

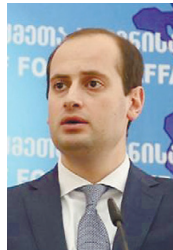
Georgia Independence Day

Increased tourism bodes well for future

Mikheil Janelidze
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF
GEORGIA

On May 26 Georgia celebrates its Independence Day, which marks the declaration of national independence from the Russian Empire and establishment of the first Democratic Republic in 1918. Moreover, this year we celebrate 25th anniversary of regaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

On this 25th year of my country's restored independence, I am proud to speak about Georgia's exemplary achievements and bright prospects for the future, despite the challenges that we have experienced over the past 25 years.



To start with, I am very happy to highlight the excellent partnership Japan and Georgia have achieved during the last decades, one that is based upon our common values and principles. The people of Georgia will always remember and appreciate the enormous support that Japan has rendered in the process of democratic and economic transformation of Georgia by aiding the key sectors of our economy such as energy, healthcare, infrastructure and the environment.

Today our nations experience growing cooperation in variety of spheres, such as political dialogue, the economy, tourism, culture, education and other areas. Official ties have developed between the sectoral agencies and parliaments, whereas partnerships have formed between our private sectors. Recently, we have also seen the fascinating annual growth of the number of Japanese visitors to

Georgia; something that is another great opportunity to expand our partnership.

Since restoring independence, Georgia has endured periods of instability and conflict culminating in Russia's large-scale military aggression in 2008 that was followed by occupation of Georgia's inalienable parts of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. Despite these challenges, over the last two decades Georgia has succeeded in its democratic and economic transformation and emerged as a leader in effective and innovative reforms in the region and worldwide. Georgia carried out comprehensive institutional, anti-corruption and economic reforms that were recognized as very successful and exemplary by the international community. In its "2016 Doing Business Report," the World Bank ranked Georgia 24th out of 189 countries in ease of doing business. The Heritage Foundation's "2016 Index of Economic Freedom" assessed Georgia as the 23rd freest economy in the world; and according to the 2015-2016 World Economic Forum's "Global Competitiveness Report," Georgia moved from 69th to 66th place among 140 countries.

In recent years, Georgia has embarked on an ambitious endeavor to further improve qualitatively the standards of our liberal democracy and ensure wider distribution of reform benefits in the country. To this end, government further imple-

mented important constitutional, judicial, penitentiary, social, human rights and anti-corruption reforms.

Today Georgia continues to pursue an active foreign policy that sets European and Euro-Atlantic integration as one of the top priorities. In this regard, Georgia has signed an association agreement with the EU in 2014 that will boost our economy, attract investments and further improve the business environment.

The government of Georgia is making strenuous efforts to further liberalize trade with neighboring countries and beyond to achieve free trade with target markets.

The visa liberalization with the EU that we expect to finalize this year will open new opportunities for business activities, as well as enhance people-to-people contacts.

At the same time, the country is pursuing the policy of de-escalation of the tense relations with the Russian Federation, based upon the respect for Georgia's sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of its internationally recognized borders.

Georgia, as a country with an ancient and rich culture, monumental architecture, renowned folk music, colorful dances and hospitality, is increasingly becoming an attractive destination for international visitors. Tourism is a fast-growing sector in Georgia, offering foreign visitors seaside, mountain and alpine



Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia ZURAB TVAURI

ski resorts, as well as spa hotels.

Due to its location, Georgia serves as a trade and transit hub for the Southern Caucasus and the Black Sea Region. Georgia provides the only access to the Black Sea for the Caucasus. As a strategic link on the original Silk Road, the shortest route for large transit volume between the Central Asian landlocked countries and Europe goes

through Georgia.

I am happy to underscore that Japan has always played an important role in the process of these remarkable developments in Georgia. However, in the coming years we expect to witness Japan's expanded role and engagement in Georgia; something that will further advance our strong friendship and partnership.



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Congratulations on the Independence Day of Georgia



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Congratulations

to the People of Georgia on Their 25th Independence Day
and the 24th Anniversary of Georgia-Japan Diplomatic Relations



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