
Georgia Independence Day Special

Celebrating decades of loyal friendship

TEIMURAZ LEZHAVA

CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. OF GEORGIA



On May 26, we Georgians celebrate the 102nd anniversary of the restoration of our statehood. Exactly 102 years ago, Georgia declared independence and established the first republic. Doing so,

we underlined our path westward to Europe and the Euro-Atlantic communities, an area which has always been in our hearts, despite more than a century of occupation by the Russian Empire.

Looking back 102 years, we chose our path to peaceful and democratic development, establishing a free country, with free people, respect for the rule of law, democracy and human rights. Unfortunately, the first republic existed for just three years and was followed by Soviet occupation on Feb. 25, 1921, until we regained our freedom again in 1991. It must be underlined that Japan was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Georgia both during the first republic, as well as in 1992.

But of course, it's not only about the recognition — we have felt the support of our Japanese friends during all our hard times and especially in the 1990s when we were in desperate need of support from our friends on our journey to building democratic institutions and a sustainable economy. And, thanks to the support of our friends and the enormous will and dedication of Georgian society, we managed to overcome all obstacles and challenges and, in an incredibly short period of time, we

turned into a truly democratic country and one of the most progressive in our region.

Currently, Georgia is one of the safest countries in the world, with one of the most liberal and flexible tax systems, an exceptionally positive investment climate and a business-friendly government. Georgia is one of the best countries in the world in terms of doing business and this can be seen both in the most prominent international rankings, as well as by a rapidly increasing number of businesses from all over the world heading to Georgia.

Located in a geopolitically important area, we are a natural bridge and hub, connecting the east and west, as well as the north and south. We are the crossroad of globally important pipelines and railroad projects. We are an economic, trade and logistical bridge with free trade regimes with almost all the important stakeholders, including the European Union, Turkey and China. Additionally, our role as an economic, trade, financial, transport and logistical hub is still growing.

At the same time, we are proud of our unique culture, history and traditions, as well as our amazing cuisine and unique wine heritage, which is the oldest in the world. Yes, we are the homeland of wine and the first wine in the world was made around 8,000 years ago in a territory that would become part of Georgia.

We are also proud of our nature and mesmerizing landscapes. Despite having a relatively small territory, we have exceptionally diverse nature. That is the reason why Georgia is one of the most rapidly growing tourist destinations, attracting millions and millions of tourists from all parts of the world. You can find many interesting facts about Georgia on our brand

new website (<http://letsgeorgia.com/>).

Indeed, we have a lot to share. Our countries have many important similarities. We both are among the oldest countries, with old and rich cultures that have managed to preserve their traditions while turning into modern societies. Most importantly we have exemplary positive political and economic relationships, based on mutual respect. I am extremely happy that these relationships have intensified recently with numerous high-level political visits from Georgia to Japan and vice versa. We can see the increased interest from Japanese companies in doing business in Georgia. For example, we are delighted that, just recently, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. decided to invest in our energy sector and procured 31.4 percent of the shares in Dariali Energy JSC, a hydropower company in Georgia, for the purpose of participating in the Dariali Hydropower Project. Our countries have already agreed on a bilateral agreement treaty to be signed in the near future that will become a new stimulus for even more intensified economic and trade relationships.

In the end, I would like to again express words of gratitude to the friendly people of Japan for their important contribution in the development of Georgia, as well as for extremely positive political, economic and cultural relationships and for the support of our sovereignty and territorial integrity. I'm absolutely sure that the already excellent relationships between our countries will become even closer and more cordial in the years to come.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.