საქართველოს საერთაშორისო ადამიანების და საერთაშორისო საქმიანობის თეთრების სივრცე

POLICY PAPER SERIES
ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Policy Paper Series include policy documents developed within the framework of the project - *National Minorities in Political Processes – Engagement for Better Future*. The papers were elaborated by the young representatives of political parties, for whom it was the first attempt to work on an analytical document. The papers address the challenges and solutions for the ethnic minorities engagement in the political, economic or social life of Georgia.

The project was implemented by the Rondel Foundation with the support and active participation of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (OSCE HCNM). The project aims to increase the political and social inclusion of ethnic minorities and to facilitate healthy policy debate on the issues of national minorities among the political parties, thus overall contributes to the good governance practices. Within the framework of the multi-component project, members of Tbilisi-based political party youth organizations, young people living in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli and active representatives of the local community attended various thematic seminars. The project also included thematic meetings of representatives of political parties and government agencies with the representatives of national minorities, the preparation of TV programs, and internships for young people representing ethnic minorities in political parties.

The views and opinions expressed in this papers are those of the authors and do not reflect the views of OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (OSCE HCNM) and the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (Rondeli Foundation).
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THE MAIN WAYS TO INVIGORATE ETHNIC MINORITIES TO ENGAGE IN POLITICAL PROCESSES

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SUMMARY

The civic integration of ethnic minorities is a strategically important issue for Georgia. Although, no one denies its importance, its active discussion often escapes political interests. The problems of the integration of ethnic minorities into society are gradually growing and becoming more and more serious.

One of the most important issues is the low rate of minority engagement in political process and this is something which has a negative impact on the quality of democracy. The passive involvement of minorities in various political activities is determined by many factors. In particular, these include: the lack of the knowledge of the state language, the passive stance of political parties, the information vacuum and the problem of political, social, and cultural exclusion, etc. Precisely for the purpose of solving the problem of the language barrier, a 1 + 4 educational program was launched in 2010 which aims to enable young people from ethnic minorities to study in state institutions of higher education.

A fundamental change in the situation is possible through a well-thought-out and targeted state policy that will be fully focused on the social integration of minorities. Of course, non-governmental organizations, the mass media and political parties must be involved in solving this problem and society should also take a certain share of the responsibility. It is necessary to develop and implement tangible alternatives.

In this paper, we will discuss several alternatives for solving the problem of the low rate of minority engagement in political processes. These alternatives include: setting quotas in the parliamentary body, the formation of political parties on ethnic grounds and programs and activities of political parties for the involvement of minorities. From these given alternatives, the last of the three aforementioned in the form of the programs and activities of political parties is the most flexible because political parties that should take representatives of ethnic minorities into account during the formation of their party candidate lists and include them in the roster of the first 20 candidates. Such an approach will invigorate minorities and give them more incentive to become more actively involved in politics. However, as we have already mentioned, the Georgian government and to some extent the local governments should also bear some responsibility. The Parliament of Georgia must initiate certain changes in the Election Code of Georgia and oblige political parties to include ethnic minorities in their activities. The Georgian government may also provide financial incentives to parties that take greater responsibility for this issue. The role of non-governmental organizations is also important as they should find ways to stimulate minorities politically and, of course, it is very important for the political parties to reflect minority issues in their agendas and nominate their representatives in the party candidate lists.

If we look at the reality of our country, there are no political parties expressing the interests of ethnic minorities in the Georgian political space nor are there any specific mechanisms that would encourage the presence and activity of these representatives. This problem can only be solved by
making a fundamental change. Ethnic minorities must have a sense of political identity with the state and under no circumstances should they be alienated from the Georgian political reality.

**INTRODUCTION**

The issue of the recognition of ethnic minorities and their political, social and cultural involvement is one of the most important challenges for our state. This issue is closely related to the establishment of a Georgian democratic state and social consolidation.

The state’s policy towards minorities has changed over the years but it has not been able to fully meet the challenges facing the country. The level of the political participation of ethnic minorities is markedly low. Minorities make up a large part of the country’s population and attending to their civic and political involvement is tantamount to the growth of the quality of democracy while their exclusion from various activities will significantly damage and hinder the democratic progress of our state.

We have seen a number of projects and initiatives across the country put forth to address this issue but no significant progress has been made. The Open Society Foundation’s study on ethnic minorities illustrates that ethnic minorities do not have a sense of identity with the state and too great a number of people are alienated from Georgian society.¹ The reasons for their limited engagement in political life varies and so it is very important to concentrate on all of the necessary factors and analyze the problems in order to stimulate their political participation to the greatest extent possible. The main reasons for the political passivity of minorities are the language barrier, the problem of political, social, and cultural exclusion and the inadequate attention of political parties to this problem, etc. However, it should be noted that the issue of the integration of minorities into politics is often reduced to the problem of language ignorance which is outright incorrect and indicates a superficial attitude toward this issue.

In this policy paper, we will discuss several alternatives and recommendations tailored to the political engagement of ethnic minorities.

The purpose of the document is to highlight all of the significant aspects that hinder a rapid resolution of this problem. The exclusion of ethnic minorities from political process can also be considered as a violation of their rights while international acts directly require Georgia to protect the rights of minorities which necessarily implies their integration into the Georgian state. “Georgia is a member of all of the major international human rights instruments that, among other things, define the rights of ethnic minorities. Some of them are limited to general anti-discrimination records and emphasize the need to eliminate all forms of discrimination, including ethnic discrimination. The only international legal instrument that imposes more specific regulation and requires a more positive obligation from the state to protect the rights of these groups is the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe.”²

Georgia indeed has the potential to deal with all of the problems related to its ethnic minorities. Due effort is required in order to meticulously study the problem and take a number of alternatives and important recommendations into account in order to bring about a solution. It is also important that the responsibility for solving the problem is shared equally not only by the government but also

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² Overview of International Standards on Ethnic Minority Rights.
by individual political parties, media outlets and non-governmental organizations. Growing social dissatisfaction and frustration may arise should this issue not receive serious attention. We believe that the problems related to ethnic minorities are manageable and solvable and that they in no way should become a determinant of a low quality of democracy in Georgia.

**PROBLEM DESCRIPTION**

Georgia is a multiethnic country and a significant part of its population is made up of ethnic minorities. The integration of ethnic minorities into society is a serious problem. A sharply distinctive feature of this process is their engagement in the political process which is one of the most important problems of Georgian democratic development. We can name a number of reasons for the passive political involvement of ethnic minorities: the language barrier, the passivity of political parties and the information vacuum, etc. It is necessary to analyze these problems and both political parties and the state should make as much effort as possible for the integration of ethnic minorities.

Today, ethnic minorities make up a significant portion of the country’s population (most of them are ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis settled in the south of the country in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions, and the east-Kakheti region as well as small ethnic groups in different regions of Georgia). Nonetheless, numerous studies show that their level of involvement in Georgian public life is low and this is especially noticeable when it comes to their involvement in political life. As was already mentioned, the passive engagement of ethnic minorities in political life and the low level of integration in politics hinder the building of a democratic and stable state in Georgia. Against this background, we believe that the representatives of ethnic minorities do not have a sense of political association with the state. One of the major problems of their passivity in political life is the language barrier. This problem is especially prevalent in a densely populated region. The 1 + 4 program was launched in 2010 precisely for the amelioration of this problem. It aims to enable young people from ethnic minorities to study in state institutions of higher education which will help them develop their own language skills. However, as we found out, young people involved in this program are going through the teaching process separately. They have no communication with Georgian students which makes the program ineffective. Unfortunately, the employment rate of young people educated through the 1 + 4 program is also low and it seems that the state does not have a special employment support policy for this group.

Another important problem to be considered is the “information vacuum.” It is unfortunate that a large portion of ethnic minorities is not able to receive information through the Georgian media which is again caused by the existence of the language barrier. It should be noted that for years the Georgian Public Broadcaster has been implementing the Diverse Georgia project which aims to provide information to the national minorities living in the country. The Azerbaijani and Armenian-language online radio and television continuously broadcasts live for 12 hours. The broadcaster is also required by law to do so. For example, the population of Marneuli, most of whom are ethnic minorities, watch the Channel One news programs. Although most of the population uses satellite dishes and can receive Georgian channels, they prefer the Azerbaijani, Turkish, and Russian channels which can perhaps also be explained by the monotonous character of Georgian TV programs. The fact is that the existing media outlets are not strong enough to satisfy the information thirst of this particular population.

Therefore, minorities often receive information through the foreign media which also affects the integration process.
Beyond the aforementioned problems, the passivity of political parties towards the representatives of ethnic minorities should not be left out. In their party programs, political entities discuss superficially or ignore altogether those issues which are important for minorities. Also, the parties do not have sufficient resources such as, for example, in densely populated regions they do not have a strong party infrastructure, have no connection with potential voters and cannot provide them with information about the party’s program.

When we speak about the passivity of ethnic minorities in the political process, we should not overlook the issue of women’s representation. Our country is not distinguished by a high rate of women’s involvement in political life, neither at the local nor the national level and against this background, the activity of ethnic non-Georgian women is even lower. This, of course, is facilitated by the problems listed above but we believe that the existing political system is also a factor. Numerous studies have shown that in countries where the proportional electoral system is in place, the rate of women’s involvement in politics is higher than in countries with a majoritarian electoral system.

It is necessary to properly assess the serious inequality that exists towards ethnic minorities. We believe that the state does not have a special mechanism aimed at strengthening the political participation of ethnic minorities which would ameliorate this problem. Even in densely populated regions, ethnic minorities are not employed at the governing positions in public services and their representation is also low in the capital’s municipalities. Such a low rate of engagement of ethnic minorities in the political process, we believe, is one of the important problems facing the state and it is necessary to find appropriate solutions.

We have repeatedly underscored that the participation of minorities in the political (and not only political) life of the country is a precondition for building a democratic state. For our country, the active participation of minorities in political life still remains one of the most serious challenges. There is a sense of alienation, resentment and injustice and, therefore, a low trust in political parties in the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities. This indicates a weak link between political parties and voters and has a significant impact on their political engagement.

It should also be noted that the programs of political parties (United National Movement, Georgian Dream, Christian Democrats, etc.) do not adequately reflect the interests of ethnic minorities and there is no quota practice for the presence of minorities in the parties. The study of the Institute for Social Research and Analysis also supports these observations.

**PROBLEM SOLUTIONS**

Georgia has the ability to invigorate ethnic minority engagement in the political process. There are many examples of international best practices that would help our country integrate minorities into the political process.

Let us consider a few alternative solutions to the problem.

**Alternative 1. Establish quotas in the Parliament.** Quotas are actively used to ensure the political representation of ethnic minorities and are meant to provide equal opportunities and balance political power. A larger representation both in the national and local level legislative body also has a positive impact on the redistribution of budgetary priorities to address the socio-economic problems faced by ethnic minorities. Such an approach is used in countries like Belgium, Romania, Croatia and Slovenia.

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Alternative 2. **Formation of political parties on ethnic grounds.** In many countries, political parties are formed on the basis of ethnicity. Although non-ethnic political parties differ in their attention towards the problems of ethnic minorities, in this case we imply the functioning of non-dominant ethnic groups as political parties.

Alternative 3. **Agendas and activities of political parties.** We believe that the most optimal solution is to address the issues and needs related to ethnic minority groups in the programs and activities of political parties. Precisely, the political parties should take into account the representatives of ethnic minorities when forming the candidate lists and allocate them in the top ten. Such an approach will make the representatives of minorities more active and give them additional incentive to participate more actively in politics. Moreover, attending to this issue is one of the most important indicators of the quality of democracy. Indeed, the political elite must be active and work to help stimulate the engagement of ethnic minorities in political life.

Let us try to expand the given alternatives and further illustrate their pros and cons as well as discuss the extent to which they reflect the interests of our country.

Let us start with the issue of quotas. Quotas are a small part of bigger issues which in this case involve the invigoration of ethnic minority engagement in politics. It is clear, however, that the establishment of quotas in the parliament alone will not result in the complete elimination of the current problem. The experience of all countries in terms of quotas is individual and depends on many factors, including the will of the political forces in the country and the general political environment. Hence, it is important to comprehend all aspects of our country's politics related to the implementation of this issue. Thus, quotas can have both positive and negative effects on both ethnic minorities and the quality of a country's politics. The main goal of quotas is to protect members of ethnic minorities from political isolation, although it can also be seen as covert discrimination.

As for the next alternative - the formation of political parties on the basis of ethnicity - this can be perceived as separatism but we must also underscore that if the party is formed in this way in a proportional system, this fact will prevent rather than incite the formation of separatist movements in a certain region. However, it is impossible to circumvent the Georgian law that prohibits the establishment and functioning of a political organization based on ethnicity or religion. Thus, this alternative contradicts the legislation of our country.

In relation to this issue, taking into account the interests of ethnic minorities and including them in the programs and activities of political parties is the most flexible alternative. An evaluation of the pre-election programs of political parties shows that the majority of the parties do not have a clear vision and their programs reflect a superficial attention vis-à-vis minorities or they ignore them altogether. All parties should take representatives of ethnic minorities into account during the formation of their candidate lists. Also, the goal of each political party should be to improve the quality and effectiveness of democracy in Georgia and provide timely and professional assessments for ethnic minorities on pre-election promises and proposals as well as concerning the political views put forward by other political parties. It will allow ethnic minorities to make more informed political choices.

As is well known, all issues can have both a positive side and a negative side. In this alternative, the fact that the inclusion of an ethnic minority candidate in the top ten may lead to the passivity of the ethnic Georgian voter is indeed a negative result. In such a case, it will be necessary to consider the candidate of ethnic minority not in the top ten but, for example, in the top 20. If the ethnic minority candidate is able to present his candidacy strongly and with dignity for the top ten, then...
he will easily be able to maintain relevance in the political field for the top 20 as well. Consequently, representatives of ethnic minorities will be encouraged to engage in politics and, at the same time, we will be able to avert the emergence of certain problems at the level of internal regulation which may have been caused by the allocation of the minority candidacy in the top ten of the candidacy list.

Finally, we note once again that the political parties do not have an effective program to integrate ethnic minorities into political life and they do not always consider the issue with due seriousness. It is precisely the political parties which must take some responsibility for involving ethnic minorities in politics and take more drastic and strategically correct steps to improve the quality of the political life of ethnic minorities which is, of course, another step towards building a democratic state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the noted solutions, the agendas and activities of the political parties are the most convenient alternative for our country.

The following recommendations are required to implement this alternative. In particular, we cannot hold any one institution responsible for increasing the involvement of ethnic minorities in the political process as this issue is very broad and complex. Therefore, several parties should be involved in finding ways to solve this problem. We believe that the Georgian government, the political parties and, to some extent, the local governments should bear this responsibility:

1. The Parliament of Georgia should make certain changes in the Election Code of Georgia and oblige political parties to include ethnic minorities in their activities.
2. The Georgian government may also provide financial incentives to parties that take greater responsibility for the issue.
3. Non-governmental organizations should also find ways to politically mobilize minorities and, of course, important emphasis should be made on the existing political parties taking a greater interest in minority issues and nominating their representatives in the party lists. Including a representative of an ethnic minority in the party lists (at least 1 in each 20 candidates) is the best way to invigorate them.
4. Media outlets should pay more attention to the necessity and importance of engaging ethnic minorities in politics.

CONCLUSION

Ethnic minorities make up a fairly large part of our country and their integration into political life is one of the best ways to improve the quality of our country’s democracy. The current reality of our country is such that no political party represents the interests of ethnic minorities in the Georgian political space nor there is any mechanism that would encourage the inclusion of minorities in the parties and their active engagement. Pragmatic and precise steps are needed to solve this problem without any superficiality of approach. A more thorough investigation of the problems faced by ethnic minorities is also very important and parties should invest more resources in densely populated regions and eliminate any discriminatory political attitudes. Equal enjoyment of political rights is important. Ethnic minorities should have a sense of political identity with the state and should not
alienate themselves from Georgian political discourse. Therefore, the programs and activities of political parties was selected as the best alternative to solve the problem.

The rights of ethnic minorities to participate in the political process are enshrined in a number of international agreements where Georgia is one of the signatories. However, we must acknowledge that these documents are often very general such as, for example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) which states that all people have the right to take part in the governance of their country and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) which stipulates that all people have the right to participate in public affairs directly or through a representative.

Invigorating the engagement of ethnic minorities in the political process can play an important role in increasing the awareness about our country in the international arena and, certainly, improving the quality of democracy as well. The main issue is for the state to realize the urgency of the problem and take effective steps towards its solution. At the same time, obviously, representatives of ethnic minorities should also be properly involved in the consultation process and through joint effort and cooperation, the development and realization of the relevant alternatives will be much easier.

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MAIN WAYS TO INCREASE THE LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES IN MUNICIPAL PROJECTS

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SUMMARY

In this paper, participation is discussed as a basic principle of good governance and the participatory process as a democratic one. Involvement in decision-making is defined as nurturing civic dignity. The role of inclusive processes in strengthening civic identity is characterized and the need to increase the sense of ownership of public places and processes is highlighted.

This paper addresses the weakness of the development of a sense of ownership of public places and processes, especially in the areas populated by national minorities. Consequently, an attempt has been made to prove that it is essential to develop a democratic process that includes national minorities and thus strengthen national identity among them. It is argued that only the involvement of national minorities in the decision-making and governance processes will ensure the proper their integration in civic life.

The alternatives section of this paper analyzes participatory planning as the most important method that not only develops important civic values in citizens but also makes management much more efficient and effective. In other words, insofar as participatory planning ensures increased civic engagement in key processes, it also simplifies administration by the government and makes it more logical.

In the context of this paper, a participatory budget was selected as the best way to solve the problem, especially as the best way to solve local problems with local ideas. We examine why locals are the best experts on local issues. The paper also substantiates the extent to which a participatory budget contributes to the community development process, including encouraging citizens to look at a particular issue from a decision-making position, perceive the difficulty of managing limited resources effectively and present ideas that best address local challenges in the local contexts.

An attempt was made to explain what steps need to be taken in order to integrate a participatory budget as a democratic mechanism at the legislative level across all municipalities. We explain the roles that the parliament, local governments, NGOs, independent experts and citizens play in the implementation and success of participatory budget legislation.

INTRODUCTION

The declared position of contemporary Georgia is to strive for European and Euro-Atlantic values. Georgia’s aspiration towards the West includes building democracy in the country and deepening the democratic process at all levels of governance. The latter is being more or less successfully implemented in Georgia. Our country’s integration into Euro-Atlantic structures is becoming more tangible over time and it is easy to see the important results of the integration process, including the fact that Georgia is the only country in the Caucasus region that has visa-free travel with the EU. However, it should also be noted that the pace of integration with the West is not always the same.
For example, the deterioration of the democracy index in Georgia in 2018-19 indicates alarming trends.

We believe it is possible to do more for the development of the democratic process. Mainly, this includes testing and introducing new democratic approaches, refining the legal framework, applying international best practices and expertise, ensuring greater civil engagement in the regions and involving national minorities in the public processes while encouraging their participation in democratic processes, etc. It is characteristic of modern democracies to incorporate as many ideas as possible in decision-making, especially the consideration and inclusion of the ideas of those people who are marginalized from public life and politics.

The aim of this paper is to outline the main ways of developing the democratic process, in general, and the involvement of citizens in municipal projects in Georgian municipalities populated by national minorities, in particular. We will also explain why it is necessary to introduce these ways, methods and mechanisms into the country at large and, especially, for national minorities.

The research methodology is qualitative while the method is observation and analysis. During the research, we studied the developing process of democracy in Georgian regions and highlight the particular elements of democratic development in the regions populated by national minorities. A limiting factor of the research is the inability to generalize the obtained results.

**PROBLEM DESCRIPTION**

Building a democracy is a dynamic process while maintaining it is more difficult than its creation. Developing and deepening democracy in Georgia is not an easy task but despite the obstacles, it is essential to make it irreversible and ensure the participation of all citizens. The irreversibility of the democratic process largely depends on the public readiness for the tradition of democracy. Nurturing this readiness and forming public sympathy for democracy is a slow process. In this process, the role of the ruling power, which is (or should be) the administrator of democratic practices, is significant. This, in turn, is also linked to the capacity of the ruling power to make its own normative ideological principles more practical. Of course, local and international non-governmental organizations, the media, intellectuals\(^1\) and other players have a key role to play in the implementation and monitoring of the democratic process.

Good governance, as a combination of knowledge, best methods and practices driving the democratic process, identifies joint participation and involvement as its main principle. Involving more stakeholders in decision-making, which better reflects the real needs, is a key approach to good governance. The principles of good governance dictate that more stakeholder involvement in decision-making makes decision more efficient while the overall satisfaction is multiplied (the latter is an important issue for this paper and we will discuss it in details later). Indeed, people’s governance means nothing more: democracy is the right and the obligation to make right and wrong choices but the primary point is to make our own choices. Good governance, as a cornerstone of sustainable development, is focused on decent citizenship along with engagement. The question is: what makes citizenship decent?

Most likely, decent citizenship will have a multiple explanation depending on whom you ask. In general, we believe that true democracy makes people think that they are a deserving part of society.

\(^{1}\) A person with a high public reputation, a politician, a writer, a religious or public figure and others.
In this paper, we intentionally raise those issues that explain decent citizenship as a civic discourse which comes to life via the joint participation of individuals in public processes. We will emphasize the importance of national minorities and the significance of their participation in local decision-making while broadly discussing their whereabouts in the ongoing democratic process in Georgia.

Decent citizenship and deserving membership in civil society comes from the contribution that each citizen has made for the well-being of their community. This contribution is not always material – a person may bring his own ideas, opinion, sharing, choice and more. By participating in elections, citizens show a willingness to participate in democratic processes.

When we talk about decent citizenship, we need to clarify the concept of civic identity that we will be discussing in this paper. We call civic identity the feeling of high ownership among citizens towards their own village, neighborhood, city and everything that is public and relates to them directly or indirectly. We should not understand ownership as owning private property. We mean a sense of ownership of shared, public places and processes that can only be achieved through the joint participation in processes. Accordingly, civic identity, as a sense of high ownership of public places and processes, is the basis of democracy and if we generalize this concept even further - civic identity is the superstructure of the identities of the homeland (Georgian identity) and the region (Caucasian identity). Civic identity has the capacity to shape important attitudes towards the homeland, territorial integrity, unity, the principle of solidarity and so on. So, is the “Georgian identity” strong if “citizen identity” is solid?

The realization of civic identity is the starting point of the democratic process. Politics as well as culture, literature and more are the attempts to realize this identity. As mentioned above, the process of deepening democracy is the only way to maintain democracy and it means greater representation in parliament, a more independent judiciary, more sustainable ministries, more efficient local administrations and municipal councils, and more solved problems for the ordinary people as a whole.

We strongly believe that the process of deepening democracy and, in this way, strengthening civic identity is essential, especially in the regions populated by national minorities. It is important to highlight this issue due to the peculiar character of the Georgian regions because several of our regions located at the border, including Kvemo Kartli, have their municipalities populated by national minorities which in some municipalities are in the majority (for example, Marneuli, Bolnisi, Akhaltsikhe).

Everyone is more or less familiar with the primary challenges being faced by such regions. The biggest challenge is that national minorities, which are represented by a majority in their own municipalities, often do not speak the state language and they are not sufficiently involved in public processes. These challenges are reflected in the state strategies and policies of Georgia and there are a number of programs, organizations and agencies that are trying to alleviate the existing problems and eliminate as much as possible the specific issues in the municipalities that prevent national minorities from being more involved in Georgian public life.

This document mainly argues that it is in the municipalities located at the border and populated by national minorities that the development of a democratic process is particularly important and which, in turn, is tantamount to strengthening civic identity (and hence homeland identity).

The problem is that national minorities living in local municipalities are not sufficiently involved in making decisions that directly impact them. The local municipality city halls and other institutions
fail to properly fulfill their obligation to facilitate maximum engagement modeling in all decisions that affect locals. At present, only village authorities, or other influential individuals, decide the fate of major projects that later will be incorporated into the budget. Thus, it is necessary to increase the engagement of national minorities in municipal projects which will help create the feeling that these projects are also theirs and that they are created for them.

**PROBLEM SOLUTIONS**

As we have mentioned, if the democratization process does not evolve, it usually decays. The deepening of the democratic process means, on the one hand, the strengthening of existing democratic practices and their penetration into all public or governmental processes and, on the other hand, no less important is the search for, testing and introduction of new practices. In this section, we will talk about the “new” practices that ensure a maximum involvement of locals in decision-making and which is less used in the Georgian reality.

The first alternative that can be considered as a unique example of participatory democracy is a participatory budget. It is a democratic process in which members of the society decide how to spend a certain portion of the public budget. A participatory budget provides each citizen with the freedom to provide an idea for their own village or town or come up with an idea that responds to a specific need that will be implemented by the local government within its competence. In other words, this tool gives people real power over real money.

When discussing a participatory budget, it is important to emphasize the following fact: a participatory budget, along with the engagement of the population in the process of collecting ideas, also expects the decision of the people on the selection (and subsequently the implementation) of these ideas. The population chooses the best among their own ideas by consensus or voting. We can argue that the participatory process gives the government the leverage to effectively solve local problems.

It is necessary to highlight the important elements of the participatory budgeting process:

On the one hand, participatory budgeting is beneficial for the engagement of the population in the public process because, first of all, the population is given the opportunity to think and analyze their own reality and to think first from the point of view of the community and then from the position of the decision-maker. The public can reflect on the existing needs and, at the same time, understand the scarcity of resources. This encourages citizens to properly assess and comprehend the situation in their village, town and region.

On the other hand, a participatory budget is conducive to the democratic process because it ensures that the population has power at the local level. Citizens are enabled to express their views as well as to convince others in the common use of their ideas. Most importantly, when a project is selected, residents feel that it is the project they have chosen, that their ideas are taken into account and that they have retained their civic dignity.

The strengths of a participatory budget are its cost-effectiveness in the micro (cheap process) and macro (municipal savings) aspects, ensuring government transparency and reducing corruption, identifying and addressing local needs, understanding the democratic process at the local level and involving citizens in the public processes which is essential in areas populated by national minorities.

The weakness of the participatory budget is the fact that, on the one hand, there are not enough competent experts in Georgia to lead the multiple participatory budgeting process. On the other
hand, for the local government, it means additional work and changing established practices and there is often a lack of readiness among the local decision-makers to this end.

A second alternative that will deepen the participatory process at the local level is the periodic elections of village representatives. According to the Law on Civil Service, village representatives are no longer public servants from 2019. Both the rule and the procedure of their employment have changed. If before the representatives were appointed for life on the basis of a competition, now the mayor of a municipality will nominate them according to his term in office. Their dismissal is also up to the mayor. This practice points to the reversal of participatory democracy since the village representatives embody the local community in the municipal council and politicizing this position will only hinder the process of deepening local democracy in areas populated by national minorities and elsewhere. We believe that it is important to elect the village representative by the village. Also important is to have a rotation for this position (for example, three, five or seven years) and village-regulated democratic elections. It is important to elect a representative with only one term to ensure the greater engagement and representation of the population.

The strengths of periodic village representative elections are the consolidation of more local interest and the promotion of inclusive development. Also, there is a depoliticization of this position. The weakness is the difficulty of self-regulating elections in the village and the use of this position by political forces during the election period and for other political purposes.

A third alternative, which is undoubtedly an essential factor for democratic development, is participatory planning. This tool acquires a significant importance in urban areas and large villages. In the participatory planning process, we mean the development of a strategy for the future development of the settlement with the maximum participation of the locals. This tool ensures that more local ideas are taken into account and qualitative research is conducted, exploring the interests and vision of locals about the development of their own town or village.

The strengths of participatory planning are the drafting of a universal development strategy, ensuring more stakeholder involvement in the strategy planning and encouraging locals to contribute to the development of a long-term plan (or a master plan) for their town or village. The weaknesses of participatory planning are its complexity (preferably led by a team of urban policy research experts) and, due to its scale, on the one hand, the complexity of consensus and, on the other hand, the risk of neglecting the interests of a large number of people.

Of these three alternatives, we believe that all three play an important role in the process of deepening democracy and all three are essential for the democratic development of places inhabited by national minorities. However, in the recommendations section we will focus on the format of a participatory budget and the steps for its implementation in Georgian municipalities.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

According to Abraham Lincoln, “Democracy is the rule of the people, by the people and for the people.” We believe that the mechanism of a participatory budget precisely reflects the pathos of Lincoln’s quote.

The most important for the implementation of a participatory budget is the legislative framework which will define as a key provision in the participatory budget for all municipalities. At the same time, it is important that the legislative framework of the participatory budget allows room for some
modification and agile development, and variations upon agreement. Due to the fact that certain monitoring of municipalities is carried out by regional administrations, it is possible to agree on participatory budget modifications with regional administrations. Thus, we deem it important to have relevant articles on the participatory budget in the Code of Local Governments.

This legislative initiative should also be developed in the most inclusive way possible. Consolidated work for drafting and developing the legislative initiative by parliamentary committees, especially the Parliamentary Committees on Human Rights and Civil Integration, Regional Policy and Local Governance, and Finance and Budget is very important.

The role of foreign experts and non-governmental organizations working in participatory democracy development and participatory democracy programs is very important. It is also possible to invite “Solidarity Fund” experts who have been working for years to implement participatory democracy development projects in Georgian municipalities. It is necessary for the legislative initiative to include both the knowledge-based contribution of the members of the sectoral committees as well as the opinion of independent experts and competent organizations.

The legislative initiative should encourage local authorities to communicate as directly and clearly as possible with the local population in the process of implementing a participatory budget. It is important that local governments in municipalities populated by national minorities provide each citizen with clear and detailed instructions on the participatory budget and encourage each local to take an active part in the implementation of the program.

Conclusion

Georgian municipalities require new democratic mechanisms that will strengthen citizen involvement in the decision-making process. This need is particularly pronounced in the national minority populated municipalities located at the borders. The participatory budget is a unique tool of participatory planning that teaches people how to manage public resources and think from the standpoint of public discourse.

It is unequivocally important to introduce this in all Georgian municipalities which requires multifaceted efforts, both by legislators as well as by the executive power and non-governmental organizations. It is necessary to create an open framework tailored to the objective reality of Georgia while taking into account the best practices of participatory budgeting in the world. It should also provide local governments with the space to refine and develop the participatory budgeting process.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

THE ROLE OF YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS IN THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

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SUMMARY

The following document describes in the historical context the reasons for the low socio-political activity and low degree of integration of ethnic minorities in Georgia. Ways to solve the problem described in the document include activities under the auspices of youth organizations, which should have a positive impact on the reinvigoration of society and integration into civic life.

The policy document consists of 6 chapters, with a list of literature used as an addendum. The introductory part reviews the historical context of the problem and its development from the declaration of independence to the present day. The next chapter explains in detail the reasons for the low degree of integration of ethnic minorities, the steps taken by various governments to address this problem, and the obstacles ethnic minorities have faced in exercising their constitutional rights.

The cycle of activities, which aims to localize the existing problem and accelerate the integration process, consists of three main modules: the use of non-formal and informal teaching methods, the formation of youth councils, and the organization of a multicultural festival dedicated to the day of cultural diversity. Given the problems and political context in the ethnic minority regions, the aforementioned activities are considered to be an effective means of improving the low degree of integration, providing young people with a deeper knowledge of civic-political culture, rights and entitlements, and ensuring their active involvement in the processes of governance.

The recommendations include a list of major activities that can serve to achieve the main goal and deal effectively with the problem.

The concluding section of the policy document summarizes the content of all chapters and discusses alternative solutions to the identified problem in the context of joint action with the state and non-governmental sector.

The research methodology includes an analysis of information using existing literature, research and policy documents, articles, statistical data processed by Geostat and international organizations, and national and international legal frameworks.

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the first Democratic Republic of Georgia was the result of selfless work by generations and a resolute struggle with the occupier. After the suppression of a number of popular uprisings, the struggle for independence entered a decisive phase in the 1970s and 80s, with the Georgian press and socio-political movements making a major contribution. The Act of Independence, adopted on May 26, 1918, among other important provisions, emphasized the equal rights of all citizens of Georgia, regardless of nationality or gender. When most Eastern European countries were fighting dictatorship, the Democratic Republic of Georgia was able to draft the first constitution, and create a parliamentary governance and electoral system. Georgia was also able to form an active opposition and a free press.¹

Fifteen political parties ran in the 1919 general election, out of which six entered the Constitutional Assembly, including the Armenian revolutionary party “Dashnaktsyutun”. Among the 130 elected members of the Assembly were 8 Armenians, 3 Abkhazians, 3 Russians, 2 Germans, 2 Jews, 2 Ossetians, 1 Azerbaijani, 1 Greek and 1 Russian-Molokan. The formation of a democratic European state, based on equal rights, was halted by Soviet annexation in 1921.

The Soviet rule, a struggle against eclecticism and representativeness erased all pre-Soviet consensus, positive experience, and the beginnings of a multicultural state, and created a completely new – Soviet - reality, reinforced by ongoing repressions along with the change of generations.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a consensus based on the unity of the ethnic majority was established in Georgia, despite the fact that immediately after the declaration of independence, the population living on the territory of Georgia, regardless of ethnicity, was declared as citizens of Georgia. Ethnic majority-oriented policies, along with other accompanying problems, have led to the isolation of ethnic minorities living in Georgia and the formation of a kind of enclave. Socio-political life, based on a centralized model of governance, has intensified the feeling of isolation among these minorities, while a lack of knowledge of the state language - Georgian – has precipitated their alienation. After the restoration of independence, this missing sense of a unified state identity, along with the lack of knowledge of the state language, disengaged ethnic minorities from the political agenda. Later, after the start of hostilities in Abkhazia, part of the territories of Georgia were occupied by Russian troops, and Abkhazia declared independence. Such developments have long hindered state consolidation and the integration of certain groups of the population into the socio-political processes.

According to the agreement signed between Georgia and Russia in 1995, Russian bases were established in four settlements of Georgia (Batumi, Gudauta, Vaziani and Akhalkalaki) for 25 years. This, along with the problems in the country and the mistakes made by the government, contributed to the isolation of ethnic minorities and left them living in a condition exclusive from the state. The economic activity of the people living in Samtskhe-Javakheti was mainly connected with the Russian military base. The Russian Ruble was actively used in this region of the country, even after the introduction of a national currency in Georgia, and the Russian base in Akhalkalaki was perceived by the population as a security guarantor and the means to exert pressure on the Georgian state.

The situation has changed since the 2003 Rose Revolution. The policy of the new government considered Georgia as a state for each of its citizens, and defined the idea of being Georgian on the basis of knowledge of the state language and Georgian citizenship. During the same period, the obligation to indicate ethnic origin on the Georgian passport was abolished. A comprehensive national concept and an action plan of tolerance and civic integration for 2009-2014 was developed during the period of the National Movement. However, at the same time, the Georgian National Communications Commission did not issue broadcasting licenses to the radio stations of the Armenian and Azerbaijani community. The educational program implemented during this period known as “1 + 4” is noteworthy. The program provides access to higher education for ethnic minorities and to a General Aptitude Examination test in Abkhazian, Ossetian, Armenian and Azerbaijani languages. Young people who want to get an education, after passing the General Aptitude Examination, take a one-year preparatory educational course in Georgian, and then continue their studies at the faculty of their choice. The “1 + 4” program has had a significant impact on the reinvigoration of young people from ethnic minorities and their integration into the educational process.

2 Unlike the Baltic countries, where the Russian-speaking population had limited citizenship.
Following the change of government in 2012, after eight years of waiting, the Armenian-language radio “Nor” received a broadcasting license, which in terms of filling the information vacuum and strengthening the media was clearly a positive development. In addition, the Azerbaijani-language radio “Marneuli” acquired the right to FM broadcast in 2015. However, it should also be noted that the Georgian-Azerbaijani community radio “Ivrisi” of Iormughanlo in Sagarejo Municipality faced some problems obtaining a license. It has been applying for a license since 2015, but has thus far been unable to get broadcasting rights from the Georgian National Communications Commission.

The issue of integration of ethnic minorities into socio-political life combines many important aspects. It should be noted that the development of relations between the authorities and minorities is taking a positive trend. However, the problem of integration of ethnic minorities is still acute. The level of knowledge of the state language and the degree of involvement in political processes is quite low.

**PROBLEM DESCRIPTION**

Ethnic minorities living in Georgia lack state identity. Their positioning in society is somewhat distanced from the majority, and hardly gives the impression of coexistence in one state. One of the important reasons for this condition is, of course, the language barrier. The vast majority of ethnic minorities speaks the state language poorly. Therefore, access to Georgian-language media is limited, and the information space of minorities is much narrower and, in many cases, easily manipulated.

According to a 2014 survey by the National Statistics Office of Georgia, the share of ethnic minorities in the national composition of the Georgian population is 13.2%. The highest number of these minorities are Azerbaijanis (6.3%) and Armenians (4.5%), who live compactly in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. In the compact settlements, the problem of state language and participation in political processes is more acute.

Due to the language barrier, ethnic minorities are not active users of the Georgian media, and use non-Georgian media to fill the information vacuum, which creates a real risk of them becoming victims of propaganda or misinformation. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that Georgian media outlets themselves have little material on ethnic minorities, while the local, ethnic minority media is weak. As a result, the ethnic minority is not fully informed either about the current events in the country, or the developments in the international arena. Added to this is the low degree of involvement of ethnic minorities in socio-political issues and the formal nature of minority representation in the state’s highest legislative body. Article 6 of the Law of Georgia on Political Parties prohibits the formation of a political party on a regional or territorial basis, for certain subjective reasons, such as the threat of increased separatism, which would be additional pressure for a country in a state of war. This has shaped the Georgian government’s policy towards ethnic minorities over the years. However, it should be noted that the issues and challenges of the minorities living in a certain region are so specific that the systematic articulation of these problems and their rapid solution might be effectively tackled precisely through a union formed on a territorial or regional basis. Of course, this is just a hypothesis that really has a right to exist in the face of today’s challenges. Interestingly, there was an attempt in Javakheti to register a party created on an ethnic basis, called “Virq”, in the late 1990s.

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3 IREX. Media Sustainability Index 2015.
4 Netgazeti. 2017
5 Geostat. 2014
Ethnic minority regions are usually sympathetic to parties holding the power. For example, in the 2012 elections, while nationwide the “United National Movement” received 40% of votes, in ethnic minority areas it was supported by almost 70-80% of the population. At the same time, the example of Ninotsminda former majoritarian Enzel Mkoyan illustrates the formality of the parliamentary representation: he has been a member of every parliament since 1999. On behalf of the “United National Movement”, Mkoyan won the election with a significant lead in 2012, then left the party and joined “Georgian Dream”, the newly elected party in power. Such cases show that in regions with low political activity, procedural democracy is used to achieve the goals of specific groups and individuals more than to overcome the challenges facing the population.

In the wake of Russia’s atrocities in Abkhazia, liberal and democracy-based policies toward ethnic minorities have been perceived as very risky in the various governments of Georgia. This is illustrated by a number of cases, such as in the delay in obtaining licenses for TV and radio broadcasting in the ethnic minority-populated regions. The status quo in which Georgia operates is absolutely understandable; however, it cannot justify the state’s insufficiently flexible policies and, in some cases, actions with elements of unequal treatment, as this impedes the achievement of a desired result, which implies rapid and full-fledged integration of minorities into the state’s socio-political life. The elections are just one component of all this, and as a chain reaction, it should be followed by the active involvement of the local population in self-governance and issues of national importance, as well as bilateral feedback between the population and the elected government, equal and fair conditions of development, freedom to engage in the political activity, political campaigning and agitation, etc.

The Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality works on issues regarding the integration of ethnic minorities, guided by the State Strategy and Action Plan for Civic Equality and Integration (2015-2020). This strategy has been operational in Georgia since 2009.

The Action Plan includes four main strategic goals: equal and comprehensive participation in civic and political life; creating equal social and economic conditions and opportunities; ensuring access to quality education and improving knowledge of the state language; preserving the culture of ethnic minorities, and ensuring a tolerant environment.

The Strategy and Action Plan is committed to the obligations adopted by Georgia’s accession to the Council of Europe in 1999, and is in line with international agreements and documents.

For many years, the non-governmental sector has been active in the Georgian regions inhabited by ethnic minorities. Through various educational and professional development-oriented activities, they seek to spread democratic values and to introduce to the population the tools of participation in socio-political processes bestowed by the law, to provide them with credible and quality information, thus promoting active involvement and rapid integration of the population.

It is important to note that the integration process includes many aspects, among them economic, social, and political. Integration is complex in essence, and its goal is to place the self-identification of individual groups within a single state, social, and cultural framework. The success of the integration process depends on various factors, and the contextual relevance and sustainability of

6 CEC, 2012.
7 Official Website of the Parliament of Georgia.
8 IREX, Media Sustainability Index 2006/07; 2008; 2009; 2010.
9 See Annexes and tables, Table 1
10 Democracy at The Local Level, Sisk Timothy D., 2001
the integration policy; however, one of the most important components that determines the success of an integration policy is the planning and implementation of activities targeting students and young people. Numerous scientific studies confirm that the rate of knowledge and skills acquisition at this age is much higher than later. On the one hand, this is important because civic self-awareness and diverse perception of the world, as well as its acceptance, will become an integral part of young people’s lives, and on the other hand, any sign of difference is perceived not as isolation, but its full integration into the diverse world and state. The key for productive work in this regard is youth organizations, and there is a need to significantly increase their role in the integration process. Currently, there are several youth organizations in Georgia, operating within and without the ethnic minority regions, but the overall vision and common long-term goals are not clearly articulated. Consequently, the potential activities carried out by such organizations are relatively ineffective and ad hoc, characterized by the absence of a complex problem-solving mechanism, lack of a unified vision, and an insufficient degree of cooperation.

Notwithstanding the international commitments and agreements made by the state, and the implementation of the action plan established at the national level, the degree of socio-political integration of ethnic minorities does not live up to the challenges facing this multicultural state. The language barrier, the low rate of involvement in civil processes, the information vacuum and the use of non-Georgian media as the main source of information reinforce every threat that could seriously damage the sovereignty of the state and the democratic development of its society.

**Aim of the study and methodology**

The aim of the study is to illustrate the role of youth organizations in the process of integration of ethnic minorities by reviewing the factors hindering the integration of ethnic minorities in public and political life, and analyzing the path that ethnic minorities have taken since the restoration of Georgia’s independence.

The aim of the research is also to analyze secondary data, literature, legislation and policy documents, as well as to analyze the historical context and past experience, in order to identify the activities that complement the measures taken by the government and the non-governmental sector to address ethnic minority issues, increase the degree of their involvement in public administration and improve their civil awareness.

**PROBLEM SOLUTIONS**

Developed countries around the world, along with international organizations and the non-governmental sector, have long agreed that strengthening democracy, improving the political process and encouraging participation in socio-political processes can be achieved through active work and cooperation with young people. The set of efforts that each state makes individually and in a coordinated manner is aimed at securing a better future, with young people considered as being the direct heirs and leaders of the future.

The resolution adopted by the 122nd Assembly of the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) emphasizes the importance of the full and active involvement of youth and youth organizations in democratic processes, both national and local, as well as at the international level, for the purpose of establishing and further strengthening a full-fledged democracy. Since the positive impact of youth involvement on the economy, poverty alleviation and the elimination of deviant or socially
unacceptable behavior is recognized, active work in this area might positively change the existing political agenda, both locally and internationally.\textsuperscript{11}

22.5\% of the Georgian population is young (15-29 years old).\textsuperscript{12} According to the results of every election held in Georgia since the 2010 local elections, 18-29 year old voters constituted no more than 24\% of the total number of voters.\textsuperscript{13} In a situation where the number of voters above 18-29 is three times higher than the number of young voters, and the problems of ethnic minorities themselves occupy a small part of the political parties’ agenda, focusing on the needs of young people living in an ethnic minority region can be assessed as electorally less profitable, which, in turn, can only exacerbate the problems facing the state in terms of minority integration. However, this can change if political parties devote a significant portion of their election agenda to young people, underscoring the need to increase their involvement, acquire a better education, improve employment opportunities, and then delivering that information correctly to young voters. The implemented activities might be transformed into a positive synergy and have a constructive impact on improving the ratings of specific political parties, as well as raising the interest of young people and the quality of integration.

In order to complement ongoing and already implemented projects by the state and the non-governmental sector, it is possible to consider the execution of educational and volunteer activities in regions populated by ethnic minorities under the auspices of youth organizations. The target group of the developed strategy will be young people (15-29 years old) living in these regions. Today, a number of well-functioning youth organizations with a positive impact on the intellectual, professional or civic development of the next generation is already operational. A youth organization focused on integration into socio-political processes will be able to target the segment of the population that arguably feels most painfully the shortcomings of the existing policies and the insufficiency of conducted measures. More so because young people are most concerned with their own future perspective and opportunities that will lead them to the desired outcome.

To overcome the challenges facing the state and society, and to encourage active involvement in the socio-political life of ethnic minority regions, a cycle of youth-led activities can be set up, consisting of three alternatives. These alternatives can be implemented separately as well as together.

The first alternative involves the establishment of a non-formal\textsuperscript{14} and informal\textsuperscript{15} education\textsuperscript{16} system and the consistent implementation of various activities with the involvement of young people belonging to ethnic minorities.

The cycle of activities of the youth organizations based on non-formal and informal education includes both civic-political and educational-entertainment components.

The educational program should cover: the history of Georgia as a multicultural state, examples of peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups living in Georgia, history of civic activism, analysis of successful coexistence of developed multicultural societies, analysis of past positive experiences, and the use of digital and technological progress for education, self-realization and civil engagement. Moreover, the program should include the relationship between the citizen and the state, and understanding of civil rights and responsibilities, as well as their promotion and active use.

\textsuperscript{11} Resolution of the 122\textsuperscript{nd} Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2010.
\textsuperscript{12} Unicef, 2014.
\textsuperscript{13} CEC, Electoral Statistics, 2020
\textsuperscript{14} Non-formal education is an evidence based, goal-oriented form of education.
\textsuperscript{15} Informal education is a cycle of unstructured and disorganized activities that incorporates knowledge and skills acquired from day-to-day activities.
\textsuperscript{16} see. Annex 1
The work of the youth organization includes different types of activities, among them: several months of thematic schools, conferences, seminars, panel discussions, film screenings, and various volunteer activities. The activities take place in an informal and comfortable environment (which includes outreach meetings), where young people will be able to enjoy the educational process and, through an interactive mode, provide information to the organizers about their problems and visions. After studying the forms of citizen participation in self-governance, the young people involved in the projects, together with the organizers, will try to realize the civil rights bestowed by the law, monitored by the youth organization. The beneficiaries of the project will organize a common settlement meeting to discuss issues important to their community, will collect signatures for a petition, will attend assembly meetings, and will learn to exercise their rights in practice. Upon successful completion of the project, the youth, divided into several groups, will try to formulate an election program for a party according to the needs and problems of the ethnic minorities, as seen from their perspective.

The youth organization will measure the effectiveness of the alternative by the change in the number of civic initiatives, implemented volunteer projects, and forms of participation in self-governance. The effective implementation of this alternative requires the support of local agencies and the allocation of space and an appropriate budget for the activities. The support of NGOs and the media will also be necessary.

The second alternative of measures is the formation of youth assemblies, youth councils and thematic working groups in the regions populated by ethnic minorities. This will be conducted under the auspices of a youth organization based on cooperation with the non-governmental sector. After acquiring the necessary trainings, the young people will try to conduct a survey of the population, process information and then discuss it with the Youth Assembly. They will submit deliberated proposals to their municipal assemblies in accordance with the law. The youth assemblies can be formed by holding local elections in the community schools. The winner of the election will be able to represent the pupils of that school in the youth assembly. This format will instill a political culture in schoolchildren from an early age, and make it very clear to them how important it is for each person to participate in the ongoing socio-political processes in the village, town or country. Once the project has been developed and brought in line with the state law, the Youth Agency can be involved in the project as a state contributor. It should be noted that the functioning of the youth assemblies does not require mobilization of large resources, but for the council elections the youth organization will require some financial contribution from the local government or partner organizations.

The format of the Youth Council emerged in Europe in the early twentieth century. It is now well-proven in developed countries and is very popular with young people locally, nationally, and internationally. The UN “World Youth Report” (2018) discusses the importance of youth contributions in public policy-making and socio-political processes through youth councils and parliaments. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child includes the promotion of youth councils as a platform for expressing their opinions and positions.

Statistics on the use of forms of participation of young people in the self-governance in ethnic minority regions can be used to measure the effectiveness of this alternative. The Ministry of Education and the Central Election Commission, together with the non-governmental sector, have an important role to play in implementing it.

The third alternative is to organize a multicultural festival to celebrate Cultural Diversity Day (May 21), which includes both entertainment and educational activities. Representatives of each demographic group will be involved in organizing the festival. Within the framework of the festival, the citizens of Georgia, representing different cultures and ethnicities, will better understand each other’s culture, cuisine, folklore, tradition, etc. The educational component of the festival includes several hours of intensive training, conducted in a format compatible with the festival. Brochures and information cards aimed at raising civic awareness will be distributed from information stands at the festival. This event will facilitate direct communication between the representatives of the minority and majority, which is a tangible basis for a common multinational, state consensus, as state unity is formed through different groups of society coming together around a common idea.

The third alternative, unlike the first two, requires the most financial and human resources, and is related to various bureaucratic procedures, among them finding a festival area, obtaining permits from the relevant government agencies, etc. which, of course, cannot be achieved without active government support. The effectiveness of the latter can be measured by looking at statistics on post-festival initiatives or the use of other possible mechanisms of civic engagement in an area populated by ethnic minorities. However, as the focus of this alternative is more on public interaction, the above statistical changes may not be the result of festival activities at all.

The implementation of any of the proposed measures will have a positive impact on the integration of ethnic minorities into socio-political life, although the implementation of all three components will greatly increase the effectiveness of each.

In terms of the financial, human and other resources required to implement the cycle of events, the first part of the proposed cycle of measures is the most advantageous; that is the one focusing on raising awareness among ethnic minorities and increasing their involvement in civic processes through non-formal and informal education. Following implementation of the first part, it will be possible to execute the idea of youth councils and, later, to mobilize the necessary resources for the festival dedicated to the Day of Cultural Diversity.

The proposed solution involves the implementation of planned activities with the active support and participation of all stakeholders. The local governments, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia, the Youth Agency, the non-governmental sector and civil society have an active role to play in the implementation of the proposed alternatives. The contribution of these institutions to said implementation includes intellectual and procedural, as well as financial support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Encouraging the involvement of ethnic minorities in socio-political processes and increasing the degree of integration can be achieved by targeting a specific age group of the population (youth) and taking appropriate measures.

The following activities can be carried out under the auspices of the youth organization to better represent the role of society in political processes, to establish clear political accountability, and to raise civil awareness:

- Thematic law and civic education schools, seminars, conferences, panel discussions, film screenings, volunteer activities, etc.;
- Youth Councils, youth assemblies and thematic working groups; staffing of councils through youth elections;
Multicultural festival dedicated to the Day of Cultural Diversity with the active involvement and participation of ethnic minorities in Georgia. It is also important to strengthen and promote the ethnic component in state holidays.

Along with the state strategy and the NGO sector activities, the development of a working strategy for youth organizations, and the aforementioned activities, which will focus on the civic-political engagement of ethnic minorities and the expansion of opportunities for self-realization, will accelerate the integration process and the formation of a sense of state identity.

**CONCLUSION**

Given the geo-political situation in the country and the needs of a democratic state, the state policy and strategy aimed at protecting the rights and freedoms of all citizens, equal realization of their capabilities and active integration into local and national socio-political processes, is of utmost importance. To do this, first of all, it is necessary for the responsible state security agencies to constantly monitor and incorporate into the threat assessment document the challenges that may undermine state sovereignty. The state policy should be based on the objective reality in the country, and then the state goals and objectives of Georgia should be adapted to the existing multicultural situation. The state consensus must unite every citizen living in the country - the vast majority of the country’s demography must identify itself with the Georgian state, and have an aspiration to actively participate in public and political life. To do this, the state must take bold steps and actively protect the interests of minorities, ensuring the freedom to exercise all the rights enjoyed by the majority of this country. Of course, such an approach would be, on the one hand, a sincere fulfillment of the obligations undertaken by the state in the international arena, and, on the other hand, a future-oriented action based on the principles of a just state.

Improving the isolationist attitudes, low civil awareness and low degree of integration of ethnic minorities can be achieved through the involvement of all major public actors in the state. Given that changes and innovation are relatively easy for the youth segment to absorb, and given the positive international experience, the reinvigoration of youth organizations in ethnic minority regions can be seen as an important step towards overcoming the challenges facing the state. This will significantly accelerate the formation of a common popular consensus, multicultural civil society and the strengthening of democracy in Georgia.
Table 1. Strategic goals of the State Action Plan for Civic Equality and Integration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Equal and comprehensive participation in civil and political life</th>
<th>2. Create equal social and economic conditions and opportunities</th>
<th>3. Ensure access to quality education and improve knowledge of the state language</th>
<th>4. Preserve the culture of ethnic minorities and ensure a tolerant environment</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Gender mainstreaming</td>
<td>2.1 Promote social and regional mobility</td>
<td>3.1 Increase access to preschool education</td>
<td>4.1 Keep in mind the role and importance of ethnic minorities in the development and implementation of cultural policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Increase access to public administration and law enforcement tools and agencies for ethnic minorities</td>
<td>2.2 Provide vocational and adult education</td>
<td>3.2 Increase access to quality general education in both state and native languages</td>
<td>4.2 Protecting and promoting the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.4 Encourage the participation of ethnic minorities in political decision-making</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.3 Increase access to higher education</td>
<td>4.3 Promoting cultural diversity</td>
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<td>1.5 Improving access to media and information for ethnic minorities</td>
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<td>1.6 Ensuring public awareness on the rights of ethnic minorities</td>
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Annex 1. Non-formal education is a goal-oriented form of education and is well documented.\(^\text{19}\) This form of education is carried out through training courses, seminars, panel discussions, film screenings, etc.

The peculiarity of informal education is derived from the life activities of adults. It is conducted daily and is related to doing a variety of work, either social activities or leisure and entertainment.\(^\text{20}\)

The Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020), based on the Lifelong Learning (LLL) strategy, includes teaching through formal, non-formal and informal methods. There are 4 main goals of ET 2020: making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training; promoting justice, social unity and active citizenship; and increasing creativity and innovation at all levels of education and training.\(^\text{21}\)

The Strategic Framework recognizes the special role and advantages of non-formal and informal education over institutional forms of teaching. In addition to the fact that the system of non-formal education is characterized by a rapid pace of adaptation compared to formal education, it also requires fewer financial resources, and educational content always stems from public demand - a set of needs that are relevant and demanded in real time.

It is noteworthy that in developed countries, a great deal of focus is put on non-formal education. In the wake of the digital revolution and the rapid integration of electronic services, the synthesis of

\(^{19}\) Education.ge, 2016.

\(^{20}\) Education.ge, 2016.

\(^{21}\) European Commission, 2020, Policies.
technologies and non-traditional teaching methods is also perceived as one way to overcome the challenges of the future. Western European countries consider non-formal and informal methods of education to be as important as the traditional form of teaching, which is why many countries have procedures for assessing or recognizing the skills and knowledge acquired during learning. It should also be noted that a large part of the population in developed countries is involved in the LLL process, therefore actively using non-formal means of education.\textsuperscript{22}

According to statistics compiled by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the rate of participation in non-formal and informal education and training among the population aged 25-34 appears as seen below:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart.png}
\caption{Participation in non-formal and informal education and training among the population aged 25-34.}
\end{figure}

By comparison, the same indicator is 31\% in our neighboring Turkey and 30\% in Russia.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22} Werquin P. OECD, 2010.
\textsuperscript{23} OECD, 2010, OECD.Stat.


8. Election Administration of Georgia. Web-page: https://cesko.ge/


IMPROVING THE SUPPORT OF ETHNIC MINORITY EDUCATION IN TBILISI HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
TRANSPORTATION COMPONENT (CASE OF KVEMO KARTLI)

Elene Alimbarashvili – New Rights Party
Lasha Makhatadze – Christian-Democratic Movement
Tornike Mumladze – Free Georgia

SUMMARY

The two largest ethnic groups in Georgia, ethnic Armenians and ethnic Azerbaijanis, reside in high density in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, far from the capital city Tbilisi. Of the many problems hindering the integration of ethnic minorities, one of the least covered is the current public transportation system. Its dysfunctionality makes travel difficult, and this problem affects virtually all ethnic groups, including Georgians. The existing transportation system is not tailored to the interests and needs of the residents, thereby inhibiting youth who want to obtain a quality education. The improperly designed intercity public transportation schedules often prevent students from systematically attending lectures and courses. It is our opinion that improving and modifying the transportation system will strengthen the promotion of ethnic minority education in Tbilisi higher education institutions.

The following document presents the alternatives through which it is possible to achieve the desired goal. We consider the joint, coordinated work of Tbilisi universities and the Tbilisi Transportation Company an optimal alternative. For the implementation of the selected alternative, targeted recommendations were provided to Tbilisi City Hall, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia and, of course, the Tbilisi Transportation Company. With the involvement, support, and concerted action of the listed entities, we will achieve a tangible result, that is, on the one hand, the establishment of a well-functioning intercity public transportation system and, on the other hand, improvement of the support of ethnic minority education in Tbilisi universities.

INTRODUCTION

Numerous events have been held and various initiatives have been voiced for the integration of ethnic groups living in Georgia by both the government and international donors. Important steps have been taken in terms of education. The introduction of mandatory Unified National Examinations served to restore the equality of education and eradicate corruption, although the introduction of this system turned out to be discriminatory for ethnic minorities due to their inadequate knowledge of the Georgian language. Given the existing shortcomings, the state has begun to introduce various National Exams concessions specifically for minorities living in the regions.

Since 2010, these groups have been beneficiaries of the 1+4 program, seeing them able to take national exams in the Armenian, Azerbaijani, Abkhazian and Ossetian languages. In addition, within the framework of this program, it is mandatory to take a one-year preparatory course in Georgian, which serves to solidify the state language among the ethnic non-Georgian population.
The Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia translated schooling materials from Georgian into Armenian and Azerbaijani (as well as Russian), replacing the textbooks that had been supplied to non-Georgian schools by the respective countries of origin of the national minorities.

Based on the listed and other measures already taken, we can say that the state truly cares about supporting the education of these groups.

Yet, despite the existing opportunities, the transportation component is still one of the most important obstacles in the process of the above ethnic minority youth obtaining a quality education. First of all, students living in the minority regions have to travel a long distance to reach universities in the capital. At first glance, it may appear difficult to connect education to a dysfunctional public transportation system; however, in the document below, we show how it is possible to improve the promotion of ethnic minority education in Tbilisi universities by refining and modifying the existing intercity public transportation system.

**PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION**

Ethnic minorities living in Georgia face various problems and challenges. Among them, quality education tailored to the ethnic minorities is a problematic issue, and the lack of knowledge of the state language is also a barrier, significantly hindering the involvement of these groups in the social, cultural and economic life of the country. One of the most important and necessary conditions for acquiring an education is for the student to attend ongoing courses and to understand and speak the state language in which the teaching is conducted. Hence, two main problems emerge: the language barrier and the existence of a dysfunctional transportation system.

During the Russian Empire and under Soviet rule, most communication was carried out in Russian, which was common to the Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani ethnic groups. Following the declaration of independence in Georgia, linguistic problems arose, and the lack of knowledge of the state language began to significantly hinder the involvement of ethnic minorities in the social, cultural and economic life of the country. According to the results of the 2014 census, 74% of the ethnic Azerbaijani population and 51.3% of the Armenian population living in Georgia either do not speak at all or possess incomplete knowledge of the state language (Geostat, 2016). Given that higher education in Georgia is provided in the state language, Georgian, if a citizen cannot speak this language, then they will not be able to get a higher education in Georgia and will be compelled to go abroad to continue their studies. Accordingly, state policy is aimed at increasing access to education by improving knowledge of the state language. Concrete steps have been taken by the state in this regard, and since 2010, ethnic minorities have been beneficiaries of a simplified approach to acquiring a higher education in Georgia. The well-known 1 + 4 program, makes it possible to take the National General Skills Examination in Armenian, Azerbaijani, Abkhazian and Ossetian. Representatives of ethnic minorities take a training course in Georgian for 1 year, and after accumulating a certain number of credits, continue their studies at the faculty of their choice.
Since the launch of the program, the number of ethnic minority students in Georgian higher education institutions has been growing by the year. The number of non-Georgian students enrolled in 2010 was 247, and according to the data of 2018, that number rose to 1231, an increase largely made possible by the aforementioned program. Although the population has a great desire to learn the state language, as well as to pursue education in the country’s higher education institutions, these tasks remain hard to accomplish due to many interrelated problems. One of the major problems is the lack, and in some cases the absence, of a proper functioning transportation system and infrastructure within and among municipalities. Public transport ensures the mobility and access of the population to workplaces and all social infrastructure - education, medical services, culture, economic activities and other socio-economic structures of society.

According to the current situation studied by the EMC team, in most of the villages inhabited by ethnic minorities, there is no public transport that will take the population to any of the central cities. In such conditions, it is impossible for young persons to plan for the continuation of their studies.

The positive initiatives taken to improve the transportation system should also be noted. Significant improvements to roads and infrastructure were made in the mountainous districts of Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda and Tsalka. Most of the roads between Akhalsikhe and Akhalkalaki were restored, which reduced the travel time from Tbilisi to Akhalkalaki from 6 to 4.5 hours. The Tbilisi-Tsalka-Ninotsminda highway was reconstructed, which reduced the travel time from the capital towards Javakheti. At the same time, the transportation infrastructure in Tsalka was improved and the section of the road from Tbilisi to Manglisi (Tetritskaro district) was restored. The state has carried out various road reconstruction and rehabilitation measures. There is also a transportation system that seems to cover the popular routes along which members of the community mostly travel; however, as an example, only two buses, N.19 and N.44, run from Marneuli to Tbilisi, crossing the Marneuli Highway and the Shavnabada turn. As for transport to Shida Kartli, the population has the opportunity to use the services of minibuses, which travel from Didube station in Tbilisi to Akhalkalaki (Kaspi) at intervals of about an hour. Yet movement is limited in the evenings, and the situation is no better in the direction of Kvemo Kartli. However, the proximity of the region to the capital in terms of mobility is an advantageous factor. It should be noted that the fare for minibuses traveling from Rustavi to Tbilisi varies from 1.30 to 2 GEL depending on the route. In recent years, the number of private taxi parks has increased significantly, which has helped to create a competitive market environment and provide affordable services to customers 24 hours a day.

Clearly, the existing transportation system needs to be refined and modified. It is necessary to create a transportation system which will be capable of providing the vast majority of the population with a sufficient quantity of public transport means, and to develop a customer-oriented transport travel schedule.

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As already mentioned, the current system of public transportation reduces the quality of academic achievement of those students who have to travel from the ethnic minority regions to Tbilisi in order to receive a higher education. Given the severity of the problem, it is necessary to look for solutions in order to improve the support of the education of ethnic minorities in Tbilisi universities.

Maintaining the status quo can be considered one of the alternatives, the positive side of which is the absence of additional costs. However, it will not improve student mobility, and, as a consequence, they will not be able to actively attend ongoing courses.

Municipalities have been taking appropriate measures to solve this problem. For example, a “Student Transportation Assistance” program has been developed, which will be implemented by the Marneuli Municipality from 2020. The program provides transportation assistance to students to the amount of 50 GEL per month for 10 months of a year. The program will be available to the representatives of a certain target group, upon submission of the relevant documentation to the Marneuli City Hall Chancellery.

The Needs Assessment of the Marneuli Municipality Youth shows that public transportation is the primary barrier for young people in their daily lives. Such transportation problems are related to the frequency of traffic, limited schedule, and quality of the transport system.

It would be better to allocate a sufficient quantity of quality transport means, the schedule of which is tailored to the universities and fully covers the schedule of all ongoing courses. The proposed way to solve the issue is associated with various challenges, including the need to determine the traffic schedule and increase the quantity of public transport means, which in turn is associated with costs and requires additional service personnel.

When compiling a university lecture schedule, the interests of students living in ethnic minority regions should be taken into account. The selective subjects a university offers to the student should be conducted at specially defined hours adjusted to the public transport timetable from the aforementioned regions.

Alternatively, the university has the opportunity to provide transportation for its own students. This requires determining the number of students who have to travel from the region to the capital every day to get a higher education. Solving this problem would also benefit the university, and is actually achievable if the appropriate transport is allocated for students, and / or the time for delivering lectures is adjusted to the schedule of public transportation.

The best way to increase the academic performance of ethnic minorities in Tbilisi universities and to improve the promotion of education, requires universities and the Tbilisi Transport Company to act in concert: cooperating to determine what measures can be taken by each to solve the problem.

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3 Guseinova N., Khalilovi E. The Needs Assessment of the Marneuli Municipality Youth. Marneuli, Center for Civic Engagement and Activism, 2019, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B5uckmRwO18zeG1seGF0N2VaNlE3Q2hqLWs1MTk3VzdFRzIt/view?fbclid=IwAR1jplQKiGXP2sT0Vh2mslfZv_lvqD8jeX-Y8UXKp3furZXmdTQxEINj7U>. 
**RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to implement the selected alternative, Tbilisi City Hall is advised to regulate and oversee the necessary measures to resolve this issue.

The involvement of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia is also important. It is necessary to determine the number of students who have to travel from the ethnic minority regions to the capital to receive a higher education. Further, before the start of the academic year, it is necessary to take into account the traffic schedule from the regions to the capital in order to adjust and arrange lectures appropriately.

The next recommendation is given to the Tbilisi Transport Company, which must acquire an appropriate quantity of vehicles and improve their daily traffic schedule. The company should cooperate with the Ministry of Education and Science and reach an agreement on a public transportation schedule prior to the start of the academic year.

**CONCLUSION**

One of the most important ways to improve the promotion of ethnic minority education in Tbilisi universities is to assist students living in ethnic minority areas to organize their timely transportation to and from Tbilisi universities.

Taking into account the given recommendations, the coordinated action of the listed entities will deliver the desired result and achieve the desired goal, which is to improve the promotion of ethnic minority education in Tbilisi universities.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE PANKISI GORGE AND LOCAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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Salome Lomidze – Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia

SUMMARY

The following policy document is dedicated to the development of tourism in the Pankisi Gorge through the involvement of the local community. Although the Pankisi Gorge has a great tourism potential, it is not being properly utilized. International practice illustrates that the development of tourism has contributed to the establishment of peace in a number of conflict regions and facilitated the dialogue between local ethnic groups as exemplified by the mixed Serbo-Bosnian cities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This paper describes the current situation and provides three alternative ways to solve the problem. The engagement of the local Kist community is crucial in all three alternatives. Our work combines an overview of academic papers and media publications as well as interviews with Pankisi Gorge residents.

INTRODUCTION

The Pankisi Gorge has repeatedly attracted the attention of the local and international media in recent years. This attention was especially heightened during the active phase of the Syrian conflict when a number of Pankisi residents went to participate in the fighting. Along with this, the region is facing severe economic problems.

The Pankisi Gorge is located on the southern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains in the upper reaches of the Alazani River. The gorge is surrounded by the Pankisi and Didgverd-Nakerali ridges. It is located at 95 meters above sea level. The gorge includes the following villages: Duisi, Jokolo, Birkiani, Dzibakhevi, Kvareltskali, Dedisperuli, Tsinubani, Khalatsani, Sakobiano, Dumasturi and Omalo. Administratively, the Pankisi Gorge is part of the Akhmeta municipality.¹

The majority of the population of the Pankisi Gorge is made up of Kists who essentially are Chechens living in Georgia. Their spoken language is the Kist dialect of the Chechen language. According to the 2002 census, 7,110 Kists lived in Georgia while in 2014 their number significantly decreased to 5,700.² For centuries, Kists and Georgians enjoyed close relationships. However, the disorder and corruption that reigned in Georgia in the late 1990s created significant problems in the Pankisi Gorge. Chechen fighters entering the valley as a result of the Chechen war, sweeping drug trafficking in the region, kidnapping and Russian propaganda have severely damaged the image of the Pankisi Gorge and contributed to its alienation. In addition, the Lapankuri special operation, the case of Malkhaz Machalikashvili, and tensions over the construction of hydropower plants to some extent exacerbated the alienation process.

Despite the relative stability in recent decades, none of the governments has taken drastic steps to improve the social and economic situation and integrate the population of the gorge. Although, as a result of Kist community activism, the negative image of the valley has been significantly eroded

² Main results of the 2014 census. Available at: http://census.ge/files/results/Census%20Release_GEO.pdf
in recent years but additional measures are necessary to accelerate this process. One of the easiest, fastest and most effective ways to solve this problem is to develop local and international tourism in the Pankisi Gorge which will allow visitors to learn about Kist traditions, customs and culture. The local community is also interested in the development of tourism in the Pankisi Gorge.

The aim of this study is to determine the extent to which the Georgian government is interested in the development of tourism in the Pankisi Gorge as well as the area’s potential to develop tourism and the steps which should be taken by both the government and the Pankisi community to develop this field.

Our work relied mainly on open sources which include existing academic research, policy papers, information in the print and online media and Georgian legislative documents. In addition, as part of the study, we interviewed Kist non-governmental organization activists and owners of family-run hotels in Pankisi.

This paper will have the following structure. The first section will be devoted to the description of the problem where we describe the current situation and the challenges in detail. The next section will be devoted to finding ways to solve the problem. Finally, through an analysis of the received information, we will identify the existing challenges and the potential of the gorge and develop relevant recommendations. The recommendations apply to three categories: government (both central and local), the private sector (hotel owners and travel agencies) and local civil activists.

We also hope that this study will contribute to the development of tourism in the Pankisi Gorge and become a kind of guide for travel companies and potential visitors to better demonstrate the tourism potential of the region.

**PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION**

Some problems in the Pankisi Gorge hinder the development of the tourism sector. After communicating with the population of the Pankisi Gorge, several problematic issues were identified. Tourism infrastructure is vital for the development of any tourism destination. Although there are several promising tourist attractions in the Pankisi Gorge, such as the Torghva Fortress, churches, remnants of old settlements, the Batsari reservation, etc., roads and hiking trails to these facilities are in poor condition and, in some cases, it is virtually impossible to get there without an experienced guide. Also, there are no indicative signs in Georgian and English which hinders the orientation of tourists in the gorge. A separate issue is the small number of rangers at the Batsari reservation who are unable to handle the growing inflow of tourists. It is also noteworthy that the aforementioned sights and the Pankisi Gorge as a whole are not included in any of the tourist maps or routes which in itself is an obstacle to the development of tourism in the region.3

The second important problem is the difficult socio-economic situation in the area. Most of the area’s employees are in the public service. There are no factories or other enterprises there. The limited land does not allow the population to massively engage in agriculture. All of these factors have pushed the population of Pankisi to emigrate. Mostly young and able-bodied people emigrate to different European countries. This trend is alarming not only for the Pankisi Gorge but for the whole country.

The Pankisi Gorge’s negative reputation as we mentioned in the introduction is another problematic issue. During conversations, the locals confirmed that regardless of the fact that almost 20 years

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3 Interview with respondent N1. A resident journalist in the Pankisi Gorge. Recorded February 20, 2020
have passed since the Pankisi crisis, the traces of these events still have a negative impact in various aspects. For example, in recent years the needless perquisition of tourists and visitors in the valley became systematic. Such practices lead to distrust between the locals and law enforcement. All of this combined does not help to increase the flow of tourists to the Pankisi Gorge but instead damages the area’s reputation both inside the country and abroad.

A large part of the Pankisi population has no knowledge of the tourism sector. It can be argued that even in the event of a sharp increase in the number of tourists, most of the residents of the area are not ready to transform their house into a guest house or open other tourist facilities and offer some services to visitors. In such a case, tourists will not be able to spend large sums of money in the gorge which will have virtually no impact on the economic situation in the region.

Certain groups of government and non-government players are represented in the Pankisi Gorge. From the government decision-making bodies, the central and local government (city hall and Akhmeta municipality assembly) should be distinguished for providing infrastructure projects and social services (such as pensions, social assistance, etc.) in the gorge. Several people from the Pankisi Gorge are represented in the municipal council although they are not distinguished by their activity. The mayor’s representatives are assigned to the rural councils in Pankisi. However, it should be noted that the central government in the Pankisi Gorge is also represented by law enforcement agencies. Among them, of mention are the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Counter-Terrorism Department of the State Security Service. Their control has been particularly heightened since the Syrian conflict and protests over the construction of hydropower plants. Among the non-governmental players, the Muslim clerics in Pankisi should be mentioned first. They are also often referred to as the Pankisi Jamaat. They control most of the mosques in the valley and have authority over much of the youth. The Council of Elders should also be mentioned among the non-government players. The purpose of the council is to preserve Kist customs and traditions as well as convey the problems of the population to authorities. In addition, there are several non-governmental organizations and the Pankisi Community Radio in Pankisi. Moreover, independent civil activists are quite active in the Pankisi Gorge. In addition, numerous representatives of the Kist diaspora in Russia, Kazakhstan or Europe have had great success in various fields such as sports, business, medicine and law. Besides having relatively large financial resources, these individuals also have a significant influence over their relatives and neighborhood. Each of them has the potential to develop tourism in the Pankisi Gorge. These people should be involved in doing certain work in the Pankisi Gorge. We think that each of them has a special and necessary role in the development of tourism. After speaking with locals, it became clear that all of them confirm that one of the most important aspects in the area is the development of tourism and they also unanimously agree on its essential nature.

The Pankisi Gorge is a region inhabited by ethnic minorities where the social structure and customs differ from the rest of Georgia. It is also noteworthy that the Kists are distinguished by their conservatism and the preservation of traditions is of great importance to them. This is important in that visitors must adhere to certain ethical norms. This primarily concerns the issue of clothing and etiquette. Issues such as a tourist wearing a provocative item of clothing or bringing pork into the gorge have repeatedly been a subject of contention with locals. This is due to the fact that tourists are not provided with information about Kist customs which is vital for the development of tourism in the region. Practice shows that informing tourists beforehand is necessary.

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4 Information on the official structures related to the Pankisi Gorge is available on the official website of the Akhmeta Municipality. See link: http://akhmeta.gov.ge/
PROBLEM SOLUTIONS

First and foremost, the will of the state is required to solve this problem. The central government carrying out infrastructural work is of vital importance. It is necessary to improve the infrastructure, build roads for vehicles and paths for pedestrian. This all should be done in an expedited manner because our main focus is tourism which is a fairly short-term source of financial income and wasting a tourist season will cause great financial loss and not only for the local population. Historic sites must be logged and signs and trails leading to them should be constructed and updated. As the Pankisi Gorge is a mountainous and forested region, the signs need to be erected at fairly close distances to avoid the confusion and loss of tourists. It is necessary to create a tourist base in the municipality specifically for this district which will be located in the Pankisi Gorge. It will provide Georgian and foreign tourists with information about the existing traditions and customs in order to avoid any confrontations. The visitors will also be able to pick up guides on-site who will accompany them to the tourist attractions in the Pankisi Forge. This will certainly lead to more people being employed and this will also help improve the profitability of other individual businesses.

The role of tourism in achieving peaceful coexistence between ethnic groups as well as in public diplomacy is well illustrated in the post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina where a bloody conflict between Serbs, Bosnians and Croats took place. The ethnically and religiously mixed cities such as Sarajevo, Mostar and Banja Luka have transformed into an important tourist destination in recent years, fostering inter-ethnic dialogue in the multiethnic region.

However, besides these traditional and necessary measures, we have developed three alternative approaches that, we believe, will further accelerate the solution of this problem. And most importantly, the Pankisi community plays a key role in these three alternatives. Let us introduce three alternative ways to develop tourism in the Pankisi Gorge:

1. **Organize an exhibition of Kist traditions** - The exhibition will help popularize the culture of the Pankisi Gorge and attract local visitors to the region.

2. **Conduct trainings for the local population in the field of tourism** - The aim of the trainings is to raise the awareness of the population about tourism and prepare the area for the growing inflow of tourists.

3. **Establish a Community Council for Tourism Development** – The unification of the authoritative people of the Pankisi Gorge and the surrounding villages into one council, working together to promote the tourism potential of the Pankisi Gorge.

ALTERNATIVES

1. **Organize an exhibition of Kist traditions** – The Pankisi Gorge, inhabited by ethnic Kists, and its traditions and customs is not well known among the general population of Georgia. Nevertheless, Kists have been living in Georgia for more than a century and have become part of the country and its history. Therefore, we consider it necessary to hold exhibitions of Kist traditions in different cities of Georgia. Kist dances, songs, cuisine, handicrafts, material culture, oral tradition and other aspects should be presented during each exhibition. Moreover, those interested should be provided with comprehensive information about the Pankisi Gorge. It is also necessary to distribute short brochures. Products from Pankisi should also be sold there. The Department of Tourism of Georgia should spearhead the organization of the event.
Expected Results: All this will not only increase the popularity of Pankisi but also help sell various products produced in Pankisi (dairy products, honey, felt, meat). As a result, more and more people from Georgia will be interested in the Pankisi Gorge and have a desire to visit. All of this will be a step forward to bringing Georgians and Kists closer.

2. Conduct trainings for the local population in the field of tourism - The trainings will be conducted for the current owners of hotels and restaurants as well as for other interested persons. During the trainings, students will learn about tourism management, the use of social media, interaction with tourists, basic English language and PR technologies.

Expected results: After passing the trainings, the trainees will master the basics in the field of tourism. They will be able to make a cost-effective estimation on guest house or hostel set-up and also their administration, manage social media and travel websites (e.g., booking.com, Airbnb.com) and attract tourists, facilitate communication with tourists and promote their own hotel facility inside and outside the country.

3. Establish a Community Council for Tourism Development - The Permanent Council will include elders, clerics, entrepreneurs, activists and representatives of the tourism industry as well as authorities from nearby and Tusheti villages. They will jointly discuss the issues of attracting tourists, creating touristic routes, supplying hotels with local products, conducting joint tours and organizing cultural events.

Expected results: As a result of the work of this council, the persons employed in tourism will be interconnected and cooperation deepened. In addition, all of this will significantly increase the trust between the Georgian and Kist populations. Local community groups will be set up to promote tourism in the gorge. It will also diminish the negative reputation of the Pankisi Gorge. All of this will also be a stimulus for the development of civil society in the Pankisi Gorge.

Matrix of Expected Results:

1. Organize Exhibition of Kist Traditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Political Feasibility</th>
<th>Administrative Feasibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>Moderate cost</td>
<td>Moderate Probability</td>
<td>Easy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementation Time</th>
<th>Profitability</th>
<th>Fairness</th>
<th>Level of Satisfaction of the Beneficiaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>Profitable in the long term</td>
<td>More or less</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Conduct Trainings for the Local Population in the Field of Tourism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Political Feasibility</th>
<th>Administrative Feasibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High effectiveness</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High Probability</td>
<td>Easy</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementation Time</th>
<th>Profitability</th>
<th>Fairness</th>
<th>Level of Satisfaction of the Beneficiaries</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Moderately profitable</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
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</table>
3. Establish a Community Council for Tourism Development

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Political Feasibility</th>
<th>Administrative Feasibility</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Low</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementation Time</th>
<th>Profitability</th>
<th>Fairness</th>
<th>Level of Satisfaction of the Beneficiaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Low profitability</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

We have developed recommendations based on open source materials and interviews with local community representatives. To facilitate the implementation of the three proposed alternatives, we offer a number of recommendations to the governmental and non-governmental branches which, in our opinion, will contribute to the development of tourism in the Pankisi Gorge.

To the Central Government:

- Continue infrastructure work in the Pankisi Gorge – The work should include both the internal roads and the restoration of the gorge’s cultural heritage monuments to their original form. In addition, the construction of an alternative road to Tusheti through the Khadori Pass is needed. Improved infrastructure will help increase the inflow of tourists.
- Integrate the Pankisi Gorge into Georgian tourist routes, maps and guides. Putting the Pankisi Gorge on the tourist maps will increase its popularity among local as well as international tourists.

To the Local Government:

- Provide training courses for individuals working in the tourism sector in Pankisi. These courses will make them more competitive and help to further expand and advance their tourism businesses.
- Interconnect Pankisi with other tourist destinations in the region. As a result, tourists who intend to visit Telavi, Alaverdi or Shuamta will be able to add the Pankisi Gorge to their route.
- Carry out various events to popularize the Pankisi Gorge both in real space and in social networks. Public meetings, webinars, social media pages and other similar methods will be able to negate the negative stereotypes about Pankisi.
- Provide English language courses. English language courses will help locals become more competitive in the tourism industry.

To Civil Society and the Media of the Pankisi Gorge:

- Promote the Pankisi Gorge through active involvement. Activists, elders, religious leaders and members of women’s organizations living in Pankisi should be actively promoting the Pankisi Gorge vis-à-vis various target groups.
- Cover the ongoing positive news in the Pankisi Gorge. The more central and local media outlets cover positive information about Pankisi, the more the awareness about this region and the inflow of tourists will increase.
- Actively involve Pankisi residents in various types of tourism associations. Publicly active people
in Pankisi should closely communicate with the owners of tourist facilities in other regions. By doing so, they will gain experience and use it to develop tourism in Pankisi.

CONCLUSION

The Pankisi Gorge is one of the most important regions of Georgia and it has a great tourist potential. Today, this potential is underused for a variety of reasons. We believe that besides the standard approaches, such as infrastructure construction, it is also necessary to use alternative and innovative ways. The active involvement of the Kist community in the process of tourism development, we believe, is one such solution. In all three of our proposed alternatives, the local community plays a key role which, in turn, increases the effectiveness of these approaches. As a result of the joint work of the Kist community and the government, the Pankisi Gorge can freely become one of the most outstanding tourist destinations in Georgia. The development of tourism in the Pankisi Gorge should be one of the most important components of the socio-economic progress of Kakheti which implies the development and modernization of the economy, education, agriculture and infrastructure of the whole region.

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CULTURAL CENTERS IN AZERBAIJANI POPULATED REGIONS AS A PLATFORM FOR CULTURAL DIALOGUE

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SUMMARY

Based on an analysis of the peculiarities of the cultural centers in Marneuli, Gardabani, Dmanisi and Bolnisi municipalities, it was recognized that despite the multiethnic composition of the regions, cultural events related to the Azerbaijani community are not properly represented in cultural centers. Therefore, the performance of said centers is failing to aid intercultural dialogue. Three alternatives have been developed to address the problem, and the strengths and weaknesses thereof are discussed in this policy paper. At the end, we present recommendations for the local authorities.

INTRODUCTION

Georgia is an ethnically diverse country, and Kvemo Kartli is one of its most diverse regions. According to the 2014 census, the Azerbaijani population is in the majority in the municipalities of Marneuli, Bolnisi, and Dmanisi, while in the Gardabani municipality it exceeds 40%. Large Azerbaijani settlements are also present in Tetritskaro and Tsalka municipalities.¹

The integration of the Azerbaijani community is still an unresolved task of the Georgian state, and despite the steps taken by various governments, the problem remains. Since the implementation of the 1+4 program, through which thousands of ethnic Azerbaijani students were admitted to Georgian higher education institutions, no further step has been taken by the government to facilitate the integration of Azerbaijanis. Moreover, employment of the graduates of this program and their involvement in public affairs remains an issue. One of the main problems is a poor level of knowledge of the state language, a barrier which significantly hinders the integration of the Azerbaijani community into Georgian society. Lack of knowledge of the state language also affects the population’s awareness of, and employment and involvement in, public affairs.

The main issue we want to underline is the lack of cultural dialogue in those regions densely populated by Azerbaijanis. In particular, the cultural centers, which are responsible for strengthening cultural relations between different ethnic groups, are failing to perform their functions at a proper level. By “cultural centers,” we imply institutions that are subordinate to municipal units populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis, and whose functions include the handling of various elements of culture. However, there is no doubt that the cultural centers have the greatest potential to become an important platform for intercultural dialogue. Today, cultural centers have the status of a non-commercial legal entity (hereinafter: NNLE), and are funded by the municipal budget. In many cases, cultural institutions are attached to the local government and are, in fact, their appendage. All of this prevents them from becoming strong institutions.

This policy paper attempts to review the issues related to cultural centers in the districts densely populated by Azerbaijanis in the Kvemo Kartli region, and to develop alternative approaches that

¹ National Statistics Office of Georgia. Available at the link: www.geostat.ge/ka
would help address these issues. In our research, we rely on open source materials that include existing research and information disseminated in the media. In addition, through the Legislative Herald, we have studied the structure and other legal aspects of the various cultural institutions in the municipalities of Dmanisi, Bolnisi, Marneuli, and Gardabani. While working on the document, we contacted several ethnic Azerbaijani activists living in the Kvemo Kartli region to obtain information.

**PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION**

As already mentioned, in Kvemo Kartli, in the municipalities of Dmanisi, Bolnisi, and Marneuli, the majority of residents are ethnic Azerbaijanis, while in the Gardabani district their share exceeds 40%. Despite the plurality of Azerbaijanis, their involvement in cultural events is minimal. Lack of cultural dialogue hinders the integration process. One could argue that there is minimal interaction and communication between the Georgian and Azerbaijani populations of the region. In many cases, the Azerbaijani community of Kvemo Kartli has become dependent on foreign-language mass media, mainly Turkish and Azerbaijani, including entertainment programs, which contributes to the disappearance of the local authentic culture.

The following cultural institutions are represented in the aforementioned regions:

1. Marneuli Municipality - NNLE Marneuli Cultural Center, which includes: the cultural center of Marneuli town; cultural centers in the villages of Algeti, Tamarisi, Kachaghasi, Sadakhlo, Tserakvi, and Aghamedlo; the libraries of Marneuli, Sadakhlo, Sioni, Tsereteli, Shaumiani, as well as the Mikheil Javakhishvili House-Museum in the village of Tserakvi, the M. Pashievi House-Museum in the village of Shaumiani, and the Marneuli Musical School.

2. The cultural organizations of Bolnisi Municipality are: the NNLE Culture, Club, Library, and Museum Associations of Bolnisi municipality; the Sulhkan-Saba Orbeliani Literary Museum; the Bolnisi Museum of Local Lore; the Bolnisi Musical School; and the “Bolnisi Municipality Theater”.

3. The cultural organizations of Dmanisi Municipality are: the NNLE “Dmanisi Culture and Art Center”, the “Zinaida Kverenchkhiladze State Drama Theater”, the NNLE “Library Service”, the NNLE “Musical School”, the NNLE “Dmanisi Educational Center”, and the Dmanisi Museum-Reserve.

4. The cultural organizations of Gardabani Municipality are: the NNLE “Gardabani Municipality Cultural Center” and the NNLE “Gardabani Municipality Library Association”.

Despite the abundance of these institutions, they fail to ensure the involvement of the Azerbaijani population in intercultural dialogue. The study devoted to the cultural institutions of Marneuli revealed the following problematic issues: inadequate interpretation of the concept of equality, problems in accessing the center’s resources and services, a sharp scarcity of intercultural activities for minorities, problems regarding the preservation of the authenticity of Azerbaijani holidays, the

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2 National Statistics Office of Georgia. Available at the link: https://www.geostat.ge/ka
lack of a long-term and sustainable cultural policy, the ethnic composition of the center’s employees, and low representation of the minorities.

Access to public information is also a problem. None of the City Hall websites of the above municipalities fully covers the list of cultural events. Moreover, a complete list of employees is not available. However, after interviewing locals, we found out that the number of ethnic Azerbaijanis among the employed is very low.

After talking to activists in Marneuli municipality, one of the identified problems was that of an artificially inflated number of staff and nepotism in the town’s cultural center. According to our respondents, some of the employees in the cultural center are related to local government officials. Moreover, in their opinion, in many cases, they are also involved in the election process. According to the respondents, such an approach is an impediment to intercultural dialogue. It was also revealed that the Gardabani Museum has too small a number of exhibits related to Azerbaijanis.7

The lack of cultural events in the Azerbaijani language is especially problematic for the Azerbaijani population. The existing language barrier prevents most of the population from understanding the cultural events held in Georgian. Certain nuances in the field of culture contribute to the increased alienation between ethnic Georgians and Azerbaijanis. For example, among the contentious issues is the name of the cultural center garden. One group of citizens wants the public square in front of the Marneuli Cultural Center to be named after Merab Kostava, and others, after Narimanov.8

At the same time, there is a lack of different courses or circles in cultural institutions. As a consequence, young people are not able to participate in this or that cultural event. Also problematic is the allocation of physical space in the center to various initiative groups for the holding of cultural and educational events, or seminars.

It is also necessary to mention important issues such as the absence of places for entertainment and relaxation. In particular, there are no cafes, clubs or similar facilities in Marneuli and Gardabani. The only such locale one will encounter is a tea house, where the appearance of women is negatively perceived by ethnic Azerbaijanis. It can be said that for the women and children, there is practically no place to pass free time in these municipalities. Local authorities have not taken appropriate measures to eliminate this problem. All of this reduces the role of women in the region and violates their rights.

Simply put, the work in the field of culture is not being carried out properly in the region. Culture is known as one of the best ways to bring people together. Yet, the government has not been using this opportunity.

**alternatives**

Numerous methods can be used to support and integrate intercultural dialogue. As a result of analysis of the current situation, we have developed three alternatives that, in our view, best meet the challenges and can best deepen the relationship between ethnic Georgians and Azerbaijanis in the field of culture. Let us introduce our alternatives.

**The Culinary Festival of Kvemo Kartli.** This festival will be held every autumn and will allow

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7 Telephone interview with local activists in Marneuli Municipality. February 2020.
representatives of any part of the country to introduce to the general public the traditional dishes typical of their region. Since Kvemo Kartli is inhabited by representatives of different ethnicities and corners of the country, such an event will facilitate the interconnection and the emergence of new contacts between the people from various regions (Adjara, Mtiuleti, Svaneti, Racha, Imereti) and ethnic groups (Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Greeks). Within the framework of the traditional cuisine festival, small brochures containing the recipes of the dishes presented at the festival will be printed in Georgian, English, Azerbaijani, and Armenian. Renowned chefs will conduct master classes with locals. One of the innovations of this festival will be that a representative of one ethnos will create the dishes of a representative of another ethnos. For example, an ethnic Georgian participant prepares a traditional Azerbaijani Shekerbura, while a Khinkali or Kubdar is prepared by an ethnic Azerbaijani, and so on. The dishes will be tasted and impressions will be shared. A winning chef from all ethnic groups will be identified and awarded a certificate. This event will increase the interest in the culture of different ethnic groups. The event should be held on a rotational basis, and each year it should be hosted by a different multi-ethnic municipal center and organized by the local cultural center.

Annual Cultural Competition - It is internationally recognized that healthy competition is one of the best means for community development. And if the competition is fun, informative and diverse, its effects will be more tangible. That is why the introduction of an annual cultural competition in territorial units populated by ethnic minorities would offer a good opportunity for ethnic Georgian and Azerbaijani youth to discover each other’s cultural elements, so promoting mutual integration. The foundation should be laid for a three-day annual festival on the Friday, Saturday and Sunday of the first week of October: a contest in four spheres to be held in the open spaces and cultural centers of Dmanisi, Bolnisi and Marneuli municipalities. The spheres are:

- Choreography – where Ethnic Georgian and Azerbaijani youth demonstrate their abilities in Georgian and Azerbaijani dances.
- Singing – where young people compete in vocal abilities. Georgian folk songs as well as Azerbaijani Mugham are presented.
- Playing musical instruments – Ethnic Georgian and Azeri youth perform various well-known compositions with the musical instruments characteristic to their own ethnos.
- Literature – where Georgian and Azerbaijani novice writers present their works both in poetry and prose.

Each component of the contest will have an invited jury, made up of specialists, to identify the winners. The members of the jury will be popular persons from different regions of Georgia. The winning contestants will be awarded various monetary and motivational awards. Among them, as a result of cooperation with various universities, tuition funding and scholarships will be awarded to pupils from high school graduate classes. In addition, the creations of young people endowed with the gift of writing will be collected in a compilation of young writers, printed, and placed both electronically on various websites and in the form of printed books in municipal libraries. These contests will promote ethnic diversity, public awareness, integration, and the realization of opportunities for young people. The event should be organized by the local cultural center.

Creating a mixed dance-music ensemble - The third and, in our opinion, most important and necessary alternative, is to form mixed Georgian-Azerbaijani dance-music ensembles for youth and children. This idea has many advantages. First of all, this project contributes to intercultural rapprochement. In addition, Georgians and Azerbaijanis will have an additional incentive to learn...
each other’s languages, while children and adults will have the opportunity to spend their free time doing valuable work that is simultaneously enjoyable and exciting. Instead of watching TV, young people will be able to learn to sing and dance. If ensembles are formed for children and adults separately, they will help each other to learn, together with the teachers. The main principle of such groups will be Georgians learning Azerbaijani songs and dances, while Azerbaijanis do the opposite. This will teach young people independent learning for the future, how to come up with new and different ideas, and will give them the confidence to participate jointly in various competitions and performances. And most importantly, a very good alternative to their daily lives will emerge that will arouse interest and increase demand for local cultural centers.

**MATRIX OF THE EXPECTED RESULTS**

We present the matrix of results for each alternative approach. The matrix includes an analysis of efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and political and administrative feasibility. We have also compared timings for implementation, profitability, fairness, and the expected beneficiary satisfaction level.

**Culinary Festival of Kvemo Kartli**

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<th>Political Feasibility</th>
<th>Administrative Feasibility</th>
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<td>Moderate</td>
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<th>Implementation time</th>
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<th>Fairness</th>
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**Annual Cultural Competition**

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<td>Moderate</td>
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**Creating a Mixed Dance-Music Ensemble**

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<td>Regular</td>
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RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAYS TO IMPLEMENT ALTERNATIVES

Alternative Selection Criteria

• When choosing an alternative, we pay primary attention to its effectiveness. The effect primarily refers to the deepened cultural relations between ethnic Georgians and Azerbaijanis. In such a case, we prefer a longer and more intensive alternative. Such is the third alternative, namely the creation of a mixed dance-music ensemble. The creation of ensembles in Bolnisi, Marneuli, Gardabani and Dmanisi will bond several hundred Georgian and Azerbaijani locals of different ages, and bring them closer together throughout the year.

• In addition, we pay attention to the cost of the alternative. Where the first two alternatives involve relatively higher costs for a short-term event, the creation of ensembles will bear a one-time initial cost (purchase of outfits) as well as a monthly salary for teachers, and municipal budgets have the capacity to do so. Space for ensembles can be allocated in halls with the municipality’s goodwill, meaning no expenses will be required for rent.

• Finally, this alternative can be considered moderately profitable, as the organizers of various international festivals are likely to be interested in such Georgian-Azerbaijani ensembles, meaning the local municipality will no longer be required to cover the costs of tours.

• Nevertheless, the creation of a mixed ensemble does not preclude the implementation of the first two alternatives, as this will depend on the capabilities of the municipal budget.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the local authorities:

• Reorganization of cultural centers – Cultural centers should be transformed from a bureaucratic institution into an open platform ready to serve the multicultural population of the region. Also, in addition to the budget funding, cultural centers should be prepared to attract additional funding from international donors and the private sector, increasing their competitiveness and efficiency.

• Invite specialists to organize events – The involvement of well-known specialists in the implementation of various events for consultation purposes should be encouraged, so that the event is able to incorporate a wide range of different ethnic groups living in the region and adequately showcase their culture.

To the curators of cultural centers:

• Proportional representation of cultural elements of different ethnicities living in the region – Cultural centers should have more employees from different ethnic backgrounds. Cultural events of different ethnicities should be equally represented. Additionally, more exhibits characteristic of Azerbaijani, Armenian and other ethnic groups should be preserved in the local museums.

• Promoting cultural centers among ethnic minorities - It is necessary to work actively with local communities in order to involve them in the activities of the cultural center. Cultural centers should be popularized among the younger generation, who should be widely involved in the events held therein.
CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that culture is one of the most effective means of integration and civic engagement. However, its interpretation may also lead to conflict, as exemplified by the tense situation surrounding the Narimanov Monument. Against the background of integration problems in the Kvemo Kartli region, cultural centers have an unprecedented potential for inter-ethnic dialogue. Literary, musical, folklore and other events, especially among young people, promote the discovery and connection of different cultures. Although the cultural centers in Marneuli, Bolnisi, Dmanisi and Gardabani are unprecedentedly bureaucratized and fail to properly perform their functions and duties, our alternative approaches will significantly improve their functions and transform them into key multicultural platforms in the region. The development of cultural centers should be part of a unified broad strategy, which should include the economic revival of the Kvemo Kartli region, the fundamental reform of the education system, improvement of infrastructure projects, and integration of the Azerbaijani population into Georgian society.

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3. Information on Bolnisi cultural institutions is available on the official website of Bolnisi Municipality. See: https://bolnisi.gov.ge/bolnisis-shesaxeb/kultura
PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURE AND THE ARTS AMONG ETHNIC MINORITIES

Nino Gachechiladze – Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia

Nino Tsanava – Conservative Party of Georgia

SUMMARY

The following public policy document discusses the role of promoting culture and art education in ethnic minority regions. Based on the identification and examination of the issues, four alternative solutions were formulated. The pros and cons of each are described below. The preferred alternative was selected through the matrix, and recommendations were developed for its implementation.

The history of culture and art is characterized by ups and downs, merger and dissemination, assimilation and conservation, while ultimately it always manages to influence society.

This paper briefly discusses the problems associated with the development of art and culture in different regions. Also, based on the situational analysis and identification of circumstances, ideas have been developed that may solve the existing problems and promote youth involvement in a region populated by ethnic minorities, as well as to motivate them to create an environment of peaceful coexistence through integration with other ethnic groups. In order to achieve the desired goal, we believe it is absolutely necessary to follow the developed recommendations and take effective steps in relation to the identified issues.

INTRODUCTION

The modern world is struggling to fully implement the human right of each person to be a full member of society, regardless of ethnicity, language, culture, religion, and customs. And despite significant progress, in this regard there are still many problems in Georgia.

Georgia is a multicultural state, traditionally inhabited by the people of various ethnicities and cultures with different ethnic, linguistic and religious characteristics. The development and strengthening of democracy is one of the main goals of Georgian society and its government, and for that purpose, it is necessary to ensure equality between individuals.

In spite of numerous measures taken by the state, Georgia’s ethnic minorities do not feel they are fully entitled citizens of the country.

Significant progress has been made in the country in terms of civic equality in recent years. Legal safeguards and the mechanisms for enforcing these legal norms have been established. However, there remain unmet needs and challenges in the ongoing process of civic integration. According to the Georgian Constitution, “Georgian citizens, regardless of their ethnic, religious or linguistic affiliation, have the right to preserve and develop their culture without any discrimination.” This principle is reflected in the State Strategy and Action Plan for Civic Equality and Integration,\(^1\) which aims to create a tolerant environment and preserve the culture of ethnic minorities, with a focus on protecting and developing their language, traditions, artwork samples, and cultural heritage.

Georgian culture is a trademark of our country. For decades, it was the only consistently successful field. The ethnic culture and traditions in Georgia are an integral part of the country’s history, and the integration of ethnic minorities will not be possible if the micro-cultures these people have created remain locked within their own “borders.”

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

There are many problems experienced by ethnic groups living in Georgia. One of the major problems is the language barrier, as a result of which ethnic minorities often find themselves in an information vacuum and unable to participate in the political life of the country. We believe that each of us should pay more attention to this issue, and for that purpose the promotion of art education can play a significant role, as art is one of the best means of communication and can further unveil a number of other issues.

As an example, with regard to ethnic minorities, we offer the problems of Marneuli and Akhalkalaki. According to a study by member organizations of the National Minority Council under the Public Defender of Georgia, young people living in Marneuli often take part in various events, although visitors rarely come to the region. Also, densely populated Azerbaijani villages are in fact isolated from the cultural center. This highlights an infrastructural problem that requires adequate funding to fix. In the villages, there is no opportunity for citizens to acquire a musical education. Marneuli music schools have neither a concert hall, nor rehearsal spaces, while schools are also in need of new musical instruments.

Unfortunately, various performing groups from Tbilisi or other big cities rarely come to Akhalkalaki. Therefore, youth is not involved in any kind of cultural exchange.

The country’s ethnic diversity is not emphasized in the central museums of Georgia, including Tbilisi. At the same time, Georgian society remains oblivious to the numerous natural and historical monuments in the minority regions, while local legends and the holidays associated with them are being lost.

The main stakeholders in this are the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of Georgia, governmental and non-governmental organizations, relevant ministries, LEPLs, local municipalities and self-governed entities.

Disadvantages of the existing policy. According to the 2017-2018 monitoring of the Coordination Council of the National Minorities under the Tbilisi Municipal Assembly, the state has a strategic plan for ethnic minorities. Numerous events were held in 2017-2018: art exhibitions, theatrical performances, conferences, literary evenings, concerts, and festivals. The strategy envisages the protection and restoration of the material and nonmaterial cultural heritage of minorities. The list of specific tasks of this strategy includes the identification of the tangible, intangible, and natural heritage of ethnic minorities.

We requested information from Marneuli, Akhalkalaki, and other municipalities about the activities held in the field of minority culture. Relevant documentation affirms that local authorities are involved in organizing minority holidays, local village celebrations, and various events. However, the degree of participation does not appear to be satisfactory.

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According to the member organizations of the Council of National Minorities under the Public Defender, ethnic minorities can make a significant contribution to the development and implementation of Georgia’s cultural policy. However, it is quite concerning and controversial as to why the representatives from ethnic minorities do not participate in the drafting process of the policy document, the strategy or the action plan.

According to the Ombudsman’s report, “the condition of the minority monuments is still dire and no steps were taken to rehabilitate them in 2018.”

According to the member organizations of the Council of National Minorities under the Public Defender, regional libraries do not pay attention to the existing book fund, especially in the minority languages. Rare, and in some cases unique editions, are destroyed. In Samtskhe-Javakheti, only 18 out of 80 libraries remain, although almost no-one uses them. Kvemo Kartli libraries are also rarely used by ethnic minorities.

To promote cultural diversity, cultural events targeting ethnic minorities were held at the Ministry of Culture in 2017 and 2018. Representatives of minorities participated in the selection of projects, alongside various agencies. Unfortunately, information about the competition was not made available to the local government officials, media and NGOs. Nor do the representatives of the local media and NGOs have information about the grant program of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia. According to a representative of the Ministry of Culture, the quality of the implemented projects is also problematic.

Decree #348 of the Prime Minister of Georgia, of May 8, 2009, initiated the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration, and its Action Plan. The Council of National Minorities examined what has been done and what problems remain in terms of the education, culture and identity of ethnic minorities living in Georgia, their access to information, and their political and civic integration. The study shows that despite the measures taken by the state, a large proportion of ethnic minorities still do not feel like they are fully entitled citizens of this country.

SOLUTIONS

Georgia’s cultural diversity has a centuries-old tradition, and a positive experience of peaceful coexistence and development. Diversity is the country’s wealth and a resource for democratic and sustainable development.

Let us consider the main directions in the development of culture and art in ethnic minorities and the central tools for promoting art education in ethnic minorities.

Alternative 1. Arranging educational camps. This option involves setting up educational camps for the joint participation of ethnic minority and majority pupils twice a year for two weeks each. It is an opportunity to integrate young people across the country, allowing them to make new friends, learn or improve their abilities in the Georgian language, and to get to know each other’s culture. The following cultural activities will be held throughout the duration of the camp: choreographic, artistic, vocal-instrumental and entertaining / educational talent shows, film screenings, and creative and intellectual evenings. This will contribute to the formation of mature members of a democratic society, the improvement of activities aimed at preserving the culture of minorities, as well as ensuring coordination between regional and local units. A challenge that may arise in the implementation of this project is related to the language barrier; however, one of the goals of this project might also be considered a partial amelioration of this problem.
Independent monitoring groups should be set up to monitor the work quality of these camps and the precise distribution of the budget, an issue within the competence and direct interest of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport.

**Alternative 2. Ethno and cultural tourism.** One of the priorities in the strategic development plan of Marneuli Municipality is the protection / promotion of cultural heritage and the development of ethno-tourism. The municipality is rich in cultural heritage monuments which can allow us to develop tourism and present Marneuli to the world as an example of peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups.

The municipality is actively working towards this goal, and has taken a number of important steps. In 2015, about 112 cultural heritage sites, including Orthodox, Gregorian, Muslim religious monuments, were inventoried / examined according to modern standards in the municipality.

Since, the municipality has many monuments and a diverse environment, the idea of ethno-tourism was born. The geographical location of the municipality is also very advantageous in this regard. The idea of ethno-tourism involves acquainting visiting tourists with the traditions and culture of different ethnic groups (Georgian, Azerbaijani, Armenian, etc.) living in the area.

Some steps have already been taken in this direction. Various routes have been developed and several groups of tourists already took the tour. The first group was made up of Georgian and Canadian archaeologists during the excavations in Imer, who visited the Azerbaijani village Damia Geurarkh and were familiarized with the culture of drinking tea, local cuisine and traditions. They also visited several cultural monuments in the municipality.

It is also possible to combine ethno-tourism and cultural tourism, which is very important for the establishment of traditional annual cultural events, various types of festivals (film, theater, opera, ballet, classical, folk, jazz, rock, pop, music, etc.), conferences and forums. The civil platform “Salam” in Kvemo Kartli, initiated the opening of a museum with exhibits related to the history of national minorities. The members of the organization are actively working on this issue; however, currently the initiative is only at an early stage of development.

**Alternative 3. “Flea Market.”** Based on the general background and also to reinvigorate the interest of youth, spaces should be created for the promotion of an event like a “Flea Market” for the ethnic minorities. All the conditions must be created so they can present their works to the public. This will not only contribute to the development and popularization of traditions, but also provide a platform for the exhibition of their ceramic and goldsmith works, carpets, and handicrafts. In the spaces intended for different nationalities, traditional dishes will be offered to the public. Such events promote culture and facilitates overcoming the language barrier. Participants should also be encouraged and incentivized to maintain and integrate their traditions. Such a project requires good organization and support from the state. Access to such spaces should be completely free, resulting in the establishment of small businesses, which is quite important for the state and the participating volunteers. Since flea markets generally have no restrictions, such an event should be held only for ethnic minorities. The event should also have an aspect of mutual exchange with various cities. This is where we may encounter a problem: ethnic groups arriving in the capital for an event will need overnight accommodation. This can be addressed in the following fashion: selected families of minorities living in the city will host them. Such families should be paid a symbolic rent, which will help increase the corresponding interest.
Alternative 4. Interdisciplinary events and international festivals. In terms of capturing the interest of young people, the “One Caucasus” festival and program, which has been held with the support of numerous foreign and local volunteers since 2014, is outstanding. It includes a variety of drawing/art projects (films, exhibitions, visual arts, non-formal education, music collaborations, drawing installations, etc.) created by Kvemo Kartli youth directly for their use.

In 2015, the “One Caucasus” team launched the first joint budget project in Marneuli, which is a unique tool for the promotion of local democracy. It was spread in other municipalities and today is represented in more than 10 Georgian municipalities.

10,000 people attended the total of 6 “One Caucasus” festivals held, most of whom were Kvemo Kartli locals.

The “One Caucasus” festival is mostly attended by young people, which is important for the exchange and integration of cultures of national minorities, primarily, at the local, but also at the international level. Human bonding initiatives are crucial to increase youth engagement. It is also important to have active support from all stakeholders and especially from public institutions responsible for education and culture.

Let us discuss the alternatives matrix.

Matrix of comparison of alternatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Alternative 1</th>
<th>Alternative 2</th>
<th>Alternative 3</th>
<th>Alternative 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale of the Project</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation period</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Support</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficiary satisfaction level</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public opinion</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selecting the preferred alternative. Based on the matrix of expected results, the advantage of the 2nd alternative was identified. The ethnocultural tourism project is intended for a large scale, does not contradict the current course in the country in terms of tourism development, and is characterized by expected high interest from the beneficiaries. The realization of this alternative will protect cultural monuments through their popularization and present Georgia as a highly cultured nation. In addition, it will solve a number of problems in the regions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We considered the second alternative - ethno-tourism - to be the most effective way to solve the problem posed in the document. The following steps are recommended:

• Relevant government agencies should support minorities to develop tourism in the regions, establish tourism routes, and develop and manufacture tourism products with the involvement of craftsmen and in accordance with the local traditions;

• It is important to display the traditions, history, culture, and contribution of minorities to the development of the Georgian state in the Central Museum;
• Coordinated planning and calculation of activities envisaged by the right cultural strategy is required. The Ministry of Culture should direct state-funded LEPLs (for example, the Sukhishvili National Ballet, the ensemble “Erisioni”, “Rustavi”, “Basiani”, etc.) to regularly conduct tours and other events in the minority regions;

• The advertising of this or that activity should receive more attention. The Public Broadcaster should play a particular role in delivering advertisements to the audience;

• The State Department for Tourism should create a website focused on the ethnic minorities, where the relevant information is constantly updated.

**CONCLUSION**

The aim of this policy paper was to identify and study the problems that exist in terms of artistic promotion in the ethnic minority regions, as well as to present alternatives that will help at least partially alleviate the issue.

Despite the numerous measures undertaken, ethnic diversity is less emphasized in the country. As a result, many natural and historical monuments, artworks, etc. in the minority regions remain unknown to larger Georgian society.

In our opinion, the second alternative - ethnocultural tourism - is the best. The implementation of this alternative will protect cultural monuments through popularization, and present Georgia as a highly cultured nation. Visitors will be able to share the traditions and culture of different ethnic groups (Georgian, Azerbaijani, Armenian, etc.) living in this area, which will support annual events, various types of festivals (film, theater, opera, ballet, classical, folk, jazz, rock, pop, music, etc.), and organization of conferences and forums. Government agencies should support the popularization of minorities in the region.

The implementation of any of the aforementioned alternatives will be a clear step forward, both for the state and for the development of intercultural thinking of its fully entitled citizens. The implementation of these alternatives means increasing motivation, expanding the labor market, combating stereotypes against ethnic minorities, and overcoming the language barrier. The formation of tolerance, acceptance of variety, and identity will also benefit greatly.

The state should do its utmost to support ethnic minorities in preserving and popularizing their culture. Relevant approaches and strategies to solve the problems should be developed accordingly.
2. Результаты мониторинга выполнения национальной концепции толеранности и гражданской интеграции и плана действий 2012-2013.
INCREASING THE LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE SAMTSKHE-JAVAKHETI REGION

Ednar Mgeladze - Strategy Aghmashenebeli
Elisabed Sarkisova - Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia
Natia Liluashvili - Aleko Elisashvili – Citizens

SUMMARY

This paper discusses the extent to which ethnic minorities living in Samtskhe-Javakheti have access to the ongoing processes in the country. Despite the steps taken in recent years, the problem of access to information still exists in the region. This policy paper reviews the current situation and suggests three different alternatives to address the issue.

INTRODUCTION

Georgia is a multi-ethnic country and the issue of the full-fledged integration of different ethnic groups has been relevant since gaining independence. During this period, various projects were implemented by both the governmental and non-governmental sectors in order to increase the level of full-scale integration and the involvement of minorities. The ultimate goal of all this is the formation of a united consolidated civil nation where every citizen of the country perceives himself as a full member of society, regardless of his ethnic or religious affiliation. About 13% of the population of Georgia are ethnic minorities.\(^1\) Out of them, densely populated Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli are notable. The incomplete integration of these populations and their low involvement in the socio-political processes of the country are due to weak state policies. The lack of the knowledge of the state language, the low involvement in socio-political processes and their lack of information are a small part of a large list of problems.

However, the issue has deep historical and political-economic foundations. Its roots appear in the Soviet system with its educational, linguistic and administrative policies which were designed to facilitate the alienation of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region from the rest of Georgia. Since gaining independence, a large proportion of ethnic minorities do not know the state language of the country of which they are citizens and this poses a serious problem in terms of their involvement in the country’s socio-political processes. They have almost no access to the Georgian media and, as a result, they show less interest in engaging in public and political processes.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

One of the reasons for the alienation of Samtskhe-Javakheti is geopolitics. As Samtskhe-Javakheti bordered NATO member Turkey during the Soviet era, a 70-kilometer closed military zone was set up in order to fortify the border, restricting citizens from entering. Soviet and later Russian military bases were located there which had a great influence on the population of Akhaltsikhe. The poor involvement of the ethnic Armenian population of Samtskhe-Javakheti in public processes is mostly due to their low level of awareness. The main source of news for this population is the Armenian and Russian media. Therefore, they know more about the current political processes in those countries.

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1 National Statistics Office of Georgia. Available at: https://www.geostat.ge/ka
and they also follow the developments in Georgia through the interpretation of these media outlets. This, of course, does not create a complete and objective picture of the socio-political life in Georgia. As is known, as early as in 2009 the government developed the National Concept of Tolerance and Civic Integration and its respective Action Plan which was prepared by the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality. The strategy aimed to improve the integration of ethnic minorities in Georgia. The strategy will be updated periodically. In 2015 under the leadership of the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, the State Strategy on Civic Equality and Integration for 2015-2020 was developed. One of the key points of this document is “improving access to media and information;” however, despite the support of the government, the lack of information for the minority populations remains a major challenge.

*Diagram 1*

![Diagram 1]

*Source: Open Society Georgia Foundation 2019*

*Diagram 2*

![Diagram 2]

*Source: Open Society Georgia Foundation 2019*

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As can be seen from the diagrams, more than half of the ethnic Armenian population receives information on current socio-political developments in Armenian and Russian at least several times a week. It should be noted that according to a recent survey, about 50% of the ethnic Armenian population is aware of the ongoing processes in our country; however, this includes information received from Georgian as well as Russian and Armenian language news sources.

Diagram 3

Therefore, we can conclude that one of the main reasons for the lack of awareness is the poor knowledge of the state language by ethnic Armenians densely populated in Samtskhe-Javakheti. At the same time, the despite significant effort taken by the state and civil society to improve education and access to information, informing the population at the proper level remains a problem. It can be said that a large part of the population does not have knowledge about the current events in the country.

In addition to preventing them from receiving information from Georgian TV channels as well as from print and online media, it minimizes direct communication with the ethnic Georgian population which eventually leads to their exclusion and isolation. Finally, the programs in the Armenian language available on the country’s public broadcaster are insufficient to inform the Armenian population of Javakheti.

Different policies have been pursued by the state at different times in order to alleviate and eliminate this problem. For example, the Public Broadcaster aired a news program, “Moambe,” in the Armenian and Azerbaijani languages. Also, local newspapers in Armenian are published in Samtskhe-Javakheti. The Georgian Public Broadcaster, with the support of the US Embassy, implements the Simultaneous Translation of “Moambe” into the Armenian and Azerbaijani Languages project within the framework of the Diverse Georgia project. Further, the web-platform of the Public Broadcaster, 1TV.ge, operates in seven languages and the news is translated into Armenian as well. The news is mostly available on the online platform while local newspapers do not adequately provide sufficient information to the population. As for the problem of not knowing the state language, it remains an acute issue and
requires a complex approach on the part of the state. The 1+4 state program for prospective students has been operating since 2012 which means that ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani applicants can pass the general skills test in their native language in order to enter university and then take a one-year Georgian language course afterward in order to receive free higher education in Georgian with a quota allocated for them. This can be considered as a very successful program considering the growing number of ethnic minorities enrolled in institutions of higher education under this program. If in 2010 247 students were enrolled in this program, their number almost quadrupled in 2017 and reached 1,074.

As for the main players and interested parties, on one side is the ethnic Armenian population whose interests include the emergence of alternative and accessible channels of information to facilitate integration and involvement in socio-political processes. On the other side is the Georgian state whose direct interest and duty is to ensure the full integration of ethnic minorities. To do this, providing relevant information in a language they understand is one of the essential factors. Additionally, Russia can be considered an external actor which is deliberately trying to hinder the integration of the region. Moreover, the Russian Federation is actively waging a hybrid war which includes spreading fake news. Taking into consideration all of the above mentioned, it is crucially important to be more active in terms of the full integration of the population of the region.

As an interested party, our goal is to increase the level of awareness of the ethnic Armenian population densely populated in Samtskhe-Javakheti vis-à-vis the current socio-political developments in the country. Therefore, in this document, we aim to select the most optimal alternative in order to achieve this goal and offer our vision on the implementation of this alternative.

* * *

The proper awareness of ethnic minorities is a major challenge for the country and important decisions need to be made in this regard.

Twenty-eight years have passed since Georgia regained its independence. During these years and under virtually all of the governments, there have been more or less active efforts to increase the quality of information for the local population in the Javakheti region; however, the issue is still problematic.

The main sources of information for the population of the region are the Armenian (TV channels or the press and radio of the Republic of Armenia) and Russian (Russian-language satellite TV channels) media - printed, electronic, internet and, especially, social networks. Consequently, the information received most likely does not adequately reflect the current socio-economic or political situation in Georgia. The problem is to inform the population of the region from the capital because isolated activities cannot serve to change the overall situation of access to information. Moreover, it should be noted that Russian TV channels are, in many cases, part of a hybrid war and are mainly of a propagandistic nature which carries a great deal of danger.

With all of the above in mind, it is natural that at present the involvement of the Armenian population of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region in the political life of the country is quite low.

It must be admitted that national broadcasters are transmitted free of charge through the digital network, including the First Channel of the Public Broadcaster, where the main news programs

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— “Moambe” broadcast at 18:00 and 21:00 – are simultaneously translated into the language of the ethnic minorities by the local media. With the assistance of the US Embassy, it was also possible to broadcast the ATV 12 and Parvana local Armenian-language channels in digital format in the Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki municipalities but this still fails to provide proper, full-fledged information to the Armenian-speaking population of the region. According to Media.ge, the Parvana Armenian-language TV channel broadcasts news, analytical and entertainment programs. Its target audience is the Armenian population of Samtskhe-Javakheti. However, the TV company only has a bureau in Ninotsminda and does not cover the problems of the Akhalkalaki municipality. Among Parvana’s shows, a news program, entitled “Antradartz” (“Reflection”), is broadcast three times a day and is noteworthy. Parvana also offers viewers programs such as “Tribune for Free Speech” and rebroadcasts a number of Armenia TV’s programs.

Parvana has its web-page where there is a specific Georgian-language TV channel in the direct operation/activation mode. Armenian language videos created by Parvana and which are uploaded to its YouTube channel are also posted on the web-page (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtsgnN2vBISEcmnNngsTntw). The subject matter of the videos is limited and does not contribute to the comprehensive awareness of the Armenian-speaking population of the region. It should also be noted that the TV channel is not able to produce programs that would inform the local population about issues related to the socio-economic or political situation in the country.

There is another Armenian language television station in the region: ATV 12 broadcasts on the 12th terrestrial TV channel (VHF 12) and covers the Akhalkalaki Municipality and its surrounding area. The ATV 12 Armenian language TV channel covers local information in the news program, “Obiektivi.” A socio-political program, entitled “Dialogue,” was also aired on the channel.

WAYS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM

Several alternative ways to solve the problem and change the situation in the region for the better can be discussed.

1. Creating a TV channel with a specific mission in the region which will be a branch of the Public Broadcaster (or private television) and have some specific obligations defined in exchange for some benefits.

2. Establishing a public organization which will work online with the population and guarantee informing the public to a high degree through specific events and/or permanent multiple activities.

3. Establishing an information-analytical agency (web-page) to provide information for the Armenian speaking population of the region, creating a special page and group on social networks (for example, Facebook) and producing a page/group with quizzes, interesting facts and other activities.

4. Advancing the already existing media resources. This implies the re-training of journalists from existing TV, print media, radio and news websites in the region, financing TV shows and providing technical equipment/assistance.

5 Aliq Media (2018). 1+4 program, a way for ethnic minorities (youth in Georgian universities)
Let us consider the selected alternatives:

**Creating a TV channel with a specific mission in the region**

The most effective way to properly and fully inform the Armenian speaking population is to create a new (or a branch of the Public Broadcaster) TV channel in the region which will deliver services to the Armenian speaking population of the region through a specific and agreed-upon broadcast network. The TV channel should be exempt from value-added and profit taxes while grants and other promotions should be allocated thereto. In return, the TV station should provide educational programs – Georgian ones with Armenian subtitles and Armenian ones with Georgian subtitles. The channel should conduct regular research on the informational awareness of the population of the region, prepare documentaries and conduct regular (“LIVE”) surveys on the ongoing processes in the country.

**Preliminary evaluations:** As is known from studies and other sources, the main means of information for the population (especially for the residents of the region) is television. Properly prepared TV talk shows, documentaries or topical news shows can cover a wide range of the region’s Armenian speaking population, especially if a positive program/report is prepared directly about the population and individual families. Also important is the fact that the population trusts the information received on television more than other alternative sources and so interesting programs or material can attract a wide audience. There is a risk that television may be influenced by a certain group (including politically interested ones) and that the population may receive information relevant to the interest of that group only. It is also important to note that television, even with minimal personnel, equipment or consumables, should be funded with subsidies (the issue of funds is individual and some compromise option should be chosen).

**Establishing a public organization**

Creating an organization for a specific purpose is also an accountable alternative. The organization should also be exempt from specific taxes. In return, the organization should be able to:

- Create a so-called “Mobile Information Center” which will be located in a minibus and travel from village to village and regularly provide information to the population on current topics. The mobile center will also collect suggestions and requests in regard to raising awareness in the population.
- Conduct monthly surveys to determine the level of awareness of the Armenian population in the region and based on the results develop recommendations for the central and local governments, the media and organizations working on the issue of ethnic minorities.
- Develop, create and regularly distribute information booklets, flyers and small format newspapers to the population.

**Preliminary evaluations:** Public organizations often have quite a high trust in the population and if they work on topics that are necessary/interesting for them, the involvement of citizens also increases. However, getting the proper effect takes a lot of effort. The organization will find it difficult to communicate regularly and actively with the population. Covering at least two municipalities with the activity of a few (for some reason – a limited number) members will not have a significant effect in the short to medium term. The expenses of the organization are mainly for the financing of personnel and consumables; however, it will be necessary to increase the funds for large-scale and full-fledged work. There is also a risk that there is a lot of negative attitude towards public
organizations by certain groups or interested political organizations and activities will be limited accordingly (the issue of funds is individual and some compromise option should be chosen).

**Establishing an information-analytical agency**

The abovementioned benefits should apply in this case as well. The agency prepares daily materials for informing the residents of the region with its journalists and service personnel and is in constant communication with the Armenian population of the region to effectively disseminate these materials. The agency will be distinguished by its analytical part as the existing Armenian language media outlets, with rare exceptions, only cover specific events and in a dry manner. A Facebook target group page will be created which will use a maximum amount of activity in order obtain the membership of as many Facebook users living in the region as possible. The page will also be in coordination with other existing relevant Facebook groups. Posts dedicated to burning issues will be systematically published and discussions will be encouraged on the website and the Facebook page and new initiatives will be stimulated in order to raise awareness on important matters. There will also be quizzes with incentive rewards which will increase the level of public involvement in the process (quizzes can be also utilized in the previous two alternatives).

**Preliminary evaluations:** It is important to note that in the case of this alternative, costs will be significantly lower than the other two; however, even more important is to consider the fact that the Internet is accessed by a very small number of people in the target regions and their involvement in activities will be quite difficult. It will be easier to engage in a variety of activities with those who have access to the Internet. This alternative will have a positive effect on the population and will increase their trust by prepare interesting and positive publications about local families, specific households and ordinary inhabitants of different villages. The risk here will also be political or clan interests.

**Advancing already existing media resources**

There are several media outlets operating in the Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda municipalities. Notable among them are Parvana TV, the Javakheti Information Center Jnews.ge and the Ninotsminda Community Radio, Nor. Other news agencies also operate in the region. Existing media resources have been covering the problems of the local population for years and are familiar with the specifics of the region. By supporting these resources, it is possible to increase their efficiency. Vocational training of journalists will increase their competitiveness and the quality of coverage of local issues. Additionally, funding various TV programs or series will increase the audience of these media outlets.

**Preliminary evaluations:** Implementing this alternative saves significant financial resources as there is no need to build a new infrastructure nor will it be necessary to hire new media staff as the focus is on retraining existing personnel.

**For all of the above discussed alternatives, the state will have to announce a relevant competition and select the best possible option. The selection committee should be designated based on qualification and impartiality.**

**Key Points to Consider When Evaluating the Alternatives:**

The first alternative is very effective but it is considerably time consuming and costly. The second one is easy to create but is limited in terms of effective communication and the third one is easy to implement; however, a low efficiency in terms of Internet access should be noted.
Matrix of Expected Results:

### Creating a TV channel with a specific mission in the region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Efficiency</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>Feasibility from a political point of view</th>
<th>Feasibility from an administrative point of view</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>High-costs/Subsidiary</td>
<td>Average feasibility</td>
<td>Average feasibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementation period</th>
<th>Profitability</th>
<th>Fairness</th>
<th>Beneficiary satisfaction level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-3 months</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average feasibility</td>
<td>High</td>
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</table>

### Establishing a public organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Efficiency</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>Feasibility from a political point of view</th>
<th>Feasibility from an administrative point of view</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average efficiency</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>High feasibility</td>
<td>Average feasibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementation period</th>
<th>Profitability</th>
<th>Fairness</th>
<th>Beneficiary satisfaction level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2 months</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Average</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Establishing an information-analytical agency (web-page)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Efficiency</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>Feasibility from a political point of view</th>
<th>Feasibility from an administrative point of view</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little efficiency</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High feasibility</td>
<td>Average feasibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementation period</th>
<th>Profitability</th>
<th>Fairness</th>
<th>Beneficiary satisfaction level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Advancing already existing media resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Efficiency</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>Feasibility from a political point of view</th>
<th>Feasibility from an administrative point of view</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little efficiency</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>High feasibility</td>
<td>Difficult to implement</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementation period</th>
<th>Profitability</th>
<th>Fairness</th>
<th>Beneficiary satisfaction level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-4 months</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>High feasibility</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Specific Considerations Regarding the Best Possible Option Selected Among the Alternatives

As mentioned in the evaluation section, all four alternatives have their advantages and disadvantages; however, we consider the first alternative to be the most optimal. Presented below are additional tips and suggestions for its effective implementation:

Creating a TV channel with a specific mission in the region:

Bearing in mind the issues discussed above, especially in terms of efficiency, a TV channel with a specific mission will be the most potent tool to work on alleviating the discussed problem. The television will be on digital broadcasting and be accessible to a large part of the Armenian speaking population of the region. The success of the channel will be ensured by an appropriate and well-defined TV network. We can propose specific programs as options:

a) **Overview of the problems of the region.** Recording interviews with the population to register their point of view about the ways to solve these problems.

b) **TV quizzes.** A daily program in order to raise awareness about the ongoing processes in the country. Symbolic prizes will be awarded.

c) **Preparing a series of shows about individual families in the region.** It will increase the interest in the show and spark curiosity not only to listen to the history of local families and households but also to participate in the show. Discussions and dialogues about current events in the country will also be organized.

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE WAYS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE**

Selection Method

In the process of analyzing this problem which included evaluating the severity of the issue and possible alternatives for its resolution, the creation of a TV channel with a specific mission dedicated to informing the ethnic Armenian population about the political-economic or social issues in Georgia was selected as the most effective alternative based on identifying the positive and negative effects of each alternative. This alternative was selected as a result of a multifactorial analysis which included the evaluation of alternatives by different criteria. Presented below is a list of the criteria on which the final decision was based:

- **Coverage (availability)** - Of the alternatives considered, the TV channel has the highest coverage as it will be on digital broadcasting and be available to the vast majority of the population. In addition, studies show that the majority of the population uses television as the primary source of information. This also adds to the efficiency of this option.

- **Degree of trust** - Surveys also show that the majority of the population trusts the information received from television the most.

- **Efficacy (achieving the maximum effect in a short time)** - The chosen alternative is predicted to have an average result in this component. It is less effective than the Internet source but more effective than the work of a particular public organization. In general, if there is both willingness and support from the government, it is possible to create a TV channel and start broadcasting in a few days as the TV grid gradually becomes filled.
• Sustainability - How long-lasting and less risky is this alternative? Here, too, the indication of the effectiveness of creating a TV channel is quite high. If there is political openness, it is unlikely that the TV channel will be suspended.

• Costs - As for the costs, it is initially important to find a private business owner who will be willing to open a TV channel. It is further important to define certain benefits on the part of the government; in particular, the channel should be exempt from value-added and profit taxes. It will also be advisable to make some subsidies. However, in the future the costs will gradually decrease and the project may even make a profit through advertising or other means.

• Political applicability - This implies the readiness of the government and the opposition to create a channel with an informational focus. Certain openness and support already exist; however, some obstacles can occur. Due to the practice of clan governance in the region, the risk of canal polarization is quite high depending on (in the private case) who owns it. In this case, the information provided on the current political processes in the country will not be balanced but biased.

**Ways to Implement the Alternative:**

The implementation period for this alternative is not time-bound; that is, after the creation of the TV channel it will be continuously on the digital broadcaster and be one of the main sources of information unless it faces a political issue like a TV shutdown, a legal dispute or other.

It is also important to fill the TV grid at the implementation stage. The main grid should be completed within a month and then relevant shows should be added gradually depending on public interest and need.

Benefits suggested for the TV channel - these benefits must be valid during the broadcasting process of the TV channel and until the channel has a profit.

As for the implementation phase’s monitoring and evaluation, this includes checking the timely and thorough implementation of the activities planned during the entire project. This includes the legality of the channel’s registration, how well deadlines were met and how the broadcasting process is going on. At the evaluation stage, specific reports will be prepared which will account for any identified violations and the achieved results. The reports will reveal the effectiveness of this alternative and if the channel provides balanced information to the population about the socio-political and economic situation in the country.

Persons and agencies involved in the monitoring and evaluation process will be those working on financial and compliance audits in order to ensure the transparency of costs and the performed activities. The Charter of Journalistic Ethics will be used to monitor and evaluate if the channel’s programs are balanced and if they adhere to ethical norms. Local and national non-governmental organizations of relevant profiles will use research to determine the effectiveness of the chosen alternative/initiative and the extent to which it will change the situation regarding the informational awareness in the population of the region.
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this policy paper is to alleviate the acute problem facing our country - the low level of awareness of the ethnic minorities (in this case, the ethnic Armenian population living in Samtskhe-Javakheti), thereby ensuring their integration into the public life of the country. The paper also tried to identify and propose the most optimal solutions for the aforementioned problem. As a result of detailed analyses, the first alternative was selected which implies creating a TV channel with a specific mission of an informational and educational function in the region.

BIBLIOGRAPHY