

## CEC Chairman Giorgi Kalandarishvili Meets with US Ambassador Robin Dunnigan

By Liza Mchedlidze

Giorgi Kalandarishvili, Chairman of the Central Election Commission (CEC), held an introductory meeting with Robin Dunnigan, the Ambassador of the United States of America to Georgia, where the main topic discussed, according to the CEC's press service, was the preparation process for the 2024 parliamentary elections.

During the meeting, Giorgi Kalandarishvili emphasized that the election administration is fully prepared to conduct elections in accordance with international standards, utilizing advanced technologies. He further discussed with the ambassador the extensive implementation of technology, including informing voters and significant projects in this regard.

The parties also reviewed the election environment in the country during their discussion.

"The Embassy of the United States of America has always been a great supporter in the development of election administration and electoral processes in the country, which is evidenced by our close cooperation with many international partners. Today's very important meeting with Mrs. Ambassador is the echo of this. We discussed the preparations for the October 26 elections, the challenges, and needs that the institution faces today. We talked about the important role of the election administration in the election processes, the importance of the support of international partners, and, of course, the possi-



bilities of further deepening the cooperation," Kalandarishvili stated.

The US Ambassador positively evaluated the CEC's efforts for the October 26 elections and pledged support to the election administration.

"We talked about the importance of the CEC in the election

process here in Georgia, and in general, everywhere throughout the world. The employees of the Central Election Commission perform extremely important work for the democratic process. We agreed that these elections are an opportunity for Georgia to demonstrate the strength of democracy. We also discussed US

support for this process. We support CEC with various programs and will continue to do so in the future. We will support international observation missions. Our real goal, the goal of the U.S. is for the process to be as transparent, free, and fair as possible, and for Georgians to have the opportunity to exercise their

right to vote," Dunnigan stated.

At the end of the meeting, Giorgi Kalandarishvili, on behalf of the election administration, thanked the Ambassador for her personal interest in these issues, her expressed interest, and the support that the Embassy of the United States of America provides to the election administration.

## Georgia's International Tourism Revenue Surpasses \$4 Billion in 2023

By Liza Mchedlidze

According to Maia Omiadze, the head of the National Tourism Administration of Georgia, in 2023, Georgia received a record income from international tourism—more than 4 billion US dollars, with the number of tourist visits increasing by almost 100% compared to the data from 2019.

Omiadze stated that this exceeds the data from 2019 by 26%.

"Compared to 2019, visits increased by 75.6%, and the country received more than 7 million international travelers. It should be noted that tourist visits exceeded 4.6 million, representing almost a 100% increase compared to 2019. In the post-pandemic years, tourism in Georgia experienced continuous growth, with each year showing increasing dynamics. However, 2023 proved to be particularly successful, especially considering the challenges faced in the region," Omiadze stated.

According to the head of the National Tourism Administration, there are ongoing active campaigns in the European Union, Great Britain, and the Persian Gulf countries. Additionally, efforts are being made in new tourist markets in India and China to raise awareness of Georgia and boost tourist flows from these countries.

"The National Tourism Administration carries out campaigns and exhibitions in strategically important tourist markets. This has a permanent nature and yields results. I think that 2024 will be much more successful, and we will achieve even better results in terms of both tourist visits and income compared to 2019," stated Omiadze.





The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Two 'Policemen' Arrested in Occupied Gali for Murder of Georgian Citizen



In the case of the murder of Temur Karbaia, a Georgian citizen killed in the occupied region of Gali, two 'police officers' have been arrested. According to Ekho Kavkaza, the ongoing investigation has led to criminal charges of intentional grievous bodily harm and abuse of authority being filed against three 'police officers' involved in the case. However, the location of one of

them remains unknown. According to the local prosecutor's office, on December 6th, one of the 'officers' made an arrest. He then took the individual to the 'police station' and conducted an illegal search without any witnesses present, failing to document the

procedure. "After the examination, Karbaia directed obscene language towards Kvekveskiri, leading Kvekveskiri to strike Karbaia. Simultaneously, Zarakua and Abshilava entered the department and, together with Kvekveskiri, used physical force against Karbaia. They repeatedly struck him on various parts of

the body, resulting in injuries including four broken ribs in the chest area and bruises near his right eye," the statement reads.

President's Administration Responds to Criticism, Reveals President Zourabichvili Congratulated Aliyev on His Election

On February 12, members of Georgian Dream accused and criticized President Salome Zourabichvili for not congratulating Ilham Aliyev on his victory in the

presidential elections of Azerbaijan, describing it as 'damaging'.

"It is a matter of elementary diplomatic etiquette that this congratulation should have been expressed long before," Defense Minister Irakli Chikovani stated.

In response to the criticism, the president's administration revealed that Salome Zourabichvili had congratulated Ilham Aliyev on his election on February 9 through a letter.

"The President of Georgia, similar to every president of a friend and partner country, has congratulated the President of Azerbaijan on his election to the presidency," the administration stated.



The European Union will direct around Euro115 million of its Euro1.8 billion annual humanitarian budget to Southeast Europe and the European Neighbourhood, mostly addressing the consequences of Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, as well as funding projects for ongoing needs in the Western Balkans, the Caucasus, and the effects of the Syria crisis in Türkiye.

With almost 300 million people estimated to need humanitarian assistance in 2024, the EU today announced its initial annual humanitarian budget of more than Euro1.8 billion for this year.

Almost Euro470 million will be allocated in the Middle East and North Africa in the face of extreme humanitarian needs in Gaza, as well as the ongoing re-

EU announces annual humanitarian aid budget of Euro1.8 billion



gional crisis in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and its neighbouring countries.

Around Euro315 million are reserved for responding to sudden-onset emergencies and unforeseen humanitarian crises that may arise throughout the year.

European Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarcic said: "As we enter 2024, the gap between humanitarian needs and resources available continues to widen. At the same time, funding needs are very high, as conflicts multiply and the climate crisis worsens... In the face of this disturbing trend, the European Commission will continue to fund humanitarian action in support of the most vulnerable, no matter who and where they are across the world.

The European Commission has been providing humanitarian aid since 1992 in over 110 countries, reaching millions of people across the globe each year.

(eunighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Tuesday, February 13

Day Mostly Cloudy High: 18°C

Night Mostly Cloudy Low: 7°C

Wednesday, February 14

Day Mostly Cloudy High: 19°C

Night Mostly Cloudy Low: 9°C

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# Maestro Usui Toshiki's Piano Concert

The Embassy of Japan in Georgia, hosted a piano concert by Maestro Usui Toshiki at Tbilisi State Conservatoire Recital Hall on February 11.

Pianist, Maestro Mr. USUI Toshiki is one of the prominent Japanese pianists to enjoy worldwide reputation, garnering high acclaim not only for his performances, but for his multiple activities to promote goodwill through music, including his charity concerts in Signagi city

since 2015. That is why Mr. Usui has been especially cherished among Georgians as Honorary Citizen of Signagi. His attachment to one of the most significant Georgian composers, late Mr. Vaja Azarashvili's compositions are, along with Mr. Usui's masterful playing are well appreciated globally. Mr. USUI is also supervising Vaja Azarashvili Project in Japan. With his efforts, Japanese music company "Zen-On" has published

Mr. Azarashvili's 9 compositions, which are successfully being prevailed in Japan and the world. Throughout the years Mr. USUI's efforts have been invaluable in consolidation of cultural ties between Japan and Georgia.

The concert featured works by Mr. Azarashvili, as well as popular Japanese composers, who all played a significant role in developing and promotion of classical music in Japan. This concert was

also to express our respect and to commemorate the achievements of Mr. Vaja Azarashvili, who had composed music which is impressing people in Japan and all over the world. His compositions are the bridge between Japan and Georgia.

The program contained works by: Vaja Azarashvili, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Toru Takemitsu, Kozaburo Hirai, and Akira Ifukube.



The Ambassador of Japan H.E. Mr. Ishizuka Hideki



Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Mr. Alexander Khvtisiashvili



Maestro Mr. Usui Toshiki







