



European Business Association Position Paper

Overcoming Challenging Times in the Tourism Industry

July 13, 2020

Taking into consideration the crisis situation the tourism industry is facing in Georgia due to COVID-19, Mariam Kvrivishvili, Head of GNTA; Dominik PAPANHEIM, Monika CSAKI, EU Delegation to Georgia and Torsten Weller, Board Member of the EBA, GM of Hilton Batumi held an online discussion “Overcoming Challenging Times in the Tourism Industry” on June 30, 2020. The meeting was organized by the European Business Association.

The meeting was attended by up to 80 people including EBA member companies, representatives of European Embassies and invited business/sectoral associations.

The meeting was moderated by David Lee, the CEO of the EBA and opening remarks were made by the chairman of the EBA, John Hugo Freddy Braeckeveldt.

People on the Panel:

- *Mariam Kvrivishvili* - Head of Georgian National Tourism Administration;
- *Monika CSAKI* - Deputy head of political, press and information section at the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia.
- *Dominik Papenheim* - Team Leader for Economic Development and Market opportunities at the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia.
- *Torsten Weller* - General Manager, Hilton Batumi
- *Lana Chkhaidze* - CleanStay and Progression Manager, Hilton Batumi
- *Ana Chkhaidze* - Security Manager and Acting Chief Engineer, Hilton Batumi

The main focus of the meeting was the challenges and needs the tourism sector is facing due to COVID-19. COVID-19 had significant effect and influence on tourism and aviation industry. During the open dialogue the current needs were discussed in detail.

Based on the meeting,

The European Business Association position concerning Overcoming Challenging Times in the Tourism Industry.

The following specific challenges were defined:

- *Importance of supporting and stimulating domestic tourism. Encourage engagement of tour operators in creating attractive campaigns and tour packages with the motto of discovering Georgia.*
- *Financial crisis – impact and challenges. The way out to make new regulations more adaptable for the businesses and engage the key business in the regulation finding process to keep costs low.*
- *Establish an environment to be agile and flexible as much as possible to face overcome uncertainties and its challenges as best as possible, this from a financial, legal, consumer as well as entrepreneurs’ view.*
- *Importance of education, trainings and coaching sessions for every organization to increase practical and theoretical knowledge level of workforce how to deal with the new normal and fulfilling the regulations.*
- *“New Normal” – Adaption of all requirements from the government, strict follow up internally in the business as well as outside. Enhance control measures from government as well as implementation mobile educational & control team to prevent a second wave of Covid-19 and an expected devastating impact on the Georgian economy and health system.*

Recommendations

- Focus should be on supporting local tourism operators in upgrading, greening, digitalization of tourism. Activating domestic marketing campaigns highlighting Georgia’s amazing moments, turn travel inspiration into advocacy and stimulating additional domestic holidays and spent. Encouraging young Georgians to holiday at home.
- The EU is actively involved in these processes and it is crucial that the Government, Donors and Businesses to be on the same page and cooperate closely, in a cohesive manner, with each other.

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- Upgrading the service quality should be one of the key priorities as a low qualification of the workforce is still identified as a main challenge, within the meeting, that hinders the success of the tourism industry.
- Upgrading the service quality and standards should be one of the key priorities on the recovery stage and after. In this process, it is very important that organizations lead by example and implement new training and coaching plans not only for their team members, but also for the community and guests. Every company should strengthen safety education, establish self-protection guidelines and increase awareness of risk prevention.
- Taking into consideration the ongoing situation due to COVID-19 Pandemic, the Government of Georgia should support more the business in terms of Bank Relations, by declaring the ongoing situation as a force majeure. In order for companies not to go bankrupt and be able to overcome the crisis, it is necessary banks to offer businesses not only a loan deferral, but also certain credit benefits.
- Ensure additional information and guidance around social distancing, hand hygiene and PPE measures are widely spread in the community as part of an additional drive to reduce the risk of second wave of Covid19. That builds up trust into the business but also into Georgia as tourism destination.
- In order to keep the COVID-19 affections down businesses should support a consistent approach by following the guidelines and the rules, but as well the regulations should be consistently checked by the authorities as there might be discrepancies between the different regions regarding implementation of the regulations. Safety of team members and guests has to come first for the hospitality sector representatives. Now is the time for leaders to lead for the safety and welfare of their employees, create an environment where the team member feels safe. How we lead will leave a legacy over the longer term, as healthy workplaces have a positive influence on the spread of the pandemic. Leaders need to be advocates of the safety and security guidelines, back and front of the house, to motivate and encourage their teams to do the same, and the teams do the same...that starts a chain reaction of acting rather than talking.

John Hugo Freddy Braeckeveldt
Chairman of the European Business Association

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