports GEM FEST and all similar festivals held in Georgia. These include the "Global Gath-

ering" which will be held on 11 September in Rustavi. This is the first such licensed festival to be held in Georgia. Festivals are, of course, one of the best methods of attracting tourists, and we therefore welcome the holding of such high level festivals in Georgia.

Radisson Blu Iveria has been nominated for a "Tourism Oscar". How important is this for attracting tourists to the country?

I am very pleased with this nomination, greatly support it and wish every success to Radisson Blu Iveria. The more such high class hotels we have in Georgia the more positively this will influence the country's image and, consequently, the inflow of tourists.

NEWS

MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS BEING BUILT IN GUDAURI AND BAKURIANI

The Georgian National Tourism Administration has told InterPressNews that the construction of mountain bike trails in Gudauri and Bakuriani has begun. They are being built by a Slovenian company, Alliance, with support from the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development and the Mountain Resorts Development Company. 1,000-metre sections of the Gudauri trail have already been cut; the total length will be 4,790 metres.

The Gudauri trail will run from the upper Gondola station to the lower Gondola station. Con-



struction of the Bakuriani trail will begin in a few weeks.

Head of the Georgian National Tourism Administration Giorgi Chogovadze talked about the project.

"This is the first time mountain bike trails have been built in Georgia. The aim is to create a new facility for tourists which will contribute significantly to the extension of the resort season. The trails will soon be complete and are expected to bring more people to these mountain resort areas, who will also use the extensive existing infrastructure

(cableways, café-restaurants, etc.). The bike trails will not cross the ski trails, and consequently they will be safe and comply with international standards.

"Extreme tourism is becoming more popular in Georgia with both domestic and international travellers. The Georgian National Tourism Administration will organise a number of mountain bike tournaments. I believe the development of bike tourism will significantly contribute to attracting more tourists in Georgia," Chogovadze said.



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The resort in the city occupying 2000 sq. meters provides various types of services for taking care after physical health and peace of mind of each customer visiting GINO PARADISE. Here you will be served at the biggest WELLNESS & SPA centre in the Eastern Europe. Various types of fragrance saunas, relaxation pools, showers with rain and thunderstorm effects, ice and leave-falling chambers, Cleopatra's milk and wine bathes, outdoor and indoor swimming pools in compliance with the Olympic standards, healing pools, beer Jacuzzi – are particularly popular with the visitors.

12 different saunas at GINO PARADISE Wellness&Space centre satisfy the requirements and needs of any customer. Visitors may choose Romanian, Finnish or Turkish saunas with plant fragrances in accordance with their desire and needs.

For example, it is well known that Finnish sauna is the best way for pain disappearing. After a tiresome day or physical stress, this is the best way for relaxation. With regard to those who do not like steam, may enjoy dry, infrared sauna – a good way for rest and cleaning of organism from toxins.

Romanian sauna is a good method for curing vascular diseases. Iodized salt steam sauna is the best method for goiter prevention. If you'd like to remove cellulite, correct weight and heal your organism, you should visit GINO PARADISE Wellness&Space centre.

However, it should be necessarily mentioned the main attraction of the WELLNESS centre- EXCELENT corner where there are introduced the only Cleopatra's gold bathes in Europe. Here you may enjoy shampoo, wine, milk and chocolate bathes. Here is also a big beer hydro massager (Jacuzzi), where the visitor may enjoy bathes enriched with beer extract and also taste some beer from nearly installed beer barrel.

Besides, WELLNESS centre offers the variety of massages and different spa procedures. There are introduced various hydro massagers (Jacuzzi) and whirlpools. You may enjoy as Turkish-Arabian soap, as well as dry, wet, chocolate, wine, apple and honey massages that significantly improve health and are the best method for keeping beauty. Everything depends on your choice.

There functions a hepidari-

um that after a cold shower and sauna is the best method of relaxation. The customer may take care after his/her health and with silent and pleasant music rest on the warmed arm-chair laid with marble mosaic.

The wide assortment of services introduced at WELLNESS&SPA centre cares about not only physical health, as well as peace of mind of the visitors. No less important is the fact that the prices at GINO PARADISE TBILISI are affordable for all visitors. You must only choose the package that is acceptable for you.

Besides, in summer there also functions the well-equipped seaside where numerous entertaining attractions are introduced.

There are constantly held interesting events at GINO PARADISE. GINO PARADISE TBILISI is a splendid place for holding a meeting and celebrating birthday parties. Every day Georgian and European animators offer diversified entertaining programs. GINO PARADISE –the resort in the city-will host you any time of the year during 4 seasons.

Shorena Tsivkarashvili



More People Visited Georgia in May and June

The Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNTA) continues to undertake international marketing programmes and more tourists are expected to come to Georgia in the coming months.

Research conducted by the Georgian National Tourism Administration shows that the number of international visitors who entered Georgia in May and June was significantly greater than in the same two months of last year. Despite economic shocks, the depreciation of the Georgian Lari and the Tbilisi Flood in Tbilisi the tourist index keeps increasing thanks to the hard work and various promotional events organised by the Georgian National Tourism Administration.

In June 2015, 496,758 international visitors entered Georgia, an increase of 9.3% on last June. The number of foreign travelers who spent a minimum of 24 hours in Georgia was 197,537, an increase of 3.4% on last June.

As Head of the Georgian National Tourism Administration Giorgi Chogovadze points out, the flood and the images of the flooded city broadcast worldwide may still have had a negative influence on the inflow

of tourists but the GNTA's large scale international marketing campaign has brought positive results.

"The Georgia promotion campaign for the summer season was aimed at nine target markets and involved placing videos on CNN and Euronews. We kept working during the flood crisis and followed a special plan, organising press tours after the flood which provided journalists with the opportunity to see with their own eyes that the government had managed to mitigate the consequences of the disaster in a very short period of time. We were in constant contact with tourist companies and international partners," Chogovadze said.

Nevertheless, most of the visitors in June (86%) were from neighboring countries.

"There were significant increases in the numbers of tourists from Russia (+47%), Armenia (+33%) and Azerbaijan (+15%). There were also increases in the numbers from non-neighbouring countries such as Kazakhstan (+40%), Belarus (+56%), Israel (+26%) and the United Arab Emirates. The international market-

ing activities undertaken by the Georgian National Tourism Administration have significantly contributed to this growth. The administration continues to undertake com-

The Georgian Times has contacted the Radisson Blue Iveria hotel to discover how this tourist inflow has impacted on the hotel trade. Its E-commerce Manager Eka Lolashvili told us,

"ed our hotel; if we look at the turnover of our restaurants and bars, there was a certain correlation between these events and income, but I can't say they have impact-

season has begun comparatively later. Over the whole year most Sheraton guests are foreigners, but in the summer the guests are predominantly Georgian".

The Marco Polo hotel in Gudauri is also doing good business. Its Sales Director Irakli Mamporia told us:

"In comparison with the previous years, May and June 2015 were quite productive. We are also satisfied with the July numbers. In summer the hotel is 75% occupied. 80% of our guests are from Israel: they come on tours of Georgia that last several days and stay in Gudauri for one or two days. Our hotel is the most attractive in this region for such visitors.

"Working with the Georgian National Tourism Administration has proved very comfortable and successful for us. We frequently organise info tours with the GNTA which positively impact the number of booking we receive. We have worked with them for many years and this has had very positive outcomes for us," Mamporia said.



plex international marketing and in subsequent months more foreign travelers are expected to visit Georgia. This projection is supported by the increased number of international visitors during the past 6 months," said Giorgi Chogovadze.

"Our guests are mainly from the business sector. May and June 2015 were very productive and heavily loaded months. We are satisfied with the current numbers. It's difficult to determine whether the flood in June or the Russian crisis and the depreciation of the Lari have impact-

ed us significantly".

Other hotels we contacted presented a similar picture. The Sheraton Batumi's representative told us that the weather is the main factor influencing hotel occupancy in that seaside city:

"This year we have had bad weather, so the summer

Super Cup and European Youth Olympic Festival - New Tourism Opportunities for Georgia

This August Georgia is expecting to see a great many visitors, as Tbilisi is hosting two big sporting events, the UEFA Super Cup and the European Youth Olympic Festival.

The Super Cup match, on 11 August, will be the most important ever to take place in Georgia. It will be held at the Boris Paichadze Stadium, more generally known as the Dinamo Arena, which has a capacity of 51,000. Consequently, Tbilisi is expecting to host this number of football fans and guests from Europe.

All the big hotels in Tbilisi are already booked solid for the days leading up to the match. 1,235 rooms have been reserved (Tbilisi Marriott - 127 rooms, Courtyard Marriott - 118 rooms, Radisson - 249 rooms, Hotel Rooms - 141 rooms, Holiday Inn - 270 rooms, Hotel Preference Hualing Tbilisi - 230 rooms, Mercure Tbilisi - 100 rooms).

However transport will be an issue. In addition to Tbilisi public transport there are 14 registered agencies in Tbilisi who provide a taxi service but they own only 631 cars between them. There are however 150 different catering venues within the tourist area, and the infrastructure of the city



hotels and the international airport are expected to guarantee that all football fans will be provided with a high quality service beyond the stadium (hotels, public transport and other services.)

Head of the UEFA Super Cup Organising Committee Lasha Dvalishvili told us:

"It is very important that Tbilisi is hosting such a large scale event. The global celebrities who come to see it will have a positive impact on tourism in our country and, consequently, we are in a winning position. Everything is proceeding in due order; there is still a little more work to do, but all the prepara-

tions will be finished soon. Tbilisi will host this event to the highest level, and there will be no problems or complications.

"We expect 3 main delegations: those of UEFA and the Barcelona and Seville football clubs, and of course all their fans. The clubs themselves have issued 2,779 tickets; however, this fact does not mean that other fans of Barcelona and Seville won't come to Tbilisi and attend the match. The Georgian National Tourism Administration is taking an active part in the organisation of the match and we have never had any problems working with



them. Every institution in Georgia you can imagine is also taking part in the organisation of this large scale event because it is so important for the country."

Georgia acquired the right to host the 2015 European Youth Olympic Festival on 27 November 2010, beating out the Czech Republic in Belgrade by 5 votes. This was another unprecedented victory for our country.

Up to 3,800 sportsmen from 50 countries will gather in Tbilisi. The Olympic village has been built and the sports infrastructure improved in accordance with European standards. All the required security mea-

asures for both participants and spectators will be taken 24 hours a day.

Like the Super Cup, this prestigious event will attract significant global attention. It will provide an amazing opportunity for enhancing our country's reputation and coverage.

The Georgian National Tourism Administration has been conducting an active online PR campaign for the Olympiad. The basic target audience is in neighbouring countries - Turkey, Azerbaijan and Russia, but a promotional video has also introduced the event to such markets as Austria, Belarus, Switzerland, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Germany,

Estonia, France, Greece, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, Holland, Poland, Portugal and Sweden.

Tbilisi Youth Olympic Festival press service manager Liza Vadatchkoria told us:

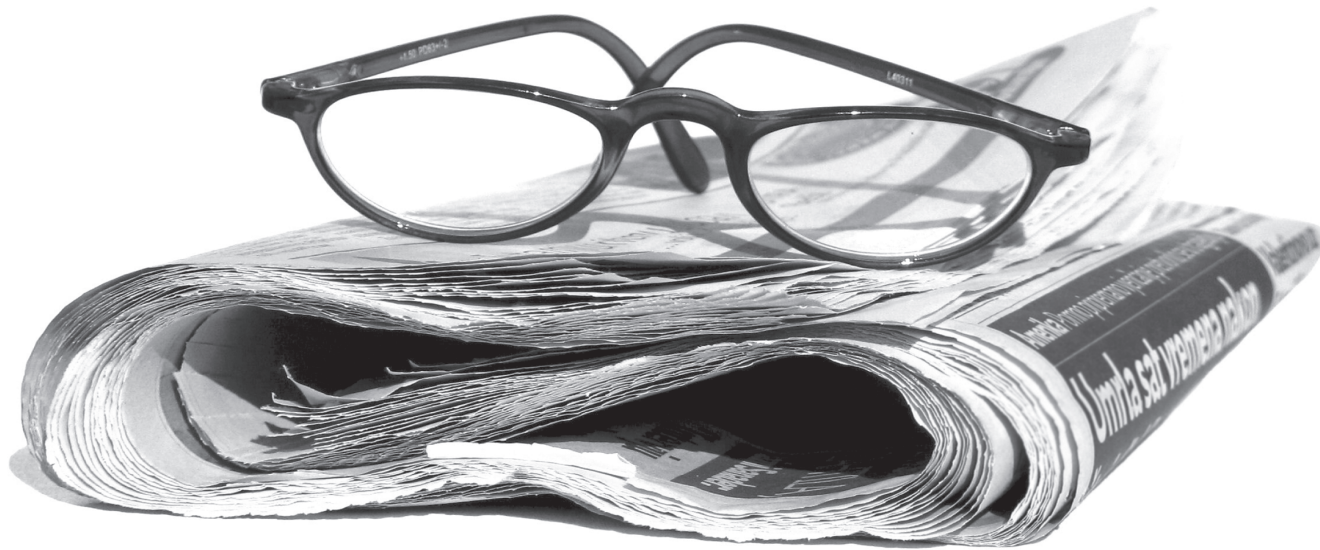
"Unfortunately, most countries are not equipped or chosen to host Olympic Games. The fact that Georgia has appeared on the Olympic map will have excellent consequences for the reputation of our country. If the Olympic Games in Georgia are a success we can organise and host other no less important international sporting events. New arenas have been built and equipped in compliance with international standards, so if Georgia is suggested as the host of any international competition we can accept such nominations now as we have the corresponding arenas. No less importantly we are expecting up to 10,000 tourists during the festival, and this will significantly stimulate our economy and tourism sphere. We are expecting delegations from 50 countries. I'd like to thank our partner, the Department of Tourism. They are focused on their own particular segment and operate very successfully".

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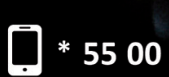


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