

**Caucasus Institute
for Peace, Democracy and Development**

**One Society,
Many Ethnicities**

Ethnic Diversity and Civic Integration
in Georgia



**Tbilisi
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Preface

Ethnic relations and civil integration are strategically important issues for Georgia. However, while almost no one would disagree with this statement in general, a real debate over the challenges and political choices within this field lingers on the margins of public attention and political interest. The marginal existence of this debate may be explained by the fact that more urgent problems, exemplified by a power crisis that led to a peaceful revolution in November 2003, are currently in the spotlight. On the other hand, many acknowledge the objective significance of these problems but consider them too sensitive for public debate – especially in a country which experienced such violent ethno-territorial conflicts in the early 90s that their consequences have yet to be rectified to this day.

Nevertheless, greater attention is gradually being paid to the problems of ethnic minorities and civil integration. And while this publication does not aim to propose a general strategy it does in fact include a strategic blueprint and specific recommendations regarding these issues. Its main objective, rather, is to help describe the current public discourse regarding the ethnic problems in Georgia. This publication also does not aspire to be a comprehensive study even in this direction – it only approaches these problems from the viewpoint of democratic principles and presents opinions of those who deal with them more or less systematically.

This publication is made up of three separate sections. The first section focuses on the results from an expert opinion poll conducted by the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development in 2003. The second section includes conceptual articles containing specific political recommendations. The third section depicts a draft concept, coupled with respective explanatory notes, of the civil integration policy for ethnic minorities in Georgia. This concept was created by the Civil Integration Committee of Georgia and debated over at committee hearings and public discussions, one of which was organised by the Caucasus

Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development. Although this draft has not been finalised yet and its future remains unclear, it none the less serves as one of the most thorough attempts to define the foundations of Georgian governmental policy in this field.

Please note that most of the materials contained within this publication were produced prior to November 2003 in a political situation that fundamentally differs from the one in which it is now being published in. However, it is our understanding that the revolutionary changes taking place with the Georgian political system have had little, if any, impact on the problems faced by ethnic minorities so far. The problems, as well as assessments and recommendations, described in this publication are as urgent today as they were in last political era, aptly dubbed Shevardnadze's time.

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1. Forum: Ethnic Minorities in Georgia

The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development appealed to the community of leading experts on ethnic problems and public policy so that they might express their opinions regarding the problem of ethnic minorities in Georgia. The following questionnaire was designed for guidance and reference. Experts could answer each question separately or address specified problems in a continuous text. However, if they chose the second option they were expected to tackle all the questions, not just a part of them. This option dictated that they did not have to focus exclusively on the specified question. Other problems, which were not addressed in the questionnaire, could also be highlighted and the respondents were encouraged to comment on the questionnaire itself.

The questionnaire deliberately omitted the problems of the so-called “frozen conflicts” (Abkhazia and Samachablo/South Ossetia). These problems are too complex and sensitive to speak about because they can often overshadow problems of ethnic minorities in those regions of Georgia where ethnic problems have not lead to tensions. The real situation with regard to these two categories of problems is completely different: today the Georgian government does not have effective leverage to control the breakaway regions. That is why, when answering the questions, the respondents were asked to consider only the part of the country that is currently under the central authority of Georgia.

Questionnaire

1. Do you see any serious problems in the situation faced by ethnic minorities in Georgia? If so, what are these problems? Do ethnic minorities pose any danger (potential or real) for the Georgian state? Are there any preconditions for new ethnic conflicts? If so, what factors can activate this danger?

2. Are ethnic minorities in Georgia suffering from any discriminatory or hostile attitudes (imagined or real) on the part of the Georgian state or society? Are there any objective reasons for ethnic minorities

to be dissatisfied with their situation? If so, what are these reasons? What is the major reason behind the relatively passive participation on behalf of the ethnic minorities in the country's social and political life: their own attitudes, the position of the majority (Georgian society), or objective factors?

3. What can best be regarded as desirable in this direction: what should the Georgian state and society seek in regards to the problems faced by ethnic minorities? For instance, which model should the Georgian state give preference to: the assimilation of ethnic minorities (French and Turkish models), relatively separate ethnic communities, ethnic federalism (creation of new autonomous, ethnically-formed units), etc...

4. Do you think it is necessary to adopt a civil integration concept or any other official document that defines the major parameters of Georgia's state policy on ethnic minorities? If not, why (for instance, in your opinion, is this problem not very important today and should it not become the focus of attention for political reasons; or will this problem be solved naturally alongside the development of state institutions and economic progress)? If such a document is necessary, what functions must it facilitate?

5. Respectively, should the Georgian state fundamentally change its attitude towards ethnic minorities? If so, what kind of changes should be implemented (for instance, is it necessary to amend the curriculum of the non-Georgian secondary schools; should the government introduce a quota for the ethnic minorities in the civil sector in order to increase their participation in the country's social and political life, etc)?

6. What kind of strategy should ethnic minorities themselves implement in their relationship with the state and the society? What must their priorities be: integration into the Georgian society (learning the Georgian language, more active participation in the country's social and political life, etc); governmental guarantees for protection of minority rights (ethnic quota within the civil sector), ethno-territorial autonomy (for instance, measures to legitimize the use of non-Georgian languages in the civil service sector in some regions), etc?

7. Today ethnic minorities usually vote in favor of pro-government forces in elections. Why? Is this strategy right? If this practice ends, what kind of change would be more likely and desirable: ethnic minorities supporting their “own” ethnically-based parties or their votes being dispersed among national parties?

8. How do you assess the role of the international community in resolving the problems of ethnic minorities in Georgia: do they tend to help Georgia settle these problems or, to the contrary, do they make these problems worse? Do you think that the international community’s position on some problems faced by ethnic minorities is wrong or tendentious? What should international organizations avoid when dealing with these issues? What specific mistakes (if any) have they made? Do you agree that Georgia should join the European convention on the protection of the rights of ethnic minorities?

9. Several terms are used in Georgia nowadays: “non-Georgian population,” “national minorities,” “ethnic minorities,” and “Diaspora,” How acceptable or unacceptable are these terms for you and which of them should be given preference?

1. Yes, I do. These problems show up differently in various regions of the country. I am trying to speak about the Armenian community of Georgia. For instance, problems in Tbilisi differ from those in the region of Javakheti. In Javakheti ethnic Armenians live close to each other. Ethnic problems within the state show up as a problem of relations between the center and the region. That is why the center views any confrontation as separatism, while the region regards it only as a struggle for social equality. When ethnic Armenians, scattered around the country, defend their cultural and social rights they are not considered separatists.

Given the general crisis in the country, if new political realities evolve, such kinds of confrontation may really endanger the Georgian statehood. For instance, in order to achieve their political ambitions, some political parties do not hesitate to fuel tensions in Javakheti through their public statements or with the help of local radicals. On the other hand, some local residents sometimes blackmail the central government. This situation has lasted for more than a decade and things are right where they began. From my point of view, when a country has an ethnic enclave within its territory, it needs to make a political decision regarding the territorial arrangement of the state; i.e. it should grant full self-government rights and reach an agreement on the division of competences, meaning the distribution of state functions between the center and the subject. There is also another option – for instance a demographic change by means of coercive resettlement or privileges for the dominant ethnic group; or by merging Armenian and non-Armenian districts into a new territorial unit. This option is out of line with European standards and would be regarded by local residents as a discriminatory solution to the problem. There is no civil society in Georgia today and, therefore, residents of Javakheti will look with fear and suspicion at any administrative-territorial reform initiated by the central government. In response to such changes they may create mechanisms that will hardly please the center. Since no real steps are being made to solve the problems of minorities, even non-governmental organizations that promote democracy, civil society and integration into Georgian society are becoming skeptical.

2. To begin with, ethnic minorities do not speak Georgian en masse and will hardly learn the language in the foreseeable future. This lack of knowledge is the main reason for the problems they encounter in society. Due to a lack of language proficiency, ethnic minorities face enmity and constant reproaches in everyday life (“why are you unable to speak Georgian?”) while on the national level they have fewer opportunities for professional development and successful careers. And the government is doing nothing to help them learn the language. As to Javakheti, the following problems should be highlighted:

1. Low level of state subsidies towards resolving the problem
2. Unresolved problems of social infrastructure, foremost being communications
3. The absence of real self-governance
4. Obstacles in the development of small and middle businesses – if the government is not at fault, why are retrograde and corrupt officials decorated and appointed to key positions?
5. The National Bank does not provide enough funds for local banks; there are no bank loan programs for local organizations; the loan system works more efficiently in Tbilisi and even in Akhaltsikhe.

The situation is much better in other regions, despite the central government’s claims that all regions of the country suffer equally from similar problems.

It is good that these problems have not led to xenophobia. At personal level people may have friendly and even brotherly relations. But it makes no impact on the general situation. From time to time there are initiatives, such as State Language Act, that curb participation in the country’s public life by minorities. That is why ethnic minorities have few reasons to be satisfied with their current situation.

All the above-mentioned aspects, combined with an information vacuum, determine the low participation of ethnic minorities in the country’s social and political life. It makes no difference to them who is in power – they do not expect anything good from them. They are reluctant to accept changes and reforms by inertia, because they have become used to the old system, which is a kind of cross between feudalism and Soviet-style socialism.

There is one point that illustrates this: a sportsman from Akhalkalaki, who was among the winners at one of the national tournaments of Georgia, was denied a chance to take part in a European tournament. Only ethnic Georgian sportsmen were sent to the tournament, even though this Armenian was ranked above them. As a result, our sportsmen, citizens of Georgia, stand on the podiums for Armenia, Russia and other countries, while their own homeland ignores them. Sportsmen who win international recognition for their country should be viewed as a national asset, even if they do not speak Georgian.

3. I have already stated my opinion above. The principle of ethnic federalism seems more acceptable. Given brotherly relations between Armenia and Georgia, the principle of ethnic federalism based on national legislation or constitution decree, guaranteed by an international pact, can solve the problem of ethnic relations in southern Georgia for quite a long time, if not for good. Such solutions are not rare in international political practice.

The genetic code, which naturally evolved along with ethnicity, is very enduring. Despite the forceful assimilation policy of the Turkish authorities, the Kurds have retained their ethnic identity. As problems faced by their enclaves have not been settled yet, conflicts are inevitable. Descendants of assimilated ethnic Armenian and Georgian residents of Turkey are nostalgic for their historical motherland – there are very few of them nowadays, scattered around the country. Assimilation was not violent in France or other western European countries – there is mass migration, which looks like a racial mix rather than assimilation. There are no assimilation problems in the USA – the major goals of migration are integration and profit. Ethnic Armenians can keep their ethnic identity there, per se. It is also noteworthy that most civilized western countries permit dual citizenship.

4. What we have today is simply a sheet of paper, which will have zero effect until fundamental institutional problems are resolved. If the above specified principle of ethnic federalism is taken into consideration, such a document does not seem to be necessary, as the problem will be resolved naturally along with the development of state institutions and economic progress.

5. Of course, the center has to get used to the idea that ethnic federalism is not the same as separatism, quite the contrary; it is an efficient mechanism to solve the problem in a civilized manner. All other mechanisms are dangerous because they may lead to a conflict which could not be solved without the use of force. But the use of force can bring about unpredictable consequences in modern conditions and realities. First of all, the state should create political guarantees of its loyalty to ethnic minorities. If ethnic communities are unable to manage the territory of their enclaves, it would be irrelevant to say that they have real self-governance. Problems of schools or ethnic quotas in the civil service sector should be discussed only within the framework of proposed principles.

6. The struggle for ethno-territorial autonomy should become such a strategy, i.e. the implementation of the principles of ethnic federalism. It must include legitimization of non-Georgian languages in the governmental structures of Javakheti.

7. This tendency stems from the half-feudal nature of the country's governance system. The situation will remain unchanged until fundamental issues are settled. People may support ethnically formed political parties but such parties are outlawed in Georgia.

8. I agree that Georgia should join the European convention on the protection of the rights of ethnic minorities. As to the role of international organizations, it is ambivalent. Their objectives are sometimes hard to understand. It looks as if replete and satisfied foreigners simply fail to grasp our Caucasian "uniqueness." For instance, foreign guests were stunned when visitors from Tbilisi and their local opponents sat beside each other at a Caucasus dinner without any hostility or hatred following a heated debate over the autonomy of Javakheti. By and large, however, I think that their activities contribute to stability rather than to negative processes.

9. In principle, each of these terms reflects the reality. We are a Diaspora for Armenian communities in other countries – all the rest is a play on words depending, on the perspective one sees things from. Identification of the state with a nationality is a sensitive issue

in Georgia and the Caucasus. Armenian or Azeri is also a nationality. It is a philosophical problem whether ethnic Armenians or Azeris can be considered Georgians even from the viewpoint of their citizenship. On the other hand, I wonder how citizens of Georgia who are ethnic Armenians or Azeris can be called a “non-Georgian population,” even if they are not ethnic Georgians. Afro-Americans, Greeks or Jews can be called Americans because “American” means citizenship, but “Georgian” means ethnicity. I prefer the term “ethnic minorities” as the most inoffensive term.

Ivlian Khaindrava

1. The spectrum of ethnic minorities is wide and diverse in Georgia. These minority groups come from different historical homelands and states:

- Georgia's neighbors – Azeris, Armenians, Russians
- countries that do not neighbor Georgia – Greeks, Poles, Jews, etc
- regions that are not independent states today – North Caucasus people, Kurds, etc
- countries that no longer exist on the world map – Assyrians

Besides, while some ethnic minorities live in enclaves (Azeri, Armenians), others are scattered across the country. Minority groups differ from each other in many parameters: quantity, religion, language, fluency in Georgian, etc. At the national level they form quite a complex pattern containing certain problems and peculiar features, some of which are especially noteworthy: residents of ethnic enclaves do not speak Georgian, are unaware of ongoing political and social processes and, respectively, feel highly excluded. I do not think that this problem is a direct and immediate threat to the Georgian state today. I cannot rule out, however, that a change in the political situation may turn some of them into a real danger unless these problems receive proper care and are tackled gradually and purposefully. First of all, it is necessary to address the problem of ethnic enclaves, since their residents are still very far from being integrated into the country's social and political life. That is why foreign countries (neighboring or sometimes even overseas) have more real influence than Tbilisi over these regions. This situation cannot be regarded as normal. Georgia has already gone through all sorts of internal ethnic conflicts. Any other theoretically possible ethnic conflict will inevitably evolve into an inter-state confrontation (like the Karabakh war). Conflicts can be triggered by social and political reasons (some of which may originate outside Georgia). The fact that all three South Caucasus republics (with minor variations) are ruled by weak, profoundly corrupt, anti-democratic and hardly legitimate governments (an attempt to shift the attention from an internal crisis to an external one – Falkland Syndrome) is a serious factor for conflict in the region.

2. Ethnic minorities really suffered from discriminatory policies in Gamsakhurdia's time (from this viewpoint, Georgia was no exception among other Soviet-successor states). Today it would be an exaggeration to say that ethnic minorities are intentionally discriminated against by the Georgian government, and the entire society: deliberate discrimination is not an element of the current government's policy. Chances are high, however, that Gamsakhurdia-time tensions may recur, due to the weak institutionalization of democracy at the national level, on the one hand, and inertia of thinking (grass roots mentality) on the other: ardent political adventurers and irresponsible "patriots" always pop-up during times of crisis. The danger is reflected in the current attitudes towards ethnic minorities. Hostile and aggressive attitudes towards ethnic minorities are spontaneous and individual, rather than organized, nowadays. Representatives of ethnic minorities are worried and concerned simply because xenophobia is not rare among ethnic Georgians – they have to make contacts with xenophobia-ridden bureaucrats within governmental structures or maintain relations with xenophobia-ridden neighbors. It is noteworthy that ethnic minorities (like any other minority) are highly susceptible to any sign of hostility (at least towards ill-concealed personal attitudes, to say nothing of direct discrimination). That is why they view poverty, lawlessness, insecurity, corruption and other current problems of Georgia within an ethnic context, to some extent. They must take their share of the blame for such a situation, because of at least one simple reason: when things go bad in a democratic country, actions or indifference by its citizens are to blame. Representatives of ethnic minorities are sometimes more passive and timid than ethnic Georgians. However, this is maybe due to their inherent cautiousness (they are always in the minority).

3. Historically, a policy of assimilation has never been characteristic of Georgia: quite the contrary; every time any difference emerged, ethnic Georgians tended to splinter (for instance, ethnic Georgian Catholics were dubbed "French"). In our reality, in the current epoch, cultural diversity is viewed as a common human value and an assimilation policy is doomed to fail. Seclusion of ethnic minorities (any sort of reservation) can only help prolong this un-wholesome and politically explosive situation. The Georgian society and the state in general should seek to integrate ethnic minorities into social, political and economic

life, and to develop and strengthen a civil consciousness in citizens with different ethnic identities.

I must emphasize that the country has a powerful resource which has not been applied yet – local self-governance. Some problems can be solved, or at least eased, at the local level (especially in ethnic enclaves). Local, followed by national, political and civil leaders can be also present at the local level.

The above mentioned diversity makes it highly unlikely that a common and universal approach towards all ethnic minorities in Georgia can be worked out. Relatively small ethnic communities scattered across various regions should find forms of self-organization on their own, take into account the experience of traditional democracies, establish contacts with other communities, identify and prioritize problems, maintain relations with public and state organizations, etc. There are a lot of opportunities for ethnic communities that live in enclaves, but they should aim towards full civil integration, not isolation (i. e. creating a sort of caste of “specific citizens”).

4. Unfortunately, a civil integration concept (it would be better to transform it into a program) could be welcomed in our reality. It is impossible to demand anybody to do anything without putting the case on paper (and even in this instance there are often no results, the Georgian state language program being a clear example). Besides, the program must become a source of information for those citizens who never bother to look for answers to such questions and fail to realize that timely solutions to some problems should be given top priority and that governmental structures alone must not assume the responsibility for dealing with them. It must be a particular document with a list of responsible agencies and officials. It must specify phases of implementation and sources of funding. It must not be dogmatic of course – assessment of various sub-programs and implementation stages may require a correction (or update) for the program. Representatives of ethnic minorities and the civil society should be actively involved in the development of the program. Consultations with foreign experts would be also useful.

5. The Georgian state must realize that ethnic minorities do not pose a constant headache, but rather represent an important human

resource (labor, intellectual, defense, etc), which has not been fully utilized yet. But this resource can cause a constant headache when no efficient integration policy exists in the country. At present, such a policy is nowhere sight. Those who demand residents of rather secluded ethnic enclaves to speak Georgian must first demand to create respective conditions and opportunities. Situations in different enclaves are not the same, but there is no denying that many minorities are willing to learn Georgian despite the absence of even elementary conditions. If the state does not provide textbooks and teachers for those willing to learn, others will. And one should not be surprised, then, that ethnic minorities educated in their native language know little about the literature, history, and geography of Georgia. School textbooks must give children objective information about both their historical and present homelands – it is a prerequisite for a strong civil position.

Pupils of Akhalkalaki and Marneuli schools must be given a chance to visit Mtskheta, Vardzia, Gelati, and Telavi. The state (governmental educational institutions) should provide funds for such trips. Residents of remote ethnic enclaves must not associate Georgia only with corrupt traffic policemen, blackouts and unemployment.

It is also noteworthy that if the government is unable to allocate budgetary funds to keep a handful of newspapers, TV and radio channels afloat while entire regions remain in an information vacuum, then in turn this means that the state has no policy at all. It would be wrong, however, to leave the problem at the mercy of the government.

It seems prudent to include languages of the largest ethnic minorities in Georgia (Armenian and Azeri) into the curriculum of some Georgian secondary schools (maybe as an optional subject), especially as both Armenia and Azerbaijan are the country's neighbors. As to ethnic quotas in governmental agencies, this practice is actually already in place. Even in Soviet times major ethnic minorities were represented in power structures, though, as a rule, they could not be regarded as real representatives since they were long out of touch with their communities. This flawed practice must be brought to an end and replaced with healthy competition. Professionalism and competence, rather than ethnic identity, must become the major criteria for the promotion policy.

The situation is different with regards to representative bodies. The country's election system must be flexible and aim at maximal representation. This is a common interest for both the state and ethnic minori-

ties. The overwhelming majority of citizens must know that their voice is heard and there will always be somebody in the governmental structures dealing with their problems at any given time.

6. One must also take into consideration the basic principle that every citizen has a right to claim or deny being a member of any minority group (including an ethnic minority). Being a member of a minority does not connote any privileges. Taking care of minorities implies measures to prevent any form of discrimination in all spheres of life and ensure equal rights and opportunities for all citizens. This approach aims at creating harmonious conditions in the country, and the society, on the basis of mutual respect, which gives every citizen the chance to realize his or her potential.

All citizens have a right to choose their own future, and that of their children, freely. If a citizen (or a group of citizens) makes a strategic decision to link his/her future to a particular country, it would be logical to focus on full integration into the social and political life of that country. If so, he or she must learn the state language, Constitution and national legislation, local traditions and lifestyles, etc. Everybody must decide for himself/herself the extent to which they wish to acquire this knowledge, depending on his/her needs and career goals.

In general, the same strategy is applied at the group level. Groups can simply defend their interests (the interests of each member) easier than individuals. Joint efforts by minorities to settle their problems seem more promising from this viewpoint. Quite simply, if one man's voice may not be heard, demands by thousands of people cannot be ignored.

7. The current voting practice (in favor of pro-government forces) is largely determined by an elementary fear that "disobedience" may lead to punitive measures, which will worsen the life of ethnic minorities. Authorities themselves contribute to such attitudes, viewing some regions as a ballot-box where a pro-government vote is guaranteed. The political opposition is usually unable to campaign in ethnic enclaves. Any attempt by opposition forces to reach out to these regions is regarded by the central government and local self-governments as "provocations" or "attempts towards destabilization." At the same time, local authorities (first among which are state commissioners of the respective regions) themselves often stage "provocations" and "attempts to disrupt

stability” in order to demonstrate – by restoring “law and order” – that they are “influential” and “indispensable,” and thus strengthen their positions in the corridors of power. Levan Mamaladze, the state commissioner of Kvemo Kartli, may be considered a highly talented expert in this tactic. It was not by chance that a close associate of Mamaladze (who mastered his technique well enough) was appointed state commissioner of Samtskhe-Javakheti in 2003.

At the same time, the opposition usually remembers these regions only when elections are close at hand. This frustrates local residents and damages their confidence in opposition forces. It’s a small wonder that full participation by ethnic minorities in the country’s political processes (including elections) does not seem real in such a situation. As a result, local residents are tempted to create regional parties based on ethnicity, a rather unwelcome but obviously inevitable process. The need to amend certain laws (paragraph 6 of the law on political organizations, which bans the creation of parties based on territorial or regional principles) is already on the agenda. Even if this provision is not revised, it can easily be bypassed. However, there are still some resources available to incorporate ethnic minorities into national parties.

8. The international community has put forth a lot of effort to ease and resolve problems faced by ethnic minorities in Georgia, and to help prevent potential conflicts. Although their assistance is not always efficient enough, we should not expect foreigners to do more than we do ourselves to settle our problems. International organizations usually encounter problems when they try to use methodologies successfully tested in other countries. The Caucasus (and Georgia in particular) has its own specifics. Western (especially American) institutions tend towards employing standard or universal solutions. However, standard methods are not equally successful in all cases. A series of training workshops focused mainly on global matters (international documents, norms, and mechanisms) and attended by the same participants is less effective than the resolution of at least one local problem. In other words, every activity must bring about its own hoped-for results and show a positive dynamic, not just any kind of dynamic.

On the other hand, I admit that educational projects are also necessary, including programs aimed at learning international laws and practice (for both ordinary citizens and civil servants). But the spectrum

of participants of such programs must be widened, while the choice of teaching methods employed for each program should depend on the specifics of a particular audience.

I think that after certain preparations (which should not last forever) Georgia must ratify the basic convention. Preparatory measures should create the conditions necessary for the efficient implementation of the provisions of the convention, ensuring that words are not at variance with deeds (it frequently happened before).

9. In my opinion, the term “non-Georgian population” is unacceptable. It is based on negation and fuels negative associations and emotions (it aims at confrontation rather than integration). “Diaspora” is not consistent with the meaning it must have: the Armenian community of Georgia is a Diaspora for Armenia, not for Georgia. “National minority” sounds like an archaic term during a time when the country strives to develop national civil consciousness. That is why it would be better to popularize the internationally employed term “ethnic minority.” Although this term also does not seem very useful to me, it ascertains the facts and does not cause irritation.

George Khutsishvili

1. Of course, I see the problem but first of all I would like to state that the historically evolved “multi-cultural structure” of Georgia is a great heritage of ours. Thus, various ethnic groups in the country do not pose any danger. As for ethnic enclaves in particular territories, for instance the Armenian enclave of Javakheti, they should not be viewed as a danger to the country, though they are a certain risk-factor. Incorrect national policy on ethnic minorities is maybe more dangerous.

The main problem is the ongoing process of alienation and marginalization of ethnic communities in Georgia. Ethnic nationalism is deeply rooted in the dominant ethnic groups. That is why the majority of the representatives of ethnic minorities hardly view themselves as integral elements of the state, which they must build and defend actively.

The problem is that mass media does not pay much attention to these issues, assuming that they are not interesting topics for the society (mutual verbal insults and fisticuffs between MPs at parliamentary sessions are much more spectacular). Nevertheless, new ethnic conflicts do not seem likely in Georgia.

2. The constitution and national legislation of Georgia rule out any forms of ethnic discrimination in the country. It is noteworthy that ethnic Georgians traditionally have correct attitudes towards ethnic minorities. At the same time, residents of the country are obviously treated selectively, depending on their ethnic identity, and characterized accordingly. There are also negative attitudes towards neighboring ethnic groups, which sometimes turn into disdain. At times, such attitudes can be found in our media. So there are enough grounds to consider ethnic discrimination as a serious problem. When participants of a TV talk-show discuss whether people with a particular percentage of “alien blood” should be allowed to take part in the country’s governance system, it becomes obvious that the ethnic issue is far from being settled in this country. That is why the non-Georgian population has a feeling of inferiority, though one cannot but emphasize that, from this viewpoint, the hard economic situation of the majority of the population only exacerbates this negative background. The urgency of the problem even drove the president to issue decree No. 68 on March 4, 2003. This

document lists parameters which are supposed to create conditions for improving the situation and aligning it with the requirements of the international law.

3. I think that integration of ethnic groups into common civil society – the state, in which citizenship and not ethnic identity will be the major determinant – is the best option that complies with modern realities. I think that it is totally unacceptable to create new autonomies at the present stage of the country's social development.

4. A civil integration concept can play a positive role both in the establishment of normative relations between ethnic groups as well as the resolution of some controversial legal problems. However, this concept will remain on paper if it is not followed by an improvement in civic education.

5. Serious measures should be taken to ensure a normal integration process of ethnic groups into the future civil society of Georgia. Large-scale state programs must be carried out to achieve this goal. The complex and lengthy process of changing the mentality will largely depend on how successfully democratic institutions and values will be established in the country.

I think that passports or any other ID documents should never include entries about the ethnic identity of a citizen; this will only contribute to further estrangement. In my opinion, ethnic quotas are also unacceptable, as they are a sign of positive discrimination, contradicting the principles of civic integration.

6. I think that acceptable answers are given in the first option – their priority must be integration into Georgian society (learning the Georgian language, more active participation in the country's social and political life) and, partly, in the second one – “governmental guarantees for protection of minority rights,” provided that this does not mean ethnic quotas.

7. Unconditional support for the government during elections vindicates that particular ethnic groups are estranged (marginalized) from the main part of the country's population. By voting for the government

they actually admit to having no civil rights and to being inferior. Increased activity by ethnic groups and the redistribution of their votes among various national political parties can become an alternative to such a situation.

National parties founded by ethnic minorities, for instance in Javakheti and Marneuli, cannot play any significant role in the general political spectrum, though they may get additional weight if separatist trends strengthen.

8. I positively evaluate the role of the international community in dealing with the problems faced by ethnic minorities in Georgia. International organizations do not have wrong or tendentious positions at all, but their assistance is sometimes formal. I fully subscribe to the idea that Georgia should join the European convention on protection of ethnic minorities.

9. The authors of this questionnaire use the term “minorities,” which is, in my opinion, is somewhat discriminatory. I would prefer to use the term “groups” or “Diasporas” instead. Depending on the context, such terms as “non-Georgian population,” “national minorities,” and “Diaspora” are quite acceptable. In some cases it would be better to use the term “national groups” instead of “ethnic groups,” though in a certain context the terms “minorities” can be used as well.

Alexander Nalbandov

1. According to the latest census, the population of Georgia totals some 4.4 million citizens, which means that it has fallen by 16% – i.e. some one million citizens – since the previous census. Recent sociological surveys that focus on the causes of migration in Georgia revealed that Georgian citizens leave the country mainly because of the hard economic situation, low living standards, unemployment, etc., but never because of discrimination (with regard to ethnic minorities). However, a majority of the migrants are ethnic minorities. For instance, although the number of ethnic Georgians has reduced in the country by 3.3% since the 1989 census, their proportion in the country's total population has raised 13.7% – from 70.1% to 83.8%. Respectively, the number of ethnic minorities dropped from 29.9% to 16.2%.

The language barrier remains a serious problem for ethnic minorities in Georgia. This “heritage” of the Soviet past – poor knowledge of the Georgian language on behalf of ethnic minorities – is one of the main reasons for the low participation by ethnic minorities in the country's social and political life. While younger generations are less affected by the language problem, as it is addressed more or less effectively in secondary schools, it is obvious that a state language teaching program must be developed for the older population, especially in ethnic enclaves. This need is urgent, since the inability of ethnic minorities to speak Georgian complicates their relationship with governmental structures, limits their job opportunities, and prevents them from realizing their full potential. Sociological research data shows that ethnic minorities are willing to learn Georgian, provided there are respective prerequisites – teachers, textbooks, etc.

The assumption that ethnic problems have led to growing social and economic instability in some regions of the country seems questionable to me. It is not a secret that conflicts in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region are still far from any political settlement. These are indeed the most painful problems for Georgia today, especially if the need to safely repatriate IDPs and refugees is taken into consideration. As to the situation, say, in Samtskhe-Javakheti, the region's problems stem from a lack of information and communications in the region, on the one hand, and the necessity to solve economic problems faced by local residents in the event of the withdrawal of Russian military base and respective

infrastructure, on the other. To the best of my knowledge, the Georgian government is well aware that these problems are very urgent and require effective solutions.

As to a possibility of ethnic conflicts, I think that the more actively people speculate about this theme, the higher the chances are that such conflicts may actually break out. For instance, when non-Georgian ethnic origin (no matter if it is real or merely a rumor) is considered as a disadvantage for a politician, people may view it as a sign for distrustful and negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities. It is even more bewildering that this problem has emerged in Georgia, a country with a great historical tradition of tolerance.

One hardly needs to be reminded that using innuendo on the ethnic origins of a political opponent as a political method of political is shameful and dishonorable for any democratic country. The problem is that such methods can only arouse internal protest, anxiety, and suspicion in any ethnic minority. Worse still, few raise their voice (for instance, NGOs are rather passive in this regard) against such speculations on ethnic themes in our country. Under such circumstances, conflicts are not unlikely. The role of certain external forces must not be ignored as well, as they are trying to achieve their own interests by fuelling constant tensions in the Georgian society.

Insufficient representation in the decision-making process at all levels of power – legislative, executive, and local – is one of the major problems faced by all ethnic minorities in Georgia nowadays. It has been repeatedly highlighted, not only by Georgian experts but also the respective structures of such international organizations as the UN and the Council of Europe. Under such conditions it would be hardly fair to say that ethnic minorities in Georgia are able to participate fully in the national state-building process. It can be admitted, to some extent, that a considerable portion of the country's population is excluded from social and political life. The poor knowledge of the Georgian language on the part of ethnic minorities is one of the main reasons for this situation. It is without a doubt that neither the state nor the civil society should tolerate it.

2. Let's refer to our country's basic law – the Constitution of Georgia.

Article 14: “All people are free by birth and equal by law, regardless of their (...) nationality, ethnicity (...)”

Article 38: “Citizens of Georgia have equal social, economic, cultural, and political rights regardless of their language, nationality, ethnicity or religion... They are free to develop their own culture without any discrimination or intervention, and to speak their native language in private and in public... Implementation of the rights of ethnic minorities shall not contradict sovereignty, state system, territorial integrity or the political independence of Georgia.”

Article 34: “The State... shall provide opportunities for all citizens to take an unrestricted part in cultural life; to exhibit and enrich cultural uniqueness; to recognize national and universal human values...”

The Constitution created a solid foundation for a system of protection and encouragement of minority rights, including the rights of ethnic minorities, at the national level. By and large, from the viewpoint of human rights, our country’s Constitution is considered an exemplary one, as it honors “commonly accepted human rights and liberties as perpetual and supreme human values” (Article 7).

Almost every normative act of Georgia has anti-discrimination provisions that guarantee equal rights for all citizens. Thus, the country has created all necessary conditions to protect human rights. Is it enough? It’s certainly not.

It seems obvious that from the viewpoint of minority rights, a lot of work has yet to be done in Georgia. The most serious problems in this regard, as well as the ways to solve them, are quite adequately reflected in the Plan of Actions to Reinforce the Protection of Rights and Liberties of Various Groups of Citizens of Georgia in 2003-05, decreed by the president on March 4, 2003 (Decree 68). It is obvious, at the same time, that a good statute, free of any discriminatory clauses, is only the first, and yet still very important, step towards developing a system of protection and encouragement for civil rights and liberties, including rights of ethnic minorities.

As to the actual (unwitting) discrimination, it would be useful to examine whether representation of ethnic minorities in our parliament correspond with their share in the country’s total population. In 1999, most non-Georgian MPs won their seats in the parliamentary elections as members of the Citizens Union of Georgia. Only a few non-Georgian candidates won the election through the first-past-the-post system and they endured the elections in respective ethnic enclaves. Does it suggest that the potential of ethnic minorities is efficiently applied in legislative

activities? I think that it does not. The situation is slightly better in executive structures and local self-governments. Ethnic minorities are represented quite well here. They even hold some key positions, especially in ethnic enclaves. Regrettably, however, here, too, the potential of ethnic minorities is not used to its fullest.

The main reason for the low participation of ethnic minorities in the social and political life of Georgia was already mentioned above – they do not speak Georgian. As to other reasons, minorities fear that the majority of the population may inadequately react to their political activism and interpret it incorrectly.

3. For a multi-ethnic country, federalism is the very model that can guarantee stable democratic development and prosperity, as well as ethnic and civil peace in society. It is impossible to implement an integration strategy successfully in a multi-ethnic country without a certain degree of decentralization. Best of all, such reforms by the governing system contribute to the development of cultural and regional uniqueness. Of course, during the decentralization process special attention should be paid to such basic democratic values as the rule of law and human rights, including rights and liberties of minorities.

4. There has been an intense debate in Georgia over the last several years regarding whether the country needs a law on ethnic minorities. In my opinion, it is not a debatable issue. As a member of the Council of Europe, Georgia should ratify, among other documents, the convention on the rights of ethnic minorities. This regional agreement has already been endorsed. That is why Georgia has to fulfill several requirements of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, including the obligation to adopt a law on the rights of ethnic minorities within two years (i.e. by April 27, 2001), in compliance with principles of the PACE set in 1993. However, the law has not been adopted so far. Opponents of the law usually say that ethnic minorities themselves are not interested in such a statute. They argue that as long as all citizens of Georgia have equal rights by law, ethnic minorities do not want to be viewed and treated as minorities. I think, however, that this argument does not stand up to any criticism.

First of all, every person has a right to decide privately whether he or she belongs to a minority group. Nobody has a right to decide this

issue or speak about this matter on his or her behalf. Therefore, any statements by an individual, or even a group of individuals, on behalf of a particular minority group are unacceptable and do not reflect the reality.

Secondly, even if the equality of rights is stipulated by law, it does not mean that all citizens of a country are really equal, regardless of their ethnic identity. That is why a law on the rights of ethnic minorities should aim at carrying out positive measures to achieve real equality among Georgians and non-Georgians. But another question is often raised in this context – Can the law result in the discrimination of the Georgian population itself? The answer is “No” because measures designed to achieve real equality will work just as long as the task requires and the need for them will expire as soon as the goal is accomplished. A statute is not a dogma – when any of its provisions become obsolete, it is revised or abolished.

In my opinion, the law must reflect basic provisions of the European convention on the rights of ethnic minorities and positive obligations of the state to achieve real equality. Particularly, it should provide for special, temporary measures to help facilitate the integration of ethnic minorities into the society and turn them into full-fledged citizens of the country.

As far as I know, the parliamentary committee for civil integration has already drafted a *Concept of Integration of Ethnic Minorities in Georgia*. It is a positive sign that such a document is being prepared, though I doubt that it can be an effective substitute for a statute addressing the whole range of ethnic problems. I deem that even if the concept is approved, the country will need to adopt such a normative act anyway.

Naturally, the notion “civil integration” implies not only the implementation of the rights of ethnic minorities, but also the full realization of the rights, liberties and interests of the majority of the population. Therefore, when it comes to speaking about integration one must take into account the diversity of its forms and social relations (between the dominant nation and ethnic minorities, between various minority groups, etc). In any case, integration processes should contribute to the political, economic, and cultural development and prosperity of the Georgian state. It is obvious therefore that the best way to build a truly democratic state, based on the principles of the rule of law and human rights, is to achieve equality between all groups of citizens in practice.

5. As to the integration of ethnic minorities in political life and the implementation of the so-called passive suffrage, it may be worth a try to introduce temporary quotas, though this measure was somewhat discredited during Soviet times. For instance, it may be useful to amend election legislation (international human rights conventions provide for so-called “temporary special measures to achieve real equality”) or to devise some other steps. There is no ready-made recipe for the problem; but anyway the current situation can hardly be viewed as normal.

6. I think that at the present stage it is necessary to carry out a set of measures, political and otherwise (and ensure the active participation by ethnic minorities within them) in order:

- to strengthen the institution of citizenship;
- to achieve real equality between the majority of the population and ethnic minorities (they must have not only equal start-up conditions and but also equal opportunities to get desired results);
- to give priority to the progress of integration processes in the Georgian society through every effort to preserve national, cultural, language and other unique features of ethnic minorities.

I think that the above mentioned Plan of Action to Reinforce the Protection of Rights and Liberties of Various Groups of Citizens in Georgia can serve as a good basis for these activities. Besides, in my point of view, these developments fall well in line with modern global tendencies and will greatly contribute to the Georgian state-building process.

7. Recent elections – local, parliamentary and presidential – demonstrated that voter turnout was higher among ethnic minorities than among the Georgian population. As a rule, ethnic minorities vote in favor of the government for the following reasons.

- Weak political culture: a majority of voters from minority groups are not fully aware of the importance of the choices they have to make – after all, ordinary voters decide the fate of the government. During elections the power belongs to voter, whereas at any other time voters depend on the authorities. Besides, one should not ignore certain indifference and even nihilism em-

ployed by voters, as some people do not believe that their vote matters at all.

- Attitudes taken by local authorities (their “recommendations” to vote for/against a particular election actor) play an important role in ethnic enclaves. Under such circumstances, formal implementation of active suffrage is considered the lesser of two evils.
- Opposition political parties do not care about the problems faced by ethnic minorities. They behave as if there are no minorities in the country at all, or if their concerns and needs mean nothing. Ethnic minorities do not know what to expect when such opposition forces come to power.

It is noteworthy that ethnic political parties are banned by law. That is why it does not seem quite correct to ask questions about participation by such parties in the elections. Anyway, ethnic minorities are supposed to support political forces, which, in their opinion, can guarantee and defend their legal rights, ensure their security and equality in all spheres of life in compliance with the Constitution and fulfill international obligations, undertaken by Georgia, most effectively. On the other hand, just such political forces can expect ethnic minorities to be loyal and law-abiding citizens in Georgia.

8. Even before the Constitution was adopted, Georgia undertook several international obligations. It signed basic UN human rights conventions in 1993-94: international pacts on civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights; conventions on prevention of/punishment for genocide; conventions on the rights of children. In 1999 Georgia joined the convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination. All these international documents have provisions regarding the protection of basic rights of ethnic minorities. Georgia is a signatory to the European convention on basic human rights and liberties, which bans, particularly, all forms of discrimination (Article 14 of the Convention, and Protocol 12).

As a signatory to the UN and European human rights conventions, Georgia has certain international obligations to take care of its citizens, as well as non-citizens permanently residing on the Georgian territory. I think that all these documents provide a clear legal framework for the implementation of the rights of ethnic minorities and they must be seen

as a positive factor in creating a base for the resolution of respective problems.

After joining the Council of Europe, Georgia promised to ratify the convention on the rights of ethnic minorities. This regional agreement was endorsed long ago, vindicating the fact that there is sufficient political will. I think that the convention should be ratified as soon as possible.

As a human rights expert, I understand – but not share – concerns about certain provisions by the convention and the likely consequences of their implementation. According to international experts, this convention is a very “flexible” program document which provides plenty of room for various interpretations and opportunities to select different forms and methods for its implementation at a national level. It is noteworthy that the convention unequivocally guarantees the sovereign rights, territorial integrity, and political independence of signatory countries (Article 21).

9. International human rights conventions prefer to use the term “ethnic minority.” I think that a priority should be given just to this term, which is defined as a non-dominant group of citizens with certain unique national, ethnic, religious, or language features which distinguish them from the majority of the population (one of the definitions used by the UN).

George Nizharadze

1. There are problems of course. Ethnic enclaves always have potential for destabilization. In the case of Georgia, the Azeri and Armenian communities require the most attention, although their conflict potential is not the same.

Ethnic Azeris are traditionally loyal to the Georgian population and maintain peaceful relations with their neighbors. The strategic Georgia-Azerbaijan partnership, which seems likely to last for many years to come, also plays a role. Besides, I have noticed that “success-oriented” motivation is weak in the Azeri community of Georgia (most of its members are peasants) or we can re-phrase a well-known Marxist term and say that ethnic Azeri residents of Georgia have a low “class-consciousness.” Under such circumstances, the Azeri community in Georgia can hardly cause any trouble. There are, however, certain risk factors: a hard economic situation in Azeri enclaves and the central government’s unwillingness to tackle the Azeris’ problems. However, there is factor that poses a unique problem for the Georgian state, though its conflict potential is hard to assess. Particularly, ethnic Azeri residents of Georgia (unlike their Armenian counterparts) have difficulty integrating into the Georgian society – they do not regard themselves as full-fledged citizens of Georgia. In my opinion, this situation seems likely to last quite long, even after their economic conditions improve.

The situation is completely different with regard to the Armenian community in Georgia; first of all because the ideology of leading Armenian politicians is founded on the idea of revising borders and restoring/creating a “Great Armenia.” Several serious steps have already been taken in this direction (Karabakh, the annexation of some Azerbaijani districts). Although Armenia claims mainly Turkish territories, it has certain interests in Javakheti as well. Its interest may be vindicated by the fact that Russian’ and English-language publications by Armenian authors often refer to Javakheti as “Javahk.” Javakheti is economically tied to Armenia much more than to Georgia. Armenia has invested heavily in the region (the local road network, etc); Armenian national currency freely circulates there, etc. Reasons, both objective and subjective, dictate that the central Georgian government’s policy in the region is rather passive. This may be explained by tactical considerations – neither Armenia nor Georgia has enough resources today to escalate tensions. In the long-term perspective,

however, Armenia seems to carry out a well-thought-out program in Georgia and nobody in Georgia cares about it.

The above specified aspects have to do with inter-state conflicts. But the internal political situation is also fraught with danger. It is known that Georgia has an obligation, imposed by its membership in the Council of Europe, to repatriate the so-called Muslim Meskhetians. The Armenian community in Javakheti is very negative regarding this project. The Georgian government has opted to employ its traditional wait-and-see tactics in dealing with the issue in the hope that the problem will solve itself, a very unlikely outcome indeed. Anyway, the requirements of the Council of Europe on the one hand and the Armenian community's attitudes on the other pose the danger of a serious crisis.

Finally, one more factor must be taken into consideration, though it is less significant than others. I mean a negative public opinion about the role of the Armenian community (as represented by the Bagramian Battalion) in the conflict in Abkhazia. The above described aspects allow one to conclude that ethnic Armenian enclaves have a rather high potential for conflict, especially in the long-term perspective.

2. It seems that historically there has never been xenophobia in Georgia. But it has come out that the absence of xenophobia does not necessarily mean tolerance. Domineering attitudes towards ethnic minorities surfaced when Georgians realized that they were a nation (it happened in Soviet times, but the process dates back to the XIX century). In my point of view, this aspect has to do with a historically evolved protection mechanism, which adopted a function to preserve national identity in an aggressive and powerful environment. I mean Georgian "ethno-centrism" (manifestations of ethno-centrism in other cultures are interesting in themselves and deserve special consideration), which can be characterized as follows: although an "average" Georgian can admit that representatives of other nations may be stronger, smarter, and more diligent, he/she has no doubts that they lack something important in all cases – an "insight into life" – and, therefore, they are viewed as backward and, in turn, treated with a mix of arrogance and irony (but never aggression). Every non-Georgian can face, to a certain degree, such attitudes, but reactions are usually different. This factor does not pose any danger to representatives of big nations. The case is different, however, with regards to "peers" of Georgians or small na-

tions – their ethnic identity is in jeopardy and that is the cause of irritation (I think that this factor alone contributed to the rise of anti-Georgian sentiments among Ossetian and Abkhaz people).

The above described protective ethno-centrist stereotype gradually evolved so that being of Georgian descent turned into a psychological crutch, while having non-Georgian relatives was viewed as a compromising factor, both at home and in the social sphere (interestingly, it did not apply to the Abkhaz people). A highly absurd notion of a “Georgian gene” became widely popular and acquired certain importance (I cannot help drawing a parallel to Easter Island; a privileged clan of so-called “long-eared people” lives there: they are light-skinned and presumably descended from European colonists, something they are very proud of. During his expedition to the island Thor Heierdahl took a blood samples from islanders and the “long-eared people” were sure that their blood would be displayed in the world’s largest museums as a priceless exhibit).

Due to the above described circumstances, the current situation looks as follows. There are few ethnic tensions, as long as the principle: “If you don’t meddle with our affairs, we will not meddle with yours,” is observed. However, as soon as a representative of an ethnic minority begins to contend with an ethnic Georgian he or she is immediately discriminated by public opinion and state structures (according to a member of an Ossetian community, it was not until 2003 that an Ossetian plaintiff won a property restitution case, though dozens of such cases had been heard in court by that time). The situation is the same with regard to mixed marriages. That is why it would be fair to say that ethnic minorities in Georgia do not share equal rights with the Georgian population and are discriminated against to some extent. However, this discrimination, and respective dissatisfaction, is limited in scope. The situation is somewhat regulated by the above mentioned principle “If you don’t meddle with our affairs, we will not meddle with yours.”

Ethnic Armenian and Azeri residents do not feel like full-fledged citizens of Georgia and are happy that the central government and local authorities do not intervene in their problems, for a certain “price.” This aspect alone can explain the passiveness of ethnic minorities and their steady support for the government in every election – they fear that any regime change can undermine the favorable “status-quo.”

3. In my opinion, assimilation is unlikely, since ethnic identity in post-Soviet territories, on the one hand, and in the Caucasus on the other hand, is the predominant personal marker, sometimes even more important than religion.

We are still very far from the term “nation.” Ethnic federalism can really become a pre-condition for future instability and disintegration of the country.

I would abstain from particular recommendations, except several trivial considerations: economic development, state-building, the growth of civil consciousness, and one more *sine qua non* – an effective concept of state policy in Southern Georgia.

4. I do not see any need in such a document today, mainly because of the above specified reasons. Moreover, it would be dangerous to accelerate the issue. It seems that the government can attempt to take advantage of the debate and campaign on this document to achieve its own tactical goals (just as it did in many earlier cases), particularly to hide more urgent problems and its own impotence. As a result, ethnic relations may deteriorate to a critical point.

5. The Georgian government must fundamentally reform its domestic policy to the determine prospects of the country. Unfortunately, the Georgian political elite – both the government and the opposition – do not seem capable of changing the situation. As to ethnic enclaves, conditions are almost the same there as in most Georgian-dominated regions. Respectively, the same policy should be applied there, albeit with more caution. In other words, the rural population must realize that they are citizens of a country whose government is aware of their problems and determined to tackle them.

I am not familiar with the curriculum of non-Georgian schools, but I am certain that they need revising. I think that the teaching of the Georgian language must be strengthened in these schools. I cannot say the same about the history of Georgia because I doubt that an adequate and politically correct history textbook can be written in Georgia today.

As to quotas, I for one have doubts about them, whether they are based on ethnicity or gender. The state must ensure that all citizens have equal participation rights in governmental structures.

6. I cannot say what kind of strategy is necessary to deal with ethnic minorities. Firstly, such strategy depends on cultural uniqueness.

Secondly, the government and the society alone must take the initiative in this issue. A strategy is to be chosen in response to the state policy and public opinion. An integration strategy seems more preferable to be sure, but the Georgian state must become attractive (for instance, in its relations with Abkhazia). So far, it has not been such. Moreover, public opinion does not favor any attempts to “Georgianize” ethnic minorities (see my answer to the question 2). Everybody remembers ethnic Armenians changing their surnames into Georgian or Georgian-like ones en masse in the 1970s. But the society’s reaction was negative and the process stopped. Mandatory Georgian language courses should be introduced gradually, step by step.

It is obvious that ethnic minorities represent a serious administrative resource and I have already explained why (see my answer to the question 2). I do not know whether this strategy is right or not. The word “right” is not quite relevant here. A strategy is right when it brings about desired results. But what kind of results do ethnic minorities “hope for”? Special studies are needed to answer this question. I suspect that various ethnic groups hope for different results. For instance, there is a tendency to create political groups with ethnic agendas in Samtskhe-Javakheti, something not quite acceptable for our country, in my point of view. On the contrary, as far as I know the influence of national parties is growing in the Azeri community.

8. I am not familiar with the activities of international organizations in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli well enough. But what I know seems quite acceptable. They are carrying out educational and economic programs, and projects aimed at the development of a civil society.

Some organizations dealing with the Georgian-Abkhaz problems seem somewhat biased, though it may be explained by the fact that Abkhaz separatists maintain their position in a more assertive way.

Although I have never read the European Convention on the rights of ethnic minorities, I subscribe to the document. But I am not sure that my country can comply with the requirements of the Convention.

9. In my opinion, all these terms are acceptable. Only the term “non-Georgian population” sounds a bit confusing and may acquire a negative meaning. On the whole I think that it would be better and more diplomatic if the “non-Georgian population” was given a chance to select a proper official term by itself.

1. In Soviet time the development of ethnic minorities in Georgia was not oriented towards integration into Georgian society. Our country can be proud of its high standards of guarantees for the education of ethnic minorities in their native languages. On the other hand, no conditions have been created in Georgia for ethnic minorities to learn Georgian, the official language of the country. Russian, which was the means of inter-ethnic communication, actually substituted for the Georgian language at one point. Such a situation quite naturally led to grave consequences when changes began in the country. At present there are ethnic groups in Georgia, which are very weakly, if at all, integrated into Georgian society. There are signs of their estrangement and exclusion from Georgia's social-political and cultural life. They are underrepresented in power structures at both the national and local level, in middle and large businesses, etc. Their civil identification remains undeveloped. For instance, Azeri voters in the Kvemo Kartli region were sometimes seen searching for the name of the Azerbaijani president in ballot papers during presidential elections in Georgia.

This situation is fraught with problems. To a large extent growing tensions were offset by a mass emigration by ethnic minorities. Sociological research data suggests that hard social and economic conditions, not discrimination, were the main reasons for emigration. In certain circumstances, the problem should be dealt with from a different standpoint, but it does not mean that the problem has become less urgent. It is also important that economically more advanced historical homelands encourage representatives from some ethnic minorities to seek repatriation.

In a new environment ethnic minorities living in enclaves appeared to have been better protected than those dispersed around the country (for instance, their participation in local self-government structures is guaranteed). Earlier, entire ethnic enclaves used to be incorporated into the linguistic and cultural space of their neighboring countries. To a large extent this practice continues at present.

Such a situation creates favorable grounds for the activities of various political forces with ethnic agendas. Today the central government can still count on the traditional loyalty of the regional population and their respect for governmental institutions. But these aspects should not be misused.

2. There are objective conditions for wide spread public discontent with the current situation in Georgia. The reason is common – the country’s miserable situation. With regard to ethnic minorities, however, this discontent contains a specific slant. Inadequate integration contributes to higher feelings of anxiety among ethnic minorities. The same reason curbs their social activity.

Ethnic minorities in Georgia have never been subjected to a deliberate discrimination policy. Quite the contrary, our country has gained positive historical experience in this regard. However, the absence of any policy on ethnic minorities can also be viewed as a sort of discrimination. This situation is caused by a lack of conceptual awareness of the problem.

History shows that in transitional periods, hostilities flare up against those ethnic minorities that are more advanced politically and economically than the native population. This is not the case in today’s Georgia. However, elements of mutual distrust should not be underrated. For instance, part of the native population does not have full confidence in the loyalty of some political or semi-political organizations in the region. On the other hand, representatives of these organizations claim that the central government does not pay enough attention to local problems.

3. The state lacks both economic and political resources for assimilation (even the most acceptable version – voluntary assimilation). There are also no cultural preconditions. Ethnic pride which has been cherished for ages, does not contribute to the assimilation of ethnic minorities in Georgia. Worse still, it is unacceptable for the native population. The 2003 election campaign demonstrated that allegations regarding a non-Georgian’s ethnic origins could be successfully used against political opponents.

In my opinion, if the country opts for ethnic federalism, the separatism within the society will only widen. The more exact the borders of a federal territorial unit match the natural boundaries of an ethnic enclave along the borders of its historical homeland, the more real the danger will become. Ethnic enclaves must be integral parts of larger territorial units (sub-regions of a region). For instance, Javakheti must be part of Samtskhe-Javakheti; Azeri enclaves should be included into the Kvemo Kartli region, etc. Regional structures must play the role of

a buffer between sub-regions and the center in order to smooth the process of integration for them (particularly, the linguistic environment). At the same time, the government should help create a legislative base for the development and functionality of various forms of self-governance in sub-regions.

4. In accordance with recommendations of the PACE, Georgia should have already adopted a law on ethnic minorities. The recommendation has not been fulfilled yet. Further still, Georgia has not ratified the European frame convention so far; the national language bill remains on the shelf; etc.

One of the most frequently used arguments in such cases is that the time to adopt the law has not yet come (though nobody says what the right time for such a law is). Caution, which may be easily confused with hesitation, is evident in all cases.

Such collision usually emerges when the phenomenon is not explained, when there is no plan of action and priorities are not defined. This is the task of a civil integration concept. In theory, if it had been proposed much earlier, there would have been no unfulfilled obligations to blush at and no need to break lances in the parliament. But this logic does not work today, when the very need for such a concept is questionable.

5. One should not hesitate to raise questions. Indeed, these problems are rather delicate; but it does not mean that they should be hushed up in the hope that the problems will dissolve on their own. It is simply necessary to avoid unwanted excitement and hysteria when discussing them.

As to particular measures, it would be relevant to look into the case of the Baltic States, which have great experience in cooperation with international organizations. They readily sponsor programs to improve the national language teaching, not only for students but also for all categories of citizens. This option was long neglected in Georgia, though the country's own Georgian teaching programs for ethnic minorities have never been successful. For some unclear reason our greedy-for-grants establishment failed to realize that funds may be attracted for a Georgian language programs.

It is sometimes argued that Georgia is objectively unable to attract representatives from ethnic minorities to participate in central and local

power structures. They say few representatives from ethnic minorities are fluent enough in Georgian. The Azeri community of the Shida Kartli region does not fit this theory. This region has huge, unused personnel resources. Many local Azeri residents get a secondary education in Georgian schools and graduate from Georgian universities and institutes. They are good professionals. It is necessary to look for a workforce among ethnic minorities more actively. Ethnic quotas may be acceptable only if nobody among ethnic minorities can speak the official language.

And again, specific measures should be viewed as a whole, in the light of a general concept. By the way, this method is applied by Latvia and Estonia, which adopted civil integration concepts long ago and have since used them in practice.

6. The desire to avoid integration is hard to understand, unless it is determined by isolationist or, especially, separatist reasons. In all cases integration is a movement towards each other. It is an interconnected process, which implies flexible approaches and the possibility of rational compromises.

7. It is not hard to presume that the Azeri community in the Kvemo Kartli region followed the elections in Azerbaijan with greater interest than the election campaign in their own region, as this local campaign is carried out in a language that the overwhelming majority does not understand. As a rule, ethnic minorities are very passive in elections. Under such circumstances, they prefer to have “a bird in the hand than two in the bush,” i. e. they will always support those in power and the situation will not change in the next elections, even if the opposition comes to power.

There are no ethnic political organizations in Georgia. It would be useful to found such organizations, provided they help people make reasonable choices and do not content themselves with minor goals. They should take into account state interests and protect the rights of minorities in order to avoid the dangers of isolationism, etc. Successful integration of ethnic minorities will eliminate the need for such organizations and the emphasis will be placed on the satisfaction of information, cultural-educational and other humanitarian needs as well as the interests of citizens, connected through language and ethnic identity.

8. If the European frame convention is a case in point, Georgia has already joined it. The problem is that our country has failed to ratify the document thus far, although all deadlines for its ratification procedure have already expired. So it would be more correct to speak about the ratification or withdrawal from the convention. The last option is highly unlikely as such a move could deal a severe blow to the country's prestige. So Georgia should either ratify the convention or drag out the process. "A bottle of wine is open, it's time to drink," as a French saying goes.

I think that the ratification should not be delayed, since the international community may begin to suspect that Georgia is unable to guarantee the mandatory level of minority rights stipulated by the convention. Some provisions of the convention encourage the development of our national legislation, especially regarding the use of minority languages in the local self-government system (at least at the lowest level).

As one can see, it is an external incentive. Our politicians lack political will regarding this issue. In my opinion, international organizations are dealing with this situation tactfully and generally avoid thrusting their remedies on Georgia, since it is obvious that each country has its own, unique situation with regards to ethnic minorities. We have certain experience in cooperating with some organizations in developing bills on ethnic minorities or official language. Parties usually cooperated by sharing their experience and no pressure was ever put on Georgia.

9. In Soviet times attitudes towards these terms were very simple. Meanwhile, the term "ethnic minorities" was usually applied in international law, which meant, first of all, cultural community and intentions to preserve and develop cultural and ethnic identity. As to the term "national minorities," foreign experts treat it with suspicion. For instance, according to Norwegian expert A. Eide, its origins can be traced back to ethno-nationalistic thinking. A minority group is viewed either as part of an ethno-nation with its own statehood or as an ethno-nation, a small group which lives in a given country and does not have its own statehood. The main ideological dogma that corresponds with such a concept is that statehood implies an ethno-national community and vice-versa. In extreme cases it encourages certain groups of people to repartition national territories, reject common civil principles to please the egotistical interests of groups of citizens, undermine loyalty to the

country of residence in favor of another country, i. e. the historical homeland of an ethno-nation. Such logic makes the principle of self-identification of nations look absurd. The well-known E. Bonner and G. Starovoytova used this logic quite successfully to advocate repartitioning certain countries.

Our society has long been caught in the snare of the above-described thinking and it will take a long time for common civil principles to gain foothold here. Maybe on the basis of political expediency or by being driven by the inertia of ethno-nationalistic thinking some experts believe that a part of ethnic minorities (the so-called indigenous people) have a right to some forms of national statehood only because they have no other historical homeland but their country of residence. Or some minorities cannot claim the same right because they already have some form of statehood outside their country of residence.

In the meantime, national statehood does not always guarantee the preservation or sustainable development of an ethnic group. Moreover, it can sometimes have the opposite effect. It is a matter of expediency, which should be based on demographic, cultural, economic, and political resources of an ethnic group and its historical experience. If they are scarce, the rights of other ethnic groups may be violated.

The case of the Abkhaz people, who were in fact fully incorporated into the nomenklatura, can be used as an illustration. The artificial introduction of the elements of statehood led to assimilation (in favor of the Russian imperial establishment) and an identity crisis. Historical memory, which was based on myths and legends, and lacked any documentary evidence, failed to withstand the emergence of a complex exclusiveness in the Abkhaz mentality.

One may be tempted to use the term “ethnic minorities” in our legal practice instead of the traditional, though not very “convenient,” expression “national minorities.” The choice of wording is not the essence of the problem. Their meaning is the main point – whether one intends to evade the above-specified ethno-nationalistic thinking.

By the way, this term is used in the declaration of the rights of ethnic, religious and language minorities. It is noteworthy that, according to A. Eide, only European countries propose to use the term “national minorities” in this declaration. In this document, but in a different context, they emphasize that national minorities should respect the territorial integrity of their country. The main objective of this term here

is to define groups of “nationals,” i. e. citizens of the state, who are entitled to the rights stipulated in the declaration. It is known that the rights and responsibilities of residents without citizenship, i. e. migrants, guest workers, and others, are regulated by specific laws.

Contacts with foreign experts confirm that the term “national minorities” is used more and more often in western legal systems, but they use it not because they heed our affection for the term.

It is important also that basic international documents on human rights do not define the term “national minorities” due to difference of opinions. This problem is common in international law. It can be illustrated by one of the latest conventions – the frame convention on protection of national minorities, which was adopted by the Council of Europe in 1995. However, the final approval of such documents is usually preceded by lengthy debates over their basic terms.

As to the term “Diaspora,” it does not have any political connotations but is used somehow incorrectly. The Armenian community of Georgia can be regarded as a Diaspora only with regard to their historical homeland, not the country of their residence or citizenship.

David Zurabishvili

1. Integration into Georgian society is one of the most important problems faced by ethnic minorities. Until this problem is solved, all other problems will remain unsettled.

The very existence of a nation-state is based on the ethnic principle, unlike, say, the feudal state which attached less importance to this factor. That is why ethnic enclaves – i. e. when ethnic minorities are not dispersed evenly across the entire country – always pose potential dangers to a state. It is not a very popular idea, and leftist-liberal circles may even view it as “fascist.” But I do believe that any other conception would simply be self-deceptive.

Indeed, if ethnic minorities in a nation-state are separated from the culture of the dominant ethnic group, have a different historic memory and do not regard the history and culture of the dominant group as their own, they naturally cannot feel like full-fledged citizens of the country and their estrangement from the national statehood automatically gives birth to separatist sentiments and inevitably creates “objective reasons” for conflicts.

That is why the assimilation of ethnic minorities is the only way to eliminate this potential danger. The need for such assimilation can hardly be questioned. So it would be useful to assess the extent of the assimilation process and contemplate reasonable and painless ways to implement the process. In other words, it is necessary to think about “how to do” rather than “what to do.” From this viewpoint, assimilation does not mean a complete and mandatory merger with the dominant nation and the deletion of differences. First of all, it is necessary to ensure that the cultural differences of ethnic minorities are not antagonistic towards the dominant ethnic culture and are even integrated into it to some extent. So the “integration” of ethnic minorities into a nation-state is no less than a euphemism for “assimilation.” We say “integration” but mean “assimilation.” By the way, the choice and use of a respective term is one of the elements that determines the successful implementation of the process.

Of course, it is impossible to develop a mathematically accurate, common formula for all countries. For instance, in some cases, granting territorial autonomy to an ethnic minority may contribute to integration (or assimilation) while in other cases it may do the opposite.

Estrangement from the state is not rare within the Georgian population either. But this tendency is even stronger among ethnic minorities. That is why there are enough grounds for real ethnic conflicts in Georgia, though the external political situation has helped maintain a balance so far. The fact of the matter is that potentially dangerous regions of Georgia (Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti) are populated by Azeri and Armenian ethnic communities, while confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan still runs deep. Both countries are keen on maintaining good relations with Georgia in order to guard against a “second front” – if ethnic Armenians rebel in Javakheti, Georgia and Azerbaijan may form an alliance, while if ethnic Azeri residents of Kvemo Kartli are up in arms, a Georgia-Armenia coalition may emerge. It must be mentioned, however, that such a fragile balance cannot guarantee sustainable stability, to be sure. As mentioned above, only integration of the non-Georgian population into Georgian society can guarantee such stability. The situation is rather difficult in this respect. Besides, at a time when the Georgian government does not have any civic integration policy at all, while the entire bureaucracy, including high-ranking officials, have repeatedly committed actions that fuel ethnic tensions, estrangement from the state felt by a majority of the Georgian population creates favorable conditions for ethnic conflicts. It seems that neither the government nor the society has learned a lesson from recent bitter experience (Tskhinvali region, Abkhazia).

With the government’s indifference and such feelings in society, Russia may become a main catalyst of conflict. For instance, if it ever comes to withdraw the Russian military base from Akhalkalaki, Russia may try to undermine the fragile balance achieved by the current Armenian-Azerbaijani relations.

From this viewpoint, the weight of the external factor (Russia) is conditional to the weakness of the Georgian state. True, the Georgian

government either does nothing to address ethnic problems or it takes such measures that should never have been implemented at all.

It would be an exaggeration to say that ethnic minorities in Georgia are deliberately discriminated against, though attitudes harbored by the government, and a good deal of the society, can be hardly described as friendly. All objective studies have demonstrated that ethnic minorities are frustrated and dissatisfied, not groundlessly, with their current situation – they do not feel that they live in their own country; they are actually excluded from the Georgian society and have to live in a certain autonomous regime.

Due to the lack of care on the part of the Georgian authorities, the Azeri community in Kvemo Kartli is oriented towards Azerbaijan and its contacts with Baku are more extensive than with Tbilisi. The situation in Javakheti is similar: the local Armenian community receives everything – from food to TV broadcasts – from Armenia.

Only a purposeful and well-thought-out policy can really change the situation. It must aim at integrating ethnic minorities into Georgian society. The role of NGOs and independent mass media is very important in this respect. Despite its significance, however, this state policy retains the prime importance. Estrangement is very deeply rooted. In a country where having a non-Georgian grandmother is viewed as a politically compromising fact, it is necessary to show firm political will, and surely not at the NGO level.

It is very important to ensure that the government's ethnic policy is by all means based on a civil integration concept. The successful integration of ethnic minorities into the Georgian state may strengthen Georgia's positions in the Caucasus, and in the international arena, and it is also a sine qua non for internal political stability. The concept alone must determine program planning and implementation. Special attention should be given to cultural integration and the notion of tolerance must be popularized within Georgian society. It means using such propaganda tools as contacts with media (special programs may be developed in the press and for TV), direct contacts, educational activities (for both ethnic Georgians and minorities), involvement of international organizations, etc.

Another factor complicates the current situation in Georgia: ethnic minorities are treated differently in various regions of the country. It is impossible to develop a particular model here. For instance, the Georgian side needs to propose a particular model of territorial autonomy in order to settle the problem in Abkhazia, and some concessions can be made in South Ossetia. In both cases concessions can facilitate integration of Ossetian and Abkhaz people into Georgian society, while granting autonomy for Javakheti would contribute to secessionist trends.

As for terminology, it does not matter what kind of sentiments are reflected in a particular term. For instance, several terms are used in Georgia simultaneously nowadays: “non-Georgian population,” “ethnic minority,” “national minority,” “Diaspora.” From the integration viewpoint, “ethnic minority” seems more neutral and, respectively, more useful. The words “non-Georgian” and “national” strengthen a feeling of separation, if not confrontation, within Georgian society. As to “Diaspora,” if this term is used too frequently, it may also become conducive to separation and division.

That is why it is important to distinguish universal factors from specific ones within a civil integration policy.

It is hard to speculate about a strategy for ethnic minorities to deal with the Georgian state and society. In my opinion, the attitudes of the Georgian government and the society are more important. As a rule, actions of minorities come as a response. The Georgian state must be interested in teaching the Georgian language to ethnic minorities as well as their active participation in the country’s political and social life. As to ethnic quotas in the civil service sector or legalization regarding non-Georgian languages in governmental structures in particular regions, these measures must be examined in context – it is necessary to assess whether they can contribute to the integration process in every particular case. As mentioned above, unified approaches are not useful here.

The fact that ethnic minorities invariably vote in favor of the government in elections also indicates an estrangement from the state. More exactly, they give their votes to power, not to the government, i. e. to

the ruling political force. This position is typical for people who never attempt to make a free choice, since they do not regard the country as their homeland. That is why they participate in elections: to demonstrate a certain tribute to power institutions alone.

If this estrangement wanes and ethnic minorities are more or less successfully integrated into the Georgian society, their current unanimous vote will undoubtedly come to an end and their votes will be dispersed among various national parties. At a certain stage the number of ethnically-based parties may increase and they will contend mainly for seats in the local self-governments. However, such a rise may be viewed as a residue of the past (or the present situation). If the government is able to carry out the integration process peacefully and reasonably, ethnic parties will be no longer in demand, sooner or later.

When it comes to discussing the government's ethnic policy, the factor of the international community must also be taken into account. From this viewpoint, the current Georgian leadership's policy looks very incompetent and can be described as "futile attempts to urge somebody else to remove thorns." Particularly, authorities are apparently trying to make foreign partners (USA, Turkey, Russia, and the European Union) and international organizations take steps towards solving the country's domestic problems, while abstaining to propose any initiative by themselves. This may be illustrated by the fact that the so-called "Boden's document," named after its author, a UN envoy, is the only document to-date that stipulates particular ways in which to resolve the problem of Abkhazia. The Georgian government always makes only general statements and has never put forward any concrete projects.

Such a policy is absolutely unjustifiable and will never bring about positive results. International organizations tend to use unified and schematic approaches, which are unlikely to suit Georgia, which has heterogeneous conflict zones. Taking into consideration that the Caucasus is hardly a primary concern for the international community, everything depends on lobbying attempts by the Georgian leadership. As long as the Georgian government neither attempts such lobbying nor carries out a well-thought-out and determined policy in this field, there is no point in criticizing foreign countries and international organizations for their

mistakes (especially as this criticism is private and does not go beyond complaints that “foreigners do not understand our problems”). To make anybody accountable, one first needs to identify one’s own goals.

As to the European convention on the rights of ethnic minorities, I am not familiar with this document and, therefore, it is hard for me to comment. One aspect is clear, however: if provisions of this document can support an integration policy, we must ratify it, while if this convention gives legitimate right to, say, the Armenian community of Javakheti to demand autonomy, we had better abstain from subscribing to it.

2. Analysis of the situation and recommendations

The multiethnic composition of Georgia: the reality, attitudes and ideas for a political strategy

By Ghia Nodia

There is a considerable fraction of the Georgian population that is usually referred to as “ethnic minorities,” “Diasporas,” or “non-Georgian population.” This means that Georgia is a multinational or multiethnic country (the latter term is now used more often). This is a reality that one can approach in various ways. One may *describe* it as a fact; one may *evaluate*, that is develop some kind of personal or group attitude towards it; or one may think how to deal with it, i. e. ponder what ethnic *policies* there are – and what there should be.

In this article, I briefly tackle all three aspects of this theme, though I consider the policy aspect to be the most important one. In particular, I give priority to a question: what is to be done to increase the level of integration of all citizens of Georgia, i. e. opportunities for their real participation in all spheres of social life regardless of their ethnicity?

While doing this, I will not dwell on such an important topic as the “frozen” conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As a result of these conflicts, there exist two self-proclaimed states that consider themselves independent from Georgia, who have effective control over respective territory (that amounts to some 15 per cent of Georgia’s territory), and Georgia’s jurisdiction does not reach them, as a matter of fact. Technically, problems in these regions are also those of “ethnic minorities”: according to international law and official position of the Georgian state, the Abkhaz and the Ossetians are ethnic minorities living in Georgia, and the conflicts revolve around their status. However, their populations do not take part in Georgia’s political life and have had no wish to participate (save for their ethnic Georgian residents), therefore discussing specific conditions of such participation would be purely speculative today.

Ethnic-demographic composition

According to the last Georgian census in 2002, 83.7 per cent of Georgia's population consists of ethnic Georgians and, respectively, 16.3 percent are ethnic minorities. Notably, this is much less than the figure of the previous 1989 census year when the share of minorities was 29.9 per cent. The following table illustrates these changes in greater detail:

Ethnic group	Quantity (thousands of residents) – 1989	Quantity (thousands of residents) – 2002	Share in the country's total population – 1989	Share in the country's total population – 2002
All	5400.8	4371.5	100	100
Georgians	3787.4	3661.1	70.1	83.7
Armenians	437.2	248.9	8.1	5.7
Russians	341.2	32.6	6.3	0.75
Azeri	307.6	284.8	5.7	6.5
Ossetians	164.1	38.0	3.0	0.87
Greeks	100.3	15.1	1.9	0.35
Abkhaz	95.9	3.5	1.8	0.0008
Ukrainians	52.4	7.0	1.0	0.0016

This table shows that the total population also reduced drastically in the same period. Respectively, the decline of the minority population looks even more dramatic when measured in absolute numbers: from 1,613,000 to 703,000 people.

It is noteworthy that many experts do not put much faith in the quality of both censuses and advise that their results be viewed with great caution. Particularly, the real number and the percentage of ethnic minorities in the total population may be somewhat greater than registered in both censuses. However, there are no other reliable sources of information and in the given case we are only interested in general patterns, which can be examined on the basis of the available data.

There are two major factors behind such a drastic decline of the share of ethnic minorities in the total population. First, residents of the two breakaway regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, were not counted during the last census. By 1989 the population of these territories accounted for 13-14% of the total population, most of them being ethnically differentiated from the Georgian population (while most of the ethnic Georgian residents in these territories were counted

in the census as internally displaces persons). Secondly, large-scale emigration played an important role in the population decline. People from all ethnic groups emigrated from Georgia, many ethnic Georgians among them. It appears, however, that ethnic minorities emigrated on a larger scale than ethnic Georgians. During the rise of the national movement and Gamsakhurdia's rule, some people were forced to leave as a result of, to use the term coined later, "ethnic cleansing," though admittedly carried out in relatively mild forms. This is true of Azeris evicted from Bolnisi and, later, Ossetians who left from various regions of Georgia, as well as Lezgins from Kakheti. In Shevardnadze's time there was no such pressure and migration was tied mainly to economic reasons. However, it seems reasonable to assume that ethnic minorities did not hope to have the same employment prospects or opportunities to improve their economic conditions as ethnic Georgians, therefore they had (and still have) greater propensity to emigrate. Moreover, cultural links to countries that are economically better off than Georgia also contributed to higher emigration in such groups as Russians, Greeks, and Jews.

Since the largest ethnic minorities in Georgia – such as the Azeris and Armenians – traditionally have higher birth rates than ethnic Georgians do, this factor cannot explain why the share of ethnic minorities reduced in Georgia. Obviously, other factors must have offset the difference in birth rates, as otherwise the share of ethnic minorities would have increased.

The proportion of different minority ethnic groups has also changed considerably. The first mentioned factor (that of break-away territories) explains the sharp decrease in the numbers of those ethnic groups that were better represented in those entities: The Abkhaz, the Ossetians, the Russians, the Armenians. With regards to emigration, it is reasonable to assume that representatives of those groups whose "ethnic homelands" could provide considerably better economic conditions (Russians, Greeks and Ukrainians) left in greater numbers. Having summed up these factors, it appears natural that among the largest minority groups it was the Azeris whose numbers declined the least in Georgia. The proportion in which their numbers diminished is similar to that of the Georgians, while their proportion in the total population actually increased, which made them the largest ethnic group, following the Georgians.

Settlement types and the level of integration

Apart from quantity, ethnic groups can be classified by their cultural-historical features and types of settlement. This, for its part, correlates with the level and forms of their participation in the country's social, political and economic life, that is on the level and form of their integration in the society. To begin with, it is necessary to identify areas where ethnic minority populations are concentrated and which border regions of neighboring countries with ethnically related populations. There are five such areas of concentration of ethnic minorities in Georgia: the two breakaway territories, Samtskhe-Javakheti (the Armenian community), Kvemo Kartli (the Azeri community), and Pankisi Gorge (the Kisti ethnic group close to Vainakh peoples—that is Chechens and the Ingush).

Region/Mkhare	Total	Georgians	Azeris	Armenians	Kisti
Kvemo Kartli	497.5	222.5	224.6	31.8	0.02
<i>Rustavi</i>	<i>116.4</i>	<i>102.1</i>	<i>5.0</i>		
<i>Bolnisi region</i>	<i>74.3</i>	<i>19.9</i>	<i>49.0</i>		
<i>Gardabani region</i>	<i>114.3</i>	<i>60.8</i>	<i>50.0</i>		
<i>Dmanisi region</i>	<i>28.0</i>	<i>8.6</i>	<i>18.7</i>		
<i>Marneuli region</i>	<i>118.2</i>	<i>9.5</i>	<i>98.2</i>		
<i>Tetritskaro region</i>	<i>25.4</i>	<i>18.8</i>	<i>1.6</i>		
<i>Tsalka region</i>	<i>20.9</i>	<i>2.5</i>	<i>2.0</i>		
Samtskhe-Javakheti	207.6	90.0	0.06	113.3	
<i>Adigeni region</i>	<i>20.7</i>	<i>19.8</i>		<i>0.7</i>	
<i>Aspindza region</i>	<i>13.1</i>	<i>10.7</i>		<i>2.3</i>	
<i>Akhalkalaki region</i>	<i>61.0</i>	<i>3.2</i>		<i>57.5</i>	
<i>Akhaltzikhe region</i>	<i>46.1</i>	<i>28.5</i>		<i>16.9</i>	
<i>Borjomi region</i>	<i>32.4</i>	<i>27.3</i>		<i>3.1</i>	
<i>Ninotsminda region</i>	<i>34.3</i>	<i>0.5</i>		<i>32.9</i>	
<i>Akhmeta region</i>	<i>41.6</i>	<i>31.2</i>	<i>0.15</i>	<i>0.10</i>	<i>6.9</i>

Such areas usually attract special attention and they are often viewed as zones of potential conflicts, as their very existence may be used for developing separatist and irredentist political programs, that is programs of “national self-determination” (as a rule, this means secessionism) or “unification with the historical motherland,” and respective political movements. These programs usually base themselves on specific versions of national histories which claim that this ethnic group (and not any other) is the “indigenous” population of the given land. That is why political conflicts are usually preceded by disputes between academic (or non-academic) historians.

It is necessary to highlight here that it is only the *possibility* of conflicts that is discussed here; this by no means suggests that these conflicts are probable or even inevitable. Residents in such areas are often unhappy that these areas are only discussed under the pretext of conflict: they allege that the too frequent use of the word “conflict” where there have been no conflict based on ethnic disputes, may, in fact, contribute to developing tensions. However, one must understand why it is that such regions tend to draw more attention than others do.

In two cases – Abkhazia and South Ossetia – large-scale political movements with nationalistic agendas were created during the break-up of the USSR. As a result, ethnic-political wars broke out and these territories actually seceded from Georgia. There were no such conflicts in other regions and, importantly, no political groups with separatist demands from a group of irredentists emerged in those regions. Nevertheless, concerns that the potential for such movements does exist and suspicion that some hidden forces are waiting for the right moment to make respective demands are voiced within the Georgian society from time to time. Against this backdrop, the Georgian society reacts with great concern to statements made by some public figures in Javakheti in favor of a special autonomous status for the region – this is usually viewed as the first step towards developing a separatist program. Such concerns are well understandable in the light of the country’s recent experience: in the Soviet administrative system Georgia had three autonomous units – Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Adjara. Violent conflicts took place in these first two regions. As to Adjara, it has had troubled relationship with the central authority, although no separatist program has ever evolved in Adjara; thus one can draw the logical conclusion that autonomous territorial units, especially if they are created on the basis of ethnicity, pose a threat to a country’s territorial integrity.

As a rule, most non-Georgian residents in minority areas do not speak Georgian and are weakly integrated in the Georgian society, in a cultural sense. Two sets of problems emerge as a result. On the one hand, this insufficient integration creates objective impediments for true participation by ethnic minorities in the country’s social and political life, and reduces their chances for economic and career advancement. Ethnic minorities residing in these regions are not sufficiently informed about ongoing political processes in the country, they have to cope with additional hurdles in relations with governmental structures and they

feel alienated from the majority. On the other hand, the fact that large groups of citizens do not speak Georgian causes anxiety among the Georgian population: it fuels the suspicion that ethnic minorities might be insufficiently loyal towards the Georgian state.

The rest of the ethnic minorities are dispersed across the country and live together with the Georgian residents, primarily in cities. Ethnic minority villages in Georgian-populated regions can be considered intermediate cases. Such minority representatives are much more likely to speak Georgian than their counterparts in areas with a concentration of minority groups. This does not mean, however, that these dispersed ethnic minorities normally speak fluent Georgian. As a rule, their native language and/or Russian serves as their primary means for communication and education for them, while their Georgian is usually basic and their level of fluency varies from one individual to the other. Despite a better knowledge of the language and a higher awareness about political processes, dispersed ethnic minorities participate in civil and political life almost to the same, if not less, degree as their counterparts in ethnic enclaves.

What indicators do we use to assess the level of civil and political participation of ethnic minorities? Contrary to popular assumptions, official data on participation in elections can be hardly viewed as such an indicator in the case of Georgia. First, election rigging – including ballot-stuffing that swells turnout figures – is usually more extensive in ethnic enclaves than in other regions. Secondly, ethnic minorities often view participation in elections as a ritual to express loyalty to the authorities rather than a real chance to take part in choosing their own government. It was this attitude towards elections that prompts ethnic minorities to vote in favor of the government en masse and express a readiness to switch sides as soon as a new government comes to power.

Representation of minorities within governmental bodies as well as their participation in institutions of civil society (political parties, NGOs, etc) are more reliable indicators. All these indicators point to the fact that participation by minorities is very low. Only 14 MPs represented ethnic minorities in the 1999 Parliament, and all of them were members of the ruling Citizens Union of Georgia. Their involvement in legislative activities was insignificant (most of them never took the floor at parliamentary sessions for one simple reason – they did not have a mastery of Georgian, the only working language in Parliament). Their

very presence in Parliament was supposed to illustrate participation by ethnic minorities within the political life of Georgia, but such ways of participating were hardly real. According to the results of the November 2003 parliamentary elections, which were subsequently abolished by the Supreme Court of Georgia, the number of non-Georgian MPs was reduced by half, although not all of them were members of the ruling party this time. This happened because the political struggle had become more uncompromising and major political actors could no longer afford to include representatives of ethnic minorities on their election lists for mere symbolic considerations. There are even fewer representatives from ethnic minorities in the executive structures at the national level – presumably because key executive posts can hardly be viewed as purely ritual. The situation is not necessarily better in the executive structures at the local level – while in two ethnically homogeneous regions of Javakheti (Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda) local governments bodies are staffed predominantly by ethnic Armenians, in the other regions with an ethnically mixed population, the representation of ethnic minorities in local governments is rather low.

This insufficient level of representation of ethnic minorities directly correlates to their low level of participation in civil life. Communal organizations made up of ethnic minorities have become more active in recent times – this fact must be welcomed. However, these organizations still stay somewhat aloof from the life of civil society in general and do not take an active part in those civil society initiatives that are not focused on ethnic problems. Over the last few years, local civil society actors have become more active in areas where concentrations of ethnic minorities reside – this is a positive development.

Comparative data regarding the participation of ethnic minorities in economic life is unavailable. There are few representatives of ethnic minorities among successful managers of large businesses. This may also be linked to their insufficient participation in political life – neopatrimonial relations make it very difficult to rise to the top of the business-elite without respective political connections. It does not mean, however, that ethnic minorities are generally worse off than ethnic Georgians. For instance, our survey in the Gardabani and Marneuli regions show that local ethnic Azeris tend to live in somewhat better economic conditions than their Georgian neighbors (presumably, Azeri residents in the region take advantage of economic contacts with

Azerbaijan more than Georgians do). Sociological surveys demonstrate that all citizens of Georgia, regardless of their ethnic identity, are concerned about such problems as unemployment, low incomes, a decline of social infrastructure, etc. From this viewpoint, it is hard to identify essential differences between the attitudes of various ethnic groups. However, it does not rule out specific economic problems faced by particular ethnic groups (for instance, residents of Azeri enclaves face the problem of land ownership; ethnic Russians, most of whom are retired, depend more on state social assistance programs and, respectively, live in worse economic conditions, etc). Anyway, the center of gravity in regards to specific ethnic minority problems does not lie in the economic dimension – it greatly involves the problem of civil integration, i. e. in the participation in social and political life first and foremost.

To sum this all up, there is an obvious tendency towards a general estrangement by ethnic minorities from the country's civil and political life. I would describe the situation as *ghettoisation* of ethnic minorities. Low proficiency in Georgian is a reason and, at the same time, a result of such estrangement: many ethnic minority representatives, especially youth, do not have enough motivation to learn Georgian since they believe that even if they master the language, they still will not be treated as full-fledged members of society. In the same vein, low political representation correlates with the weak participation in public life: where would Armenian, Azeri, Russian or other political leaders come from unless they – in one form or another – take an active part in the life of the Georgian society? However, they are not active because they do not consider themselves part and parcel of this society.

Attitudes of the Georgian political elite towards the multiethnic character of the society

Civil integration, meaning the existence of an open public space where groups and individuals interact, compete and cooperate, can be achieved on certain terms. These terms are determined by different parties. As we speak on ethnic relations here, these terms should be defined on the basis of positions and approaches by different ethnic groups, both those in majority and minority. The majority, being such, controls the major levers of formal and informal power (at least, this is

how it is under a democracy) and therefore has a greater weight in determining these terms. However, it cannot do so unilaterally, and the strategies of minorities are also very important.

Unfortunately, there has been almost no public discussion in the country to date on how ethnic minorities should be integrated into Georgian society and on what terms these various ethnic groups should coexist in the public space. That is why there is not enough material to identify the evolution of public perception of the issue. However, some general ideas can be formulated.

The Soviet era may be labeled as a period of “hypocritical internationalism.” Glorification of Georgia’s “multi-nationality” and “brotherhood between peoples” was part of the official ideology. However, because this ideology was official, these slogans indirectly contributed to the legitimization of nationalism as the main alternative ideology, the basis for the opposition to the Communist system. Some institutional features of the Soviet system contributed to directly strengthening nationalism: the existence of national republics and autonomous territories within certain territories was grounds for the existence of national communist nomenklaturas (that is, ethnically defined power elites) and national nomenklatura intelligentsias; on the other hand, specifying ethnic identity on the citizen’s IDs effectively implied the priority of ethnic identity over citizenship.

As a result, ethnic nationalism flourished after the collapse of the Communist system. This nationalism had a certain democratic element: the then-nationalistic leaders – in Georgia and other countries – strove to build nation-states on democratic principles. But this democracy – very immature in many respects – was in fact ethnically exclusive. That nationalism at that time was purely ethnic. In Georgia it was represented by Zviad Gamsakhurdia. It was a matter of political expedience whether this regime committed ethnic purges, but ideologically, only ethnic purity – i. e. ethnic homogeneity among the population – was viewed as an ideal condition for the national state-building process (even though it seemed impossible to achieve in practice). Everybody understood, of course, that it was not right to turn this ethnic purity into a goal of official policy. Nevertheless, ethnic minorities were treated as an unwanted historical legacy that Georgia inherited from the past. It would be better if there were no ethnic minorities at all, but since they are here, they should be tolerated, though small groups of them

should be urged to migrate to their “historical homelands” at a every appropriate moment (like Azeri residents in Bolnisi and Ossetians in some other places). This attitude was perfectly reflected in the informal “guest” status: on the one hand, the abundance of guests indicates that hosts are tolerant and democratic; on the other hand, guests must always bear in mind that they are only guests here and behave accordingly, as otherwise they may be expelled.

After the revolution/coup against Gamsakhurdia, this attitude towards ethnic minorities was dubbed “parochial fascism”, and ethnic minorities were relieved of the “guest” status. Non-Georgian citizens were no longer supposed to express gratitude just for permission to stay, and nobody hinted to them (at least in public) that leaving would actually be a good idea. It looked as if Georgia got vaccinated against aggressive ethnic nationalism.

This change of attitudes and rhetoric towards ethnic minorities was very important and played a vital role in achieving stability in ethnic minority areas. But it did not lead to the development of any coherent ethnic policies; instead, the problem was bashfully dodged. Parliament’s Civil Integration Committee, which was created in 1999 under the chairmanship of Gela Kvaratskhelia (later Besarion Lagvilava took over), proposed to adopt a Civil Integration Concept, but this initiative aroused little interest outside the committee. It may be assumed that in Shevardnadze’s time Georgia – its political elite – accepted the multiethnic composition of the country as a normal condition, but failed to decide how to deal with it.

Ethnic policies under Shevardnadze

The absence of publicly formulated policies was a hallmark of Shevardnadze’s style of leadership in many spheres, not only in ethnic relations; this does not mean, however, that there was no policy at all. There was a combination of political practices, which allows the reconstruction of certain logic behind them. When Shevardnadze’s party, the Citizens Union of Georgia, was first created, its activists emphasized that the new Georgia was open to ethnic minorities. The party was deliberately named the way it was in order to underline the civil and unifying – not ethnic and dividing – character of the Georgian society. From my point of view, these statements reflected the genuine inten-

tions of those who voiced them and prepared respective party documents. However, these ideas remained on paper instead of being put into practice. The real policies, on the other hand, were developed along the road.

The prime precept of this policy can be formulated as “letting sleeping dogs lie.” By definition, ethnicity is a very explosive issue. Therefore, it must be isolated from public politics as much as possible and ethnic enclaves should be safeguarded against excessive activities by political parties and civil society organizations. In other spheres, such as economy or corruption in public service, the political leadership could rather openly admit considerable problems and recognized that they should be discussed and tackled. The field of ethnicity, however, was considered too sensitive and public debate on such issues was not approved of. In part, this attitude stemmed from the syndrome inherited from the period of the national independence movement and Gamsakhurdia’s government: experience of that time showed that public debates on ethnic problems tended to fuel ethnic tensions and undermine public stability. On the other hand, there was a discernible political interest behind the “ban” on ethnic themes: the government preferred to keep ethnic minorities in political preserves, only to be accessed with special permissions; this guaranteed them the minority vote in elections and helped keep their image of the only political force capable of maintaining ethnic peace in the country.

In reality, keeping such preserves fully intact proved impossible. Occasionally some NGOs showed interest but the general picture remained unchanged for a long time. The international community became more interested in Samtskhe-Javakheti three years ago due to such themes as the repatriation of Muslim Meskhethians and the expected withdrawal of the Russian military base from the region. Consequently, civil activities also increased in the region. As a participant in these events I can testify that the Georgian government was very reluctant to allow international organizations into this “preserve.” It was not by chance that attempts by the oppositional National Movement to campaign actively in the Azeri section of the “preserve” in the run-up to the 2003 elections was met with unusually strong resistance from the government.

Quiet moves to co-opt various ethnic elites were a positive part of Shevardnadze’s political program on ethnic minorities. Gigla Baramidze

and Levan Mamaladze, young, energetic and authoritative “governors” of Georgia’s regions with large ethnic communities – Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli respectively – were architects of this policy. Initially, they were backed not only by Shevardnadze but also by “young reformers” led by Zurab Zhvania (Mamaladze, a former member of the Green Party,¹ was promoted to the post of governor as a member of “Zhvania’s team”). They were not affected by idiosyncrasies of Zviadist-like ethnic nationalism. At the same time, they did not burden themselves with illusions about the development of democracy as based on wide participation by citizens in political processes. They appeared to have believed that it was still too early to speak about the development of civil values in regions dominated by rural and largely patriarchal Azeri and Armenian communities. At the same time, they were well aware that a real danger would emerge if this population were mobilized in support of nationalistic movements. Such mobilization took place in reality around the Javakheti-based society “Javahk” in the early 90s and it greatly impeded the Georgian government’s attempts to secure political control over the region. The situation was relatively better in Kvemo Kartli. But similar methods were applied in both cases: authorities established contacts with influential local figures or, as people often say in Georgia, “clans,” and made advantageous economic deals with them, i. e. co-opted them into the patrimonial-oligarchic system of the state. These methods gave the local elite privileges that those closest to power usually enjoy in such systems: lucrative offices with an opportunity to receive incomes through corruption, distribution of their clients to control the most profitable businesses, to have a voice in the land distribution process, etc. In return, local leaders were required to ensure stability and votes in favor of the government party. Besides, the political leadership became very skilful in maintaining a balance between various local players or clans: the balancing act to satisfy the clans of Raisians, Mkoians, and Ambartsumians in Javakheti serves as a classic example. However, as political struggles intensified in the center, the balance was also undermined – the Raisian clan broke away from Gigla Baramidze and began seeking support from Zurab Zhvania, who had joined the opposition by that time.

¹ Before becoming one of the leaders of the CUG, Zurab Zhvania led the Green Party of Georgia.

This all happened against a rather minimal and inertial official policy background. The Constitution and national legislation postulated the absence of ethnic discrimination, while the problem of citizenship was solved through the so-called “zero option” as early as in Gamsakhurdia time: All residents of Georgia who lived in the country at the time of its independence were automatically proclaimed citizens. What else could one wish for? Arguably, basic directions of ethnic policy remained largely the same as they were inherited from Soviet times, and there were no attempts to revise them. Adjustments, if there were any, resulted from a change of objective conditions rather than deliberate political decisions.

Such an important direction of ethnic policy as education is one of the most vivid illustrations. The state ensures that the largest ethnic minorities have an opportunity to receive a secondary education in their native language, particularly in Russian, Armenian, Azeri and Ossetian – this practice dates back to the Soviet times and must be surely welcomed. For instance, there are 141 Azeri secondary schools and eight independent Azeri sections in schools, 133 Armenian secondary schools and 20 sections, 87 Russian secondary schools and 152 sections, and 10 Ossetian sections in Georgia. However, non-Georgian secondary schools are still based on the old Soviet concept. Moreover, publication of textbooks for these schools often depends on the goodwill of neighboring countries.² As a result, these schools by no means prepare their pupils to become full-fledged citizens of Georgia; quite the contrary— they contribute to the reproduction of the estrangement and “ghettoisation” – the main problems faced by ethnic minorities today – in the younger generations.

The state theoretically continues its traditional support of cultural and information institutions in minority languages (theatres, museums, newspapers, radio channels, etc). In reality, however, this support has either ceased completely or is simply symbolic, due to the lack of budgetary funds. At the same time, the government usually does not prohibit private cultural initiatives in ethnic communities. However, problems emerge in some cases. For instance, a project to broadcast Russian- and Armenian-speaking TV programming in the Akhaltsikhe region was foiled, like other similar projects at the local level.

² Saakashvili's government changed this practice and took responsibility for supplying minority schools with textbooks.

When there are changes in ethnic policies from that of Soviet times, they usually lead to controversy. The most painful change since the collapse of the Soviet system has been the ban on the use of non-Georgian languages in state bodies and qualification exams, which are mandatory for all applicants seeking to get or retain jobs in certain spheres (courts, medical facilities, etc). The Georgian language was used in state institutions in Soviet times as well, but in regions with a relatively high concentration of ethnic minorities (even in some regions of Tbilisi) the use of Russian was allowed. This is no longer possible: According to Article 8 of the Constitution of Georgia, the only state language of the country is Georgian, except Abkhazia where the Abkhaz language has equal status with Georgian. Informally, the Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda regions are exempt from the rule and local civil service sectors are permitted to use other languages, since these regions lack a workforce with an adequate knowledge of Georgian. Nevertheless, public servants in these regions have difficulty understanding documents delivered from Tbilisi and the Mkhare administration. In other regions, ordinary citizens who do not speak Georgian complain that they have problems in their dealings with governmental agencies (though interpreters are available in many cases). In their opinion, the government should not require them to know the official language. On the other hand, some Georgian politicians denounce the practice of using non-Georgian languages in the public services of Javakheti, as it is in breach of the Constitution.

Innovations in ethnic policy usually trigger confrontations between liberal and ethno-nationalistic directions in politics. For instance, the liberal direction gained a victory by removing one's ethnic identity from a citizen's ID and birth certificate. But there was an outcry from ethno-nationalistic politicians, who described the removal of this entry from the documents as non-patriotic and humiliating for the Georgian nation. Since citizens of Georgia brought up in the Communist system were used to associating their ethnic identity with a respective entry in their IDs, public opinion was in favor of ethno-nationalists, like Guram Sharadze, in this issue. It is noteworthy that the President did not have a firm position regarding the problem and tended to favor the restoration of the controversial entry. A liberal part of Shevardnadze's supporters managed to delay parliamentary debates on the issue for quite a long time. It was only in the summer 2003 that the parliament finally

worked out a compromise resolution to include the entry “nationality/citizenship – Georgian” on a citizen’s official documents.

A draft state language bill brought to Parliament by the State Language Chamber also sparked intense debates. The initial bill’s initial draft was rather draconian. In particular, it stipulated that every citizen of Georgia must speak Georgian. Liberal politicians argued that such a law should either not be adopted at all or, if it was necessary to pass it, it must be fundamentally revised. The office of High Commissioner on National Minorities of the OSCE intervened in the issue and cooperated with the authors of the bill and Georgian lawmakers in order to make the bill comply with international law. However, the amended bill was criticized by ethno-nationalists (particularly, by the above mentioned Guram Sharadze) and was put on the shelf as a result.

The state program of teaching the Georgian language caused less controversy. Within the framework of this program special grants were offered to those teachers of the Georgian language who agreed to work in the regions where there was a lack of such teachers – that is, in regions dominated by ethnic minorities. However, local schoolteachers were not very happy with this program, since “guest” teachers were paid much higher salaries than they were. The program improved the quality of the Georgian language teaching in some non-Georgian secondary schools but it did not improve the level of knowledge of Georgian considerably.

The above-described initiatives in the field of ethnic policies were proposed by individual political actors with different – often opposite – political principles and interests. These initiatives were not based on clear programs or careful policy planning, more or less.

The main political dilemmas of civil integration in the new reality

The events that lead to the November 2003 revolution and its aftermath once again highlighted the dangers of “ghettoisation” of ethnic minorities. Although public confidence in Shevardnadze’s government declined in the country in general, the ruling party still appeared to have won a majority of the votes in ethnic enclaves. It was often emphasized at opposition rallies that the government was mainly supported by the Armenian and Azeri votes. These statements hurt the

feelings of some ethnic minorities, though in this case the opposition did not claim that minorities had a lesser right to express their political preferences (including voting in favor of the government), but that in these regions the government had free hand to impede political pluralism and manipulate voters.

Will the revolution change this situation? It is too early yet to draw any far-reaching conclusions. It has been quite clear that as soon as formal or informal leaders of ethnic communities understood that rumors about the “fascist” attitudes of Saakashvili and other erstwhile opposition leaders were somewhat exaggerated (to put it mildly) they displayed a willingness to change sides and support the winning party. At a meeting between Tbilisi-based NGOs and politicians and representatives of the Azeri community of Marneuli several days after Shevardnadze’s resignation, prominent local Azeri leaders said that they were ready to vote for Saakashvili just like they did for Shevardnadze and Gamsakhurdia. It cannot be ruled out that the situation may not change at all: minorities will have a stable pro-government orientation, while the ruling party will encourage this orientation, since it obviously serves its interests. The greatest priorities of the new government seems to lie in spheres other than ethnic policies, therefore it will hardly be able to concentrate its efforts on the integration of ethnic minorities unless it is forced to pay more attention to these issues through some unexpected developments. So far, initial steps by the new government seem to have proved this assumption.

However, one can also discern a trend towards a gradual increase of social activism among ethnic minorities, and the revolution is likely to encourage this. The Georgian society is becoming increasingly aware that a system of ethnic ghettos poses problems not only to ethnic minorities – i. e. isolates them and diminishes their chances to succeed in various areas of public life – but also substantially impedes the democracy-building process in the Georgian society as a whole. For instance, one can hardly hope to have fair, democratic elections in Georgia while on part of its territory, namely in Kvemo Kartli, the elections are still a ritual that the local residents do not care about and local authorities are free to manipulate. On the other hand, one may assume that minorities will become less and less satisfied with passively staying on the margins of a relatively active Georgian society and will instead seek ways to increase their political and civil participation. But what will be the ways and terms of this participation?

How the process develops will depend on all players – the political elite, especially the new leaders, the Georgian society, and ethnic communities. First of all, the Georgian society must show a much greater openness towards the political participation of minorities. Speculations about Armenian ethnic origins (no matter real or alleged) by some opposition political leaders during the 2003 election campaign, used by the then-ruling party as a major tool to discredit them, were nothing short of an explicit offence to ethnic minorities. At the same time, representatives from the ruling party often stated that minorities voting for the opposition parties amounted to high treason, as it is the ruling party that symbolizes the state. Such statements send a clear message to the “non-Georgian population”: Know your place and never try to play any real role in political life; you are only entitled to support the majority and thus demonstrate your loyalty. But as soon as you venture to do anything more or different, you will be reminded of your ethnic origin.

The new government has abstained from employing similar rude methods so far, though this does not mean that it is completely “above” such approaches. For instance, when a notorious religious extremist leader Basil Mkalavishvili, popular among certain extreme nationalist circles for conducting pogroms against various religious sects, was arrested, some government spokesmen stressed his Armenian-sounding patronymic Arshakovich (though patronymics – a Russian tradition – are rarely used, if at all, in the post-Soviet Georgia) in an effort to falsify his patriotic credentials. The hint was obvious: No genuine Georgian patriot’s father could be called Arshak.

Under these circumstances, ethnic minorities will hardly come to the conclusion that more active participation in social and political processes is the wisest strategy to protect their interests. On the contrary, they interpret the above messages as a signal for them to keep a low profile.

What should we look after?

However, what is the perfect model of citizens’ co-existence in a single society? What conditions for competition and cooperation in the public space should we consider desirable ones? It would be naive to assume that such a model exists that is clear and coherent and the only thing we need is to “educate” citizens in a certain way, teach them the

politically correct rules. Dealing with the “national problem” in a liberal-democratic society is not just a practical challenge: it is not at all clear what one should aim for in this area. This uncertainty triggers intense debates in developed western societies as well.

As a starting reference point, one can say that a good ethnic policy requires achieving two goals. On the one hand, any person, regardless of his/her ethno-cultural roots, religion, or family name, must have equal opportunities to take part and compete in the public space: this implies employment, political career, etc. On the other hand, groups of people who feel themselves to be culturally “different” – that is, attribute themselves to a different national/ethnic group, speak a different language, have a different religion, and *want* to remain different instead of getting dissolved in a majority, should have such an option. Each of these goals is completely legitimate and justifiable, and neither of them should be ignored. The problem is that they are hard to reconcile with each other.

The liberal ideal of such reconciliation could be defined as a privatization of ethnic identity: in private life everybody is free to behave as a “different” person that may speak (or publish magazines, produce theatre performances etc) in his/her own language, pray to his/her God, be proud of his/her exceptional ancestors, etc. When it comes to the public life, however, a person’s ethnic origin is nobody’s business. The state and general public should be blind to the ethnic origins of its citizens: everybody must have equal rights and start-up opportunities and it is impolite to emphasize a citizen’s ethnic origins in public. This principle may be summed up in a formula: “replacing ethnic identity with citizenship.”

However, such ideal liberal ethnicity-blindness is not easy to attain. Arguably, no country in the world has attained it completely. Most people have great difficulty overcoming the presumption that those who speak, behave, or even look differently are aliens and should be treated as such. There is some ethnic prejudice in every society, however democratic; though in developed western countries it is partly compensated by rules of “political correctness.” The USA is reputed to be an exemplary country in the sense that national identity is based on citizenship, not ethnic origin. However, racial problems continue to be urgent, while white Americans are stunned to see US citizens of Mexican descent supporting Mexico during football matches between Mexican and US squads. In a civilized country, a politician trying to discredit a political

opponent by digging out his/her ethnic roots would simply be ostracized. Nevertheless, so far it is hard to imagine a man of Algerian descent being elected President of France, or a son of Turkish immigrants becoming the German chancellor. The privatization of ethnic identity and the primacy of citizenship constitute a regulatory principle that one can only come close to.

Assimilation is the most reliable precondition for liberal ethnicity-blindness. Assimilation means that a person ceases to be “different,” that is he/she speaks, behaves, and even looks as “one of us,” as a representative of the majority. Such a person can forget his/her different ethnic origin, or consider it as secondary to a newly acquired identity. At one point the French were close to electing Eduard Balladur, a man of Armenian descent, as their President (more exactly, he was the most popular French politician at a certain time). This illustrates that citizenship prevails over “blood” identity in France. But this also presumes that the French had no doubts about Balladur being a French national first of all, while his sentiments about his Armenian roots – if he had any – remained a private affair.

There may be two major problems about assimilation. On the one hand, the majority may not be open enough towards “aliens,” even if the latter want to become part of them (the Georgian society is a case in point). But a minority may also be unwilling to assimilate, that is, it may prefer retaining its identity as opposed to being “dissolved” into the majority. In the United States, the liberal ideal of colorblindness, that is indifference to racial identity, is more often criticized by activists fighting for the rights of African-Americans: some even see hidden racism in it. Today most democratic countries believe that assimilation is too high of a cost for the equality of rights. Respectively, the term “integration” is used more frequently as something different from assimilation: citizens must *integrate* into the public life, that is they should become parts of the whole while remaining *different*; they must preserve their cultural identity. Here is where the discourse of ethnic minority rights as “collective” rights comes from: we, the minority representatives are entitled to the same rights as the majority, but at the same time we have a right to maintain our identity, and take specific measures to resist assimilation.

Thus, the term “integration” is a formula for compromise. It is a way of reconciling both of the abovementioned goals: those of unity/

equality and the right for a different identity. Modern societies have no other real choice but to try to reconcile them. It does not mean, however, that there is a ready formula for achieving this. Ethnic relations are more or less challenging in any multiethnic society, especially a democratic one. Cases in both the United States and Europe illustrate that these challenges tend to exacerbate, not alleviate, over time.

If ethnic or religious fault lines in a society are so deep that a compromise is impossible to reach and civil integration is almost out of the question, a so-called principle of “consociationalism” may become an alternative solution. This is a system of representation wherein people elect representatives within certain communities, while leaders come to terms with each other at the elite level. In practice, it is a system of ethnic/religious quotas. Some ethnic minority representatives have already proposed the introduction of this system in Georgia. This principle was applied successfully in the Netherlands, which, however peaceful and civilized it may look, still quite recently could be considered a society deeply divided along religious lines (Catholics and Protestants are major religious communities there).

But positive cases of application of these principles are rare, especially when it comes to dealing with ethnic identities, when a society is divided roughly in half by certain principles, rather than has relations between the majority and minorities. The main problem is that such an approach implies institutionalization of ethnic and racial differences – which means that divisions in the society tend to strengthen and deepen. For instance, the affirmative action policies in the US, which were devised to facilitate the full integration of African-Americans, did indeed contribute to an emergence of a black middle class in its early days. Today, however, it is severely criticized (quite justly, I believe) for contributing to the “balkanisation” of American society, that is the deepening of ethnic and racial fault lines in American society even further. Usually, “affirmative action” programs are introduced as “temporary,” but in practice they can never be temporary because they only exacerbate the very problem they are supposed to solve.

Similar logic applies to the principle of ethnic federalism, that is, the creation of autonomous areas on an ethnic basis. While “consociationalism” was invented for divided societies with dispersed populations, ethnic federalism is designed to solve the same problem for “aliens” who are concentrated in certain geographical areas. Practice shows, however, that

this does not necessarily solve the problem, and either minorities or the majority, or both, remain unhappy. Examples are aplenty – Abkhazia, Kosovo, the Basque Country, etc.

Both solutions are expected to ease the problems of “aliens” living in a particular society, but they also institutionalize and embed societal divisions in the long run. They strengthen the sense of division in the public mentality and, at the same time, create influential interest groups – a racial or ethnic elite, or “ethnic nomenklaturas” – whose welfare depends on the preservation of ethnic quotas or special regional regimes. Therefore, these groups have incentives to actively oppose any attempts aimed towards true integration. Ordinary representatives of ethnic minorities may actually turn out to be losers, because the less integrated they are, the fewer chances they have to succeed in public, political and economic life.

Another problem of ethnic federalism (namely, in so-called asymmetric federations), as well as that of “ethnic quotas,” is that it structurally contradicts one of the fundamental principles of democracy – that of *equality*. Both represent the system of privileges – either for people with different races or ethnic origins or for territorial units. Everybody is entitled to the same rights as everybody else, but some also have additional rights. Usually, these privileges are granted with the best intentions: It is assumed that minorities are in a disadvantageous position by definition, that they have fewer chances for active participation and social success. That is why privileges gained through “affirmative action” are seen as a compensation for the objective disadvantage of belonging to a minority. This argument should not be ignored. However, so-called “reverse discrimination” (i. e. discrimination against the majority) is still unfair for those who are its victims and a society based on the rule of law will have a hard time accepting it. In the US when a black student is admitted to a university despite his/her much lower scores than a white or Asian contender’s, it means that the latter are discriminated against on the grounds of race, and there is no way to overlook this reality.

One of the specific features of the Soviet “nationality policy” was that it used both ways of institutionalizing ethnic identity – following the individual (ethnic identity entries in IDs) and territorial (the system of autonomous republics and regions) principles simultaneously. Some people (including people in the West) believe that the Soviet “nation-

ality policy” was successful – isn’t it obvious, they say, that there were no conflicts, people lived peacefully along each other. They fail to realize, however, that this policy could only work until the totalitarian repressive state control remained intact. As soon as the regime weakened, it began to crack exactly at its ethnic lines. The system itself created the grounds for so-called “ethnic conflicts.”

It does not mean that any deviation from the ideal “liberal blindness” towards ethnic identity should be rejected a priori. The unique feature of problems related to ethnic diversity in a single democratic society is that they cannot, and should not, be solved – people have to learn to live with them. Since Hitler’s time, the phrase “final resolution”, being applied to ethnic/racial problems, has been viewed as a synonym for genocide. One needs to learn to live with ethnic problems in such a way that they cause as few headaches as possible, for all groups of citizens. But it must be also ensured that “pain-killers” do not cause addiction which may undermine legal and moral foundations of the state.

I think that methods of formal institutionalization of ethnic identity within the state (such as ethnic quotas or ethnic federalism) should only be used if there is absolutely no other way and an open conflict serves as the only alternative. On the other hand, one should not overlook the fear of integration, as many ethnic minorities identify it with assimilation. There is still no alternative but to reconcile the interests of integration (which is a sine qua non for the existence of a democratic society based on rule of law) with the interests of the preservation of ethnic “otherness” (which minorities will hardly give up). Such reconciliation is only possible on the basis of good will and common sense. Formal institutionalization of ethnic identity may be dangerous but it is equally dangerous to ignore the reality, such as the fact that most residents of some regions in Georgia do not speak Georgian and will not speak the language in the foreseeable future.

Defining specific and feasible terms that makes civil integration possible is a multifaceted process in which attitudes of both the majority and minorities is equally important. The majority must not hope that it can simply put down the rules that minorities will have to obey. Such a naive desire was illustrated by a draft law stipulating that all citizens of Georgia shall speak Georgian. The assumption was that once it was law, everyone would learn the language. But it cannot work this way.

On the other hand, minorities should not hope that a “good guy” from the outside (for instance the Council of Europe) can force Georgia to adopt good rules (for instance, ratify the convention on the rights of ethnic minorities) and then enforce them. The convention may be ratified one day, but it will not change the reality any more than the ratification of many previous conventions did.

First of all, the majority should understand that true integration of minorities in Georgia is only possible if the majority has an open mind about it. Today many minority representatives speak about ethnic quotas or territorial autonomy because they do not see any other solutions. They are not in a hurry to learn Georgian because they deem, not groundlessly, that fluency in Georgian will hardly improve their chances for success and they will be treated as “aliens” anyway. Besides, they fear that after learning Georgian, they may hear many unpleasant things about themselves in this language. As long as Georgian officials regard an Armenian grandmother or a patronymic Arshakovich to be a factor for discredit, the Armenian community in Georgia (as well as the Azeri, Ukrainian, German or any other ethnic communities) is quite right to demand quotas or autonomy, and its arguments are hard to dispute.

But let it also be said that the strategy of minorities is equally important. Many may be annoyed to be constantly reminded of the need to speak Georgian. Psychologically, this is quite understandable. However, it is a matter of common sense that any citizen of Georgia, like citizens of any other country, will have fewer chances for success if he/she is unable to speak the dominant language of the society. Even the most liberal ethnic policy cannot compensate for a lack of language fluency. Territorial autonomy is not a sufficient solution either, since residents of autonomous enclaves will have to leave them from time to time. Many actions by the majority may cause fair protests, but self-isolation in an ethnic ghetto may produce only illusory solutions. It would be fruitless to hope that either the majority of the Georgian society or the “good guys” from the international community will ever support legalizing such ghettos.

In order to learn how to tackle these problems, one needs first to learn how to discuss them (without fisticuffs and hysterics). When it comes to ethnic identity problems the Georgian public discourse is still dominated by the “ostrich approach”: objectively, there are no problems, there are just a couple of “bad guys” or “too ambitious individu-

als” who are eager to create such problems (with the support of evil “third forces” of course). I think, however, that papers published in this small book show that we are starting to pull our head out of the sand, however slowly and carefully.

Particular case I: Parties of ethnic minorities

This article does not intend to work out a general concept of an ethnic policy in Georgia. Stepanian and Khalilov’s as well as Stepanian and Mirzoev’s articles in this publication include some very interesting ideas for such a concept. The draft of a civil integration concept of Georgia seems somewhat too general for me, but it contains some useful ideas as well. However, I don’t want to limit myself to a general description of the existing situation or a discussion of general principles. I would like to elaborate, by way of illustration, two specific and rather sensitive points. These are only particular cases: by dwelling on them I am not trying to hint that other aspects of ethnic policy are less significant.

The first is the issue of the establishment of political parties of ethnic minorities. Creation of such parties is resisted in Georgia (as mentioned in the Stepanian and Khalilov articles). The history of the Virk party is a good example. This party was founded in Javakheti as a party of ethnic Armenian citizens of Georgia. The word *Virk* means “northern country,” i. e. Georgia, in ancient Armenian. The Javakheti activists claim that it was Georgian government representatives who first encouraged them to create such a party, envisaging it as a political organization in the Armenian community of Javakheti in support of President Eduard Shevardnadze and his party, the Citizens Union of Georgia. That is why it was the local political-oligarchy elite, seeking to demonstrate its loyalty to the regime, that were the first to enlist in the party. It came out, however, that the idea was not coordinated with Tbilisi well enough: the Ministry of Justice turned away several attempts to formally register Virk in compliance with the Law on Political Association of the Citizens of Georgia. Before one of the attempts, the party leaders even renamed it “Zari” (“Bell” in Georgian), but in vain. The Ministry of Justice invariably stated that law bans the creation of regional political parties. However, the party leaders claim that the Virk has regional offices in many parts of Georgia, including Tbilisi, and

that they outnumber the similar offices of most other registered parties (there are dozens of political parties in Georgia).

If it is true (and I tend to believe that it is) that the Georgian government first urged the Javakheti residents to found such a party and then refused to register it, this case once again illustrates that the Georgian political elite does not even have general guidelines for an ethnic policy (at least there were no such principles in the time of Shevardnadze and Citizens Union of Georgia). But what *should* the policy be on this particular issue?

The Georgian political elite staunchly oppose the idea ethnic minority political parties. The creation of such parties is seen as a step towards separatism, territorial or psychological. The initiative to found such a party looks twice as dangerous when it comes from Javakheti, as many in Tbilisi believe that this region has great separatist potential. To some extent, the activities of the Virk vindicate such fears: the Virk calls for the territorial autonomy of Javakheti, while few in Georgia have any doubt that this demand is a step towards separatism. Reports that “demands for autonomy are raised in Javakheti” are usually substantiated by quotations from Virk leader David Rstakian’s interviews. It’s a small wonder that authorities use all sorts of pretexts to deny the registration of such a party.

Is the creation of ethnically based political parties desirable? If the question were asked on the level of the theory of democracy, my answer would be no. In a healthy democracy, political parties should differ in the ways they propose to solve problems that exist in common public space. If parties differ in ethnic origin rather than in the opinions of their members, it is legitimate to ask whether such a common public space exists at all. Had parties of white, Hispanic, Arab, Chinese, or African-Americans competed for seats in the US Congress instead of Democrats and Republicans, America would be a totally different country: I for one would like it much less. Americans themselves can hardly imagine such a possibility: it would too nightmarish for them. Had an Arab party been created in today’s France or a Turkish party in Germany, and respective constituencies started to vote for them rather than mainstream political parties, it would be a sign of a serious crisis for democratic institutions in these countries.

This makes me understand why the Georgian political elite (including people who genuinely support the development of democratic insti-

tutions and the integration of minorities into society) do not want ethnic parties to emerge in Georgia: it is really out of line with the liberal ideal. It does not mean, however, that the creation of such parties should be resisted by simply banning them. As I mentioned above, the establishment of such parties indicates that the existence of the common civil space is in question. But we do not need the story of Virk to know that there is no common civil space in Georgia; at minimum minorities have yet to be integrated into it. When ones placing obstacles to hinder the creation – more exactly, the registration – of such parties, this continues the old Soviet practice of fighting with indicators, rather than problems. In other words, it is another demonstration of the ostrich behavior. Those who practice this ostrich mentality fail to realize the obvious fact that if conditions for a serious separatist movement are created in one of the regions, lack of registration in the Ministry of Justice in Tbilisi will not help: Georgia could have learned this from its own bitter experience.

Developed democracies do not have ethnic or ethno-regional parties not because they are banned, but because there is no need for such parties or because such parties would not be viable. It would be more correct to say that such parties can be created but they would not play any serious role because the existing national parties successfully represent the interests of various groups of citizens, and ethnic minorities can find “their” parties among them. In some developed countries, ethnic or ethno-regional parties do have some role: this is true for Great Britain or, to a greater extent, for Spain. This indicates that some groups of people in these countries have problems integrating. But these problems are not caused by parties, exactly the contrary is true. Experience in post-Communist countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia, et.) shows that the creation of ethnic or ethno-regional parties does not exacerbate existing problems.

Such parties are not just demonstrate challenges in civil integration. They usually help discuss these problems in a civilized manner and may even contribute to finding some solutions. In some cases (for instance, Latvia) unsuccessful attempts to create ethnic parties demonstrated to ethnic minorities that such a strategy is unproductive and they should opt for other methods to defend their interests – for instance, by appealing to mainstream national parties. Even if this is true, however, ethnic minorities should be given a chance to come to this conclusion on their own.

In effect, ethnic minorities do not participate in Georgian political life today: they have almost no representatives among activists in political parties. The Citizens' Union of Georgia used to create an illusory solution to the problem by including a certain number of "nomenklatura minority representatives" on its election lists. These representatives then formed a group of "deaf-mute" MPs, who were unable to take part in legislative activities simply because they did not understand the working language of the parliament. However, it was possible to report that ethnic minorities had a certain number of representatives in Parliament. It seems that the National Movement has decided to abandon this tactic. But what are the alternatives? Is it better to wait until minorities are integrated and political activists emerge among them naturally? This will hardly happen any time soon, for several reasons, some of which are described in this paper. Until that time minorities will have to put up with their political marginalization. But will they be willing to? The current situation will continue: Most ethnic minority voters will, in fact, ignore elections, as they will not understand them and will not be interested in them, while ethnic minority areas will remain prone to mass rigging of elections (why should their votes remain wasted?). In the meantime, minorities will start to "wake up" through creating registered or unregistered political organizations – in all likelihood with nationalistic agendas – because it is impossible to isolate them from ongoing democratization processes in the country.

The creation of ethnic parties in today's Georgia – provided ethnic minorities themselves want to establish them – may even contribute to their integration. These parties will soon realize that they can hardly achieve any results without a coalition with national parties (those who disagree may look at the table in the beginning of this article). On the other hand, national Georgian parties will understand that cooperation with ethnic parties – or at least incorporating their demands – is a prerequisite for winning minority votes.

Either national political parties actively try to involve real (not symbolic) representatives of ethnic minorities who will present the true problems and concerns of minority groups, or the government should allow ethnic minorities to create their "own" parties to voice these concerns. Failure to follow one of these options is a sure way to create a crisis in the long run.

Particular case II: the problem of “non-Georgian” schools

In every country the public education system is a major, and maybe the principal, instrument of ethnic or integration policies. It is commonplace to say that the public school system bears the primary responsibility for raising citizens in a country. Georgia has inherited the Soviet system of schools, with minor modifications. There are schools operating in different languages (Georgian, Russian, Armenian, Azeri, and Ossetian). In practical terms this implies that the Georgian education system facilitates disintegration trends in the society.

At several meetings focused on the problems discussed here, I have said that the system of “non-Georgian” schools nurtures future émigrés. I was told that some representatives of minority organizations felt offended by my statements, since in their opinion I encroached on the right of ethnic minorities to receive an education in their native languages. I am not going to question this right at all. But I will try to tackle the issue based on common sense.

The Soviet school used to bring up Soviet citizens, but it did so in different languages. Russian schools were for everybody while “national schools” were for respective minorities: Georgian schools – for ethnic Georgians, Armenian schools – for ethnic Armenians, Azeri schools – for ethnic Azeris, etc. The Georgian system of education has undergone some changes since the country became independent. Particularly, (1) the Soviet ideology and respective subjects, such as the history of the USSR, were removed from the school curricula; (2) earlier, some Georgian parents used to send their kids to Russian schools, as Russian was the language of a successful career, but today few of them do; (3) there are some changes in the curricula of Georgian schools, as they are supposed to teach citizens of the state, whose character on the one hand is Georgian and on the other democratic. But “non-Georgian” schools were only marginally touched by these changes. Most importantly, public stereotypes that determine parents’ choices of school for their kids remains unchanged: ethnic Georgians are supposed to study in Georgian schools, ethnic Armenians – in Armenian schools, ethnic Azeri – in Azeri schools, and everybody (in the new reality, this implies all ethnic minorities) has the option to study in ethnic Russian schools. This implies that (real)

Georgians are brought up by Georgian schools, while other schools raise “non-Georgians.”

The Georgian society and state actually function only in Georgian. In other words, Georgian is the only actual and possible language for civil integration in Georgia. Given the general attitudes of the Georgian society, as well as the ethno-demographic statistics, it would be hard to expect this to change. Other languages may be used in public life in ethnic enclaves but it remains specific for those areas. However, the Georgian language is taught in non-Georgian schools for several hours a week only. Moreover, there are no sufficient professional, or semi-professional, teachers of Georgian even for such a small number of classes. No Georgian is used in these schools other than during language lessons. All other subjects are taught in non-Georgian languages. In effect, Georgian is taught in non-Georgian schools as a foreign language. This corresponds with the above-described stereotype: since non-Georgian schools are for ethnic minorities, Georgian is a foreign language for them. Many of us remember from the past Soviet experience that the curriculum of an ordinary Soviet school was not designed to give fluency in a foreign language: those who really wanted to learn a language went to specialized schools, foreign language institutes or private tutors.

In the early 1990s the Ministry of Education of Georgia made an unprecedented decision: since the Georgian government lacked funds to publish textbooks even for Georgian secondary schools, it appealed to the “historical homelands” of minorities – Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia – to supply textbooks to respective non-Georgian schools by way of a temporary exception. The historical homelands gladly agreed. This sent a clear message to minorities: as you are not really Georgians, let your historical (i. e. genuine) homelands take care of you. By this decision by the Georgian government shot itself in the foot, since it ran contrary to any civil integration policy. This practice was never revised during Shevardnadze’s rule.

The reality in today’s Georgia’s is that all state agencies function exclusively in Georgian (save for two unlawful exceptions in two regions of Javakheti); few opportunities remain to receive a higher education in minority languages (it is much easier to get such an education in English – if, of course, English can be considered a minority language); those unable to speak Georgian have great difficulty in finding a job; almost all mass media uses only Georgian. Under these circum-

stances, by maintaining the system of non-Georgian schools, the Georgian state excludes its would-be citizens from the society and denies them a chance of success in their own country. Using more radical terms, one could say that in their current form, non-Georgian schools can be viewed as a tool for slow ethnic cleansing: minorities are actually pushed to emigrate, as this becomes the only reasonable solution for them. An alternative option is separatism: the creation of areas where Georgian is not used at all.

Speaking about “exclusion” or “ethnic cleansing” by no means suggests that the described practice has been deliberately designed to achieve these results. Quite the contrary, Georgian politicians and governmental officials of different ranks proudly quote statistical data on the number of schools and independent sections in minority languages at various meetings and for a and sincerely believe that they thus demonstrate the Georgian government’s respect for the cultural rights of minorities. But this does not change the actual role these schools play. Moreover, the part of the Georgian society which, willingly or unwittingly, tends to support ethnic cleansing as the best solution to the “nationality question” hardly has any reasons to complain about the problems of education in non-Georgian schools.

How should one change this situation? There are two obvious schemes and both should be combined. On the one hand, the government and the society must get rid of the stereotype that Georgian schools are only for ethnic Georgians. No, Georgian schools are for all citizens of the country, regardless of their ethnic origins. To achieve this goal, first of all one should work to change attitudes in the schools themselves, among their teachers. Opponents may say that under the current law there are no problems anyway – parents of any nationality can send their kids to a Georgian school. But this is not enough. Georgian schools must have friendly and open attitudes towards pupils from minority groups. These attitudes must be reflected in the school’s curriculum and teaching practices. For instance, research projects carried out by the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, and its partners in the Kvemo Kartli region revealed that a part of this region’s ethnic Azeri residents were willing to send their children to Georgian schools but were afraid that their kids might be proselytized to convert to Orthodox Christianity. An obvious inference may be drawn from this particular observation: in order to become instruments of civil integra-

tion, Georgian schools must be religiously neutral rather than being designed for Orthodox Christians. The current teaching practice in Georgian schools contradicts this principle.

The teaching of history is another crucial issue in this context. The teaching of history is the cornerstone of civic education in any country's educational system. If so, however, the history of a country should not be only an ethnic history. It should not be limited to cultivating ethnic pride – it is exactly history textbooks that must embed an understanding that Georgia is an historically multiethnic country; that no other kind of Georgia has ever existed; and that citizens of “non-Georgian” ethnic origin have an indispensable place in the past, present, and future of Georgia.

This is the context in which the issue of teaching the histories of “historical” or “ethnic” homelands in schools for ethnic minorities, which is highlighted in Stepanian and Mirzoyev's articles, should be discussed. Given the significance of history studies for civic education, hardly any country will be excited by the idea to include “alien” history into the curriculum of its schools (providing, of course, that they are not seen as schools for future émigrés). Moreover, these history textbooks may be written on the basis of ethnocentric positions and the interpretation of some issues will probably contradict what is taught in Georgian history textbooks. On the other hand, it is natural to assume that pupils in Armenian or Azeri schools can be hardly satisfied to learn only the history of Georgia if it is written as the history of ethnic Georgians.

Another direction of reforms in the education system is a thorough overhaul of so-called “non-Georgian” schools. It is fully appropriate that the state provides guarantees for relatively large ethnic minorities to receive an education in their native languages, which implies not only granting permits or licenses for private schools in these languages (this is obvious), but also by allocating funds for such schools. The system of education should provide ethnic minorities a real opportunity to preserve their cultural and linguistic identities. That is why the system of non-Georgian schools must be preserved in principle. However, when state-run schools are the issue, they must at the same time prepare future citizens of Georgia who will be able to enter Georgian universities (that function in Georgian), work in Georgian organizations, serve in the Georgian army, watch Georgian TV; in short, to be equal and competitive members of the Georgian society. Therefore, school

graduates should be able to speak the official language of the country fluently, effectively as well as they speak their native languages. Particular changes in school curriculum, which should be implemented to achieve these goals, must be discussed separately, but in any case the changes should be quite fundamental.

Of course, these changes are hard to implement and need time. In the first case – reform of Georgian schools – obstacles are likely to be mainly political and psychological. The second case will pose the same obstacles, but in addition they will require substantive financial and organizational resources, and a long period of time. As the first step, however, it is necessary to recognize a need to move in this direction or, at least, to discuss the need for such reforms. By merely putting up with the current situation one is preparing for future conflicts.

Condition of Ethnic Minorities in the Georgian Society

**Arnold Stepanian
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This paper takes into account more than three years worth of experience in the Public Movement Multinational Georgia. It is based on individual interviews held during different periods, discussions in focus-groups, analysis of official documentation, mass-media, declarations and appeals by public organizations and political parties.

1. Introduction

The heritage of the recent past

After gaining independence, radical nationalist forces came into power in Georgia. They were oriented towards establishing some form of “ethnocracy.” During the short period of their authority the conditions faced by ethnic minorities drastically changed for the worse. Rhetoric of ethnic nationalism that accompanied the liberation movement of 1989-1991 laid the groundwork for tension. As a result of this policy, the society was faced a real threat of breaking up. All of this had an impact on all regions of Georgia with compact settlements of ethnic minorities. Nationalistic and corrupt groups in the regions populated both with ethnic majorities and ethnic minorities, took advantage of secessionist incentives and managed to agitate the national feelings of the people. It caused, on the one hand, a territorial division of the country and on the other it split the society into many parts. Two ethno-territorial conflicts resulted in the creation of two self-declared republics, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, stretching over 15% of the entire territory of Georgia, as well as the expulsion of ethnic Georgians from these territories. During the same period some ethnic minorities were expelled from the places of their compact settlement (Azerbaijani-populated villages of Kvemo Kartli and Shida Kartli, Ossetians from Kakheti and the migrant ethnic Georgians from Western regions were settled there).

In other cases, some regions of compact settlements (Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli) established an orientation of the autonomous development of local communities, mostly against the background of total inaction and negligence from the side of the central authorities. During this same period ethnic minorities with a dispersed or compact arrangement of settlements that didn't represent the majority of the population started to unite themselves into organizations, in order to secure their cultural and language identity. Those organizations looked like "strongholds" rather than non-governmental organizations and they unintentionally started a process of self-isolation from the rest of the population, establishing the illusion of protection and psychological comfort.

The process of the state development and ethnic relations

Inter-ethnic relations are a pressing problem for Georgia today, as they coincide with the process of the establishment of a nation-state.

After declaring independence, Georgia found itself in an unordinary situation. A declaration of independence not only coincided with the collapse of the USSR, but also, at the same time became the result of this process. Georgia declared its sovereignty by backing it with legal grounds. In a very short time the state had received all necessary signs of statehood—territory, frontiers, parliament, government, legislation, army, judicial power, national emblem, anthem etc. Despite the problems it faced, Georgia found the courage to affirm itself. However, contrary to a classical scheme of state development, wherein a society gradually matures and shapes itself politically to establish a state, the sequence of events was different in Georgia: First the state had been established and then the process of shaping a Georgian society started.

The process of forming a new state and a new society, first of all, should be based on a common idea that consolidates the public and serves as a foundation for stability. It's obvious that in a multi-ethnic country this idea should be acceptable for all citizens, regardless of their ethnic affiliation.

Establishment of a new Georgian statehood depends on several complicated processes and problems in the field of the ethnic self-identification of ethnic groups in Georgia and inter-ethnic relations:

1. Alternatives in a theory of approaches and practical movement of the society to the political or ethnic determination of the national
2. The problem of ethnic self-identification within the Georgian ethnic (right up to separatist movements)
3. The problems of identification of some ethnic groups as ethnic minorities and re-identification of others as an ethnic minority, but within another state.

It should be mentioned that ethno-political consequences turned out to be rather unexpected for Georgia. Development of a new state still has not led to significant progress in integrating (consolidating) the society.

2. Major problems facing ethnic minority populations

As was already mentioned, currently there are some regions, cities and settlements with compact settlements of ethnic minorities, including Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Pankisi Gorge and Tbilisi (the first two territories are effectively not under the jurisdiction of Georgia at this moment'. The level of transaction and cooperation between the populations of those regions is brought down to minimum. Horrible consequences that followed the conflicts in the Caucasus (conflict in Nagorny Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan; Georgian-Abkhaz, Georgian-Ossetian'; Russian-Chechen conflicts and other negative developments, like the deportation of Meskhetian Turks from Georgia in the 1940s; tensions between Ossetians and Kisti (ethnic Chechens) in Pankisi Gorge; the recent emigration of Dukhobors (Russian ethnic) from Samtskhe-Javakheti to Russia; and the complicated situation between the Greeks and displaced migrants (ethnic Georgians) in the Tsalka region, existence of a language barrier, lack of information from different regions of Georgia, complicated access to central media to the regions, lack of transport communication to the regions (except Tbilisi) – all the aforementioned things are not likely to encourage favorable conditions either for the development of inter-ethnic relations in the regions mentioned above or for inter-regional relations in a whole country.

Ethnic communities and the degree of their integration

An interesting situation has been established within ethnic groups. Each ethnic-group that is compactly settled in aforementioned regions is internally heterogeneous. For example, Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli are getting education in the Azeri language, but the Azerbaijani population in Shida Kartli studies in Georgian. Armenians that are residents of Tbilisi are more integrated with the Georgian community than the Armenians in Samtkhe-Javakheti (most of them do not speak Georgian); given the position of Armenians in Abkhazia, they have no positive experience of relations with the rest of Georgia over last decade. The same is true for the Russian Community. The Greek community is divided into two parts – Greek speaking and Turkic speaking. The Jewish community is represented by Georgian – speaking Jews, mountainous Jews, who speak one of the dialects, and Ashkenasi Jews who mostly speak Russian. There is a certain opposition between Kurds and Yezids. Parts of them consider themselves Kurds by nationality but Yezids by religion. Part recognizes themselves as Yezids by nationality; both of these groups speak one of the Kurmandji dialects.

The role of the educational system

On this extremely important subject, see the article by Stapanian and Mirzoev in this publication.

Linguistic barriers

The so called linguistic barrier has always been and still remains one of the most serious problems to develop within inter-ethnic cooperation. First of all, it entails the ethnic Georgian and ethnic non-Georgian populations. We are fully aware that the lack of knowledge of the Georgian language, a heritage of the Soviet regime, is the most serious problem that deprives representatives of ethnic minorities to participate in the political and social life of the country. If the problem of learning Georgian is more or less solved at the secondary school level, this issue is still acute with regards to adults. The necessity of knowing Georgian is evident, as the lack of knowing a state language complicates relations with state agencies, impedes opportunities in the labor market, estab-

lishes poor grounds for self-realization and, as a result, becomes a barrier in relations between our multi-language countrymen.

Sociological analysis proves that ethnic minorities are ready to learn the Georgian language if there are adequate condition for the teaching process—teachers, text-books or manuals for self-tutoring etc. It's desirable to develop a network of training courses, especially in the places with compact settlements of ethnic minorities. Let's see how this problem will be designed within the framework of a law On State Language that will be discussed in future.

Emigration

This is a paradoxical problem: children from families of ethnic minorities are getting educated at ethnic schools in their native language and after leaving schools, the most talented ones are emigrating to their historical homeland or are lost in the crowd. I. e. the existing language filter restricts them from finding prestigious social opportunities.

Civil Education

Legal and civil education are some of the best opportunities to involve ethnic minorities in the process of developing Georgia. Many problems and deficiencies in the process of integration take root from a lack of legal and civil education among ethnic minorities. In particular, many ethnic minorities do not feel any commitment or obligations toward the state and this is mostly caused by a lack of legal education and a lack of knowledge of one's own rights. That lays a good foundation for self-exclusion, partial isolation and poor involvement of ethnic minorities in social and political life. Even the more active representatives of the ethnic minorities do not obtain information regarding the mechanisms of protection of minority rights or even legal normative acts in Georgia. Some of them have no idea even about the existence of certain norms in internal or international law.

The scope of involvement of the representatives of ethnic minorities at all levels of state management and social life

Today more than 120 ethnic minority NGOs are functioning in the country. Unfortunately, some of them represent only attachments to

political organizations or do not operate at all. The participation of those NGOs in the social life of the country is negligible. In this regard we have witnessed a certain amount of progress and intensification of their activities over last 2-3 years. We can hardly say anything about the participation of ethnic minorities at the state management level, as they occupy very few positions in the higher echelons of state power. For example, in 1999-2003 the number of ethnic minorities within the supreme legislative body of the country did not exceed 6% of the total number of deputies. This same trend of inadequate participation exists within the agencies of local self-governance with mixed populations. Local observers, as well as international experts from organizations like the Council of Europe and the UN have repeatedly noted these deficiencies. In short, there is evidence of failed integration of representatives of ethnic minorities into governmental, legislative and administrative structures and that entails a substantial risk of future instability.

In this context we also have to mention the problem of individuals with mixed ethnic origin involved in higher levels of power. Ten years have passed since the regime of nationalists was overthrown and more and more people appear toting the slogans that Georgia has forgotten already. There is an attempt to make Georgia step aside from inter-ethnic reconciliation efforts and put issues regarding a pure blood and ethnic affiliation on the agenda. This new wave is raised and supported by some politicians, regional and other leaders.

At the outset of a third millennium, our society still looks for extrinsic elements in the human genes acknowledging them as defective who would do best just to reside quietly in Georgia. Politicization of ethnic affiliation becomes one of the most effective tools in evaluating the accessibility of a person to the process of state management. The non-Georgian ethnic origin of the mother of the former Chairman of the Georgian Parliament Zurab Zhvania was actively used against him by his political opponents. At the same time some politicians, who possess the most progressive image of the society, when speaking about democracy and equal treatment, often try to gain from ethnic themes. Such conduct breeds inter-ethnic discord and increases tensions in society.

Unfortunately such an approach is within the interest of many of the elite, which in fact breeds intolerance and divides in the society onto “the first class” and “the second class.” It’s twice as bad that all

aforementioned ideas are often supported by the media, sometimes even with undisguised allegations regarding inter-ethnic hostility and tension.

Relations between the population and law enforcement bodies

The fact that many representatives of ethnic minorities often complain of a discriminative attitude taken by law enforcement bodies toward them indicates that the problem is especially acute. Due to the fact that very few representatives of ethnic minorities work in state structures (both at local and national levels) they feel estranged from the state. The problem is especially painful with respect to law enforcement bodies, as citizens get in touch with representatives from these structures most frequently.

Georgian Army

Representatives of ethnic minorities serve in the Georgian Army together with other citizens of this country. However, there are specific issues with this respect. They are revealed when ethnic origins coincide with regional ones. Frequent misunderstandings between soldiers often occur, primarily with ethnic Azerbaijanis originating from Kvemo-Kartli. The percentage of ethnic Armenians originating from Samtskhe-Javakheti province who evade their service in the army is also high.

The problem of land

The 21-km border zone where land cannot be privatized in accordance with Georgian legislation causes serious dissatisfaction among the ethnic communities of Georgia. As regions predominantly populated by ethnic minorities of Georgia are mainly situated along the borders (Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions), the population of the regions sometimes regards the creation of such a zone as a farfetched pretext for denying the residents of the mentioned regions a transfer of land for ownership.

Access to information

In order to take part in the life of a state, one has to have access to information on the situation in that country. This is a basic political

right. A lack of information creates conditions for the dissemination of distorted reports on the situation in the country. This may be manifested in attributing ethnic coloring to problems caused by the ineffectiveness of the state social programs, economic underdevelopment, and so on. In spite of the fact that 21 newspapers and four magazines for the non-Georgian population are published in Georgia in the languages of these ethnic minorities, editions are often unavailable for the majority of ethnic minorities. Besides, many of them are not constructive, as they are not independent and fulfill the political orders of parties, clans, and internal and external forces. This serves to add fuel to the fire. Local television stations are unable to organize news programs in minority languages. To a certain degree, this is due to the problems caused by the legislation, according to which most of the programs of local televisions must be in Georgian.

The factor of historical motherlands

Under the conditions of low civil culture and the weakness of the central authorities, the factor of the historical homelands of ethnic minorities can play a negative role, especially if regions predominantly populated by ethnic minorities border with them (Javakheti borders at Armenia, and Kvemo-Kartli with Azerbaijan). Incorporation of entire regions into linguistic and cultural space of neighboring countries continues.

Infrastructure

The poor condition of roads between regions of compact settlements of ethnic minorities and the capital city, as well as between other regions of Georgia, deepens the isolation of the mentioned regions and consequently reduces the number of opportunities to establish good cooperation between the majority and minorities.

3. Political environment, favorable for minorities in their relations with the state and in a larger regional and global context

Federal arrangement and the autonomy problem

Projects regarding a federal arrangement of the country have been discussed in Georgia over the country's last period. However, there has been no coherent concept formulated so far. It is at this level that traditional problems of the protection of the rights of ethnic minorities grow into administrative and territorial ones especially when the problem of regional self-government is raised in the areas they predominantly occupy. The problems of the regional languages' status and others are usually connected with this approach.

Opponents of federalization are afraid of a growth in ethnocratic and separatist tendencies in the areas predominantly populated by minorities. On the other hand, supporters of federalism in Georgia probably base their ideas not on the ethnic diversity of Georgia but on the requirements of the social and economic development of regions.

Supporters of federalization have strong arguments on their side. However, one should find a right balance between devolution of power to the regions and maintaining control at the national level. Otherwise, favorable conditions may breed to local, unbridled Mafia-clans, sometimes with ethnocratic coloring.

Difficulties are more numerous with regards political aspect of minority problems. We have to deal with the installment of civil peace in the autonomies. The Abkhazian and Adjarian autonomies will gain special political status within the framework of the proposed federalization. Parliament consisting of two chambers has also been discussed. An Abkhazian representative will head one of its chambers – the senate. However, the problem has not been elaborated theoretically or judicially. The discussion is limited only to political statements.

The state's respect for the right of nations towards self-determination, which can be implemented in different ways, is an important condition here. Its implementation should not contradict the sovereignty, state arrangement, territorial integrity or political independence of Georgia and should be based on equal rights for all citizens.

Attempts for a peaceful settlement of the conflicts are made in conjunction with the UN and OSCE. Georgia's position is as follows: maintaining the principle of unity and territorial integrity of this country while creating, through bilateral talks, conditions for maximum rights for Abkhazians and Ossetians in the framework of the existing state. This approach is in accord with the recognized norms of international law.

Many European states have walked a path which was not at all sown with roses. Special, time-tested constitutional provisions and individual laws govern the relations of the center with administrative-territorial and ethnic-territorial entities.

Theoretically, the population of the two regions predominantly populated by ethnic minorities, Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti may raise the problem of autonomies in Georgia today. We have deliberately omitted two conflict regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the region, which is already autonomous – Adjara. The question of autonomy for regions predominantly populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis has not been raised during the last years. However, there are signs that there is a potential for nationalistic moods in the Azerbaijani community. The autonomy issue is more frequently discussed in Samtskhe-Javakheti. There are several factors that play certain role in this respect. The following ones are specific for the Samtskhe-Javakheti province only: the presence of the Russian military base in the region; the lack of stable communications with the rest of Georgia; a common border with Turkey.

Human Rights legislation in Georgia in the field of ethnic minorities

It is clear that a country like Georgia has to be tolerant, as this is the only possible way of ensuring the state's firm internal stability which will enable its progressive development.

Minority rights are quite clearly provided in the Constitution of this country. Chapter II of the Constitution contains a list of rights and freedoms of the citizens of Georgia and any other persons under its jurisdiction.

We mean in particular Article 14, which declares equality and equal protection of the law for everyone, irrespective of their ethnic, linguistic or religious affiliation or other racial characteristics. Article 38 of the

Constitution is especially important in the context of the discussed problem. According to it, all citizens of Georgia have equal rights in the economic, political, cultural and other fields of life of the society, while minorities have the guaranteed right of free development of their languages, cultures and traditions. It is true, however, that the same article of the Constitution contains a reservation, according to which the exercise of the minority rights should not be contrary to the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of Georgia. To put it in other words, the Constitution provides for broad rights of cultural autonomy for the minorities, leaving no room for separatist aspirations.

Many Georgian laws contain provisions prohibiting any form of discrimination. Article 142 of the Criminal Code discusses the illegal nature of acts which cause grave violations of rights and freedoms of ethnic minorities.

Georgia has undertaken serious international commitments in the field of minority rights by joining the International Pact of Civil and Political Rights, the Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the European Convention of Human Rights and Basic Freedoms. Besides, it should be kept in mind that according to the Constitution, international agreements signed by Georgia are legally predominant over national standard acts. Also, the mentioned agreements have a legal force in the legislative system of Georgia. To put it in other words, no national laws are necessary to implement them except in some rare cases. Consequently, the international agreements can be directly appealed in national courts.

The country can be proud of the democratic character of the adopted laws. However, they are implemented badly. The gradual alienation of legal acts from the real situations prevailing in society can lead to undesirable consequences. After 75 years of "frozen" conditions, the state and the society are obviously unable to apprehend innumerable democratic achievements of the humanity at this time. It is true, however, that the presence of this relative potential gives hopes of a speedy democratization of the society, if the international community increases its direct involvement in the process of comprehensive development of the state. We are sure that under our conditions, we are still a rather long way from having in practice the level of equality that is provided by law.

Political parties

Ethnic minorities are now unable to shape their relations with the state at the highest political level. As the legislation of Georgia prohibits political parties to be formed on an ethnic, as well as regional basis, ethnic minorities are devoid of the possibility to affect the political atmosphere in this country in an organized way.

Shaping ethnic policies of Georgia

Recognition of the multiethnic and multicultural nature of Georgian society, as well as recognition of the value of the fact, are key principles in shaping an ethnic policy in Georgia that could normalize the relations between minorities and the state. It should be recognized that the cultural and religious diversity of the society is an asset, which ensures cultural richness and minorities should be regarded as inalienable parts of society. Moreover, in a multicultural society, a normal and peaceful life requires the observation of additional conditions, such as:

- Development of civil unity and of policies aimed at the country's integration in the social, ethnic, regional and legal sense
- Creation of a climate of tolerance and intercultural dialogue.

Thanks to these principles, each ethnic group will be able to preserve and develop its identity through culture, language and traditions. At the same time, they will contribute to the integration and consolidation of the Georgian society. Non-observance of these principles can lead to the introduction of elements of federalization in the development of the Georgian society, which is not desirable.

Social stability depends upon the choice of priorities of this or that ethnic minority, upon their organic involvement in the process of the social, economic and political transformation of Georgia.

Relations between the state and its citizens

Within the framework of a process of globalization of the Georgian society, any ethnic minority can achieve a "unity of fate" with ethnic Georgians without feeling estranged. Precise legal relations between individuals and the state, as well as the indisputable equality among citizens, represent the most significant factors of integration. However,

such developments are only achievable through the forming of a civil society and promoting democracy.

Further development depends on the relation between the state and its citizens. Four types of possible interrelations can be underlined:

- The state, possessing the tools of coercion, becomes a potential threat for certain citizens or ethnic minorities
- The citizens act as creators of a democratic state, its legitimating factor
- The citizen depends on the state that secures welfare and protection
- The citizens are members of a cultural community determined by the titled language, history, traditions and lifestyle and this community is protected and cultivated by the state through its cultural institutions and programs.

4. Who is integrating with whom: The answer from the minority perspective

Towards civil unity

However paradoxical this may be, the question of how and based on what conditions should minorities integrate into the Georgian society has never become a topic of serious public discussion. There may be several causes for that. One of them exists in the fact that different ethnic groups in Georgia, with the exception of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, have lived quite peacefully side by side during this period of independence. Consequently, most public attention is concentrated on other urgent problems, political or economic. One could suppose, however, that the explanation lies somehow deeper. After the misfortunes that pounced upon this country during ethnic conflicts in the early 1990s, most ethnic Georgians followed the natural instinct of leaving ethnic problems untouched. They are considered to be too dangerous and delicate. Consequently, people think it is better not to pick at them in the country, which suffers from many other problems. However, such a position can hardly be productive in the long run. The fact that some minorities are in fact alienated from public and

political life in this country is quite evident. Sooner or later, this will surely lead to problems.

Due to the crisis of the Soviet system and the collapse of the USSR in the late 1980s, Georgia and other Soviet republics had to face the problem of creating nation-states. Of course, the situation stimulated the national consolidation of the Georgian public and manifested in the growth of national self-consciousness, the rise of the national-liberation movement and the revival of Georgian nationalism. Under such conditions, the choice for a concept for national consolidation depended upon responses to basic questions of social and psychological (*Who are we?*), and political (*What is Georgia?*) identification – are we an ethnic or civil nation state? The latter defined the form of the future national and state order, as well as all specific matters connected with interethnic relations within the republic. Civil nations that “include” (for example, America, France) are based on the “law of soil” and identify culture as a basis of unity without any indication to common origin. In such cases, the state can even permit the existence of other nations within itself in an attempt to establish a broader feeling of unity that embraces the entire population of the state. This means that participation in the common political culture is a characteristic feature of the civil concept of a nation.

Meanwhile, “excluding” nations (for example, German) are based on the “law of blood” and view common origin, in the final analysis biology, as a basis for national unity. They emphasize components like genealogy, populism, traditions, and language. The ethnic concept of a nation tends to replace the legal codes and institutions that make the foundation of a civil nation with traditions and dialects. Even the common culture and the “civil religion” (patriotism) of a civil nation have got their equivalents in the ethnic concept.

In the Georgian context, representatives of ethnic communities have rather different approaches on issues relating to prospects and conditions of civic integration in this country. For example, representatives of small ethnic groups (Kurds, Yezids, Assyrians, Ossetians) tend to demand certain guarantees for ethnic minorities on the part of the State and the international community, such as the adoption of a law on the protection of the minority rights and ratifying international conventions for the protection of minority rights. Meanwhile, most representatives of the large ethnic communities in Georgia approach the problem in a

different way. They say that the rights ensuing from the mentioned documents and laws will separate them from the public based on their ethnic orientation.

The question of whether nationality should be indicated on the identity cards of citizens of Georgia is also very interesting. From time to time, the problem becomes a playing card in the hands of politicians. Due to the absolute misunderstanding of the difference in meaning of the terms “nation and citizenship”, and “ethnic nation and ethnic nationality”, many representatives of the public (from both the majority and minorities) tend to perceive the elimination of the “nationality” line from official identity cards in the following way: ethnic minorities regard this as an attempt at assimilation on the part of the ethnic majority while the ethnic majority views this as an attempt of encroachment upon the “nation, which shapes the state.” Both the minorities and the majority perceive this as a loss of ethnic identity.

First steps toward civil integration

The first step towards civil integration made by the state was granting citizenship to all people who lived in Georgia in 1993. The Law on Citizenship was the first to define the concept of “citizen of Georgia.” It was based on the so-called zero principle, i. e. all those who lived on the territory of Georgia at the time the law was adopted and did not decline Georgian citizenship officially became citizens of Georgia.

Growth of the Georgian State’s interest in speeding up civil integration was manifested in the creation of the Committee for Civil Integration in the Parliament of Georgia. The committee, in fact, replaced the Parliamentary Committee for the Affairs of National Minorities in 1999. It was a time when a serious discussion of the content of civil integration and a study of its positive and negative sides started in Georgia. Public probation of several possible trends in the integration processes was undertaken at that time as well. Three years later, one could speak of the successful work of the committee. Its activities contributed to the understanding that the prospect of social stability has to be linked to giving preference to a civic, rather than ethnic, concept of the nation.

Integration processes and linguistic problems

Regulation of integration processes is a very important problem countries in the middle of a transitional stage in their development have to face. Some countries face the task of moving from one type of internal integration to a qualitatively new one; others, young and newly formed states, have to start building internal integration from nothing.

Georgia belongs to the second group of states. In the Soviet times, the level of its internal integration was low. This led to a deep political and legal crisis in the post-Soviet period and manifested in open and latent ethnic conflicts.

Unregulated linguistic space is one of the manifestations of such a state of affairs. The problem of strengthening the infrastructure of Georgian as the official language is urgent. It will become one of the major integrating factors. However, it is not duly spread all over the country's territory. Linguistic problems have turned out to be among the most acute ones in the conflicts that persist in the nation.

Correct national language policies should become one of the most important guarantees of stability in the field of interethnic relations in Georgia. Unfortunately, many mistakes have been made in this field during the last 13 years. The state has not backed up the priority given to the official language compared with others, as declared in 1989, by teaching the Georgian language to representatives of ethnic minorities. Due to what was said and, to an equal degree, to the linguistic policy of the Soviet time, ethnic minorities are now facing a linguistic barrier which hinders them from getting actively involved in public and state life. However, this is a problem that persists not just for the minority, but for the majority as well, as it cannot establish contact with part of the country's population. Elaboration, implementation and backup of a correct linguistic policy are of paramount importance for the resolution of this problem. Training of qualified bilingual teachers who know both languages (the one they teach and the one native for their students) equally well could become a part of it.

Anyway, whatever hopes for the future we could have, one thing is clear: civil societies cannot evade solving urgent linguistic problems and elaborating a balanced national linguistic policy under the conditions of rise of ethnicity in the whole world.

Religion

In defining the religious situation and the degree of activation of religious groups, a conclusion offers itself on the growing politicization of different religious confessions, both at the national and local levels. Under these conditions, the state should ensure more profound participation by all confessions existing on the territory of Georgia in the public and political life of this country, thus avoiding the penetration and dissemination by religious extremism that will lead to full disintegration of the society.

Gender issues

The problem of women's rights is quite topical in the ethnic minority regions. Their condition is a subject of concern for the Georgian society. Urgent attention should be paid to the absolute disintegration of women from the societal processes and to the secluded lifestyle of some ethnic and religious groups, such as: Azerbaijanis and Assyrian communities in Kvemo Kartli, the partially Armenian and Dukhobor communities in Samtskhe-Javakheti, the Kurdish community and the Yezids in Tbilisi.

5. Recommendations

Elaboration of complex plan of political and other measures

In order to establish a more favorable political environment for ethnic minorities residing in Georgia at the first stage, it's necessary to work out a complex plan of measures, political and otherwise, aimed at:

- strengthening the institution of citizenship by all available means
- achievement of real equality between the majority and the minority of the population, not only through the establishment of equal starting conditions but aimed at getting final results
- development of the integration process in Georgian society that will secure the national cultural, language and other unique qualities of minorities.

We suppose that such development is in conformity with modern international tendencies and has the capacity to strengthen the Georgian statehood.

Stability of the inter-ethnic relations

The following factors necessary for the stabilization should be strengthened:

- in the political field – equal representation by the ethnic minorities in the structures of state authority;
- in the social-economic sphere – to solve the problems of employment
- in the legal sphere – strengthening of criminal and administrative liabilities in cases of nationalism and abuses of ethnic dignity
- in the cultural and language fields – to solve the problems related to the lack of press issues, literature and textbooks in minority languages.

There should also be a system of measures implemented with regards to the regulation of interethnic relations, in particular:

- regular monitoring of conflict situations
- establishment of an organizational basis for early prevention and removal of ethnic tensions (e.g., inter-ethnic councils)
- support to the organizations of ethnic minorities
- a system of measures securing ideological support of the above measures (e.g., through mass media)

State agencies should constantly monitor the situation of the inter-ethnic relations through research institutions.

Plentitude and freedom of identification

A greater level of identification of Georgian residents with the common civic system does not imply the assimilation process, but provides for freedom of identification – distinctions between ethnic, religious and national components of the identification.

Each identity can be pursued and expressed in a free manner.

Elaboration of a program for combined civil education

A long-term civic education program for ethnic minorities should be elaborated in order to strengthen the process of civic integration (including learning of the state language, conflict awareness, political awareness, jurisprudence etc.). The program should be equipped with adequate methodologies on civic education, training courses at the schools and universities, at the state agencies for non-Georgian civil servants, and, finally, a network of multiethnic resource centers should be established in every region of Georgia with compact settlements of ethnic minorities.

Reforms in the education system

Development and changes of the education system at schools should encompass:

- Training of qualified bilingual teachers that are fluent in the language of the schoolchildren and in a taught language.
- Establishment of experimental schools for ethnic minorities, teaching specific subjects in Georgian, except literature and native language.

The Ministries of Culture and Education should be responsible for providing the education curriculum for secondary schools and universities for ethnic minorities in compliance with the national program of education.

It's necessary to work out textbooks on history in a balanced form of opposite views of ethnic minorities and Georgians regarding the past of Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the whole region.

Strengthening of the position of Georgian language in the regions

Practical measures should be carried out to strengthen the existing infrastructure of the Georgian language in the regions. This requires the elaboration and implementation of effective state programs, proper language policy, a multi-oriented approach to the problem, incorporation of various strata of society in the capital city and in regions with the compact settlement of minorities.

The creation of economic projects may serve as the most important precondition for the strengthening of the position of the Georgian language in the regions that will obtain the regions of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, and will thus establish many well-paid working positions. Paperwork in those enterprises will be in English and in Georgian and this will give more incentives to the population of compact settlements to learn the state language.

It's necessary to establish a group of NGOs for monitoring the state programs on teaching of the state language. In order to secure the status of the Georgian language both state agencies and the non-governmental sector should join efforts; international assistance should be attracted. The state shall allocate more appropriations for this purpose. It's reasonable to establish vocational institutions in Tbilisi as well as in the regions that have a prevailing number of students from ethnic minorities where they will have opportunity to learn the Georgian language alongside other subjects. With this they will have an equal chance to develop their future.

Media

The elaboration of a program on the Georgian language or the elaborations of other programs is not sufficient to overcome the existing stereotypes between the Georgian and non-Georgian population without a supplementary strategy for strengthening the media.

Some proposals for strengthening the role of media in the process of integration are as follows:

- Georgian TV broadcasts should be accessible across the whole territory of Georgia. TV is the most influential means of media but the current infrastructure of TV needs further deliberation; new Georgian programs should be designed and aimed at facilitating the integration of Georgian society;
- The quality of state radio news programs should be improved.
- In accordance with the practice of the EU countries, the state should find adequate finances to support media means running in the languages of ethnic minorities. Bilingual newspapers should also be facilitated. Exchanges among journalists in the Georgian and non-Georgian press would be sufficient.

- Great attention should be paid to the media, TV and radio broadcasting in minority languages that will remove the informational vacuum and speed up the process of civil integration of non-Georgian speaking minorities.
- Improvement of information policies in regards to minorities is a subject of special care. Schoolteachers, community leaders, leaders of young generation should provide information to the community, including key issues of the state policy. In particular, there is a need to impart legal information.

Interregional communication

This implies the development of the existing regional projects and elaboration of new ones aimed at confidence-building and the extension of economic cooperation.

Specific measures should be taken to eliminate regional isolation and development of interregional communication networks. This implies, first of all, the development of communication means in the territories in those compact settlements of minorities, as well as the construction and renovation of motorways and local roads.

Providing information to the Georgian population about ethnic minorities

Georgian society should be better informed about the culture of ethnic minorities residing in Georgia and their role in the country's history. History textbooks should be reviewed and revised. Other sources also have to be applied, such as books, TV etc. It's important to perform similar activities in the Georgian army as the army is an important institution in the building of the state of Georgia, but still fails to carry out this function.

Civic patriotism and political loyalty

Evidently, a multi-national country should provide equal opportunities to all ethnic groups to develop their culture and language and to secure high standards of their ethnic self-consciousness. As a logical consequence (as expression of gratefulness for ethnic-lingual tolerance), this group will also develop civic patriotism and loyalty to the state.

Women's issues

Women's issues are a field of activity for NGOs. Those activities aim at the protection of women's rights should be welcomed. More close contacts and cooperation between groups of women of ethnic minorities and the establishment of a network of women's organizations may become an additional channel for the involvement of minorities in the public life of the state.

Religion

Revival of religion is a sign of civil identification and it should be taken into consideration when elaborating a policy of strengthening inter-political stability and civil integration.

Establishment of state executive bodies

It is necessary to establish state executive bodies to facilitate the implementation of adopted laws in the sphere of human rights protection and the regulation of processes of civil integration and inter-ethnic relations.

Elaboration of an effective policy

Integration of ethnic minorities into the political, economic and social life of Georgia should be a key priority of Georgian policy. This strategy shouldn't oppose guarantees to secure ethnic communities expression of language, culture and religion in a frame, but rather as the members of a community desire it to be. Recent experience shows that there is no direct threat of a forcible assimilation or voluntary assimilation of non-Georgian ethnic groups. The most pressing problem that is a subject of concern of minorities in Georgia is estrangement from several aspects of public-life. Though the Georgian government doesn't exercise any discriminative policy against ethnic minorities, this passivity is not enough against the background of the current situation: a more effective policy should be elaborated, aimed at integration as well as a special plan of action to fulfill this task. I suppose that by having a certain historical condition and reasonable state policy, any ethnic group is capable of preserving ethnic self-consciousness and develop state loyalty. The aforementioned issues call for special attention from

the side of Georgian government, international donors and other interested sides.

Elimination of ethnic-conflict propaganda and ultra-nationalism

The state should take effective measures to prevent inter-ethnic conflicts. To this end, expression of ultra-nationalist sentiment should be suppressed and, on the other hand, activities aimed at inter-cultural education, culture, confidence and mutual respect should be encouraged.

Personnel policy, especially within the law-enforcement agencies

It's vitally important to design a new political-legal strategy that provides ethnic minorities opportunities to participate in the life of the state at all levels in order to have some real influence on the organization and functioning of state authority. The state shall work out a special program for selecting young people from the minorities, willing and capable to work at the state institution and law-enforcement agencies. The state also should provide scholarship and training programs to them.

Rehabilitation

It is necessary to take measures to rehabilitate those individuals who suffered from inter-ethnic conflicts, and restore their right to property.

International community

The international community should support state and public institutions that are ready to encourage the development of the cultural heritage of minorities. It should also augment its participation in the processes of regulation and development of ethnic relations, and to help accelerate civil integration in Georgia.

Situation in the Sphere of Education in national minority languages in Georgia

**Arnold Stepanian
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Statistics

In Georgia there are: 141 Azerbaijani-speaking secondary schools and 8 independent Azerbaijani-speaking sectors attached to other schools, 133 Armenian-speaking schools and 20 independent sectors, 87 Russian-speaking schools and 152 independent sectors, 10 independent Ossetian sectors. Altogether, in Georgia there are 361 so called “non-Georgian-language” schools and 190 independent sectors where languages of instruction are languages of ethnic minorities (here and after statistical data on Abkhazia and South Ossetia will not be included).

General Situation

Today Georgia, which finds itself in such a difficult economic situation, is paying attention to the issue of the education in minority languages. This may be considered as a certain manifestation of respect to and esteem for the cultural and linguistic rights of the citizens of Georgia belonging to different ethnic groups. However, there also exist specific difficulties that thwart all efforts undertaken by the state in the sphere of education of ethnic minorities. These difficulties deserve to be discussed while we are aware of just how deep the challenges faced by the Georgian educational system in general run.

Problems of Textbooks

In many secondary schools where an ethnic minority language is used as the language of instruction textbooks tend to come from different countries – generally the ethnic homelands of a given minority. The education curricula in these countries may not coincide with the standards adopted in Georgia. Many textbooks published in Georgia are

also of poor quality. There is the lack of appropriate and proven educational programs for those establishments where minority languages are applied as languages of instruction. In addition, there are no effective agencies able to work out appropriate curricula.

History Textbooks

State educational institutions operating in minority languages do not include histories of respective historical homelands of ethnic minorities as a mandatory subject in their curricula. However, many minority representatives insist that such subjects be included in a school curriculum. In this case, both the state and the society face a dilemma: introduction of these histories into the school curricula may lead to contradictions within a single school curriculum and contribute to the aggravation of interethnic tensions, as these textbooks (written in respective states) may present and interpret history in a way that comes into an open contradiction with the Georgian history textbooks' interpretation that are part of the same school curricula. On the other hand, ignoring the demands of a part of the population may lead to discontent and erosion of loyalty of ethnic minorities towards the state. One should take into account, at the same time, that histories of historic homelands of ethnic minorities are actually taught in schools, though as an optional subject, and this does not encounter any serious opposition on the part of the state.

Secondary Schools

The quality of education in those secondary schools where language of this or that ethnic minority is applied as the language of instruction is more or less the same as in those schools where instruction is in the official language of Georgia. That can be explained by a number of the aforementioned problems, including the problem of textbooks (the lack of textbooks, their high prices and poor quality), deficit of qualified teachers, especially the catastrophic shortage of teachers of the Georgian language. The latter is caused, in part, by the inability of the state to pay salaries to such teachers in the regions where ethnic minorities are concentrated. At the same time, the absence of special and proven educational programs and of the near absence of high education estab-

lishments where a minority language is the language of instruction may further aggravate the situation and add to feelings of lack of prospects by ethnic minorities.

Bilingual Education

Currently in Georgia, there are bilingual classes in secondary schools where a language of this or that minority group is used as a language of instruction, usage of which is only limited by the teaching the Georgian language as a separate discipline and, in rare cases, by the teaching history of Georgia. Today, a proposal to create experimental bilingual classes is gaining momentum in the society and, naturally enough, this idea has its supporters as well as its opponents.

1. Supporters

The idea of bilingual classes is supported by those representatives of state structures and Georgian intelligentsia, who hope that as a result of such classes, it will be possible to start the real process of integration (or assimilation) of minorities into the social structures of the mainstream population. There are supports of this policy among representatives of ethnic minorities as well. These people are mostly those who live in large towns with mixed population, as well as representatives of a local ethnic minority elite.

2. Opponents

Opponents of the bilingual classes are mostly forces of nationalistic character, both representatives of ethnic minorities and the mainstream population, and they are generally opposed to this idea due to absolutely different reasons: while nationalists from the mainstream population are opposed to the introduction of bilingual schools in order to maintain the existing advantage over ethnic minorities which is sometimes the case in daily life, as well as trigger and encourage the process of emigration of ethnic minorities, nationalists belonging to ethnic minorities are in opposition to the aforementioned novelty out of fear of being assimilated (or integrated?). If we refrain from saying that the existence of the aforementioned category of people in the state structures and organs of local government may have a seri-

ous impact on the future of bilingual schools, at least we can state with certainty that at the moment the state does not possess enough financial and human resources needed for the comprehensive implementation of this idea. At the same time, however strange it may seem, leaders of ethnic minorities are afraid of losing their position and status in the society. The problem is that in those regions where the overwhelming majority is a rural ethnic minority population, this strategy is unpopular, and community leaders do not want to undermine their position by supporting it. Headmasters of those secondary schools where language of this or that minority is used as the language of instruction, as well as aged teachers, unable to undergo re-qualification, and naturally enough afraid of losing their jobs, also have vested interest in resisting such reform.

Pre-school education

In Georgia, there are no state-sponsored establishments where children of ethnic minority parents are able to be educated in their native languages, except for Russian. There are also no bilingual kindergartens. As a result, children who attend Russian-language kindergartens cannot speak Georgian by the time they enter secondary schools, and conversely, children attending the Georgian-speaking kindergartens are not able to actively develop their knowledge in the languages of any ethnic minority groups, even if they belong to them.

University Education

The number of higher education institutions in Georgia is absolutely inadequate compared to the number of secondary schools.

The problem is that currently today representatives of ethnic minorities, while being educated in their native languages, are largely deprived of the possibility to learn the state language properly, and not surprisingly, are unable to obtain a university-level education in Georgian. Therefore, due to reasons beyond their control, they cannot contribute to the public good and are left isolated from the rest of society. This paradoxical situation, understandably enough, does not serve the best interests of either the state or representatives of ethnic minorities.

One of the results of this is that graduates of secondary schools are deprived of the possibility of getting a university education, and effectively compete in the labor market of qualified jobs. They can only get unprestigious and low-paying jobs. As a result, the most talented and capable representatives of the ethnic minority youth tend to emigrate to their historical (ethnic) homelands other countries or are lost in the crowd. That is, there exists a language filter that deprives representatives of ethnic minorities of access to prestigious jobs.

Civic Education

One of the major pre-condition for the active participation by ethnic minorities in Georgia's state building process is the existence of legal and civil education opportunities among them. Many difficulties that prevail in the inter-ethnic sphere that delay the integration processes and do not allow representatives of ethnic minorities to actively participate in the process of development of Georgian society and state are mainly due to the very low quality of legal and civil education among the representatives of ethnic minorities. For example, many of them do not bother themselves to take commitments with regard to the state and these sad realities are largely due to the lack of knowledge of their own rights, and, more often than not, distrust towards them. All the aforementioned problems naturally enough tend to lead to self-discrimination, partial isolation and inadequate participation of representatives of ethnic minorities in the social and political life of the country. At the same time, it is paradoxical that many of the most active representatives of ethnic minorities do not have information regarding the instruments of protection of human rights of minorities put down in the normative legal acts of Georgia and are sometimes are not aware of the existence of such legal acts at all.

The State System of Education, Non-governmental and International Organizations

The failure to find solutions to the aforementioned problems very often are the results of:

- non-existence of effective state policies in the sphere of the education of national minorities;

- The failure to take into account the real situation in the education system;
- Frequent inconsistency between the goals and allocated means of achieving these goals, thus leading to misunderstanding between high ranking officials in the sphere of education and those supposed to implement their decisions;
- the fact that some decisions were based on short-term political considerations and failed to take into account their long term consequences;
- insufficient information and assistance provided to parents;
- inappropriate distribution of financial means and credits, as well as the practice of corruption at almost all levels of the education system;
- The absence of cooperation with the non-governmental sector.

The Non-governmental Sector

More often than not, representatives of non-governmental organizations do not have leverages necessary to influence the reform process in the system of education. While this concerns ethnic minority NGOs, they either are not active in this field, or, in some cases, support minority-language schools through helping them to obtain textbooks published in respective ethnic homelands.

International Community

The international community, being aware of the problematical character of the current situation, is trying to contribute to ongoing reforms through rendering financial assistance to the central state structures, and such a policy, unfortunately, has not brought about any substantial results. Meanwhile, the NGO sector is very often left out and deprived of adequate attention; thereby NGOs have no real leverage to exert influence on the process of reforms in the system of education.

Recommendations

- To accelerate the process of reform of the education system in general, and in the sphere of the education of ethnic minorities, in particular— support of educational initiatives and novelties; creation of conditions necessary for the survival and development of the educational system; legal and economic protection of education and its subjects; make prognoses and take preventive measures.
- To establish centers of civil and legal education, while simultaneous teaching the state language.
- The central authorities should secure conditions for representatives of ethnic minorities that would enable them to learn the state language in a proper manner
- To set up a group of NGOs to carry out monitoring of the implementation of state programs in the sphere of education, including the program of teaching the state language.
- To take measures aimed at bringing the level of education in those state schools where languages of ethnic minorities are used as languages of instruction to the level of education of those schools wherein the state language is used as the language of instruction.
- To consider the possibility of using languages of ethnic minorities as a language of instruction in technical, professional and university establishments of higher education.
- An educational plan envisaging the teaching of professional-technical disciplines in the native languages of students should be elaborated in a manner which would allow students after graduation to work in accordance with their professions using both a minority and the state language.
- Educational programs related to ethnic minorities should be worked out through active participation of ethnic minority organizations.
- To introduce bilingual education in kindergartens, increase consultative support and improve methodological training of teachers in kindergartens.

- To create structures aimed at elaborating and assessing educational programs for those establishments where languages of minorities are used as the language of instruction.
- To create new principles of organization of educational process, including bilingual education; to secure state-sponsored training of teachers in bilingual schools to work out instruments that would allow the assessment of effectiveness of the process of bilingual education; to carry out, on a permanent basis, the monitoring of this process through active participation by the NGO sector; to carry out research work and discussions on major issues of bilingual education.
- To carry out analysis of the situation in the education sphere, through the initiatives of independent experts, interested groups and organizations.
- Together with mass media, to work out a system aimed at providing information on the most important decisions taken in the sphere of education.
- To create within the system of education a directorate of education of minorities. The head of this directorate would enjoy the status of deputy minister of education. He/she should be recommended by the public consultative council, composed of representatives of school administrations, teachers, NGOs, parents and students and endorsed by the minister of education. The directorate should work in accordance with rules of procedure, endorsed by the ministry of education with the consent of the public consultative council.

3. Appendix

C O N C E P T

Of the Policy in the Sphere of Integration of National Minorities in Georgia

Definition of Terms

Integration of national minorities means the most active and effective involvement-participation of national (ethnic) minorities' representatives in the social life.

Prerequisite of the policy implementation in the sphere is a formation of the social subject with developed civil consciousness. He(she), irrespective of his ethnic origin, effectively and freely participates in social life, in public administration and in creation of material and cultural values.

Principles of the Concept's Implementation

Implementation of the Concept should occur in compliance with requirements of the international law and internationally recognized principles and documents on human rights' protection.

The principles are:

- universal character and priority of human rights;
- anti-discriminatory background;
- unifying and integrating role of Georgian nation (and of Abkhazian nation on the territory of the autonomy), of its language and culture;
- preservation of the territorial integrity of the country;
- Guarantees of national minorities' rights, assistance in the development of national minorities' languages and culture;
- as an individual or as a group to enjoy rights, guaranteed by legislation;
- voluntary nature of participation in the integration process;

- prohibition of activities that are aimed to undermine State security, inspire social, racial, national and religious hatred;
- assistance to diasporas living in Georgia in maintenance and development of their contacts with their mother land.

Goals of the Policy of Integration

1) In the political and legal sphere:

- formation of civil society;
- formation of a such a State-territorial arrangement that would provide for unity of state's and of minority groups' specific interests;
- consolidation of common efforts of the state and civil society, political and religious figures in order to achieve a national consensus, to strengthen principles of equality of citizens of all ethnic backgrounds;
- conflict prevention and resolution;
- creation of such legal, organizational and material conditions that would contribute to taking in account and satisfying of national-cultural interests;
- provision of the legal protection of national honor and dignity of citizens;
- aggravation of responsibility for rousing a discord;
- struggle with manifestations of aggressive nationalism.

2) Realization of the State economic interests in accordance with State regional policy.

3) In spiritual sphere:

- formation and dissemination of ideas of tolerance, friendship, international consent, cultivation of sentiments of civic patriotism;
- dissemination of knowledge about history and culture of Georgian people and of ethnic minorities living in Georgia;

- preservation of the historic heritage and further development of originality and traditions of ethnic groups living in Georgia;
- upbringing of respect towards the culture, history and language of Georgian people, creation of the atmosphere of respect towards cultural values of minorities and of world culture as a whole;
- use of Georgian language as a State language (Abkhazian on the territory of the autonomy) and formation of optimal conditions for preservation and development of languages of all ethnic groups living in Georgia;
- strengthening and improvement of the system of education as a means for the reinforcement positions of the Georgian language as a State language, as well as a means of preservation and development of language and culture of ethnic groups living in Georgia.

4) In the sphere of external policy:

- In compliance with international obligations to fulfill the policy on guaranteeing rights and interests of ethnic communities residing in Georgia;
- participation in bilateral and multilateral international intergovernmental agreements on protection of national minorities, on cooperation in the resolution of problems concerning national minorities that compactly reside in frontier districts, including regulation frontier regime;
- cooperation with international community on prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Strategy of the Implementation of the Concept

The Concept takes into account broad scope of practical problems. Regimes of fulfillment of a Concept are determined in accordance with these problems.

So, State provides completely for minorities conditions for realization of their rights and fulfills this regime at the expense of central and local budget (ratio of budget assignments would be determined specially for peculiar cases);

State provides considerable conditions for realization of minority rights, that implies usage partly of budget resources and other sources of finance (grants, donations, programs of assistance from mother country, etc.);

State facilitates or encourages private initiative on implementation of rights or opposes the practice on prohibition or restriction of rights, or does not impede the access to rights.

Mentioned regimes of access are most fully realized in districts where minorities reside densely. Various regimes are applied in case of minorities that reside dispersally and this is dependent on their quantity. For example, Russian minority has no significant compact settlements though it is one of the most numerous minority group. We should take into consideration a situation that Russian language mechanically retains the function of the language of interethnic relation. So, a regime that opposes the practice on prohibition and restriction of its usage in social life should be applied in respect to this language.

Main spheres

Education

1. State provides completely a teaching of Georgian language (Abkhazian within the territory of the autonomy) as a State language in all types of State educational institutions with the perspective to enlarge the number of subjects taught in Georgian (Abkhazian within the territory of the autonomy) in non-Georgian (non-Abkhazian within the territory of the autonomy) educational institutions.

Teaching the Georgian language (Abkhazian within the territory of the autonomy) in accordance with curriculum confirmed by the Ministry of Education is one of the main requirements for private educational institutions in which language of instruction is not Georgian (Abkhazian within the territory of the autonomy) to get license.

State provides completely an establishment of courses for adults as within as outside the system of the Ministry of Education that teach Georgian and Abkhazian languages on the territory of country.

State provides completely a teaching the Abkhazian language, literature as separate subject at the institutes of higher education of appropriate specialization.

State provides considerably or State facilitates or encourages an initiative on teaching of Abkhazian language and literature outside the autonomy in the systems of high and higher education as a constitutive or facultative part of curriculum if there is a sufficient number of pupils whose families ask for it.

2. In districts where minorities reside densely State provides completely an access to education on their native language, and also provides completely functioning of existent national schools outside this settlements.

State facilitates or encourages a private initiative on providing the access to education on minorities' languages in the systems of pre-school, high education, access to teaching their language and literature as a constitutive or facultative part of curriculum if there is a sufficient number of pupils whose families ask for it.

3. State provides completely for representatives of minorities an access to some kind of higher education on their languages (Armenian and Azerbaijanian sectors at pedagogic university);

State provides completely teaching of ethnic minorities languages and history, their culture as a separate subjects at higher education institutions of the appropriate specialization,

State facilitates or encourages initiative on teaching of ethnic minorities languages and history, their culture as a separate subjects as a separate subjects constitutive or a facultative part of curriculum in other institutions of the higher education if there is a sufficient number of pupils who asks for it.

4. As for instruction in Russian language State provides completely an access to the pre-school, high and higher education in this language throughout the whole territory of Georgia if there is a sufficient contingent. At the same time State provides essentially its teaching as a foreign language at State non-Russian educational institutions.
5. State provides for teachers' training and retraining for the realization of regime «provides completely».

Media

1. State, respecting the principle of the independence and autonomy of the media, provides completely functioning of official media agencies in the Georgian language throughout the territory of the whole country (in the Abkhazian language on the territory of the autonomy).
2. State provides completely within official central radio and TV broadcasting an availability of regular programs in minorities' languages.
3. State provides completely functioning of the official local radio and TV broadcasting in State language and in minorities' languages in the regions of their compact residence.
4. State in accordance with legislation facilitates or encourages an establishment of private radio and TV agencies that would function in minorities' languages. State applies similar regimes in the sphere of audiovisual production and their dissemination in minorities' languages.
5. State provides completely on the regular bases publication and dissemination of central official newspapers in Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani languages.
6. State provides completely on the regular bases publication and dissemination of local official newspapers as in minorities' languages in the regions of their compact residence. State also makes available on the regular base publications of separate materials in minorities languages in local official newspapers where minorities reside densely.
7. State in accordance with legislation facilitates or encourages an establishment and dissemination of private newspapers in minorities languages.
8. State doesn't impede the direct reception of radio and television broadcasts from neighboring countries in languages that are identical and similar to minorities' languages and doesn't oppose in accordance with legislation to the retransmission of radio and TV broadcasts from neighboring countries in such languages.

Cultural Activities and Tools for their Implementation

1. The State should provide completely the availability of the achievements of Georgian and Abkhazian cultures for national minorities.

2. Through cultural and educational institutions, the State should provide considerable development of amateur and folk arts in the areas of compact settlement of national minorities; the State should provide, encourage, facilitate and maintain minorities' libraries, video services, cultural centers, museums, archives, theaters and cinemas, as well as fiction and movie production, maintenance and development of amateur and folk arts/ festivals, etc.
3. The State should take the responsibility of protecting cultural and historical monuments of national minorities throughout the whole territory of the country.

Interstate Exchange

For recognition of the rights of national minorities the State should put bilateral and multilateral agreements in the spheres of culture, education and information with those states which are historic motherlands of national minorities represented in Georgia. State facilitates should cooperate with the local governments of border districts and regions.

Economic Life

Within the framework of regional politics (specifically in the regions compactly resided in by national minorities) the State should create the following conditions:

1. Make the level of social-economic development equal throughout the regions.
2. Take advantage of the labor territorial division and enterprising cooperation among regions.
3. Implement special activities in order to improve the situation of employment in regions that particularly suffer from the deficit in the employment rate.
4. Implement special programs for small and medium enterprises.
5. In order to draw investments and assistance from international donor organizations, the State should encourage and facilitate the formation of farmers' and entrepreneurs' associations and unions and other forms of cooperation, including agricultural credit unions

(for example, for developing irrigation systems and mechanization facilities).

6. The State should attach special importance to providing employment for those persons working at Russian military bases, parallel with the withdrawal of Russian bases from Georgia. Through a special State program, the State should provide employment for Georgian citizens who worked at Russian bases, as well as their involvement in small and medium enterprises. The State should also encourage and facilitate efforts by international and donor organizations in this direction.
7. Due to the fact that significant mega-projects (for example Baku-Tbilisi-Cheyhan pipeline) will be created in the areas that are populated by national minorities these populations will be provided with increased scientific and technical capacities.

In addition following should also be provided in the economic sphere:

To use a Georgian language (Abkhazian in the autonomous republic) that is related to the economic sphere and a legitimate interest of the State in all types of documentation.

The State should oppose practices aimed at preventing the usage of non-State language in an internal document that is related to economic and commercial activities in citizens in which a legitimate interest of the State is not extended. If necessary, a Georgian translation of this documentation should be provided.

The State should oppose the practice of prohibiting the usage of a non-State language in documentation related to contract agreements and safety measures instructions. If necessary, translation in the State language should be provided.

Public Life and Political Participation

Particular importance should be attached to the right of minorities to establish associations and other public organizations. These institutions have a right to participate in the activities of international non-governmental organizations, including human rights protection organizations. They are supported by the State.

Persons belonging to national minorities and their public organizations should have the right to establish contacts with each other in their native language throughout the whole territory of Georgia. They should

be able to establish contacts with the population and public organizations in their historic motherland, as well as in other countries.

The State should form councils within the central and local legislative and executive bodies that consist of representatives of national minorities and advise these bodies on issues concerning national minorities. These councils would also have consulting functions.

Departments that work with minorities' problems should be established at the legislative and executive branches of the central authority with the guaranteed participation of representatives of national minorities within them.

In areas compactly resided in by national minorities, forms of interaction of the and civil society in such spheres as planning of local government activities, decision making and implementation process should be developed and perfected on the basis of transparency.

The State should encourage the creation and development of non-territorial public self-governing bodies for dispersed national minorities in order to provide participation of their representatives in the state governance.

Bodies of the judicial branch

1. The State should provide the usage of the Georgian language as a language of *judicial proceeding* on the whole territory of Georgia (the Abkhazian language on the territory of Abkhazia).
2. Upon the request of one side, the State should provide an interpreter on the whole territory of Georgia.

Administrative authorities and public service

1. State should provide the complete *usage* of the Georgian language in governing and self-governing bodies, in public service throughout the whole territory of Georgia (Abkhazian in the autonomous republic). Central authority bodies should conduct all paperwork with local government and self-government in the Georgian language.
2. The State should not oppose the practice of usage of minority language by authority bodies in verbal communication with persons who address them in their native language in areas compactly resided in by national minorities.

On the regional level, the State should also ensure that there exists a certain amount of staff members who speak a national minority language and accordingly enable representatives of administrative bodies to communicate with a respective national minority group.

The State should not impede the usage of a language understandable for both sides in verbal communication between representatives of national minorities and authority bodies on the whole territory of Georgia.

3. The State should not oppose the practice of using a national minority language in debates during sessions of representative bodies in areas compactly resided in by national minorities. At the same time, a document adopted at the session is translated into the State language should be provided; it should also be guaranteed that debate proceedings are interpreted for those persons who do not know the non-State language.
4. Through the official mass-media the State should provide publications of laws and other normative acts in national minority languages in the areas where these minorities reside compactly.

Spelling of name, patronymic and surname of citizens of Georgia. Language of toponyms. Language of the name of State authority bodies, self-governance bodies, agencies, companies and organizations. Language of information notices.

1. Each person belonging to national minority group should enjoy the right to use his name, patronymic and surname in the language of the respective minority group and also the right of their official recognition in accordance with existent legislation.
2. Toponyms should be created and displayed in the State Language.
3. Official names of State authority bodies, self-governance bodies, agencies, companies and organizations should be created and displayed in the State language and in minorities' languages in those places where minorities reside. Private companies should be entitled to the right to use minority languages in their names with obligatory translation of these names into the State language through the whole territory of the country.

4. Texts of announcements, notices, bills, displays, playbills, advertisements and other visual information designed for the attention of the public should be provided in the State language and could be accompanied with a translation into a respective minority language in areas of where these minorities reside compactly.

The above-mentioned concept should be implemented by creating legislative acts and by making amendments and additions to existing legislature, as well as by creating State programs, resolutions, decrees, orders, and other acts of central and local authority bodies. One of the necessary preconditions for its implementation is support from international donor organizations. Based on this concept, the executive authority together with the Parliament of Georgia should elaborate the following State programs by May 1st 2003.

- 1) A State program for the strengthening the position and development of the State language.
- 2) A State program on the employment of persons working at Russian military bases in case of the withdrawal of these bases.
- 3) A State program for creating a network of civic education centers.
- 4) A State program for developing a network of governmental and non-governmental organizations working on integration issues.
- 5) A State program for creating centers working on the popularization of Georgian culture and the cultural achievements of national minorities residing in Georgia.

The explanatory note for the concept of integration of ethnic minorities of Georgia

The problem of integration of ethnic minorities is very urgent for Georgia. This is especially relevant for ethnic enclaves of the country. Representatives of ethnic minorities play a passive role in the country's political, social and economic processes.

Integration of ethnic minorities should comply with international human rights conventions. According to many foreign experts, the national legislation of Georgia meets international standards. At the same time, there are some legal problems reflecting the general situation of ethnic minorities. Particularly, Georgia has joined the frame convention on protection of ethnic minorities. However, the document has not been ratified yet, although Georgia undertook to adopt a law on ethnic minorities during its accession to the Council of Europe.

What is the reason of such a situation?

We think that Georgia should fulfil all its obligations but there are certain problems in this case. As a matter of fact, Georgia is home to many ethnic groups, which differ in size and types of settlement (ethnic enclaves and dispersed population). They have different religions and histories of their migration to Georgia. Ethnic minorities of Georgia are not homogenous. For instance, the Armenian community emerged in Javakheti in the first half of the XIX century, when Georgia was part of the Russian Empire. But ethnic Armenians settled in Kakheti and Kartli regions much earlier and, therefore, they are integrated into the Georgian society to a much greater degree. The same is true for the Greek community. The Kurd community has the problem of self-identification – some of its members consider themselves as Jezids, while the rest as Kurds.

Unfortunately, ethnic or national groups are not defined in the Georgian legislative practice. It is noteworthy, however, that debates on problems of ethnic minorities usually generates unhealthy public excitement. It happened, for instance, during debates on a language bill or a bill on ethnic minorities. Representatives of ethnic minorities are not unanimous in this issue. In the opinion of several influential organisations, the term “national minority” should be removed from the legislation, because it contains an element of discrimination. We think that the

legislative process should be further developed in this direction but, at the same time, practical activities aiming at the resolution of particular problems must intensify. We expect international organisations to assist Georgia in dealing with this issue. Our committee drafts bills, which aim to give an impulse to the development and implementation of various programs, such as, for instance, Georgian language teaching programs or programs of measures that should be carried out along with the withdrawal of Russian military bases from Georgia. These measures include providing employment for local employees of the bases, creating conditions for them to engage in small and middle business, etc.

The practical and legislative bases for the ratification of frame convention on the rights of ethnic minorities are currently under development. But the process should be preceded by understanding of the problem. Particular approaches to the issue should help make practical and legislative activities purposeful and systematic. The proposed version of the concept is not final and it is discussed by representatives of various strata of the society.

Integration of ethnic minorities implies their active and efficient participation in public life. The policy in this field aims to shape up a social subject with high civil consciousness, which will participate in the country's public life, decision-making and the creation of material and spiritual values freely and efficiently, regardless of his/her ethnic origins.

The integration policy also aims to develop a democratic civil society and arrange the administrative-territorial system of the country, which implies a harmony between general interests of the state and specific interests of ethnic minorities.

Teaching Georgian to representatives of ethnic minorities has an exceptional place in the concept. It is a sine qua non for civil integration, because just for this problem, as a rule, ethnic minorities are unable to take full part in the country's political, economic, and social life. At the same time, one should not ignore 350 non-Georgian schools of the country, which are a distinct asset of our national policy. The uniting role of the Georgian language and culture (the Abkhaz language in Abkhazia), guaranteed protection of the rights of ethnic minorities, and support and development of their cultures and languages are significant preconditions for successful implementation of the concept.

The program minimum of the concept is to keep implementation of the rights of ethnic minorities at its current level in order to push ahead with existing achievements and wipe out current flaws.

The concept takes into account the scale of practical problems to determine its implementation regime: the government **fully** ensures realisation of the rights of ethnic minorities by funds allocated from local and central budgets (the proportion between budgetary revenues varies and should be specially adjusted); or the government **basically** ensures realisation of the rights of ethnic minorities using both budgetary funds and other financial sources (grants, donations, aid of historical homelands, etc); or the government **supports and encourages** realisation of private initiatives within the limits of the granted rights.

Any of these regimes can be implemented relatively completely in ethnic enclaves. Various regimes can be also applied to dispersed groups of minorities, depending on the number of their members.

Implementation schemes of this strategy are given for such particular spheres as education, culture, mass media, foreign relations, economic life, public life, governance, judiciary, etc. Special attention is paid to provisions regulating the use of various languages in governmental agencies and civil services.

The concept is carried out through developing and amending the national legislation, and by means of governmental programs and decrees.

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