

## Tourism development in Georgia

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### Summary

Recently the Georgian government started promoting mountain and rural villages for tourism development to improve local communities' livelihoods through tourism. Despite ambitious plans, tourism development seems rather chaotic in Georgia; lack of the strategic planning slows down tourism development in country. Tourism development seems new not only to local companies and local communities but to the governmental agencies as well and this may result in the negative impacts on natural and social environment.

Green Alternative's Policy Briefs are short analyses on some of the challenges to country's sustainable development. They are part of the broader Green Alternative's analytical works; some complement or summarize reports, while others combine analysis from the research with consultation around a pressing issue. The purpose is to convey urgent public policy problems and promote debate on courses of action to resolve them.

This policy brief is intended for public policy makers and practitioners; it will also be useful for those groups and individuals seeking to influence the policymaking processes.

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## Introduction

The outdoors lies deep in the world's tradition. It has had immeasurable impact on the World's character and on those who made its history... When someone looks for the meaning of their past, they seek it not only in ancient ruins, but also in mountains, by a river, or by the edge of the sea... Today's challenge is to assure all people permanent access to their outdoor heritage. (ORRRC 1958)

Nowadays, travel and tourism is considered one of the largest industries in the world. In 2010, tourism and travel business produced approximately 330 million jobs across the globe. The gross economic benefits this industry brings are evident, for example, international tourism generated €642 billion in 2008, which is 30% of the world's exports of services. Every year the quantity of tourists and travellers is increasing and 1.6 billion international tourists are forecasted to exist by 2020 (WTO).

Technological development is one main factor that accounts for the financial increase in the travel and tourism industry. Cheaper and more efficient transportation, growing wealth, development of the hotel business and information technology enabled the expansion of and demand for tourism.

Tourism is crucial for many countries such as Greece, Egypt, Brazil, Thailand and many others, due to increased opportunities for employment and large monetary gains for local businesses. Different countries have various strategies and approaches toward tourism development, some approaches are propelled by poverty alleviation. Pro poor tourism (PPT) is one tourism development approach that increases tourism's input toward poverty reduction, facilitating participation of poor people in effective product development (Ashley, Roe & Goodwin, 2001; Spenceley & Seif, 2003).

Tourism, especially mass tourism, is often criticized for disrupting local economies, creating seasonal unemployment and degradation of the natural and cultural environment. Over the last few decades, however, more sustainable forms of tourism have been emerging. For instance, new flexible, unpackaged tours are supposed to be more environmentally friendly, concentrating on improvement of the livelihoods of local peoples and tourist recreation. Indeed, tourism development can play a great role in poverty alleviation and bring better living conditions to rural and mountain villages too (Ashley, Roe & Goodwin, 2001).

Recently, the Georgian government started promoting mountain and rural villages for tourism development, influencing local populations to improve their livelihoods through tourism development. Although tourism development seems rather chaotic in Georgia, lack of the professionals in the field and lack of the long term planning slows down tourism development.

## 1. Brief Overview of new types of tourism

Before moving further some terms mentioned below should be briefly explained such as for instance, mass tourism, new flexible tourism and pro-poor tourism.

**Tourism** is the sum of government and private sector activities that shape and serve the needs and manage the consequences of holiday, business and other travel (Pearce et al. 1998).

**A tourist** is a person who travels 40km or more away from their home for a period of at least one night, for any reason other than paid employment (Harris and Howard 1996).

**Visitor** to mean a person who undertakes temporary travel outside their home to another location for any purpose other than engaging in paid employment in the location visited (Harris and Howard 1996).

**Mass tourism** can be defined as highly organized travel, minimum contact with the destination culture, travel in large groups, a reliance on tour operators to arrange flights and accommodations. Mass tourists enjoy an element of liberty, but will still tend to stay on the 'beaten' track. In addition, mass tourism, which is sometimes called package tours, can be associated with thoughts like; Search for the sun, follow the masses, eat in a hotel dining room, looking for homogeneous countries and cultures (Mowforth & Munt, 2003).

**Emergence of new, flexible types of tourism** - Over the last few decades, however, more sustainable forms of tourism have been emerging. For instance, new flexible, unpackaged tours are supposed to be more environmentally friendly, concentrating on improvement of the livelihoods of local peoples and tourist recreation. This new types of tourism can be also called; eco, sustainable, community based ethical and pro poor tourism, etc. There should be a shared concern for development that takes into account environmental, economic and socio-cultural impacts. The goal of new type of tourism is stated to be a greater understanding of the natural and human environment. This understanding should involve both the education of tourists and the host community. The host community will, therefore, be able to better understand the tourist and cater to them.

Flexible, new type tourism is often associated with notions of wanting to experience something new, wanting to be in charge, appreciating, but not destroying or overusing for pleasure, understanding, adventure and a willingness to try local fare.

**Sustainable tourism** can be seen as based upon three core principles. The first is quality. Sustainable tourism should provide a quality experience for visitors, while improving the quality of life of the host community and protecting the quality of the environment (Inskeep, 1991). The second core principle is continuity. Sustainable tourism requires continuity of the resources upon which tourism is based, continuity of the culture of the host community, and continuity of visitor support or tourist demand (Wall, 1993). Finally, sustainable tourism is about balance. It is tourism that balances the

needs of the host, guest and the destination environment (Bramwell & Lane, 1993).

**Ecotourism** is defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people”(TIES,1990).

**Pro-Poor Tourism** (PPT) is tourism that results in increased net benefits for poor people. PPT is not a specific product or niche sector but an approach to tourism development and management. It enhances the linkages between tourism businesses and poor people. So that tourism’s contribution to poverty reduction is increased and poor people are able to participate more effectively in product development. Links with many different types of ‘the poor’ need to be considered: staff, neighbouring communities, land-holders, producers of food, fuel and other suppliers, operators of micro tourism businesses, craft-makers, other users of tourism infrastructure (roads) and resources (water), etc.

**Responsible tourism** includes many types of travel, all of which aim to minimize tourism’s negative impacts on the environment, and maximize the positive contributions tourism can make to local communities. Traveling responsibly is not about making sacrifices, stopping development, or staying home. It is about designing tourism programs and individual trips carefully, to provide travelers with the experience they seek, while leaving a positive footprint at their destination.

**Wildlife tourism** is a specialized and extremely important aspect of the tourism phenomenon. Most of the people would love to go places where animals live, which might be explained with the fact that even few generations ago most of our ancestors saw wild animals every day. Nowadays, when most of the people live in big cities watching the beautiful nature mostly on television, electronics enable people to ‘experience’ wildlife from their cosy rooms but at the same time people maybe are more connected mentally to nature than ever before to at least some aspects of wildlife. Visiting places where animals live and can be seen behaving as they always have may offer an important opportunity for bringing virtual reality closer to the reality as our ancestors experienced it (Higginbottom, 2004).

Furthermore, wildlife tourism can improve the depressed economies in rural areas, because wildlife is often most rich far from major urban development (McCool 1996; Fennell and Weaver 1997, Goodwin et al.1998). In a few cases, wildlife tourism is a major component of the economy of nonmetropolitan areas or towns. There are quite a few examples that illustrate economic importance of wildlife tourism in some parts of the world:

- Mountain gorillas alone provide annual revenue of US\$4 million to Rwanda (Higginbottom, 2004).
- Each individual lion in Amboseli National Park worth US\$515,000 as a tourist resource over its lifetime (Higginbottom, 2004).
- Economic value of wildlife to international tourism in Australia in the range AUD\$1.8 to AUD\$3.5 billion per year, and koalas alone worth about AUD\$1.1 billion (Higginbottom, 2004).

In Georgia wildlife watching and eco-based tours are slowly emerging as well, although it is very specific type of tourism and so far not as many visitors are coming to Georgia as for the cultural tours. Only few Georgian companies are offering wildlife watching tours such as (birdwatching, butterfly watching or carnivore tracking tours). Therefore to create bigger market for these tours requires not only marketing and promotion but professional guide service and managers who can plan and implement wildlife watching tours.

## 2. Tourism Impacts on international or on local level

Tourism is like a fire, which can prepare food for you and warm you up, but at the same time it can burn down your house. (Jaap Lengkeek)

Tourism can have negative impacts as on local as on the global level, it is important to know negative impacts which might have tourism development and try to avoid or minimize it. Below, environmental impacts of tourism at the local level are summarized:

**Impacts on natural resources:** In regions where water is problematic for the local people building chains of hotels or snow cannons (on ski resorts to ensure snow cover on the skiing routes) can cause problems in terms of overusing the natural resources. Finally this problem can become concern not only for the region but for the whole country.

**Pollution:** Air pollution, i.e. CO2 emissions as from the airplanes as from transportation which are used in mass tourism destinations. For example when mountain regions and national parks are becoming the mass tourism destination and on the touristic season quantity of the vehicles reaches the pick.

**Waste:** Solid waste and sewage waste around the tourist destinations. Poor waste management can cause problems at every mass tourism destination, when the quantity of the visitors is much higher than the local population. Old style of the landfills is growing which will have negative impact on the nature and can be grounds for spreading the disease.

**Visual pollution:** When for the tourism development governmental bodies or companies are building high or inappropriate buildings which do not fit with surrounded landscape. For example concrete building in the forested areas or on the top of the mountains, or the high buildings which do not fit with surrounded settlement and landscape.

**Physical impacts:** Specific impacts can be seen from the tourism activities such as; off-road driving in National parks (damage to nesting birds and on small mammals). Furthermore, recreational activities such as; hiking, walking, mountain biking can have negative impacts on vegetation. It happens when tourists do not follow touristic paths.

Loss of biological diversity: It can happen when building huge hotels, highways and cities on coastal regions or in wetland places which is important for the ecosystem.

### 3. Planning for tourism development in Georgia

Georgia lies in the central and western part of the Caucasus region between the Black and Caspian seas. This mountainous country covers 69,700 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 4.7 million, yet it retains a high proportion of undisturbed areas. The Caucasus region is interesting because of its high level of biodiversity compared to other non-tropical regions of the northern hemisphere. The IUCN lists the Caucasus as one of the planet's 34 most diverse and endangered hotspots (and one of four hotspots in Europe and Central Asia). The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund and WWF International have also identified the region as globally important for biodiversity.

Furthermore the Caucasus has a high proportion of endemic and limited-range flora and fauna, a high diversity of landscapes (from humid mountain forests and wetlands to high mountains and semi deserts), and viable populations of many species endangered in the rest of the western Eurasia. Although Georgia covers only one-seventh of the Caucasus, it aggregates nearly every kind of habitat and biome found in the region. The country's species diversity far surpasses two-thirds of the species found throughout the entire Caucasus, comprising nearly 1% of the planet's animal and plant species.

Therefore, Georgia can offer visitors diverse tours starting from Caucasus mountains till the Black sea coast; mountaineering, climbing, hiking, mountain biking, skiing, paragliding, canoeing, rafting, wildlife watching and etc. Also tourists can enjoy cultural tours through Georgia and black sea coast for water sport activities.

Nowadays, different tours are offered to tourists in Georgia by hundreds of small and big tour companies; Tourism development is one of the first priorities for Georgian government as well. Although in some cases tourism development seems rather chaotic, since till now Georgia does not have national strategy and neither national nor regional plans for tourism development.

In 2007-2008 there was an attempt to develop national tourism development strategy and plan. To assist with developing and maximizing the country's competitive advertising tourism, the Government of Georgia signed an agreement with the U.S. Trade and Development Agency on June 21, 2007 for the America-Georgia Business Council and sub-contractor SW Associates to develop National Tourism Development and Investment Plan and Strategy. The document has indeed been prepared and it is available only at SW Associates' web-site, however it has never been subject to public consultations, neither it was adopted formally, though as claimed by SW Associates, "the focus of the plan was to develop a formal tourism strategy which would serve as a roadmap for economic growth in Georgia through sustainable tourism development".

Usually, before instituting work on the tourism projects the Strategic Tourism Plan should be prepared and adopted in consultation with all interested stakeholder groups, including sector agencies, local tourism and business operators, non-

governmental organizations and scientific institutions. The Plan should set out an inventory of current and potential tourist attractions identify what needs to be done to enhance tourism opportunities, as well as specific goals and objectives to improve the marketing and appeal of the area. Plus there should be clear picture of the target countries to have information regarding the potential visitors and their desires. Furthermore, environmental and social impacts of tourism development should be studied rigorously and mitigation measures should be proposed in order to avoid adverse environmental and social effects.

All of these planning processes are missing in Georgia. This one the one hand slows down the tourism development and on the other, very often puts the Georgian flora and fauna under the pressure.

Lack of planning leads to inconsistency in the decisions. For example, very often managers in Georgian Tourism Agency and Agency of Protected Areas are changed and this leads toward full-size changes in priorities. New staff usually abandons previous projects and starts working on new projects. Two years ago ecotourism was main stream for Agency of Protected Areas, there was spent lots of time and finances for marketing and promotion of eco-based tours in Georgian national parks as for domestic tourists as for international tourists. However, today ecotourism development was challenged while government wants to put on the market hunting permissions on Georgian endangered species.

It is clear that there was not only jump from one project to another, but change in types of tourism as well. Furthermore, it can be understood as rather orientation on short-term economic gain while challenging ecotourism and initiating hunting tourism. It should be also stressed that research regarding the population of the mammals which will be hunted has not been done yet, however, government already announced quotes for each species.

### 4. Hunting tourism in Georgia

Nowadays, hunting tourism is developed in many countries and at present around 6 million wild ungulates are harvested in the northern hemisphere every year, instigated by a complex framework of tradition, commerce, and social values (Bauer and Giles, 2002). In Germany, one of the most industrialized countries in the world, hunting remains an important land use and tradition. The result is a harvest of nearly 1.2 million ungulates, equalling approximately 50,000 tons of venison every year. It should be mentioned at the same time that even countries with great experience in hunting management (such as, Germany, Canada and etc.) very often are facing negative impacts.

The impact of hunting is a highly variable parameter, which is determined by factors such as:

- Type of hunting (chase, stalk, ambush, dog-aided);
- Species taken (low recruitment, high recruitment, alert, primitive);
- Intensity (occasional, regular, continuous);
- Season (rut, season of births);

- Time of day (resting periods, feeding periods);
- Tools (firearms, trap);
- Transport (on foot, horse, car, boat, helicopter).

Besides, hunting can cause a wide range of impacts on target species, and these impacts are reported widely in the literature on wildlife management. Examples include the impact of lead shot, frequently used in waterfowl hunting areas, impacts on non-target species, and impacts on habitats (e.g. Kalchreuter, 1984, 1987). There is a variety of hunting methods, such as snares and traps, generally associated with illegal activities that kill many non-target species. Hunting can cause different levels of disturbance, which impair the fitness of a population or have a level of perceived, or real, cruelty (Pacelle, 1999; Cartmill, 1993; King, 1991, Causey, 1989; Johnson, 1981).

Impacts on the long-term genetic fitness of a species may occur if, for example, trophy hunting is highly selective towards mature, large-sized, and often male, individuals. Theoretical papers claim negative consequences (Caro et al., 1998; Caro, 1994; Geist, 1988), and practical studies suggest impacts such as a change in sex ratio or in age distribution (Adamic 1997; Ginsberg and Milner-Gulland, 1994; Bauer, 1989; Bauer & Pflieger, 1989).

It is the worldwide experience that impacts of hunting can never be wholly eliminated, particularly in remote regions (often preferred by hunters), and countries that lack legislation or infrastructure to enforce regulations. Sophisticated game management requires a consistent, long-term, objective research component and the legislative and practical means for implementation through a responsible and well trained group of hunters (eg. Bauer and Giles, 2002).

In Georgia hunting was allowed only in hunting farms, and hunting on the red list wild animals was perceived as poaching. However, in August 2011 the meeting was held at the Ministry of Interior with the representatives of the travel agencies, where members of the government introduced the governmental plans to allow hunting of endangered rare species, included in the Red List. The ministers offered the travel agencies to start working over attracting tourist hunters from abroad. As they explained, the relevant legislative amendments would be approved soon, particularly upon the opening of an autumn parliamentary session (Macharashvili, 2012).

Indeed, a draft law amending certain legislative acts was released in September 2011. The draft law offered new regulations, which posed a threat to Georgia's biodiversity. Specifically, the draft law: allowed extraction of endangered (Red listed) species for commercial purposes; allowed hunting in protected areas, including in national parks; legitimated the possibility of destruction of habitats of rare and endangered species; abolished a natural resource consumption tax on extraction of the Red Listed and other hunting species and simultaneously, abolished compensation for environmental damages caused as a result of illegal extraction (Macharashvili, 2012).

After non-governmental and international organizations (including Green Alternative, Nacres, WWF Caucasus

office) made the position statements and submitted firm arguments, several articles posing a threat to the country's biodiversity were removed from the draft law. In particular, the articles allowing hunting in national parks and envisaging introduction of zero taxes on extraction of endangered (Red listed) species were removed, however, the parliament still approved the law (The law No.5201 came into effect on November 8, 2011) (Macharashvili, 2012).

As for allowing hunting of species included in the Red List, quite an ambiguous wording was included in the legislation. Although article 22 of the Law does not explicitly state that hunting of endangered wild animals is allowed, owing to the Georgian Government's interpretation, commercial hunting of animals included in the Red List is allowed. Moreover, the government issued several normative acts in this respect (Macharashvili, 2012).

On December 29, 2011 the Georgian Government issued a decree No 513 amending decree No 242 of the Georgian Government dated August 20, 2010 "On Approval of the Rules of Forest Use". According to this amendment, the species included in the Red List also belong to huntable objects; the decree now determines how much a hunter should pay to the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources to obtain a relevant hunting document (Macharashvili, 2012).

Furthermore, order No 275 of the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources of Georgia dated December 27, 2011 amending order No 07 of the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources of Georgia dated April 6, 2011 "On approval of the provision on the rules and timeframes of extraction of wild animals, by their species, and the list of weapons and equipment allowed for hunting", along with other species, has determined certain conditions and prohibitions on the extraction of endangered wild animals. Specifically, it has prohibited hunting of: a bear under one year, as well as a female bear, who has a cube under one year; female specimens of red deer, tur, grouse and snowcock; male specimens of tur with horn length less than 100 cm (along curve); male deer, whose antlers are not branched and/or are branched, but the length of the main axis is less than 90 cm. It should be emphasized that these restrictions are formal, since there are no mechanism to fight poaching, as well as to control or monitor hunting process (Macharashvili, 2012).

Finally, on December 27, 2011 the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources of Georgia issued the order No 276 amending order No 30 of the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources of Georgia dated May 10, 2011 "On approval of opening and closing dates of the hunting and fishing season". The amendment defined the timeframes for hunting of endangered (Red Listed) wild animals, along with other species (Macharashvili, 2012).

On January 10, 2012 the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources issued a statement on its official website, according to which "quotas on the extraction of the objects of the wildlife for 2012 hunting season were approved". Species mentioned in the statement did not include Red listed species, however, it named species and numbers only, without specifying hunting areas (Macharashvili, 2012).

It should be stressed that during years, not a single state or scientific institution has ever registered hunting species outside the protected areas (previously hunting was allowed only in hunting farms, now it is allowed anywhere, except nature reserves and national parks). Furthermore, hunting quotas should definitely be bound to a particular hunting plot. Legalization of the number of hunting species without specifying those areas, where it is possible to extract these animals (i.e. without distribution of extractable species by hunting plots) is quite absurd (Macharashvili, 2012).

Finally, it should also be noted that articles were published both in the national and international media criticizing decisions on hunting which made a quite negative image of Georgia as a touristic destination and negatively reflected on Georgia's international reputation. It can be stated that reputation of the country which only few years ago was promoting ecotourism and trying to establish image of Georgia with untouchable flora and fauna, washed-out own image with one irresponsible decision.

## 5. Promoting mass tourism in Georgia

Another problem which tourism development in Georgia is facing today is a rather 'old-approach' of Georgian tourism agency. Specifically, it is clear that Georgian tourism agency tries to develop mass tourism and bring in coming future five to six million international tourists in country. For some reason they do not take in consideration western countries experience regarding the mass tourism development.

As some scholars (Mowforth & Munt, 2003) stress out, the growth of mass tourism has led to a variety of problems, which have become more and more evident over recent years. Such problems include environmental, social and cultural humiliation, unequal sharing of financial benefits, promotion of paternalistic attitudes and the spread of disease. Below we will try to identify which of the mentioned problems are already visible in Georgia.

First of all Georgian tourism agency did not take into consideration recommendations provided in the national tourism development strategy and plan prepared by SW Associates in 2007. When setting performance targets, the document states that: *"Arrivals increase to at least 2.5 million with 16% (400,000) higher spending visitors from long haul and Western European markets (especially the USA, UK, Germany, Israel, Japan and South Korea) by 2015 in order to achieve economic sustainability for current and planned hotel developments and other visitor services"*.

It is clear that SW Associates proposed to increase number of visitors till 2.5 million by 2015 and highlighted that at list 16% (400,000) has to be higher spending visitors from Western European countries. This means that only quantity of the tourists is not enough and it is essential to offer tours which will convince higher spender tourists from Western European countries to come to Georgia.

Second problem which may cause the mass tourism development in Georgia is waste management. In general waste management is a major problem for Georgia, since there are still Soviet style landfills around every city. Most

likely waste is buried which in case of wrong technologies creates significant danger to environment and public health. In mountain villages local people throw all their garbage to the rivers. One can find plastic bags and bottles on the hiking paths, or alongside the rivers, mostly at almost every touristic spot.

Poor waste management can be observed around the all three main touristic places in Georgia: Kazbegi, Mestia and Batumi. In Kazbegi landfill is located just in river bed of Tergi river, approximately in 500m from the Georgian military highway. Since the site is not fenced stray dogs and cows have easy access to the landfill.

Development of ski resort in Mestia (Svaneti) is a new project which is highly promoted by the Georgian government. However, so far there is no official dumpsite and most of the waste goes to the river Enguri and then washed into the Black sea.

Batumi is the third largest city in Georgia; in last few years government started promotion the city for the beach tourism, built new hotels and renovated old part of the city. It should be noted however that there is huge landfill not very far from the city, next to the river bed of Chorokhi. As in case of other landfills in Georgia, this landfill is not fenced either and attracts stray dogs and cattle.

Above mentioned dumpsites has massive negative impacts on environment and they can become the hearth for spreading different diseases. Georgian government has goal to bring six million tourists in Georgia in coming few years, and if this problems will not be taken into consideration impacts on environment might become international concern.

Third problem that mass tourism can cause is 'paternalistic' attitudes that happen when governmental bodies or big companies are supporting specific people/companies or their projects. Such cases were recorded in Georgia by Green Alternative and its partner organizations in two different touristic places (Black sea cost and Svaneti); the lands which belonged to local communities were taken by government to create attractive land for tourism development for the international corporations.

Finally, mass tourism development can have negative impacts on the environment while developing infrastructure or building huge hotels in mountains or in the coastal regions without conducting Environmental Impact Assessment during planning of such projects. Very often buildings do not fit with local landscape and not only have negative impact on local ecosystem but do not make cosy atmosphere for tourists as well, especially for the tourists coming to Georgia for nature watching tours and who belong to higher spender tourists.

## 6. Conclusion and recommendations

Tourism is crucial for many countries due to increased opportunities for employment and large monetary gains for local businesses. Different countries have various strategies and approaches toward tourism development, some approaches are propelled by poverty alleviation but at

the same time lack of the strategic tourism plan and wrong approaches toward tourism development that can cause problems and have negative impacts on local environment.

It is crucial to bear in mind that tourism development cannot be only alternative way for the development of rural and mountain regions and tourism cannot be seen from only positive side. It will be more rational to make long-term plans for tourism development, to bear in mind dark side of the tourism and manage the ways to avoid it.

First of all, long-term strategic tourism development plans at national, as well as at the regional level should be developed and adopted with close consultation of all interested stakeholder groups. It is important that high participation of local companies and communities are ensured in the development of regional tourism plans.

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Secondly, before starting promotion of any type of tourism in the mountainous or rural regions, the research should be undertaken regarding the tourism potential and local people's expectations.

Thirdly, to avoid negative impacts on the environment and local communities, Environmental Impact Assessment must be mandatory for the large-scale tourism development projects.

Finally, when long-term strategic tourism plans are developed, it is important that they are respected and followed by the governmental agencies in the first place.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author, reflect Green Alternative's position and should not be taken to represent those of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands in Georgia.

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