



## AMBASSADOR OF ITALY TO GEORGIA, ANTONIO ENRICO BARTOLI, ON THE GEORGIAN-ITALIAN CULTURAL RELATIONSHIP

Culture is a privileged means of communication between people. Therefore, an important diplomatic tool. It is, of course, an effective way to promote the image of my country (we call it “Vivere all’italiana”, living the Italian way), but also to foster Georgia’s own image and growth. Like Italy, Georgia can boast an amazing cultural heritage and a vibrant contemporary creativity. Contributing to enrich your cultural landscape serves three important objectives. It offers your new generations an additional educational platform. It provides value added to your attractiveness as a tourist destination. It fosters creative industry and scientific collaborations and, more in general, highlights the importance of taking advantage of culture heritage also as a driver for economic development.

Our idea has been to bring over champions of universal values to get ordinary Georgian people, especially youth, closer to them. We started one and a half years ago and have thus far brought in several of these giants: Botticelli, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Raphael, Leonardo, Titian, Bernini. Just to name a few. Common citizens are offered the opportunity to witness beauty first hand, at home: without even having to travel. Students can discuss what Renaissance, Baroque or De Chirico represent. They can understand, and then see, directly. We have had more than 110,000 visitors so far: an unprecedented number for Tbilisi, and a testimony to the success of the initiative, conducted hand in hand with your main cultural stakeholders (above all the National Museum of Georgia) and supported by Italian and Georgian institutions.

*What are your future projects?*

We are honouring the 500th anniversary of Leonardo’s death, with an exhibit and a series of lectures and visits at the National Museum of Georgia. On April 15, Leonardo’s birthday and Italian Research Day around the world, we are organizing an event dedicated to innovation. The partners are GITA (Georgian Innovation and Technology Agency) and its Italian counterpart,

COTEC Foundation. The skills of the Italian Innovation and Technology Transfer sector are made available to local companies and R&D centers, to enrich the Georgian ecosystem. The best Georgian innovator will develop his or her idea in a leading Italian innovation district near Milan, called Kilometro rosso. Until the end of May, visitors can admire De Chirico’s painting and sculpture in a special exhibit dedicated to the founder of the Metaphysical art movement: at the National Gallery in Tbilisi. We are also working on a fascinating project, at the crossroads between art and technology: Imagica, a Passage to Italy. This immersive exhibition will walk visitors through a journey of emotions and knowledge, from the ancient Rome to Canova’s neoclassical beauty, passing through the elegance of Giotto and the stunning masterpieces of Renaissance. We are also bringing some extraordinary Roman mosaics from the Capitoline Museums. Another Tbilisi exhibition, “The shape of color”, will display some 65 paintings, including Canaletto, Tintoretto, and many others, from the extraordinary collection of Trieste National Gallery, in Italy.

All these events will be complemented by educational programmes, workshops with professional experts to share experiences and know how with groups of Georgian (from mosaics to new technologies in the field of cultural heritage).

We are planning a lot of events also in the field of performing arts: to bring here La Scala Soloists or the Milan Ballet, proposing a show dedicated to Verdi. Finally, we have developed programs to have Georgian and Italian artists work together. Some Georgian artists already spent a period in Turin, their Italian counterparts will be here in May. Together they will propose a joint exhibition in May, during the Tbilisi Art Fair. Other residencies for Georgian artists in Italy have been supported by our Embassy.

*How do you assess Georgian creativity? What do you like about this country? What are your favourite artists?*

Good taste and creativity are in the air. Beauty is inscribed in your long history, in your DNA. You can tell that while admiring contemporary art or Georgian stylists, or the fascinating craftsmanship. In Georgia, like in Italy, nature is deeply intertwined with culture, with history. This is a great asset. Cultural heritage is not just a nice memory from the past or an identity factor for your people; it’s also a great driver for economic development. The region I prefer is Svaneti. I’ve seen a lot of beauty there.