

FactCheck



Giorgi Kvirikashvili



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FactCheck

In one of his interviews with the media, the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, Giorgi Kvirikashvili said that the number of visitors from those countries with which Georgia has no visa regulations (Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and so on) has also shown a decrease. He explained this to be the result of the worsening economic situations in these particular countries. According to the Minister, visa regulations have also slightly influenced the number of visitors.

FactCheck took interest in the accuracy of this statement and looked into it.

A total of 5,493,492 visitors entered Georgia in 2014 which was 2% more than in 2013. The number of visitors shows a trend of decrease in the first two months of 2015.

The largest annual inflow of visitors to Georgia is typically from its neighbouring countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Russia and Ukraine). A total of 1,435,822 visitors entered Georgia from Turkey which is 161,616 people less than it was in 2013. Hence, the number of visitors from

Turkey to Georgia decreased by 10%. As for the current year, the number of visitors incoming from Turkey decreased by 7% in January and by 10.7% in February.

The number of visitors from Armenia and Azerbaijan to Georgia did not decrease in 2014. However, the number of visitors from Armenia decreased by 2.4% in January 2015. As for Azerbaijan, the number of visitors, much like the previous years, has been increasing in 2015 as well. It increased by 11.9% in January and 8.5% in February.

By number of visitors to Georgia, Russia and Ukraine hold the 4th and 5th places, respectively. Despite the fact that the number of visitors from Russia to Georgia did not decrease in 2014, the growth rate went down significantly. The growth rate was 49% in 2013 whilst in 2014 it reached only 6% and fell by 7% in the first two months of 2015. As for Ukraine, the growth rate of visitors from this country reached 13% in 2014 whilst in 2015 it saw a 12.5% decrease.

Visa regulations, according to which Georgia cancelled visa free regimes with 24 countries from 1 September 2014, also had their effect upon the decrease in the number of tourists in the country. Five of these coun-

tries are amongst the top 20 countries with the number of visitors to Georgia. Given the fact that there are no exact statistical data describing the number of tourists entering Georgia from specific countries by months and years, we used the data about the number of incoming visitors to the country in order to analyse the results of the new visa regulations.

A total of 1,729,004 visitors entered Georgia from the top 30 countries in the last four months of 2014. The number of visitors from the countries with which Georgia introduced visa regulations decreased by 41,112 as compared to the previous years which constitutes 2.3% of the overall number of visitors.

One of the reasons for the decrease in the number of tourists is the worsening economic situation in the region. The growth rate of the economy in the Commonwealth of Independent States fell in 2014. However, if the decrease in the number of visitors from the Commonwealth of Independent States (2,290 people) was only from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, the number of visitors from Russia and Armenia has also fallen in the first two months of 2015.

Table 2: Change in Number of Visitors in % from Top 30 Countries (September-December 2012-2014)

Country	2013	2014	Country	2013	2014
Turkey	23%	-35%	Kazakhstan	45%	22%
Armenia	32%	-3.6%	UK	19%	19%
Azerbaijan	15%	9%	France	20%	-4%
Russia	4%	0.9%	Belarus	58%	43%
Ukraine	59%	7%	Bulgaria	0.03%	4.1%
Iran	0.93%	-84%	USA	-13%	3%
Iraq	253%	-97%	Greece	4%	-5%
Israel	23%	12%	India	-25%	27%
Poland	95%	-4%	Austria	3.9%	6%
Germany	20%	6%	Uzbekistan	-36%	4%

CONCLUSION

The number of visitors from those countries with which Georgia introduced visa regulations since 1 September 2014 went down which made for a 2.3% decrease in the overall number of visitors in the last four months of 2014.

The number of visitors from those countries with visa free regimes with Georgia decreased by 15% in the last four months of 2014. Among these countries, as stated by Mr Kvirikashvili, are Armenia and Turkey. He also added Azerbaijan to this list even though the number of visitors from this country increased and there has been no trend of decrease. In addition, the number of visitors from countries with stable economies has also fallen.

Hence, Giorgi Kvirikashvili's statement is HALF TRUE.

TRUE



EUROPEAN
ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY

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The German Marshall Fund
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Starbucks Enrages U.S. Armenian Community With PR Misfire

RFERL

Social media users claim to have seen the poster depicting women dressed in traditional Armenian garb under the crescent and star of the Turkish flag in several Starbucks locations in Los Angeles County, which is home to a large number of people with full or partial Armenian ancestry.

An attempt by U.S. coffee giant Starbucks to appeal to Los Angeles' sizable Armenian population has backfired after its coffee shops displayed posters depicting women dressed in traditional Armenian garb under the crescent and star of the Turkish flag.

The posters were spotted this week in Los Angeles-area Starbucks locations, infuriating activists and social media users who called the image offensive in light of what Armenians refer to as the "genocide" of their people by Turkish Ottoman forces in the early 20th century.

"Why is Starbucks selling coffee using an image of women, dressed in traditional Armenian costumes, celebrating a Turkish state that systematically victimized Armenian women during the Armenian Genocide, and that still denies this crime against all humanity?" the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) wrote in a February 18 post on its Facebook page.

Scholars estimate that some 1.5 million Armenians were killed by Ottoman forces in what is now eastern Turkey between 1915 and 1918. Ankara has rejected the term "genocide" in connection with the killings, saying both Turks and Armenians committed atrocities during and after World War I.

Social media users claimed to have seen the poster in several Starbucks locations in Los Angeles County, which

is home to 446,000 people with full or partial Armenian ancestry, according to 2007 U.S. Census Bureau data cited by California-based scholar Shushan Karapetian.

As outrage swelled online and Starbucks customer service representatives fielded angry calls, the company posted an apology on the ANCA's Facebook page on February 18, promising to remove the offending photographs.

"Serving as a place for the community to connect is core to our business and we strive to be locally relevant in all of our stores," a Starbucks representative wrote in the post. "We missed the mark here and we apologize for upsetting our customers and the community."

The representative added that the artwork would be removed from a store in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Woodland Hills and that Starbucks is "working to make this right."

It was not immediately clear exactly how many shops displayed the photograph.

A Starbucks spokesperson told RFE/RL in a February 19 email that the company is "quickly looking into this to ensure this image is not in any other Starbucks locations."

"Flood Of Concern"

ANCA executive director Aram Hamparian said the group became aware of the posters from social media users in California early in the morning on February 18 and that his group believes they were displayed in at least "two or three locations in Southern California."

"It became very clear very quickly that this was a very serious issue for the entire community, because we started getting a flood of concern," Hamparian told RFE/RL, adding that Starbucks responded "very appropriately."

The photograph, in which one of the women dressed in Armenian garb is holding a paper Starbucks cup while

red balloons embossed with the Turkish star and crescent float overhead, appears to have originated with California-based designer Tim Rose.

Rose, who has worked on campaigns for Starbucks and other multinationals, including Coca-Cola and Nike, featured the photograph on his website as recently as January 28, according to a cached version of the site.

The image has since been removed from the website

Rose did not respond to an emailed request for comment. But he posted a statement on his website apologizing for the photograph, which he said was taken for Starbucks during a 2011 festival celebrating Turkey's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

"Neither I nor the photographer knew the dancers were Armenian," Rose wrote.

He added that he removed the image from his website "once it came to my attention that this was rightfully offensive to the Armenian community."

"I am in full support of their plight and would never have knowingly supported any action that would hurt either them or cause unnecessary pain," Rose said.

Preparations are underway worldwide for this year's commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the mass killing of Armenians under Ottoman rule. The tragedy has been recognized as "genocide" by more than 20 countries, including Canada, Russia, and France.

Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan on February 16 recalled from parliament protocols on normalizing ties and establishing diplomatic relations with Turkey, accusing Ankara of lacking "political will" and thwarting the process with "preconditions."

With reporting by RFE/RL's Armenian Service





Kremlin Criticizes Arrival Of U.S. Military Trainers In Ukraine

The U.S. Army announced the arrival of the paratroopers on April 16, saying they would train 900 members of a Ukrainian reservist force that was called up in 2014 to bring volunteers and pro-government militia under government control

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Russia has criticized the arrival of 300 U.S. paratroopers in Ukraine to train troops from the National Guard, saying their presence could destabilize the situation in the conflict-torn country.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, told reporters on April 17, "The participation of instructors or specialists from third countries on Ukrainian territory, where the domestic Ukrainian conflict is unresolved...could destabilize the situation."

It was unclear why Peskov used the term "third countries," since Moscow has consistently described the Ukraine conflict as a civil war and insisted all along that it is not a party to the Ukrainian conflict despite Kyiv and Western governments accusing it of active involvement.

The U.S. Army announced the arrival of the paratroopers on April 16, saying they would train 900 members of a Ukrainian reservist force that was called up in 2014 to bring volunteers and pro-government militia under government control.

The training operations are taking place in the western region of Lviv, about 1,000 kilometers from the areas in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions where Russian-backed rebels hold territory and are fighting government forces.

U.S. Army Major Jose Mendez, a brigade operations officer, said the U.S. trainers would be "conducting classes on war-fighting functions, as well as training to sustain and increase the professionalism and proficiency of military staffs."

Troops from the same U.S. unit were deployed to Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in 2014 to train forces there and alleviate concerns raised by those countries over Russia's military intervention in Ukraine.

About 200 of the U.S. paratroopers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade also took part in a September 2014 NATO training exercise called Rapid Trident in western Ukraine along with 1,100 troops from 14 other NATO member and partner countries.

The Kremlin also complained about that NATO training exercise, which had been scheduled before Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and before fighting broke out in eastern Ukraine.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine has killed more than 6,000 people during the past year and continues despite a February cease-fire agreement that has decreased fighting.

The Kremlin said on April 17 that diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving Ukraine's conflict were continuing "at the high level of foreign ministers" from Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany.

Meanwhile, about 2,200 troops from the United States, Britain, Moldova, and Romania launched training exercises in southeastern Romania on April 16 close to the Ukrainian border in an operation called Wind Spring 15.

In a separate exercise launched this week called Atlantic Resolve, the U.S. Air Force also deployed 12 A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft in Romania.

Those combat planes, which also are known as Warthogs, are designed with the sole purpose of providing close air support to ground troops that are engaged in battle.

U.S. Air Force General Darryl Roberson told reporters at Campia Turzii air base in northwestern Romania on April 16 that Atlantic Resolve was aimed at reassuring Eastern European countries concerned about Russia's military role in Ukraine and its aggression in the region.

Roberson said, "Intimidating actions... have created significant distress among East Europeans and resurrected thoughts of a not-too-distant past."

With reporting AP, AFP, Reuters, Hotnews, ro, and TASS



Tea Tsulukiani:

Minister of Justice of Georgia



"It is due to the new visa regulations that the European Union has assessed the first stage of the visa liberalisation process positively."

The new Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons was enacted on 1 September 2014. According to the new Law, visas are no longer issued by the Public Service Development Agency of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia. Instead, visas are issued by diplomatic representations or consulates of Georgia abroad. Issuing visas on the state border of Georgia will only be possible in special cases. These changes have seriously complicated the procedures of entrance for foreigners. Due to this fact, a new electronic visa service has been established from 8 February 2015. In addition, the number of days allowing residence in Georgia without a visa was decreased from 360 to 90 (in a 180-day period). It should also be noted that visa free travel for 24 countries has been cancelled.

Rules for gaining a residence permit have also become more complicated. According to the new Law, in order to gain a residence permit it is necessary to have a visa of the same purpose. Many foreigners turned out to be on the territory of Georgia without sufficient purpose after the Law was enacted. In general, the new Law complicated the procedures connected with the legal entrance of foreigners to Georgia. The context of the statement of the Minister of Justice of

Georgia was that these kinds of changes were compatible with the requirements of the European Union.

The action plan of the visa regime liberalisation process was formulated in terms of the visa dialogue between Georgia and the European Union. One of the parts of the plan included the management of migration and changes to be undertaken in this field according to which it was necessary to consolidate the legislative and institutional frameworks of the migration policy in accordance with international and EU standards. In addition, according to the action plan, it was also necessary to fight against illegal migration and adopt a national strategy for migration and an action plan in order to effectively implement the legislative framework of the migration policy.

The fact that the changes needed to be made in the given manner was not stated in the action plan. The Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU also did not point to any specific directives. Hence, the EU gave Georgia wide discretion to strengthen its migration policy and fight against illegal migration. The Georgian Government had every opportunity to choose a method which would not damage the economy of the country and complicate the lives of foreigners living in Georgia.

A second Progress Report

on the implementation of the visa liberalisation action plan by Georgia was published on 29 October 2014. The Report, among other things, mentions that Georgia adopted the new Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons. According to the statement of the European Commission, Georgia fulfilled all the requirements of the first phase which meant the adoption of necessary legislative changes. There are no assessments of the Law or its implementation. The fact that the Progress Report on visa liberalisation mentioned the adoption of the Law does not mean that the EU required such changes in such a manner.

Regulation No.539 of the EU determines the list of the countries with which the EU does or does not have a visa requirement. The list of the countries whose citizens can travel to Georgia without a visa significantly differs from that of the EU. Citizens of eight countries (Bolivia, Chile, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Paraguay, South Korea, Uruguay and Venezuela) have the right of three-month visa free travel to the EU whilst Georgia restricted visa free travel to these countries altogether.

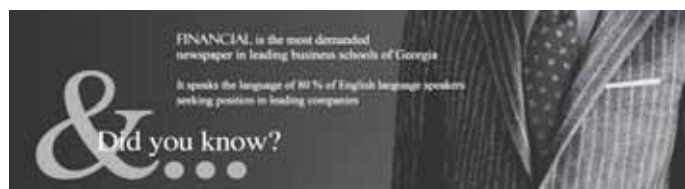
The 10 March 2015 comment of the former Deputy Minister of Justice of Georgia, Davit Jandieri, should also be taken into account, saying that tightening the visa regime in the given manner was not a requirement of the EU.

CONCLUSION

The context of the statement of the Minister of Justice of Georgia was that tightening the visa regime was compatible with the requirements of the European Union. The analysis of the visa liberalisation action plan reveals that abolishing a visa free regime for certain countries, reducing the number of days of visa free travel for others or changing the procedures for getting a visa was not a requirement of the European Union. The action plan prioritised the creation of a common policy and the fight against illegal migration. Given the fact that the migration policies are the discretion of the state itself, the EU did not determine exact guidelines. In terms of giving wide discretion, Georgia could have chosen the path that would not damage the investment environment of the country and create problems for incoming tourists. FactCheck concludes that Tea Tsulukiani's statement is **MOSTLY FALSE**.



MOSTLY FALSE



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