

## **Government Programme**

**“For Strong, Democratic and Unified Georgia”**

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## **Government Programme**

### **“For Strong, Democratic and Unified Georgia”**

#### **General Provisions**

Building strong, effective, and democratic institutions based on rule of law principles remains the Government’s invariable priority. The legislative base has been significantly modified to make democratic reforms irreversible and carry out large-scale reforms; balance and coordination among various government agencies has been achieved; the process of building effective local self-government institutions has been launched; fundamental phased justice reform is ongoing; multiparty political system has been established; freedom of expression is fully exercised; formation of the civil service insulated from political pressure has been launched; short-, medium- and long-term development policy for the country has been elaborated; Socio-Economic Development Strategy of Georgia up to 2020 has been prepared; Public Administration Reform Strategy is in its final stage, the implementation of which is one of the key instruments for building a democratic state.

By conducting presidential and local self-government elections in a free and transparent manner, the Georgian Dream coalition laid the groundwork for democratic elections in Georgia.

Georgia has launched and continues to pursue the development of institutions based on liberal and democratic values; establishing the rule of law has become an irreversible process; the State guarantees the inviolability of constitutional rights of citizens; the fight against crime is uncompromising, whereas political persecution is strongly rejected; the process of building judicial and law enforcement systems insulated from political pressure has been launched.

European and Euro-Atlantic integration, which is a free, unanimous and unshakable choice of our society, sets a benchmark for Georgia's political and economic development.

By signing the Association Agreement in 2014, Georgia made a historical step forward, which brought its relations with the European Union to a qualitatively newer level making the country's Europeanization an irreversible process. The Parliament of Georgia ratified the Agreement on 18 July 2014, followed by ratification by the European Parliament and a majority of the EU Member States. With the enforcement of the Association Agreement on 1 September 2014, European integration became part of Georgia's domestic policy. The Association Agreement provides a legal basis for Georgia's European transformation and an important investment in Georgia's security and prosperity. By implementing the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area component, Georgia will consistently become part of the EU economic area.

Implementation of the commitments under the Association Agreement is one of the key priorities of the Georgian Government's domestic policy. 1 September 2014 marked the country's transition to the most crucial stage in the implementation process. The Association Agreement covers a broad range of areas of political, social and economic life. Large-scale reforms, therefore, will contribute to the protection of human rights, consolidation of democracy, higher level of transparency, effective governance, strengthening of security and regional cooperation and formation of stable macro-economic environment and favorable business climate. The Agreement is in full compliance with the Government's vision about the socio-economic development of the country. These reforms are designed to help Georgia transform itself into a European-type democracy. Work is currently in progress to put into operation respective institutional and administrative mechanisms under the Association Agreement needed to ensure the implementation of large-scale reforms. Plans are made to bring the domestic law into line with the EU acquis to implement the Association Agreement.

A series of reforms carried out by the Government has made visa-free access to EU countries a short-term prospect. Most importantly, the Visa Liberalization Action Plan has contributed to the implementation of reforms in various areas, including fight against organized crime and corruption, human rights protection, document security, migration.

We continue active cooperation with the European Union with the goal of promoting security and stability in the country and enhancing the European Union's role in peaceful settlement of the conflicts in Georgia.

The Government continues to pursue cooperation with the NATO with the goal of increasing the level of integration and eventually becoming a member of this organization. Georgia's NATO membership is a guarantee of security and stability and is, therefore, conducive to the country's sustainable and democratic development, as well as to its economic growth and prosperity.

The Georgian Government's economic policy is based on the values and principles of free market economy. The Government will continue to work towards overcoming unemployment and poverty and creating decent working conditions for employable citizens; with this goal in mind, small- and medium-sized businesses and agriculture are developed at an unprecedented rate and this process will further continue; the Government will proceed with its efforts to reinforce the protection of property and labor rights; will ensure the country's integration into the world economic system; will continue to provide decent living conditions for unemployable citizens by introducing a secure social environment and developing a system of social solidarity; will continue to maintain the country's cultural heritage, and to modernize educational, as well as social and economic systems.

Important steps have been taken to ensure media independence, and the Government continues to work effectively in this direction. The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development prepared a package of legislative amendments enabling reforms that are necessary for smooth transition to digital broadcasting in Georgia. Such amendments are designed to promote freedom of expression and media pluralism; to encourage the development of the broadcast market and the production of broadcast content in Georgia; to bring to minimum the obstacles hindering access to the broadcast market and to provide customers with high-quality and versatile broadcast content.

The political party financing system will ensure the allocation of necessary funds to enable political parties to function effectively and to conduct an election campaign in an adequate manner. Significant amendments have already been made to respective laws.

The government policy is based on the clearly demonstrated interests of the Georgian population. The Government is determined to increase citizens' engagement and make it the basis upon which to build the planning and implementation of its policy.

## **Programme Directions**

### **Constitutional Order of the Georgian State**

After the presidential inauguration, amendments made to the Constitution of Georgia came into effect transforming Georgia from an executive presidency into a parliamentary republic. The new Constitution, however, contains many flaws and vague norms that call for correction in order to ensure that power is balanced between different branches of the government – a feature characterizing a law-based state. With this goal in mind, the Parliament of Georgia in October of 2013 set up a state constitutional commission to revise the Constitution of Georgia.

The revised Constitution will offer a new model of governance guaranteeing stability of the government, on the one hand, and, on the other, providing the legislative body and public at large with real levers to exercise an efficient and effective control over the government activities.

### **Judiciary**

The concept of judicial reform has become the basis for creating a politically insulated judicial system; the judiciary is becoming steadily a more independent and impartial branch of government;

Organizational support for the judiciary is provided by the judiciary itself. Institutional independence of the judiciary including financial independence will be guaranteed.

Significant changes have already been made leading to complete depoliticization of the High Council of Justice; new democratic rules for the election of Council members have been developed and, Council judge-members were for the first time elected in accordance with

these rules. Clear criteria and a transparent system have been introduced for the High Council of Justice to monitor the performance of newly-elected judges, who, after having gone through a three-year probation period, will be appointed to a lifetime judicial position. The Government aims to increase the involvement and participation of judges in the discussions related to challenges facing the judicial system. Work will continue to ensure transparency of judicial administration and publicity of entire judicial process.

Judges will be appointed to office through contest, in which persons whether having undergone or exempted from High School of Justice training courses will take part on equal terms. The law will specify criteria for the selection of qualified judicial candidates. Rules for obtaining reliable information regarding judicial candidates, for detecting cases involving conflicts of interests, as well as for appealing against refusal of appointment to judicial positions will be determined.

Competitive admission procedures to the High School of Justice will be elaborated; competences will be differentiated between the High Council of Justice and the High School of Justice; obligation will be imposed on the High School of Justice to objectively and fairly conduct competitive examinations and to substantiate its decisions; the transparency of High School of Justice activities will be promoted and an opportunity to appeal against High School of Justice decisions will be provided.

Judges will be appointed to permanent judicial positions after having successfully completed a three-year probation period. During the probation period, assessment of the performance of judges will be based on objective and impartial criteria, in accordance with international practice and criteria.

A mechanism for automatic distribution of files will be introduced; degree of transparency of High School of Justice activities will increase.

Disciplinary procedures will be streamlined; the High Council of Justice will have the sole power to institute disciplinary proceedings against a judge; open and transparent procedures will be developed for promoting judges and assigning them to other courts. Assignment of a judge to other court without his/her consent will be allowed only where necessary, and if the interests of justice so require.

Cassation appeal admissibility criteria will widen. In particular, the Supreme Court of Justice will recognize the admissibility of an appeal against an appellate court decision if it contradicts the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. Moreover, cassation

appeals will be admissible against all judgments in juvenile delinquency cases. The number of Supreme Court judges will increase in compliance with the law.

The Government works towards heightening the level of independence of judges. Chairs of Courts will be elected by judges. Additional guarantees for ensuring independence of judges and judicial non-interference will be provided.

### **Criminal Justice System Reform**

Efforts are underway to improve crime detection rates and investigative activities; The Government has launched a policy aimed at ensuring that the punishment is fair and commensurate with the offence; imprisonment as a preventive measure, as well as sentence-serving regime is brought into closer conformity with international standards leading to a better protection of human rights.

Bail agreement has acquired features of a speedy, fair and effective mechanism for administering justice; rights of the aggrieved party have increased in compliance with international standards and the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Government has prepared legislative amendments regarding delivery and revision of decisions on pre-trial detention. The adoption of these amendments will ensure the protection of individuals against any arbitrariness.

The process of revising and improving the Criminal Code is ongoing, aimed at ensuring its liberalization and modernization.

Juvenile Justice Code was developed for the first time, which is an important legal document designed to uphold the best interests of the parties to the juvenile proceedings, including juvenile defendants, juvenile convicts, juvenile witnesses and victims. The Code is an innovation in Georgia's legal domain and the Government is committed towards its full and effective implementation.

In parallel to effective fight against crime, programme for re-socialization of former inmates is underway and is due to continue further.

Drug control policy reform is ongoing, which aims at formulating a well-balanced and evidence-based anti-drug policy oriented towards the protection of human rights, as well as at differentiating between the purchase, possession, transport, transfer and sale of drugs in the Criminal Code.

### **Reform of the Code of the Administrative Offences**

A new Code of Administrative Offences is in the drafting stages. The length of administrative detention has been reduced to 15 days.

### **Reform of the Prosecutor's Office**

The Government actively works towards increasing public confidence in the Prosecutor's Office. The objective of the Prosecutor's Office has been modified and its main task now is to protect the public from crime, to defend the legal rights of accused and convicted defendants, as well as of aggrieved parties, and to ensure the lawful functioning of the investigative agencies by exercising control over their activities.

The Prosecutor's Office is a de-politicized organ and will continue to be so. The Prosecutor's Office has been formed as an independent law enforcement agency within the system of the Ministry of Justice. The Government carries out important measures for the professional development of employees of the Prosecutor's Office, in order to enable them to rise up to the new challenges involved in judicial independence and equality of the parties in the judicial process.

Prosecutor's Office reform concept and respective legislative amendments have been developed based on international standards and best practices of various countries. As a result of the reforms, and with due regard for the applicable constitutional norms, the rules regulating the selection and appointment of Georgia's Chief Prosecutor will be thoroughly modified and the participation of the Government, Parliament and public at large in this process will be ensured. Our goal is to adopt a model in which the Prosecutor's Office will act as an open and accountable system capable to effectively fight against crime in order to ensure safety of the population.

The restoration of justice and the return of property illegally seized prior to 1 October 2012 to its rightful owners remain one of the key priorities of the Chief Prosecutor's Office. An investigation unit will be set up at the Chief Prosecutor's Office and charged with the task of investigating offences committed during the judicial process. Legal mechanisms will be put in place to ensure the return of the illegally seized property and to provide speedy and effective remedies for the breached rights.

### **Reform of the Ministry of Internal Affairs**

In November 2012, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was formed as a community-oriented agency insulated from political pressure. Its main objective is to protect the rights and safety

of citizens. The Ministry of Internal Affairs is a completely de-politicized organization and there will be no deviation from this course. The principle of impartiality and neutrality established within the system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 2013 will remain unchanged including with respect to the electoral processes. The police performs its functions in full compliance with the law, democratic standards and ethical norms.

As part of the ongoing reform within the system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the government has drawn up a plan to split the Ministry of Internal Affairs into two units, with the State Security Service kept separately. This represents a logical continuation of the reform launched within the Ministry in 2012. After the adoption of a series of legislative amendments, it will be necessary to determine an institutional model upon which new law-enforcement and security bodies will be based with a greater degree of democracy and accountability.

Prevention of and fight against crime will remain the main function of the Police whereas the State Security Service will be focused on the collection and processing of information relating to national security threats, as well as on fight against specific crimes. The State Security Service will adhere to a high standard of accountability manifested, on the one hand, in the rules for appointment of the Head of the Service and, on the other, in the creation of parliamentary oversight mechanisms.

These changes will lead to de-concentration of excess power within the system that will increase the effectiveness of the protection of human rights.

This new organizational structure will allow the Ministry of Internal Affairs to perform police and non-police functions, including in the areas of migration, border and crisis management. Special attention will be paid to introducing such approaches as community-oriented police and analysis-oriented police. The community-oriented police means cooperation between the police and people envisaging involvement of the latter in resolving problems relating to crime and public order.

The priority of the Ministry of Internal Affairs is to improve standards in the police, based on best international practices. A police performance evaluation system will be introduced that will contribute to the skills training and professional development of policemen. The Ministry actively cooperates with U.S. partners in this area as well.

The police will continue to remain oriented towards the community and its needs. Strengthening confidence and cooperation between the police and the community will remain one of the key priorities. Special attention will be paid to respect for human rights,

the rule of law, and the principles of balance, equality and neutrality. Incorporating international human rights standards into the curriculums of the Academy is yet another priority of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Opportunities of ensuring public order will increase. The process of constructing new police buildings, rehabilitating the existing ones and refurbishing the infrastructure and logistics of the Ministry of Internal Affairs will continue. Forensic expertise techniques will improve.

There are plans to build temporary detention cells on a par with contemporary standards, as well as to reconstruct the existing ones and to replenish the logistical base of the Ministry. Doctors will be employed in all temporary detention cells to provide detainees with better medical care.

Fight will continue against organized crime with special emphasis on carrying out preventive measures, as well as on raising public awareness.

Fight against illegal drug trafficking, as well as maintaining the already successful efforts against drug-related crimes will remain atop the list of priorities. The Ministry of Internal Affairs will continue to pursue a well-balanced drug policy. Fight will continue against trafficking as well. Law-enforcers will undergo special training courses in this regard.

Reducing the incidence of, and intensifying efforts against violence both in the short-term and long-term perspective will be yet another overriding priority of the Ministry. Mechanisms allowing policemen to effectively react to cases of domestic violence will be upgraded. A great deal of attention will be paid to raising public awareness of domestic violence, youth violence, drug addiction, trafficking, road safety and public order.

Priority is also given to the effective management of migration processes. Migration Department that was set up within the Ministry of Internal Affairs in September 2014 is responsible for detecting persons illegally staying in Georgia and ensuring their departure from the country. A temporary accommodation centre for individuals illegally living in Georgia has been set up in accordance with European human rights standards. An electronic programme for detecting illegal immigrants has been put into operation. Border security level will be improved. Plans are made to construct/rehabilitate maritime infrastructure (including coastal defence infrastructure), as well as to upgrade coastal defence fleet. Working conditions for border guards will also be improved.

The Emergency Response System has been reformed to facilitate the effective and integrated management of emergency situations. The Emergency Management Department of the

Ministry of Internal Affairs has been converted into the Emergency Management Agency incorporating regional and municipal rescue and fire units. The Ministry of Internal Affairs works towards improving emergency capacity building and effectiveness of response to chemical, biological, radiation and nuclear threats, as well as towards bringing standards of the emergency services with the EU civil protection mechanism.

The Chemical, Biological, Radiation and Nuclear (CBRN) Security Policy remains one of the focuses of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. National CBRN Threat Reduction Strategy and Action Plan have already been elaborated and approved.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs remains focused on the upgrading of the normative framework, as well as on the maintenance and improvement of service quality. The Ministry will enhance its capacities by renovating its logistical base and promoting the professional development of its staff. The existing vocational training programmes have been adapted to the needs of the Ministry and new special programmes will be developed. From September 2015 the MIA Academy will offer its students a new bachelor's programme.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs continues to pay special attention to the social security of its employees. Social security benefits for policemen will enhance and will equal to those of military men.

### **Penitentiary System Reforms**

The priority of the penitentiary system is to protect the rights of accused and convicted defendants. The penitentiary institutions will continue bringing prisoners' housing, nutrition, medical, and hygienic conditions into line with European standards. Special attention is paid to preventing the ill-treatment of prisoners, invigorating the internal human rights monitoring mechanism and adopting effective measures for ensuring the transparency of the system.

The classification of convicted defendants into risk groups is one of the important factors behind the development of the penitentiary system. Prisoner referral and placement mechanism based on their assessed risk is an absolutely new approach. Penitentiary establishments will also be classified according to risks involved. High-risk and low-risk penitentiary establishments will be set up.

Individual sentence planning currently used by the juvenile penitentiary establishments will be widely introduced elsewhere within the penitentiary system. In the adult system,

individual sentence planning will initially be applied to the establishments of female convicted defendants, as well as to low-risk and special-risk establishments. The existing bail release model will be revised, based on the international best practice. A new bail release model together with individual sentence planning will become an effective instrument for successfully carrying out resocialization and rehabilitation programmes for convicted defendants.

Important measures will be taken to carry out institutional reforms: the penitentiary system will be formed as an integrated agency; civilian and special positions (jobs) will be differentiated; staff training and certification rules will be put in place; issues relating to the status, as well as to social and legal protection of employees will be addressed; The security and social agencies will adopt new approaches and new methods; new personal data protection standards will be introduced.

A series of ongoing penitentiary healthcare reforms will continue leading to the substantial improvement of the components of financing, administration, infrastructure, programmes and services, as well as to the decrease of inmate mortality rates.

A primary healthcare model has been introduced, penitentiary healthcare standard and a list of basic medications – approved and important measures – adopted in order to develop a healthcare system oriented towards vulnerable groups and their needs. Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS & Hepatitis Programme is successfully ongoing. Work will continue towards the integration of penitentiary healthcare into civilian healthcare, as well as towards the further development of penitentiary healthcare. It is planned to further expand suicide prevention and methadone detoxification programmes.

Priority areas within the penitentiary healthcare system will continue to be: continuous professional development of medical staff; development of infrastructure and administrative capacities; expansion of medical services; continuous care for people with mental health problems and other vulnerable groups.

Work will continue to further improve the defendant's risk assessment and individual sentence planning instrument, which is actively used at this stage.

The capacity of the probation system will be further developed including the effective use of non-custodial sentences; system of electronic monitoring over under-age and full-age defendants will be introduced.

A pre-trial reporting system will be put into operation within the juvenile justice system that will ensure that the best interests of minors are duly considered in criminal proceedings and will improve court decisions.

### **Public Administration and Civil Service Reform**

Effective public administration system is a major instrument for building a democratic state. In 2012 the Georgian Government launched public administration reform, which, on the one hand, aims at achieving democracy and good governance and, on the other, at getting closer to the EU public administration system. The aforesaid reform covers such areas as policy planning, human resource management within the civil service, accountability, public financial management, provision of public services and local self-government.

A policy planning system that will be developed through the implementation of reforms will ensure a greater level of interconnection between policy planning and budget planning. At the same time, effective policy monitoring, assessment and reporting mechanisms will be created.

The long-term objective of the public administration reform is ensure the continuous improvement of legal and institutional environment that will eventually lead to the development of effective policy.

The civil service reform is an integral part of the public administration reform. Development of an effective civil service is essentially important in terms of Georgia's integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures. The implementation of the civil service reform will lead to the formation of an open and effective civil service insulated from political influence. Such civil service will be based on the clearly-defined and solid legal framework; an institution of career civil servants will be formed allowing the continuous professional development of civil servants - a prerequisite for creating a merit- and performance-based civil service.

Civil Service Reform Concept elaborated by the Government, which will form the basis for a new law on civil service, will underpin the aforesaid process of reforms.

Central civil agencies are currently subject to functional analysis in order to ensure the integrity of the entire civil service system, the incorporation of each civil agency in it, as well as the contemporary institutional design of civil agencies.

Such initiatives as civil service training programmes will continue in order to increase the effectiveness of the civil service and to attract new qualified personnel.

Furthermore, in order to ensure that the civil service is formed as a transparent and accountable system as part of the civil service reform, the institute of whistleblowers has already been created; it is planned to develop a code of ethics for civil servants; a mechanism of monitoring over asset declarations of senior civil servants is now introduced as an effective tool for fight against corruption

### **Protection of Human Rights**

Pursuing a policy oriented towards the protection of human rights is one of the top priorities of the Government. The Government developed and the Parliament approved National Human Rights Strategy for 2014-2020, in order to increase the effectiveness of and coordination among various human rights agencies.

The Human Rights Strategy defines the Government's long-term vision and priorities in the field of human rights, including minority rights. With the goal of ensuring the successful implementation of the Strategy, the Government developed and approved a two-year action plan which will be regularly updated and sets forth the main human rights challenges facing the country. A mechanism of monitoring over the implementation of the Action Plan is already operational.

### **Education and Science**

One of the Government's top priorities is to develop and improve the system of education and science in Georgia. The Government of Georgia, therefore, adheres to the universally recognized principle of academic freedom and guarantees high-level administrative and financial management autonomy.

The long-term strategy for sustainable development of education envisages the following interventions: developing the lifelong learning system; developing inclusive education system based on equity of access to education; improving quality of education and science; creating a result-oriented quality management and support systems; ensuring autonomy and institutional development of educational institutions; developing human resources within systems of education and science; enhancing community involvement and social partnership; improving the education and science management systems; upgrading a mechanism of funding the education and science systems.

As part of efforts to ensure access to education, all projects launched in 2013 will continue: providing free textbooks for pupils; transporting pupils to/from the school premises; carrying out a safe school environment concept; introducing the service of psychologists, special needs teachers and doctors; assistance in career planning; developing inclusive education programmes and resources; offering free university programmes; state funding for vocational training; funding for PhD students and other social and training programmes.

In compliance with the Strategy, the education system will incorporate changes at different levels. Teachers' Professional Development and Career Advancement Scheme will become operational in 2015-2016. Qualified personnel will be trained under updated university programmes; professional development of teachers will be promoted; an effective evaluation system will be introduced; teachers' pay policy will be optimized; academic achievements of pupils will be improved.

All teachers of exact and natural sciences will be trained Georgia-wide, within the framework of the Second Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact. The standard of natural science laboratories will be approved and schools will be equipped with modern laboratories.

New guidelines for approval of textbooks will be adopted and new textbooks will be issued based on the revised curriculum. Preschool education component will be introduced in preschools. Policy and strategy documents dealing with the ways to improve the quality of education for ethnic minorities will be finalized and respective programmes will be put into operation. Infrastructure of schools will continue to be rehabilitated and new schools will be built.

To increase geographic access to vocational education, vocational training institutions will continue to be established/upgraded.

Professional standards drafted on the basis of European methodology and through the involvement of the private sector will be approved in compliance with the initiated legislative amendments; module programmes will be introduced; practical training component will be revised in coordination with the private sector and a model of training based on practical experience will be introduced. The existing vocational programmes will be further revised based on the findings of the labour market study.

Credit transfer and accumulation system will be introduced in vocational institutions as stipulated by the Association Agreement. Educational deadlock will be removed opening up opportunities for vocational school students to receive higher education. Student dormitories will continue to be rehabilitated/built.

Institutional accreditation concept will be implemented at all levels within the education system, which envisages introducing a result-oriented evaluation system and effective quality monitoring mechanisms. Accreditation process will be internationalized, especially in the area of higher education that will increase the level of confidence and ensure the international recognition of diplomas and certificates. The examination system will be optimized and in parallel, new mechanisms for managing and financing higher education institutes will be introduced.

In the context of Georgia's accession to the Bologna process, the Government makes active efforts to achieve the integration of the country into the European higher education area. National Qualifications Framework, evaluation mechanisms and standards in higher education are currently subject to revision.

Research and Innovation Council headed by the Prime Minister of Georgia has been set up to enhance the role of science in the sustainable economic development of the country. The Council will promote the development of various fields of science in order to realize to the maximum extent the country's scientific potential and to promote its commercialization. In parallel to financially supporting the development of science, including by granting scientists a pay increase, a result-oriented evaluation system will be developed, on the basis of which further stages for the development of science will be defined. Legislative amendments will be drafted to assist scientists and research organizations in carrying out their activities. Efforts will be stepped up for the institutional development of the research organizations.

Effective steps will be taken towards the full-scale integration with the European Union. Relations with the international research centres will deepen. Negotiations will be concluded for the release of an impact factor scientific journal. Georgia will find new ways for developing natural, engineering and exact sciences, as well as for engaging in international research programmes. Negotiations will continue for Georgia's full-scale engagement in Horizon 2020 – a research programme.

## **Civil Integration and Protection of National Minority Rights**

Representatives of national minorities will continue to actively engage in the ongoing developments and decision-making processes in Georgia; representatives of national minorities will take part in the implementation of all state programs related to national minorities.

The Government's top priority will be the implementation of the national language teaching programmes that is an essential prerequisite for facilitating civil integration. The Government will promote the national language teaching process and will provide representatives of national minorities with better access to quality education.

Regular media coverage of national minority problems, their achievements, culture and other important topics will be supported. The Government will improve access for national minorities to media and information, and will promote respect for their culture, languages, traditions and values. Historical monuments and museums will be protected and developed with the goal of maintaining the identity of national minorities.

The Government will contribute to raising public awareness of the values, culture, history and religion of national minorities, as well as to establishing tolerance and cultural pluralism within society, and also to developing intercultural and interreligious dialogue and relations.

Based on the policy implementation assessment of the previous years, a new civic equality and integration strategy and an action plan for 2015-2020 will be developed, whose aim, on the one hand, will be to protect the rights and identity of national minorities, and on the other, to ensure their full-scale integration into Georgian society.

## **Foreign Policy Priorities**

The main objectives of Georgia's foreign policy are as follows: strengthening the country's security and sovereignty and restoring its territorial integrity; continuing the non-recognition policy with respect to Georgia's occupied regions; promoting the country's European and Euro-Atlantic integration; deepening strategic cooperation with the United States of America; strengthening relations with the neighboring and regional countries; de-

escalating the existing tense relations with the Russian Federation and achieving the normalization of relations based on respect for Georgia's sovereignty, territorial integrity inviolability of its internationally recognized borders; expanding close, mutually beneficial partner cooperation with European countries.

Protecting rights of and strengthening contacts with Georgian citizens living abroad is yet another important focus of Georgia's foreign policy. Special attention is paid to the expansion of the international legal framework of bilateral and multilateral agreements, as well as to the coordination of the process of preparing and submitting Georgia's regular national reports to the international human rights organizations.

Strengthening the country's sovereignty and restoring its territorial integrity is one of the overriding objectives of Georgia's foreign policy. The efforts of the Foreign Ministry, in this light, will be directed towards increasing the international community's involvement in the peaceful resolution of the conflicts in Georgia; strengthening the non-recognition policy; building confidence and deepening contacts between the communities torn apart by the war and the dividing lines. With a view to resolving the conflict between Georgia and Russia, the Government will continue its constructive participation in the Geneva International Discussions, which was created to ensure the fulfillment of all commitments under the 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement.

Georgia pursues its relations with its chief ally - the United States of America in four priority areas identified in the Charter on Strategic Partnership: defense and security; economy, trade, and energy; democratic governance and civil society; people-to-people contacts and cultural exchanges. Georgia considers the Charter as a commitment undertaken before the Georgian people. Georgia directs serious efforts towards deepening the high-level dialogue with the U.S. on the issues relating to trade and investments, including on the opportunity to sign Free Trade Agreement that will further strengthen strategic partnership between the two countries.

Georgia's foreign policy envisages developing close political and economic relations with the neighbouring and regional countries. Maximum efforts will be made to further deepen cooperation for the implementation of the ongoing economic and energy projects in the region that will make the region economically more attractive and will enhance its security.

Due to its strategic geopolitical position, Georgia makes its own contribution towards developing the historical Silk Road and ensuring the full use of its potential. In this context it is worth noting that Agreement on Cooperation for the Development of the New Silk Road

Economic Belt was signed between China and Georgia in Beijing, on 9 March 2015. Furthermore, Tbilisi Silk Road Forum will be held in Georgia on 15 and 16 October 2015, at the initiative of the Prime Minister of Georgia. This high-level dialogue will be attended by representatives of various countries and international organizations and will deal with the possibilities of strengthening partnership in the areas of transport, energy and trade, as well as people-to-people contacts.

The Government's overriding priority is to normalize relations between Georgia and Russia based on respect for Georgia's sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of its internationally recognized borders, which must be preceded by the de-occupation of the Georgian territory and the reversal of the recognition of the independence of the occupied territories.

Yet another priority of Georgia's foreign policy is to further develop cooperation with the European countries that is of particular importance to Georgia, including in terms of realizing the main priorities of Georgia's foreign policy – achieving European and Euro-Atlantic integration, the irreversibility of Georgia's democratic development, de-occupation of the territory and territorial integrity of the country.

In the light of development of global partnership, a great deal of attention will also be paid to the deepening of mutually beneficial bilateral and multilateral relations with the Latin American, Caribbean, Middle East, Arab, African, North American, Asian and Pacific Rim countries.

Another key focus of Georgia's foreign policy is to develop active cooperation with the international organizations and institutions functioning within their framework, with the goal of ensuring the success of the ongoing democratic reforms, enhancing the role of the international organizations in the peaceful resolution of the conflict, building confidence among the Georgian population torn apart by the war and creating security and human rights mechanisms in the occupied regions.

Efforts will continue towards the further development of the democratic system of governance. Great importance will be attached to the implementation of economic diplomacy aimed at ensuring the development of Georgian economy, including, among others, the attraction of foreign investments and the full-scale involvement of the country in the international economic processes.

### **Integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic Structures**

European and Euro-Atlantic integration one of the main objectives of Georgia's foreign policy. It represents a firm and unwavering choice of the Georgian people considering it as a fixed point of reference for building a truly European liberal democracy, as well as for ensuring the prosperity and economic development of the country.

The Georgian Government actively continues to carry out the successfully launched Association Agreement and the Association Agenda in compliance with the Annual National Action Plan. The task before us is to ensure that the Georgian population receives in due time the benefits of rapprochement with EU standards and values.

Substantial progress has been achieved in terms of visa liberalization. Comprehensive reforms under the respective Action Plan have been carried out.

The Government will continue intense cooperation with the civil society on European integration issues.

Projects within the framework of EU assistance will continue in order to support the ongoing reforms in Georgia, including with the goal of harmonizing the Georgian laws with the EU acquis and bringing the national standards closer with the EU norms and standards. The European Union's financial assistance for 2014-2017 worth up to EUR 140 mln will go towards such priority areas as public sector reform, agriculture, rule of law, as well as expert assistance for carrying out commitments undertaken under the Association Agreement.

Georgia plans to take an active part in the EU-funded national, regional and thematic programmes aimed to institutionally reinforce the government agencies in Georgia, as well as to develop regional cooperation in such priority areas as energy, transport, environment, tourism, education, culture, others.

Throughout 2015, the Government will remain committed towards the implementation of the Substantial Package granted to Georgia at the NATO Wales Summit, whose main objective is to assist Georgia in its preparations for becoming a member of the Alliance. NATO-Georgia joint training and evaluation centre will be set up and start functioning until the end of 2015.

Georgia has come to that point when further steps towards integration with the NATO fully depend on the political decision of the member states. Preparations for the NATO Summit to be held in Warsaw next year will be of priority importance to Georgia in 2015. Accordingly, Georgia will continue to actively coordinate with the capitals of the NATO Member States to ensure that the progress achieved by the country on its path of integration is duly assessed

during the Warsaw Summit. Georgia as an aspirant country will continue to ensure that such integration mechanisms as Annual National Programmes and the Agenda of the NATO-Georgia Commission are effectively implemented.

Furthermore, Georgia will use to the maximum the opportunities it enjoys as a result of joining, along with Sweden, Australia, Finland and Jordan, the Enhanced Opportunity Partner's Group within the platform of interoperability.

Georgia still makes its own contribution towards the strengthening of global peace and security. Georgia will continue to participate in the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan and will take part in the NATO Response Force (NRF) from 2015 to 2018.

Georgia's contribution to the EU-led peacekeeping operations is also important. In 2014 and 2015, Georgia successfully took part in the EU Missions (EUFOR/EUMAM RCA) in the Central African Republic. Georgia plans to contribute to the new Military Advisory Mission in the Central African Republic, as well as to the EUTM Mali.

Georgia pursues active cooperation within the framework of the global coalition whose main goal is to ensure peace and stability in the Middle East.

Georgia will continue to fight against the challenges currently facing the international community, including against international terrorism and transnational organized crime, as well as to make its own contribution to energy security, arms control and non-proliferation.

Steps will be taken to promote Georgia and its potential internationally, as well as to share the country's reform experience with the external world.

In 2015 the Government will activate its efforts to maintain and further strengthen the Georgian population's support for the country's European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The Communication and Information Strategy of the Government of Georgia in the sphere of EU Integration for the period of 2014-2017 and the Action Plan for 2015 will continue to be effectively carried out. The government agencies and other organizations responsible for strategic communication will consolidate their efforts in order to confront any wrong message or myth regarding the European and Euro-Atlantic integration process and to bring to the attention of each citizen objective and comprehensive information on the benefits such integration may bring about. The Information Centre on EU and NATO is actively involved in carrying out the Action Plan to the Strategy.

## **Migration**

Institutional and legislative reforms that have been carried out in the area of migration over the past few years have played an important role in the successful implementation of the Visa Liberalization Action Plan.

Based on the needs as revealed through the assessment of the Migration Strategy for 2013-2015, the Government plans to elaborate Migration Strategy for 2016-2020, which will identify current challenges of migration and will determine the country's priority goals and objectives for the next 5 years.

Work is underway to create an integrated analytical system, which will collect and process information from various databases thus contributing to an in-depth analysis of migration processes based on predictable characteristics.

A new format of Georgia's migration profile for 2015 is now developed. Its aim is to bring together and analyze the vast amount of comprehensive information relating to migration.

With a view to further improving the migration management system, the State Commission on Migration Issues will be institutionally strengthened through the development of analytical capacities of the Commission's Secretariat.

### **Economic Policy**

The main goal of the Georgian Government's economic policy is to increase the prosperity level of the population that can be achieved through sustainable and inclusive economic growth when every citizen enjoys the benefits of economic development and at the same time, the entire population is fully involved in the economic development process.

Maintaining macro-economic stability is an important pre-requisite for ensuring the inclusive growth, as well as for effectively carrying out measures under the economic policy. The Government's economic policy is based on the principles of free market economy, in particular, effective protection of property rights, competitive market, and freedom of the private sector under the effective and transparent government.

For the successful implementation of the economic policy, it is of paramount importance to create a relevant environment that would be conducive to the development of the private sector as a driving force behind inclusive growth, to enhance its competitiveness, and to ensure the effective functioning of those industries where the private sector's possibilities are weak or limited.

The main directions of the economic policy include: improvement of business and investment environment; development of entrepreneurship, including small and medium-sized businesses in order to increase the latter's role and share in the economy; improved funding of the private sector through the development of new financial instruments; enhancement of competitiveness of Georgian economy both regionally and globally through the reasonable use of comparative advantages; further development of foreign trade and economic relations which ensures the growth of Georgian exports of goods and services; development of export-oriented industries and attraction of foreign direct investments for the production of value added goods that will increase employment opportunities and will lead to the introduction of innovative technologies; development of the service sector that will help increase the competitiveness of the country, will create new job places and will ensure the involvement of broad masses of the population in the economic development processes. Also of importance is the introduction of green economy principles and the promotion of production of ecologically friendly products.

**Measures for carrying out the economic policy:**

To ensure the development of free trade and competitive market, the Government will create effective enforcement mechanisms, including through the strengthening of the independent institution. Furthermore, the Government will contribute to the growth of companies, as well as to the removal of artificial barriers hindering their development. Investment laws will be revised to improve the investment environment and to boost confidence of investors.

To ensure the effective operation of business, the Government, based on the international best practices, will contribute to the use of mediation in commercial dispute resolution and will ensure the independence of mediators.

To create stable and predictable environment for the development of business, the Government will ensure maximum transparency and involvement of all stakeholders in the drafting of business laws. Besides, to relieve business from additional burden, Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) system will be developed to analyze how new and existing laws may impact the business environment and economy.

To ensure open and competitive market, the Government continues to introduce internationally recognized trade instruments designed to facilitate the development of domestic market and hence, will increase employment opportunities.

The process of sharing international best practices has been launched and is ongoing, through the support of donors, for the further development of cooperation between the public and private sectors, as well as for the effective use of Public Private Partnership (PPP) mechanism. Public Private Partnership (PPP) mechanism for Georgia will be developed in close cooperation with the international partners, taking into consideration the specifics of the country and the realities it is facing.

For the further development of the investment environment, the Government, through cooperation with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), sets up Investors' Council which will comprise representatives of the Government, business community and international organizations. The Council will act as a platform for conducting a dialogue for the improvement of communication between the government and the business as well as for the exchange of initiatives and ideas between them.

The Government's goal is to ensure the rational use of state-owned assets and to deploy unused assets for economic gain through turning them into private property. With this goal in mind, the privatization process will continue actively; detailed inventory of state-owned assets will be completed; state-owned enterprises will be optimized. The Government will transparently and effectively conduct the state property management and privatization process.

With the goal of supporting entrepreneurship, including small-, medium-sized and startup businesses, the Government will ensure the development of entrepreneurial skills, availability of financial resources, the strengthening of startup business and businessmen's export capacities, as well as increased access to innovations and technologies. Small- and medium-sized business strategy and related action plan is now developed to promote the development of small- and medium-sized businesses in Georgia and the introduction of international best practices and policy in this area. It will have a positive impact and will increase employment and self-employment opportunities. Special attention will be paid to the development of small business in the highland regions.

For the promotion of small- and medium-sized businesses, Entrepreneurship Development Agency was set up in February 2014, which is mainly oriented towards increasing private sector competitiveness. The Agency will employ both financial and non-financial instruments for the development of small-, medium-sized and startup businesses. The Agency will be largely focused on increasing access to funding, training entrepreneurial skills, developing and promoting export, adapting business to DCFTA requirements, and

holding consultations regarding the demands and regulations of local and international markets.

For the development of small- and medium-sized businesses, the Entrepreneurship Development Agency will continue to effectively carry out the Produce in Georgia Government Programme, which envisages providing those intending to start up and develop business with an increased access to funding, infrastructure, technical assistance, consultations, innovations and modern technologies. To promote economic activities in the regions, especially in the economically vulnerable ones, micro and small business promotion project was launched within the Produce in Georgia Programme, which is focused on promoting micro and small business activities, increasing financial support and developing entrepreneurial skills.

The Government will promote the development of the capital market in the country as a way to introduce alternate ways for attracting investments and increasing access to funding. Reforms have been launched to ensure the development of the capital market and its effective functioning.

To increase the amount of savings being an important long-term investment resource, efforts are underway to reform the deposit insurance system, which will be used to insure deposits, on the one hand, and on the other, will promote the accumulation of additional financial resources within the financial institutions.

It is important to develop additional financial support capabilities in order to encourage the development of export. There are plans to establish an export credit institution, the main goal of which will be to encourage export companies. An export credit model specific to Georgia will be introduced, in close cooperation with international partners, which will be focused on the export of both: goods and services.

The Government is determined to deepen cooperation with the existing and potential trade partners in order to achieve Georgia's integration with the international economic space, promotion of export and diversification of export markets.

Special attention will be paid to the development of preferential trade arrangements in bilateral, multilateral and regional formats.

Negotiations will become more active on the issues relating to trade and investment relations with the United States of America.

Following the signature of the Association Agreement, the Government is focused on achieving integration with the EU market, which is conditional on the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA). To ensure the successful implementation of the DCFTA, an action plan for 2014-2017 was developed setting forth the ways to harmonize the Georgian laws with the EU Acquis and to develop respective state institutions clearing the way for Georgian goods to the EU market. Besides, the Government, teaming up with the European Union and other international donor organizations, will facilitate the adaptation of the private sector with the DCFTA requirements.

The task before the Government of Georgia is to develop stable trade-economic relations with all neighbouring and regional countries, including with the Russian Federation, that will contribute to export growth and investment inflows.

With due regard for Georgia's favourable geographic location, the Government of Georgia aims to create an integrated transport system in order to use to the maximum its transit potential and ensure that it effectively performs its role in international carriages and trade operations. To increase the competitiveness of the transit corridor, the Government will contribute to its integration with international transport systems and will deepen regional cooperation. In close cooperation with the Asian Development Bank, a transport policy document will be elaborated.

The Government aims at improving the existing transport systems by developing respective transport infrastructure, multimodal and intermodal carriages and logistics centres. In civil aviation area, the Government will promote the Open Skies Policy and will ensure that flight security, aviation security, environmental protection, protection of consumers' rights and other areas are developed on a par with European standards and that Georgia becomes part of the common aviation space.

The Government will develop light-craft aviation and transport infrastructure in the highland regions that will contribute to the economic development of these regions.

Development of port infrastructure is the Government's key priority in the area of maritime transport. Particular importance, in this light, is attached to the construction of a new deep-water port. The port will be built in several phases and its capacity will reach 100 million tons per year. The construction of the Anakia port will not only enhance Georgia's transit potential but will also increase Georgia's role and will eventually turn it into a logistical hub in the region.

In accordance with the Association Agreement, the Government will ensure that the Georgian laws are brought into conformity with the EU transport regulations and guidelines that will further improve the security level of transport operations.

Development of regional cooperation aimed at full-scale realization of the country's transit potential is yet another priority of the Government. Georgia continues to actively engage in various regional programmes, projects and initiatives (TRACECA, Viking, Silk Wind, Lapis Lazuli). Special attention is paid to the Baku-Tbilisi-Karsi railway project, which considerably reduces carriage time between Asia and Europe and is a prerequisite for attracting additional volumes of cargo. The construction of the Georgian section of the railway line is due for completion by the end of the year.

Development of communication and information technologies is one of the key priorities of the Government since it can create high-pay job places within the shortest possible time and contribute to the development of other fields of economy.

The Government's priority is to ensure that Georgia assumes an important position in the region in terms of export of information and communication technologies (ICT) both in the short- and long-term future. Georgia's Innovation and Technology Agency – a legal entity of public law was set up in February 2014, with a view to building innovation-based economy; turning intellectual products, innovations and technologies into goods for export; introducing information and communication technologies and innovations in all areas of science and economy and enhancing competitiveness of Georgian science and economy through the aforesaid instruments; carrying out integrated state policy, related strategy and targeted programmes for the establishment of innovative ecosystem in the country.

IT specialists as well as their earnings will considerably increase.

Special attention will be devoted to internetization issues. Georgian communities will be provided with high-speed Internet infrastructure. For this purpose, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development has already announced an invitation for bids.

Computerization process in the regions and raising awareness of computer technologies will continue.

With the goal of increasing public sector competitiveness, particular importance will be attached to the promotion of applied researches by improving the effectiveness of state funding in this field.

Respective infrastructure: technology parks, accelerators, ICT incubators, laboratories for industrial innovations (FabLab) will be provided to encourage the development of innovations and technologies. The construction of the first technology park is now underway.

The Government of Georgia will contribute to the development of tourism – one of the main preconditions for boosting economy, as well as for increasing income and employment opportunities. Development of tourist infrastructure and new tourist products will be promoted, so will the diversification of the existing ones. Regular researches will be carried out for identifying and removing factors that hinder the development of tourism and service quality.

Special attention will be paid to the development of tourism at a regional level; to the improvement of service quality; to the encouragement of small and medium-sized tourist business, as well as to the promotion of moderately priced and family hotels. The Government will actively cooperate with representatives of the Georgian Diasporas to attract Diaspora investments and foreign direct investments through the assistance of diasporas, to promote Georgian goods in the host countries and to increase exports. It will encourage economic growth, as well as will maintain and further reinforce Georgian Diasporas' links with Georgia.

### **The Georgian Government's Energy Policy**

One of the main directions of energy policy is to increase the country's energy security and degree of independence, to achieve phased reduction of dependence on imported energy supplies through the development of local energy resources and diversification of supply sources and routes.

Availability of energy resources is a necessary prerequisite for improving living conditions amid the growing and competitive economy. To attain this goal, the Government will continue to engage in such priority areas as the rational use of local energy resources that, in the medium- and long-term future, will substitute energy imports and will increase export potential, ensuring, at the same time, the readiness of the energy sector in case of development of energy-consuming sectors of economy.

The investment policy in the energy sector will be built upon the creation of additional power generation facilities and the implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects. Besides, the investment policy will provide for the possibility of carrying out a stable tariff policy, especially in the electric power sector. The Government will provide a favourable

environment and will introduce simplified and transparent procedures for attracting private investments to the energy sector.

The optimum use of renewable energy sources, with due regard for technical, economic, environmental and social requirements and based on the international best practices will remain one of the Government's priorities.

In parallel to the aforesaid priorities, energy saving and energy efficiency policies will be implemented through carrying out effective measures and introducing respective technologies.

Implementation of local and regional infrastructure projects will also be one of the main directions of the energy policy. Construction-reconstruction of main gas lines and high-voltage transmission lines will ensure smooth and stable power supply.

To provide local customers with better service, an individual metering programme throughout the country will go through to the finish, whereas gasification of the regions will be based on the feasibility studies.

Bringing the domestic legislation into line with the EU energy laws is also of paramount importance as part of the Euro-Atlantic integration process. By carrying out respective reforms and amending the applicable regulations, trans-border trade, market liberalization and attraction of foreign investments will be promoted that will contribute to the development of regional trade and will enhance transit and export potential.

### **Labour market Development**

The Government's priority is to contribute to the development of effective and civilized labour market. The main goals of the government policy aimed at the formation of labour market are as follows: rational use of human resources; promotion of effective employment; consistent reduction of unemployment and qualitative improvement of the labour force.

To achieve these goals the Government in 2014 approved State Strategy for the Formation of Labour Market and 2015-2018 Action Plan for its implementation; Concept on the Introduction and Development of Labour Market Information System and Action Plan for its implementation; Concept on the Development of Continuous Professional Consultation and Universal Access to Career Planning Services and the 2015-2017 Action Plan for its implementation.

Law of Georgia on Labour Migration, which was adopted in 2015 sets for the state mechanisms for the regulation of labour migration.

Within the framework of the EU twinning programme titled “Capacity Building of the Employment Support Services (ESS) in Georgia”, the development of employment support services will be ensured giving citizens an access to professional and career development.

In compliance with the commitments under the Association Agreement and the Visa Liberalization Action Plan, active steps have been taken to create a mechanism, which will be equipped with administrative and executive powers and will phase in standards of the International Labour Organization.

A labour inspection agency was set up to inspect the norms of labour security, to develop/improve the legislative framework, to elaborate/revise technical regulations/standards and to develop, in cooperation with the International Labour Organization, respective mechanisms for the introduction of international standards.

For carrying out works necessary for the introduction of an inspection system, the State Programme of Monitoring the Labour Conditions was put into operation, which ensures detection of systemic violations, elaboration/revision of security and health standards and drafting of bills.

Active cooperation with international organizations and partner countries will continue to encourage labour and employment.

### **Health Protection**

The introduction of the Universal Healthcare Programme in 2013 providing each citizen of Georgia with a basic package of medical services is an important achievement, which has increased access to healthcare, in accordance with the resolutions of the World Health Organization and the UN General Assembly.

The further development of the health policy and programmes, including the Universal Healthcare Programme, aims at increasing life expectancy and improving health status of the population. The Georgian population is better protected from excess costs and risks of impoverishment. Efforts are still underway to ensure quality healthcare and provide a better access to medications.

In accordance with the Association Agenda, special attention is focused on the public health policy, as well as on the elaboration/improvement of programmes in such priority areas as

infectious disease control, drug abuse, mental health, blood and organ donation, tobacco control and regulations for the improvement of healthcare service quality.

The effectiveness of budget spending will increase through improving the administration of public health programmes and making greater efforts at the level of basic healthcare. The possibility of introducing a universally recognized integrated healthcare financing system is being considered to make more effective the use of budgetary funds allocated to the medical services. Efforts are underway to improve the healthcare financing programmes (20 healthcare programmes targeting specific diseases, including early detection of diseases, diabetes and rare diseases), based on research findings and international best practices.

Special attention will be focused on developing/introducing healthcare quality management systems, within the framework of both universal health insurance and private health insurance schemes; quality management mechanisms (systematic monitoring of quality indicators, internal audit, accreditation and reporting) will be developed and introduced stage by stage within in-patient, out-patient and laboratory services; fundamental reforms will be carried out in the medical education and certification areas at pre-diploma, post-diploma and continuous medical training stages.

Based on the analysis of healthcare infrastructure, various levels of medical services and specific needs of the population (including the population of highland regions and the population living in the adjacent areas to the conflict zones), the Government will promote the further development of healthcare infrastructure by implementing public and private investments. Regionalization, referral and quality management improvement systems will, at the initial stage, be introduced in maternal and child health services and will further extend to in-patient, out-patient and emergency medical services.

As a result of reforms launched following the assessment of emergency medical services, the task of providing emergency healthcare throughout the entire territory of Georgia will be undertaken by the State. Ambulance staff training program is currently underway to improve the emergency medical services; fleet replacement and dispatch service improvement programmes are planned to be carried out.

On 21 April 2015, representatives of the Georgian Government and Gilead Science, Inc signed a memorandum of mutual understanding laying the groundwork for the world's unique project on the elimination of Hepatitis C in Georgia. The project will reduce Hepatitis C incidence and mortality rates and will prevent new hepatitis cases.

## **Pension and Social Policy**

Social risks caused by poverty and ageing of the population will be reduced. Individuals with disabilities and other vulnerable groups will be encouraged to take part in the country's social and economic life. Basic principles for the formation of accumulative pension system will be determined. Retirees under this system will receive a refund of their accumulated payroll contributions.

Fundamental reform ongoing within the pension system and envisaging transition to accumulation principle will be based on compulsory pension insurance. As a result of the reform, private pension institutions will play a significant role within the system. Amount of pension will depend only on the period of insurance and on the amount of insurance contributions. The State will assume a regulatory function in order to maintain system stability. Besides, citizens, whose total insurance period is shorter than the qualifying insurance period, will be paid social pension. As for the pensioners who retired or reached retirement age at the initial stage of the reform, they will be paid social pension by the State in the amount not less than living wage.

As far as the social policy is concerned, the purposefulness of the social assistance program will increase. Methods for assessing the social-economic status of the family have been changed through minimizing the bias involved in subjective evaluation, revising criteria, enhancing the social information management system and improving the administration scheme. New methods better reflect the needs of children and their families. A differentiated social assistance system will be introduced ensuring that more assistance reaches out to those families that are most in need of support.

Measures for improving physical and social conditions of the persons (including children) with disabilities and for ensuring their integration into society will continue to be carried out under "The Government Action Plan 2014-2016 on Ensuring Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities".

Progressive realization of the principles and obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will continue.

Medical model approach to persons with disabilities will gradually be replaced by social model approach; development of social service will be based on providing access to quality service suited to the individual needs of beneficiaries.

Child care system reform will continue in the areas of de-institutionalization, strengthening of families and promoting the upbringing of children in family environment.

### **Local Self-Government**

Strong local self-government is one of the main instruments for supporting democracy, civil society and regional socio-economic development. Its goal is to address issues of local importance independently, under its own responsibility and with due regard for the interests of local population.

The Organic law on Local Self-Government Code adopted by the Parliament of Georgia in February of 2014, based on the principles of decentralization, subsidiary performance and efficient management, creates a relevant legal basis for further development of self-government – in terms of territorial optimization of municipalities, institutional and material strengthening of local self-governments and improvement of municipal services. The reformed system will continue to incorporate further improvements to ensure institutional, financial-economic and management efficiency, including fiscal decentralization and material support of municipalities.

An effective system for continuous training of local self-government staff will be created. An increasing number of municipalities will open up service centres. The local self-government territorial reorganization process will take into consideration such factors as local human and material resources, compatibility of villages to form a municipality and other socio-economic factors.

Urban development of cities will be ensured; new centres of attraction will be set up within the municipalities; every community (village, town, city) coming within the municipality

will use an effective mechanism for taking part in the solution of issues relating to the community concerned.

## **Regional Development Policy**

Regional development policy is one of the Georgian Government's recognized priorities, which will play a crucial role in achieving sustainable economic growth and nation-wide success. By carrying out a comprehensive and effective regional development policy, the Government aims to help citizens achieve their goals by employing the traditional method of equalizing the standard of life, as well as by promoting efficient economic processes on the ground and increasing the competitiveness of the regions. The Government considers the identification and optimum use of comparative advantages of certain regions, their specific structures, opportunities for long-term development of various sectors and potential to transform the existing resources as a precondition for implementing the effective regional development policy. The Government of Georgia will continue to work intensely towards ensuring the consistent and inclusive implementation of Georgia's Regional Development Programme for 2015-2017, as well as of the existing strategies for the development of different regions, that, first of all, envisages carrying out the duly drafted action plans and introducing effective monitoring mechanisms.

The Government will elaborate a framework law setting forth respective institutional mechanisms for implementing the integrated state policy of sustainable regional development, rules for drafting documents on cluster regions and development planning, as well as on planning, financially supporting and implementing the entire process of regional development.

At the same time, for ensuring progress in the socio-economic development of the highland regions, special stimulation instruments will be created, for which a new law of Georgia on the development of highland regions will be elaborated.

Effective mechanisms for reflecting the interests of municipalities and ensuring their participation in regional projects will be created. Efforts will be made to address issues

relating to socio-economic and infrastructural development and to create and improve at the regional level respective institutional mechanisms for planning and implementation.

### **Development of Infrastructure**

The development of public infrastructure is one of the main prerequisites for promoting regional development and poverty reduction. One of the principal tasks before the Government is to promote the improvement of infrastructure and to create relevant conditions for identifying and eliminating weaknesses.

With due regard for the geopolitical realities, the Government will ensure maximum integration of Georgia into international projects; Construction of new main roads, reconstruction of the existing ones, renewal and upgrading of road infrastructure will continue based on such factors as geographic location and traffic load.

Other priority areas of infrastructural development are as follows: stocking and sorting out waste materials throughout the country in compliance with European standards; providing population in the regions with 24-hour supply of drinking water; building and repairing water supply and sewerage systems in the towns and villages throughout Georgia, and bringing these system into line with European standards.

Preventive measures (building anti-landslide, anti-avalanche and flood-hit constructions) will continue to be taken to protect the population from the consequences of natural disasters – landslides, floods, etc.

At the same time, with a view to ensuring the optimum coordination of projects and introducing respective approaches based on international standards, we will make a more effective use of our long-term relationship with donors.

### **Development of Agriculture**

The Georgian Government's one of the overriding priorities is the development of agriculture, the most important prerequisites for which can be the elaboration of a well-thought-out agrarian policy and considerable enhancement of financial resources in this sector.

The strategic vision of the development of Georgian agriculture implies the creation of such an environment based on the principles of sustainable development, which would contribute to increasing agriculture competitiveness, stable growth in the production of quality goods, as well as to ensuring food safety and security and reducing poverty in rural areas.

Within the framework of the Association Agreement, comprehensive reforms will be carried out in all relevant directions, in the area of food safety, in particular. Georgian entrepreneurs will be able to phase in international and European standards, which will increase the production and supply of quality products and will improve their competitiveness in the European market.

Sources to finance agriculture will include: the state budget, as well as loans, grants and private investments (both domestic and foreign) allocated by international organizations and certain donor countries.

Within the framework of the agrarian policy, efforts will be made to develop the agrarian land market; to set up register of farmers; to provide the agricultural sector with equipment and raw materials; to develop farm credit, leasing and insurance systems; to provide small and medium farmers with financial resources; to further develop farmer cooperatives/associations; to support agro-processing industry and storage, sorting, packaging and distribution sectors; to improve consulting services and scientific support for agrarian workers; to improve and stimulate business environment; to ensure food safety, food security and to maintain agro-diversity; to further develop regional and agricultural infrastructure, including rehabilitation of irrigation and drainage systems. Special attention will be devoted to the development of quality seed and plant production.

The implementation of the aforesaid policy will increase productiveness, cost-effectiveness and competitiveness of the agrarian sector, will enhance agricultural incomes and will also improve the living conditions in the regions. The agricultural sector will create new jobs in the coming years, will help the self-employed boost their earnings and will reduce unemployment in rural areas. Agricultural foodstuffs produced in Georgia will find their niche both in domestic and international markets.

## **Tax Policy**

The Government's tax policy aims at providing attractive and stable tax environment for the private sector, foreign investments and business development.

A series of legislative initiatives are now in the drafting stages. Within the framework of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement between Georgia and the European Union, the Georgian customs laws will be brought into line with the EU Acquis. Effective customs control procedures will be introduced to facilitate trade. The Georgian tax laws regulating indirect taxes (VAT, excise duties) will be harmonized with the EU Acquis.

The Government considers each taxpayer as a partner in building the country as well as in providing the population with improved civil service. Efforts will, therefore, continue to ensure that physical and legal entities fulfill their tax liabilities. A dialogue will continue with representatives of the business community in order that their problems of practical character are reflected in respective laws. A database (including various normative acts and decisions resolving tax disputes and lawsuits) will be created within the revenue service on the basis of which the civil agencies will adopt a uniform approach to all taxpayers and will take their decisions. With due regard for business interests, the tax administration system will be simplified and tax sanctions will be optimized. Tax control and collection procedures will be streamlined. The existing tax dispute review system will be updated. Respective mechanisms for promoting domestic production and encouraging export of goods/services will be introduced.

## **Monetary Policy**

According to the Constitution of Georgia, the responsibility for carrying out a monetary policy rests with the National Bank, which takes its decisions independently. The Government of Georgia will support the National Bank in effectively pursuing its monetary policy, in particular. Main priorities of monetary, credit and exchange rate policies are determined in accordance with respective parliamentary resolution.

Against the background of the ongoing processes in the region and the fluctuating exchange rate of Georgian Lari, of particular importance is the coordinated implementation of the monetary and fiscal policy and cooperation with the international financial institutions in

order to work out an adequate policy. Despite these challenges, the Government is determined to maintain a floating exchange rate as the most relevant option for Georgia.

Healthy competition among commercial banks will be supported; deposit insurance system will be introduced, which will become a reliable mechanism for increasing savings and deposits.

### **Fiscal Policy**

The Government continues to improve the public financial management to ensure that priority areas and social expenses are funded through the budget, on the one hand, and on the other, the country's economy is stimulated and fiscal stability is maintained.

Measures carried out in budgeting, within the framework of public financial management, will ensure the effective management and transparency of public funds, mobilization of resources necessary for the development of various sectors amid the efforts to maintain fiscal stability and to conduct fiscal policy aimed to achieve the growth of economy in parallel to performing social obligations.

Work will continue to adopt unified planning standards, which will apply to national documents as well as to medium-term fiscal and other sectoral strategic documents. Medium-term plans will be used as an effective instrument for achieving fiscal stability. To stimulate economy, budget deficit may occur within a certain period of time, in parallel to increased government spending. However, such deficit will be kept narrow in the medium term. Accurate prediction and stability of macroeconomic and fiscal indicators will remain one of the overriding challenges against the background of the ongoing developments in the region. In the medium-term and long-term perspective, it will be highly important to maintain such macroeconomic and fiscal indicators that could lead the rating companies to give better evaluations and make the country's investment climate more attractive.

The Ministry of Finance will continue its work in the area of macroeconomic analysis and forecasting. To streamline the budget planning process, efforts will be made to improve medium-term tax revenue forecasts for the national and consolidated budgets. Scope of the

forecast will be expanded to comprise a wider range of economic sectors. Time limits of the forecast will also increase allowing a long-term planning of the fiscal sector.

The fiscal policy will be conducted in a reasonable manner, in order to ensure the government debt sustainability. Despite the fact that the unstable exchange rate of Lari had a negative impact on government debt-to-GDP-ratio, the latter remains low – based on internationally recognized standards, is consistent with the benchmark level and is even much lower than the level provided for by the law. This upgrades Georgia's sovereign rating outlook to positive and assists the country in attracting credit resources. The Government will continue to pursue a selective approach to investment/infrastructure projects, which are financed within maximally preferential credits, in order to ensure the sustainability of the government debt portfolio. The Government will also continue to issue securities and to use domestic credit resource that will contribute to the development of the securities market.

Efforts will continue towards introducing programme budget and improving respective methods, including by working out methodological guidelines for budget-funded organizations that will help them effectively manage the internal programme budgeting. Full-scale introduction of result-oriented budgeting will be ensured. Mechanisms for carrying out budget-funded programmes and sub-programmes and for describing their expected results will be brought into line with international standards. Efforts will also continue to increase the degree of budget transparency and to ensure that Georgian citizens are provided with necessary information.

In parallel to ensuring the functional improvement of eBudget and incorporating into it the budgets of legal entities of public law, as well as the budgets of the autonomous republics and local self-government bodies, efforts will continue to improve the electronic financial management system that will contribute to the consolidation of public finances and will, accordingly, help upgrade the instruments of public financial management. The process of directing funds of legal entities of public law into the Exchequer account will be finalized. Mobilizing all public financial resources into the integrated Exchequer account will ensure the timely preparation of comprehensive reports on the execution of all types of budgets, including the budgets of legal entities of public law.

International Public Sector Accounting Standard on accrual basis will be gradually introduced. Upon achieving full compliance with these standards, the Government's financial statements based on accrual method will be published annually.

An integrated approach and instruction will be developed for introducing a financial management and control system, which will upgrade the level of managerial accountability, managerial and financial control mechanisms and elements of financial management. Professional development of internal auditors and the effectiveness of their activities will be ensured. Internal and external control and audit mechanisms in the public financial management area will be improved. An effective mechanism for putting into practice the recommendations of the State Audit Office will be introduced for improving the budgeting process.

### **Environmental Protection and Rational Use of Natural Resources**

The Georgian Government's one of the top priorities is to ensure environmental protection and rational use of natural resources. The Government aims to introduce the principles of green economy and promote the development of green business.

To improve the environmental management quality in the country, European environmental policy standards and principles will be gradually introduced in Georgia, in compliance with the Association Agreement. Georgia will continue to fulfill the commitments undertaken under the bilateral and multilateral environmental agreements.

The environmental legal framework will be revised and upgraded in such areas as: waste management, water resource management, atmospheric air protection, reduction of natural and anthropogenic hazards, nuclear and radiation safety, protection of biodiversity, sustainable management of natural resources, issuance of permits and licenses, environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment.

The environmental monitoring system will be gradually expanded and modernized.

Forest sector reform will be conducted and its aim will be to introduce a sustainable forest management system and to improve its qualitative and quantitative indicators. The institutions responsible for forest management will be strengthened.

Integrated Water Resource Management System will be gradually put in place based on the European principles of basin management.

Liquid fuel quality standards will be gradually made stricter in line with EU standards. The pollutant emission rate recording system will be upgraded. Air quality standards will be brought into line with European standards.

The existing environmental permitting system will be improved and new permit regulations conforming to European standards will be enforced. Strategic environmental assessment system at sector level will also be introduced.

To ensure management and rational use of natural resources, the natural resource license system will be upgraded.

Based on the commitments and obligations under the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, mechanisms for the sustainable use of land resources will be developed to reduce soil erosion, prevent desertification and preserve soil fertility.

Measures necessary for the protection of biodiversity will be taken in accordance with the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for 2014-2020. National Biosafety Regulatory System will be developed in the country.

The network of protected areas will be expanded and their management will be improved. Activities aimed at developing protected areas and promoting ecotourism will be carried out.

A modern waste management system will be created. Waste management strategy and waste management action plan will be approved, in order to apply European methods of waste management and facilitate the development of relevant infrastructure.

Georgia will embrace the EU's approaches to the prevention and control of industrial accident; natural disaster risk assessment mechanisms will be upgraded; Forecasting and early warning systems for natural disasters will be established/upgraded.

National Adaptation Plan for Economic Sectors and Ecosystems and National Low-Emission Development Strategy will be prepared in accordance with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Climate change mitigation and adaptation measures will be undertaken.

The national environmental control system will be modernized ensuring compliance with the laws regulating such spheres as environmental protection and use of natural resources; prevention, detection and elimination of environmental pollution and illegal use of natural resources.

Nuclear nonproliferation regime will be strengthened; nuclear and radiological threats and risks will be reduced; population will be protected from adverse effects of ionizing radiation; legal framework for radioactive waste management will be developed; such sectors as nuclear and radiological safety will gain institutional strength.

The Government will move towards sustainable development and introduction of green economy principles.

Mechanisms ensuring access to environmental information and public participation in decision-making will be elaborated and improved. Measures will be taken to promote environmental education and awareness raising.

### **Support and Protection of Rights of IDPs and Refugees**

The Government bears responsibility for the life, health, safety, social integration, living conditions, employment, property protection and return to the place of origin of each displaced and war-affected citizen. Taking into account specific needs of IDPs, the Government will guarantee the protection of their rights during the period of their displacement and will make every effort to achieve long-term solution of the problems of IDPs, to provide them with residence in various regions of the country, as well as with sources of income, healthcare, and social integration, and to create socioeconomic conditions allowing refugees to live in dignity and peace. In order to help IDPs get integrated in another part of the country before their eventual return to the places of permanent residence, the Government will support the participation of IDPs in agricultural programmes and will provide those already taking part in agricultural activities with necessary infrastructure and

resources; the Government will also encourage the creation or further development of agribusiness incubators and mixed agricultural cooperatives.

The Government recognizes the right of IDPs to the restitution of real property left at the places of their permanent residence. This right is descendible and will continue to apply even if IDPs are provided with long-term residence. The Government will make special efforts to plan and implement the process of return, housing and reintegration of IDPs. Confidence-building between the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian communities torn apart by the war, broader international involvement and realization of the strategy aimed at conflict resolution through political negotiations will become a precondition for the return of refugees.

## **Conflict Resolution**

Conflict resolution remains the most important component on the Government's domestic and foreign agenda. Against the background of the persisting challenges, special attention will be focused on efforts to mobilize the international community in order to end Russia's occupation policy and steps taken towards annexation, as well as on the creation, through the support of international organizations, of effective human rights protection and monitoring mechanisms.

In parallel to supporting the Geneva International Discussions as an important platform for a dialogue between Georgia and Russia through international mediation, the Government will also remain committed to open up a direct dialogue with Abkhazian and Ossetian communities. Despite the difference in positions with respect to the political settlement of the conflicts, the Georgian, Abkhazian and Ossetian communities must assume responsibility for the security of the region as well as of the next generations. It is necessary to launch negotiations on security guarantees, the mechanism of which must be created within the format of international organizations/partners (e.g. European Union, OSCE or UN). It is also highly important to address humanitarian issues and to take steps towards restoration of confidence. The Government will continue to support public diplomacy, social and economic rehabilitation and business projects. Family and personal contacts between the communities living on different sides of the dividing line will continue to be encouraged.

Through the participation of partner countries and international organizations, the Government will considerably increase support for the projects of the non-governmental sector, which will contribute to conducting a dialogue between the parties at the level of political experts, as well as to the creation of groups of businessmen, journalists, women, farmers, ecologists, medical workers, students and other target groups.

In order to retain the conflict-affected families in the villages adjacent to the dividing line, the Government has taken upon itself the strategic task to achieve the socioeconomic development of those villages and regions, and plans to put into practice a strategy specifically elaborated for this very purpose. The strategy incorporates projects (both already implemented and ongoing) envisaging restoration of irrigation and drinking water systems, rehabilitation of schools and clinics, gasification, financing of higher education, targeted material assistance for the local population, etc. The Government will continue to engage with donors and partners in order to assist the regions adjacent to the dividing lines and to continue supporting the state development policy.

New state strategy for peaceful settlement of the conflicts is currently in the drafting process, and will be based on new approaches to conducting a direct dialogue, to confidence building and reconciliation, as well as on the principle of respect for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Efforts will continue to create such legal and institutional mechanisms that would grant residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia the same benefits and services that are available to any other citizen of Georgia. The same is true of the benefits and opportunities granted to Georgian citizens under the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, as well as of the visa-free travel opportunity as envisaged by the visa dialogue with the European Union.

One of the important tasks before the Government is, therefore, to raise the Abkhazian and Ossetian communities' awareness of Georgia's European integration; of the values and benefits implied in Georgia's European development way, in particular, in terms of ensuring the protection of human rights and freedoms; of the opportunities offered by the Association Agreement, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement (DCFTA) as well as of visa-free travel between Georgia and the EU countries. Building democratic institutions and addressing the problems hindering the socioeconomic development of the country will be essential for achieving the successful resolution of the conflicts. The success of the Government's policy in this regard consists in convincing the population of Abkhazia

and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia of the advantages of living in a unified European country.

## **Defence System and Armed Forces**

The Georgian Government's overriding priority is to establish institutionally strong defence system based on democratic principles, and to form NATO-interoperable professional armed forces capable to deal with the threats facing the country. The Defence Ministry plays one of the leading roles in the process of Georgia's integration with NATO. Accordingly, its top priority is to meet all preconditions for becoming a member of the Alliance and to make an effective contribution to ensuring the international security.

A series of important steps have been taken to achieve defence objectives, which were followed by positive evaluations both within and beyond the borders of the country. In 2014-2015 NATO authorities and experts repeatedly pointed out the progress achieved by the Ministry of Defence in terms of increasing transparency, reducing corruption risks and carrying out institutional reforms.

Strategic and policy documents set out in detail future plans and priorities of the defense system.

Each new initiative is worked out through the analysis of the obtained experience, existing needs and successful international practice. Against the background of the current security situation, regional risks and threats and limited resources, it is of particular importance to correctly identify priorities of the Georgian armed forces, to determine optimum time-limits for their implementation, to ensure balanced development of priority directions and to put international aid to the most effective use.

Ensuring transparency and accountability of the defense system; improving defence management and defence capabilities; increasing NATO-interoperability and international cooperation are among the most important institutional reforms whether planned or ongoing.

In order to maintain high level of transparency and prevent corruption, the Georgian Defence Ministry has actively participated in the NATO Building Integrity Programme since

2013, which is aimed at improving transparency and effectiveness of the defence and security systems. In 2015 a MOD Building Integrity and Anti-Corruption Monitoring Council was established.

Special attention is focused on the protection of basic rights and freedoms of servicemen, on the strengthening of civil-military relations, as well as on the prevention and elimination of any form of gender discrimination. To achieve these goals, Gender Equality Strategy of the Defence Ministry was elaborated and approved.

Three-level system of decision-making was put in place in order to improve management. This system allows employees of each structural entity of the Defence Ministry to take an active part in the decision-making process.

Efforts continue to develop and revise regulatory laws and procedures in order to ensure a better regulation of the issues pertaining to defence area. Organizational support systems are also introduced. An electronic human Resources management system (HRMS) is in the process of being introduced.

The Defence Ministry's yet another priority is to further develop programme budget, resource management and procurement planning systems. Partner countries, advisors and expert contributors continue to share their experience with the Defence Ministry. Special attention is paid to the efforts to further increase financial transparency.

With a view to improving the economic and operational effectiveness of the resource management system, it is planned to set up standardization and codification units. The logistical base of the defence system will be brought closer to the standards, on the one hand, thus contributing to improvement of quality and reduction of costs, and on the other, logistics inventory will be brought into line with NATO standards. An electronic logistics management system will be created for the armed forces.

To upgrade the internal control mechanisms, special attention will be paid to efforts to put into operation the internal audit department and to improve the effectiveness of other internal control mechanisms.

To improve defence capabilities, priority will be given to the development of such areas as: education, military training, military doctrines, management and control, mobility and countermobility, military intelligence system, artillery capabilities, anti-tank capabilities, air defence capabilities, special operations forces, military police capabilities, logistics system, reserve system development, development of cyber defence capabilities, military infrastructure.

Efforts continue towards planning and implementing infrastructure projects, in particular, towards building and maintaining military bases, cantonment buildings and canteens that will allow servicemen to exercise their duties in a due manner and in dignity.

The education and training system will be further reformed with a focus on task-oriented and real-life combat training, on the conduction of joint international trainings and on the improvement of training programmes for servicemen. The Georgian military education system will, in the foreseeable future, incorporate all stages for military career development. A great deal of attention will also be paid to professional development, as well as to the establishment of new training centres and to the further development of the existing ones.

Work will continue towards ensuring the protection of social rights of the military personnel including by carrying out wounded serviceman support programmes, by paying allowances to the families of those servicemen who were wounded or killed in the exercise of their duties, as well as by improving military personnel healthcare and nutrition quality and by reforming the pension system.

Deepening cooperation with the NATO, European Union and strategic partners will remain the reference point in organising the activities of the Defence Ministry. Special accent will be put on fulfilling the commitments undertaken with respect to the NATO and the European Union. Considerable amount of resources will be directed towards the timely and effective implementation of the NATO-Georgia Substantial Package. The Ministry of Defence will continue intensive cooperation with the United States of America under the U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership; will actively pursue cooperation with partner countries both in bilateral and multilateral formats will develop cooperation with new partners; will continue strengthening cooperation with new partners; will promote security in the region by deepening cooperation with the regional countries in both bilateral and multilateral formats.

The Defence Ministry continues active cooperation with the partner countries, NATO, European Union and other international organizations in the areas of defence and security.

Cooperation with the Alliance has considerably deepened. Georgia is recognized to have achieved the highest level of interoperability with the NATO, among other aspirant countries. At the NATO Summit in Wales, Georgia joined the Enhanced Opportunity Partners Group and was granted the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package designed to strengthen the country's security and defence capabilities and to enhance its NATO-interoperability in order to speed up the process of Georgia's integration with the Alliance.

The main task before the Defence Ministry is to successfully implement the initiatives under the Substantial Package.

At the same time, the Defence Ministry continues effective cooperation with the Alliance within the framework of the NATO-Georgian Commission, Annual National Programme, Planning and Review Process, NATO-Georgia Military Cooperation Action Plan, NATO Trust Fund, Professional Development Programme, NATO Defense Education Enhancement Program, Smart Defence Initiative and other instruments of cooperation.

Georgia makes a substantial contribution towards ensuring global security and is determined to further participate in the NATO- and EU-led international peacekeeping missions.

Georgia will continue to contribute to the Resolute Support Mission until 2016. About 900 Georgian soldiers have been successfully carrying out their duties under the U.S. and German command since 2015.

The Georgian Defence Ministry takes part in the Connected Forces Initiative in order to improve Georgia's interoperability with the NATO. In 2015, Georgia's combat division joined the NATO's Rapid Response Force.

Georgia continues to make its contribution to the ongoing crisis management operations under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), in particular, to the EU Military Advisory Mission in the Central African Republic (EUMAM RCA) and to the European Mission EUTM Mali.

The Defence Ministry will successfully fulfill its defence commitments under the EU Association Agenda.

The Defence Ministry will also continue to implement the recommendations as well as the commitments it has undertaken before the OSCE and the UN.

Defence diplomacy takes on an increasingly higher importance in the present-day world. The Defence Ministry will remain particularly active in this direction as well. Georgia in the future will be represented not only by its troops on the international arena but also as a country capable to export positive experience in the institutional development of defence.

### **Diasporas**

The Government will devote special attention to our compatriots living abroad, to ensuring their engagement in Georgia's sociopolitical, socioeconomic and cultural relations, as well as to strengthening the ties between Georgia and those countries where Georgian citizens live and work.

The Government will continue efforts aimed at increasing native language and culture awareness among Georgian citizens, especially school children living abroad. The Government will also continue training teachers and preparing respective curriculums based on Georgia's education standards for schools with a Georgian ethno-cultural component of education. Georgian language instruction programme has already been developed for Georgian citizens living in Turkey and approved by the Education Ministry of the Republic of Turkey.

The Government will keep on providing traditional support and assistance to Georgian-language schools, Sunday schools, ensembles, sports teams and other types of Diaspora organizations abroad. Georgian Online School – a Georgian language distance-learning project for Georgian citizens living abroad is currently in the drafting stages. The program component of the project is now complete and only technical issues are yet to be addressed.

The Government will continue its efforts for locating, maintaining and restoring the Georgian historical and cultural properties abroad, and if possible, for ensuring their return

to Georgia. A special parity commission continues to work for transferring ownership over the Leuville Estate to Georgia.

The Government will promote the establishment and activities of Georgian Diaspora organizations abroad (whether professional, scientific, cultural, youth, etc). In order to ensure registration of, and communication with Diaspora organizations, and to plan and implement activities relating to Diasporas, a register of Diaspora organizations will be created bringing together information regarding Georgian Diaspora organizations abroad, their founders and chairs, as well as their goals and activities. A Diaspora training programme is now offered to western-educated young people abroad. Within the framework of this programme, about 40 students have already undergone training in Georgia's various government agencies.

Based on the requirements of the Association Agreement with the EU, the Government will consistently move forward with its obligations undertaken before the emigrants and will continue to cooperate with the international organizations in order to provide Georgian citizens living abroad with respective information.

## **Culture**

The Government's culture policy is oriented towards maintaining the country's national and cultural identity. According to the Association Agreement with the EU, cooperation with the European Union is ongoing in order to develop and introduce an inclusive culture policy. Besides, efforts continue to ensure the implementation of the UNESCO 2005 Convention on Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expression.

Efforts will continue to integrate Georgian culture into the global cultural space by supporting international instruments. Important steps will continue to be taken to incorporate culture into Georgia's socioeconomic development process. With a view to developing, promoting and integrating Georgian culture into the European space, an agreement was signed in Brussels, on 24 February, making Georgia a member state of EU program "Creative Europe". An office of Creative Europe will be set up in Georgia, for which respective procedures are now agreed with the European Commission.

Substantial measures are taken to improve the legal framework of the cultural sector and to bring it into line with the European laws. For this end, respective amendments and additions will be drafted and made to a series of respective regulations.

Furthermore, Cultural Heritage Code is now in the drafting stages and is due for completion until the end of the year. The Code will incorporate all regulations in the cultural heritage sector and will upgrade cultural heritage regulatory mechanisms, as well as professional regulatory issues in the cultural heritage sector.

Institutional reforms are ongoing within the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection as well as within the organizations subordinate to it. In cooperation with the ICCROM, the Government has stepped up efforts towards developing a regional training programme and establishing a training centre (training platform) in Georgia.

The cultural heritage preservation and rehabilitation process will proceed based on the international conventions, universally recognized standards, and recommendations of the UNESCO and other international organizations. Works launched in 2014-2015 will further continue towards rehabilitation of the architectural complex of Mutso, the historical-architectural complex of Vardzia, the village of Chazhashi, the architectural complex of Nokalakevi, the Squri Church, the Bebris Tsikhe Fortress, the Nogha Fortress; towards transformation of the Grakliani Hill near Gori into an outdoor museum, as well as towards archaeological and conservation works of the Geguti Palace and archaeological works of Bagineti. The Georgian cultural heritage database management system and the cultural heritage geographic information system (GIS) are now developed.

The financial reinforcement of culture and capital expenditure programme and the assessment of infrastructural needs of legal entities of public law (84 organizations) coming within the system of the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection will further continue.

The Government attaches paramount importance to supporting art education and art institutions. Master's programmes and professional development programmes are carried out through the government support, which also goes towards gifted children from regions who study music arts. The Government also encourages Georgian citizens to receive higher arts

education or to attend art courses abroad. Participation of pupils and students in international contests and festivals will be promoted; graduate-year students of the drama direction faculties will be allowed to produce stage plays for the state theaters in the regions.

To contribute to the development of modern art, high-priority projects will be selected and implemented in such areas as: Georgian book and literature, music, pictorial art, theatre and cinema; culture of national minorities will be supported and people with disabilities will be integrated into the cultural life of the country. Special attention is paid to the preparations for Georgia's Guest of Honour appearance at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2018.

Cultural life in the regions will be promoted, in particular, by providing regional theatres and cinemas with necessary equipment; rehabilitating cultural and recreational parks; promoting classic music; providing art school teachers and students with methodological assistance; providing technical support to folklore ensembles; promoting and popularizing theatre troupes and companies.

The Government will continue to uphold such principles as the right of Georgian citizens to freely engage in cultural activities and the government's non-interference in the creative process.

Special measures will be taken to uphold the Georgian language as the official state language, in order to ensure the protection of the constitutional status of the Georgian language. Three ancient forms of the Georgian alphabet were granted the category of intangible cultural heritage of national significance. Respective nomination was prepared and submitted to the UNESCO Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage for inscription of the Georgian alphabet on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

To achieve the aforesaid goals, long-term Cultural Policy Strategy up to 2015 and Action Plan to the Strategy for 2016-2017 are now drafted through intensive consultations and public engagement.

## **Sport and Youth**

The Government of Georgia continues to place high value on the introduction and promotion of healthy lifestyle among young people. Through the study and analysis of the situation in the sports sector, the State Policy Document for Sports Development 2014-2020 was elaborated and approved. Strategic plan for Sports Development is in the drafting stages and its main focus is to ensure access to sports. Prisoners will have access to various sports activities and informal education that will further promote their adaptation and integration into society.

Based on practical experience, a series of legislative amendments will be developed and adopted for the popularization of sports activities and introduction of healthy lifestyle in the country. The Government will move forward with its efforts to gradually build and rehabilitate the sports infrastructure throughout the country, to open sports and recreation centres in the regions and to provide them with modern equipment. Long-term target programmes will continue to be financed by the Government. Georgia is due to host a number of international sports forums in the future.

The Government will continue to pursue non-interference policy in the activities of the sports federations and youth organizations.

The recently founded State University of Sports and Physical Culture will go ahead with its task to become a regional centre of sports education, in compliance with European standards. Special attention will be paid to the development of sports science, including sports medicine and sports law. The Government prioritizes the opportunity to receive professional sports education.

The Government continues to facilitate the process of initiating projects by young people and youth organizations and will support and finance such projects. By means of the programmes already in place, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs will assist young people in developing project management skills and capacities and will help them integrate sustainable development into the management process of innovative projects.

Research study of youth problems and challenges, which has been done in cooperation with international organizations, provides the basis for the reformed action plan for the implementation of youth policy. Engagement of young people in the decision-making process at the level of central and local authorities will be regulated by law. Forms of their

activities will be determined. Action plan of validation of informal learning, as well as informal learning standards will be developed; volunteering will be encouraged.

In order to ensure full-scale development of young people and ensure the effective implementation of youth policy goals and objectives, a target programme for the promotion of sportsmen was elaborated, which will provide Georgian sportsmen with the opportunity of high-level training for Olympic Games and other international competitions and will ensure their successful performance there.

Infrastructure of youth centres in all regions of the country will continue to be upgraded; youth programmes on a par with European standards will be elaborated to ensure the smooth functioning of the centres. Programme for the support of non-governmental youth organizations will be improved to promote state-oriented thinking, as well as European, democratic and civic values.

To support employment of young people living in the regions and to encourage the local non-governmental youth organizations, large-scale regional grants competitions will continue to be organized with due regard for various priorities. Special adapted programs will be carried out in order to encourage and integrate young people with special needs living in the regions. Relevant arts, culture, scientific and sports activities and events will be carried out in order to help young people better fulfil themselves and realize their talents to the maximum. To bring young people closer to the Euro-Atlantic space, appropriate youth programs will be introduced and implemented in cooperation with international organizations and partner states.