

UPF Tbilisi, Georgia's Korea and the Caucasus: Relations and Perspectives

Maka Abugbaia
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Tbilisi, Georgia - Speakers from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia described relations between their nations and South Korea.

The online conference "Korea and the Caucasus: Relations and Perspectives," which was held on April 21, 2021, had more than 130 participants online and around 300 views on the UPF-Georgia Facebook page.

One of the central themes of the webinar was the panelists' perspectives about the history of relations between South Korea and the nations of the Caucasus.

The moderator of the webinar was Maka Abugbaia, the secretary general of UPF-Georgia.

Hasmik Kababyan from Armenia, a lecturer of Korean language and Korean history at Yerevan State Linguistic University, spoke about diplomatic relations between South Korea and Armenia. She included the two nations' cooperation in the fields of culture, sports and education and the promotion and reciprocal protection of investments between the two governments.

Hallyu, the "Korean wave" of pop culture, arrived in Armenia in 2010 through K-dramas, she said. Nowadays, youth from Armenia have the opportunity to study in South Korea via Korean Government Scholarship Programs.

The second panelist, Dr. Rovshan Ibrahimov from Azerbaijan, a professor at the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, joined the webinar from Seoul. He remarked that after Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia left the Soviet Union in 1991, the Republic of Korea followed the United States' example and recognized and developed relations with each of the three nations separately, not as a whole region.

Dr. Ibrahimov pointed out that economic relations between South Korea and Azerbaijan reached their highest level in the last few years of the 2000s. The NGO SeBa (short for "Seoul" and "Baku") regularly holds cultural exchange events in the two capitals.

After the pandemic, it's expected that direct flights between Baku and Seoul will be implemented, he said. He also mentioned the growing numbers of Hallyu fans in Azerbaijan.

The third panelist, Milan Lee, a Korean living in Georgia, is a Korean language and culture lecturer at Guram Tavartkiladze Tbilisi Teaching University and at China International Education College. She spoke about diplomatic relations between South Korea and Georgia, starting from 1992.

Koreans are attracted by the ancient history, unique culture, diverse nature and food of Georgia, Ms. Lee said. She introduced guidebooks to Georgia that have been published in the Korean language for Korean travelers. She also mentioned the growth of interest by Georgians in the Korean language, K-pop, K-drama and K-beauty.

All the panelists remarked that the area of relations between Korea and the Caucasus nations with the greatest potential is tourism. Korean travelers choose to travel to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia at the same time, she said, and the popularity of "Caucasus 3 Countries" tour packages has risen rapidly among South Koreans in recent years.

After the webinar UPF received positive feedback from the participants, who were grateful for receiving a wide spectrum of knowledge about relations between Korea and the Caucasus nations.