

**THE ARMENIAN MINORITY IN THE
SAMSTKHE-JAVAKHETI REGION OF
GEORGIA:
Civic Integration and its Barriers**

Policy Paper

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Abbreviations

CEC – Central Election Commission

CITC – Civil Integration and Tolerance Council

CNM – Council of National Minorities

CoE – Council of Europe

CSOs – Civil Society Organisations

ECMI – European Centre for Minority Issues

ECRML – European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

EU – European Union

FCNM – Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

GeoStat – National Statistics Office of Georgia

GPB – Georgian Public Broadcaster

MIA – Ministry of Internal Affairs

MoES – Ministry of Education and Science

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NCAP – National Concept and Action Plan for Tolerance and Civil Integration

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

PACE – Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

PDO – Public Defender’s Office

SME – Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

SMR – Office of the State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality (formerly known as Office of the State Minister for Reintegration)

TPDC – Teacher’s Professional Development Centre

VET – Vocational Education and Training

ZZPA – Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration

I. INTRODUCTION

The Armenian minority is present in different places in Georgia, but lives compactly in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, where it accounts for 54.6%¹ of the region's population. For a number of different reasons, such as its geographical location, the Armenian minority has somewhat been left behind in the state-building process, which has been a great barrier for its integration in all sphere of civic life.

The main purpose of this paper is to analyse the level of integration of Armenians within Georgia's public life, as well as to issue recommendations on how to enhance integration. In order to do so, the barriers faced by Armenians in the region and the work done by the government to overcome them were analysed.

This research was done through a qualitative analysis of reports, policy papers and relevant legislation on the different topics touched upon. In order to gain a more insightful knowledge of the reality of the situation, interviews were carried out with minority experts, the Georgian authorities and local experts. The research took place between November 2015 and February 2016.

First, a brief overview on the region is provided to reflect the particularities of the region, which contextualise the reality of the Armenian minority. Then, the legislation with regards to minority issues is described, to provide a framework that shows the current situation of minorities in Georgia, as well as the commitments of the Government, and its willingness to deal with the problems faced both by minorities and by Georgia due to the lack of integration of minority groups. Education and media have been identified as the most relevant and problematic fields in public life with regards to the Armenian community, and as the ones that need particular and urgent attention. For that reason, they are dealt with in separate sections, so that a more in-depth analysis can be provided. The other aspects of public life are analysed in the same section, except for political participation. It is important to reflect that political participation is a key element to understand whether or not integration is being achieved. Disengagement from political processes is often a reflection of a lack of a sense of belonging, and shows the failures of a state to include its citizens. Finally, policy recommendations are issued to address the problems identified.

¹ Jonathan Wheatley, "The Integration of National Minorities in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli Provinces of Georgia", European Centre for Minority Issues Working Paper #44, September 2009 p.5.

II. THE SAMTSKHE-JAVAKHETI REGION: AN OVERVIEW

A. GEOGRAPHY AND DEMOGRAPHY

The geographical location of Samtskhe-Javakheti has always played an important role in determining the level of engagement of the region in Georgian political and social life. With an area of 6.41 thousand square kilometres, it represents 10.7% of Georgian territory. In the east, Samtskhe-Javakheti borders with the Javakheti and the Abulsamsari ranges in the neighbouring region of Kvemo Kartli. In the west, it borders with the Arsiani range in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara. The northern part is limited by the Achara-Imereti and Trialeti ranges in Shida Kartli, Imereti and Guria². The south has the Georgian national border with both Armenia and Turkey. This southern connection makes the region a hub for international trade, as it is part of the great Silk Road trading route³.

Due to the fact that it is a landlocked mountainous region, the climate is quite harsh. Winters are cold and long, but summers are warm. Temperatures in January range between 0 and -7.2°C, whereas in July, between 16 and 20.2°C. The annual average precipitation is around 500-600mm⁴.

The region is wealthy in natural resources such as basalt, perlite and marble, and for its famous mineral waters that carry the name of their location: *Borjomi*. Due to these resources, Samtskhe-Javakheti has a great potential for developing the building industry. Nevertheless, its main sphere of activity remains agriculture. The total area of agricultural plots in the Samtskhe-Javakheti amounts to 396 thousand hectares, of which 77.6 thousand hectares are arable, producing mostly cereals and potatoes⁵.

The region has a total population of 213,700⁶ and is divided into 6 municipalities or districts: Adigeni, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe, Borjomi and Ninotsminda. There are three historical provinces – Samtskhe, Javakheti and Tori. The region comprises 353 settlements including five towns: Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Borjomi, Vale, and Ninotsminda; seven townlets: Bakuriani, Bakurianis Andeziti, Tsagveri, Akhaldaba, Adigeni, Abastumani, and Aspindza; and 254 villages⁷. Akhaltsikhe is the administrative centre and capital. Located within the Akhaltsikhe depression on both banks of the river Potskhovi, at 1000m above sea level, it is the largest town in the region with 18,000 inhabitants⁸.

Samtskhe-Javakheti has been an Armenian-populated region (54.6%) since the 19th century, with a varied ethnic composition including Georgians (43.35%), Greeks (0.36%) and others (1.7%), such as Russians and Ossetians⁹. Although ethnic Armenians are spread across all of the districts, the historical province of Javakheti (Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda

² The Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus, ““Political Administrative Region: Samtskhe- Javakheti”, pp. 1-2. Available at:

<http://www.rec-caucasus.org/Flash/PDF/GE/GE5.pdf>

³ Igor Bondyrev and Zurab Davitashvili, *The Geography of Georgia: Problems and Perspectives*, (World Regional Geography Book Series, 2015), pp. 175-179

⁴ *Ibid*, p.2.

⁵ “Study of Economic Relations Between Georgia and Armenia: The Development of Regional Trade Related Growth in Samtskhe-Javakheti”, Caucasus Research Resource Center, September 2007, pp. 45-46.

⁶ National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat), 2014, available at:

http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=1184&lang=eng.

⁷ GIZ, “Samtskhe-Javakheti Regional Development Strategy 2014-2021”, Tbilisi, 2013, p. 5.

⁸ The Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus, *op.cit.*

⁹ Jonathan Wheatley, *op. cit.*, p.5.

municipalities) has a total ethnic Armenian population of 94.8% (94.33% and 95.78% respectively)¹⁰. The fact that ethnic Armenians live compactly in these regions has been a factor that has hindered their integration into Georgia's civic life. It has therefore been a challenge for Georgia's governments.

B. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND SINCE THE FALL OF THE SOVIET UNION

The 1990's proved to be a challenging period for the newly-independent state. Soon after Georgia's independence, a civil war broke out. In addition to the war, all regions in Georgia were heavily affected by poverty and corruption, especially the remote regions¹¹.

Samtskhe-Javakheti was neglected by the central government during the rule of Eduard Shevardnadze. Poor infrastructure and a lack of knowledge of the Georgian language provided grounds for ethnic minorities to become isolated, which in turn led to a high level of disengagement from the local population. Before 2003, ethnic minorities did not identify themselves as Georgian citizens, as there were no opportunities to engage in social and state life. In addition to this, Russian influence played a crucial role in further aggravating the detachment of the local population from Georgia's life. The 62nd divisional Russian base was located in Akhalkalaki, providing the local population not only with employment, but also a source of trade, and thus close ties with Russia that still somehow remain relevant¹².

After 2003, when the revolutionary government led by Mikheil Saakashvili came into power, the general attitude towards the region changed drastically. During the first few years of the new government, ethnic tensions escalated in Samtskhe-Javakheti¹³. In 2005, the council of local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) adopted a resolution calling on the Georgian government to grant autonomy to the region, including the creation of a "Samtskhe-Javakheti parliament through free and direct elections"¹⁴. According to the resolution, the central government had offered the highest degree of autonomy to South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and failing to do the same for Samtskhe-Javakheti meant discrimination against other ethnicities by Tbilisi. Between 2005 and 2006 there were violent demonstrations due to the increase in the deployment of security forces and the strong promotion of the Georgian language, which made Armenians fear assimilation¹⁵. In addition, Saakashvili forced the closure of the Russian military base in 2007; a move that he thought would lead to a new chance for the central government to obtain a position of power in the region and to fully integrate it into state life¹⁶. This created a further sense of distrust between the government and the Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti.

The war of August 2008 in South Ossetia increased the fear of further instability in Georgia instigated by Russia's influence in Georgia's regions, where ethnic minorities live compactly. In this context, engagement with the region was considerably increased¹⁷.

¹⁰ *Idem.*

¹¹ Igor Bondyrev and Zurab Davitashvili, *op.cit.*, pp.3-4.

¹² Stephen F. Jones, *War and Revolution in the Caucasus: Georgia Ablaze*. (Routledge, 2010), pp.33-34.

¹³ International Crisis Group, "Georgia: The Javakheti Region's integration Challenges", Crisis Group Europe Briefing, No 63, 23rd May 2011, p. 2.

¹⁴ Hedvig Lohm, "Javakheti after the Rose Revolution: Progress and Regress in the Pursuit of National Unity in Georgia", ECMI Working Paper #38, April 2007. p. 18. Also see: Eka Metreveli and Jonathan Kulick, "Social Relations and Governance in Javakheti, The Initiative for Peacebuilding", 2009.

¹⁵ *Idem.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁷ *Idem.*

In an attempt to improve relations, Saakashvili's government developed the Strategy on National Integration and Tolerance, prepared by the State Ministry for Reintegration Issues (SMR) in 2009¹⁸. The Strategy aimed at improving the integration of ethnic minorities in Georgia and covered different aspects of public life: rule of law; education and state language; media and access to information; political integration and civic participation; social and regional integration; and cultural preservation of identity. The strategy and its action plan have been a positive development and something of a change in attitude towards minorities. The SMR opened a regional representation in Akhalkalaki, headed by a local community representative¹⁹.

An improvement in infrastructure and the development of targeted programmes have greatly improved the integration of Georgia's minority groups. However, the particular geographical location of Samtskhe-Javakheti and its close ties with both Armenia and Russia pose particular challenges to the government.

¹⁸ This Ministry changed its name in 2014 and is now known as Office of the State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality State; Ministry for Reintegration Issues (SMR), "Strategy on National Integration and Tolerance", 2009. Available at: <http://www.smr.gov.ge/docs/doc203.pdf>

¹⁹ Eka Metreveli and Jonathan Kulick, *op.cit.*, p.15.

III. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

This section will outline the main legislation relating to minority issues in Georgia, which will be further developed throughout this paper in the relevant sections. It will also explain the implementation and monitoring mechanisms for the protection of minority rights.

A. INTERNATIONAL LEGISLATION

Upon accession to the Council of Europe in 1999, Georgia committed itself to signing and ratifying the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML)²⁰. The FCNM was ratified in 2005. To date, two monitoring rounds have been done. In April 2013, members of the Georgian government publicly confirmed their desire to ratify the ECRML. For that purpose, a high-level Inter-agency Commission was established in June 2013 and within the framework of the Council of Europe (CoE) Action Plan for Georgia (2013-2015) a European Union (EU)/Council of Europe Joint Programme entitled “Civic Integration of National Minorities in Georgia and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages” was developed, in order to support the ratification and potential implementation²¹. To date, however, the ECRML remains unratified. The topic of the ECRML has proved problematic, as it has been subject to an incorrect interpretation of ‘regional or minority language’, which has raised concerns that its ratification could pose a risk to Georgia’s territorial integrity²². In April 2013, the Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church, Ilia II, showed his opposition to such ratification ‘until Georgia’s territorial integrity was restored’²³. It is a widespread belief that Russian should not be protected because it is a result of imperialist policies, and that other minority languages, such as Armenian and Azerbaijani, are in fact diaspora languages and not traditional languages that Georgia needs to protect²⁴.

Through the EU-Georgia Visa Liberalisation Plan, human rights and the rights of minorities in Georgia have become an important commitment for the government. The plan set up an agenda with Georgia with regards to all the issues the EU requires for further cooperation. This has entailed great successes, like the approval of the Law on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination in 2014 mentioned in the next section.

B. DOMESTIC LEGISLATION²⁵

Though there is no law on minorities *per se*, as Georgia committed itself to enact when entering the Council of Europe²⁶, (which has been reiterated by the Advisory Committee of

²⁰ Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), “Georgia’s application for membership of the Council of Europe, Opinion 209(1999), para. 10.1. Available at: <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=16669&lang=en>

²¹ Council of Europe, “Action Plan for Georgia 2013-2015” (ODGProg/Inf(2013)15), September 2013. Available at: https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=2102099#P1265_126853

²² Nana Macharashvili *et al.*, “Policy Advocacy Success in Georgia: The Role and Limitations of NGOs in Influencing Public Policy”, Academic Swiss Caucasus Net, Tbilisi 2015, p.148.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

²⁴ *Idem.*

²⁵ In this section, the legislation concerning only the *de facto* independent regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region are left out as they do not directly affect the Armenian minority living in Samtskhe-Javakheti. The same goes for the *Law on Repatriation of Persons Forcefully Sent into Exile from Georgian SSR by the former USSR in the 1940s of the 20th Century*

²⁶ PACE, *op.cit.*, para. 10.2.

the FCNM), the Government of Georgia chose instead to incorporate special measures to ensure equality in many domestic laws²⁷.

The Constitution of Georgia states in its article 14 the principle of equality for all, further developed in article 38, where non-discrimination is added; both articles specifically including minority groups²⁸. Article 9 establishes freedom of belief and religion, though granting a special role to the Georgian Orthodox Church, determined in a Constitutional Agreement²⁹. This in turn means that other religious groups are left without any specific legal protection.

Article 4 (1) of the 2005 Law on General Education establishes Georgian as the language of communication in all educational institutions³⁰. Nevertheless, section 3 of the same article specifies the rights of people belonging to national minorities to receive primary and secondary education in their native language³¹.

The 2004 Law on Higher Education establishes a 5% quota for minorities in all state university places, for ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani³². In addition, students belonging to the Armenian, Azerbaijani, Ossetian and Abkhazian minority groups are required to pass just a single test in their native languages, as opposed to the 4 undertaken by ethnic Georgians.

The Criminal Code of Georgia considers racial, religious, national or ethnic intolerance an aggravating circumstance in conjunction with different crimes, for example, in case of murder (Art. 109), or torture (Art. 127)³³.

In 2014, a new Law on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination entered into force, as part of the EU-Georgia Visa Liberalisation Action Plan. Although it has been criticised for different reasons, it must be said that the adoption of such a law already represents a progressive step towards human rights protection.

On 8th May 2009 the Government of Georgia adopted the National Concept and Action Plan for Tolerance and Civil Integration (NCAP), with its first action plan for the period 2009-2014. Up to then, minorities had been generally relegated to a national security issue, thus often seeing their rights not protected or even neglected. The NCAP represented the first document drafted in order to develop and assess the protection and promotion of the rights of minorities in Georgia, and it was therefore certainly a step forward. Some civil society organisations (CSOs) have complained about the unsatisfactory levels of involvement they were allowed throughout the drafting. They believe that despite the efforts made, the monitoring and assessment of the implementation of the NCAP has not been adequate, as measurement indicators were not duly developed³⁴.

In December 2015, the new strategy and action plan were presented by the SMR in Tbilisi. The new strategy has a few changes, with regards to its structure. Gender mainstreaming has

²⁷ Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), “2nd Report Submitted by Georgia Pursuant to Article 25, Paragraph 2 of the FCNM” (ACFC/SR/II (2012)001), Strasbourg May 2012, pp.17-18.

²⁸ Article 14 and 38, Constitution of Georgia, 1995.

²⁹ Article 9, Constitution of Georgia.

³⁰ An entire chapter will be devoted to Education, and all topics mentioned in this section with regards to education will be analysed in-depth in the next chapter (IV – Education)

³¹ Article 4, Law on General Education of Georgia, 2005.

³² Article 52.5 (1), Law on Higher Education, 2004.

³³ Article 109 and 127, Criminal Code of Georgia, 1999.

³⁴ Interview with expert on minority issues, November 2015.

been a great development, and also the creation of a working group within the state inter-agency committee dedicated to small and vulnerable ethnic groups³⁵.

In July 2015, the Law on State Language was approved, entering into force in January 2016³⁶. This law ensures the central role of the Georgian language in all spheres of public life, granting some rights to minority languages in specific contexts that will be explained throughout this paper. However, it has been criticised by ethnic minority experts, who claim it mostly emphasises the central role of Georgian language to the detriment of minority languages.

Other legislation in which minority rights are directly or indirectly envisaged are as follows: the Labour Code; the Electoral Code; the Administrative Code; the Law on Political Unions of the Citizens; the General Administrative Code; the Law on Public Service; the Law on Gatherings and Manifestations; the Law on Broadcasting; the Law on Rights of the Patient; the Law on Political Associations of Citizens; the Law on Protection of Health; Law on Local Self-Government; and the Law on Culture³⁷.

C. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF MINORITY LEGISLATION

Pursuant to the Government Decree of 2009, the SMR is in charge of the implementation of the NCAP, providing implementation reports on a yearly basis. Nevertheless, it is the Civil Integration and Tolerance Council (CITC) under the President of Georgia who monitors the implementation³⁸. In addition, in 2013 the SMR also set up an Interagency Working Group dealing with the occupied territories and the particular needs of the conflict-affected population³⁹.

The Ombudsman – Office of the Public Defender (PDO) is in charge of supervising the protection of human rights and freedoms in Georgia. As such, s/he is also responsible for minority rights. S/he can issue recommendations when human rights have been infringed and request that court decisions be reviewed. S/he can also issue recommendations on how policies can be improved in order to prevent human rights violations or discrimination from happening⁴⁰. For enhanced effectivity, the Ombudsman has several regional offices with local representatives: one of them located in the city of Akhalkalaki, in Samtskhe-Javakheti⁴¹.

Two main bodies relevant to minority rights protection and promotion exist under the PDO. The first and main one is the Council of National Minorities (CNM), established in 2005. It is a permanent consultative body that works as a platform for dialogue between the government and the representatives of national minorities. It gathers more than eighty minority organisations, providing an opportunity for CSOs to give advice or provide information for minority-related policies, including the NCAP. The CNM also monitors the implementation of the Council of Europe's FCNM and issues recommendations on it⁴².

³⁵ SMR, “State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and 2015-2020 Action Plan”, p. 5.

³⁶ Even though the Law entered into force on 1st January 2016, articles 33, 34, 36 and 37 of the Law entered into force in February 2016.

³⁷ The present list is not exhaustive.

³⁸ FCNM, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

³⁹ SMR, “2013 Report”, 2014, p. 15.

⁴⁰ Public Defender of Georgia, “Mandate”. Available at: <http://www.ombudsman.ge/en/public-defender/mandati>

⁴¹ *Ibid*, “Regional Division”. Available at (in Georgian only): <http://www.ombudsman.ge/ge/about-us/struqtura/sammartveloebi/regionuli-sammartvelo/samcxedjavaxeti>

⁴² Tolerance Centre under the Auspices of the Public Defender, “Council of National Minorities”. Available at: <http://www.tolerantoba.ge/index.php?id=1359536926>

The second relevant body is the Council of Religions of Georgia, a body in charge of promoting dialogue among Georgia's religious groups, as well as freedom of religion. Through the Council, the different religious associations undertake the responsibility to cooperate in the respect and promotion of Georgia's cultural diversity and human rights, as well as the involvement of religious minorities in the process of civil integration⁴³.

⁴³*Ibid*, "Council of Religions". Available at: <http://www.tolerantoba.ge/index.php?id=1359539573>

IV. EDUCATION

During Soviet times, Russian was the *lingua franca* all throughout the Soviet Union, including in the different republics within the Union. Nevertheless, learning minority and regional languages was encouraged through minority-language schools for primary and secondary education, where pupils also learned Russian⁴⁴. Many minorities like the Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti did not actually learn Georgian, despite being in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, as the language of communication was Russian. This became a problem when Georgia gained independence, as Georgian became the new language of communication for all ethnic groups. It thus created a barrier to the civic integration of minorities, together with the lack of infrastructure in the region. Even though the infrastructure has greatly improved and therefore ways of communication have been enhanced, it remains somewhat problematic. To date, many programmes have been implemented in order to overcome the language barrier. However, it still remains the largest barrier; especially for education.

The education system did not change greatly after the fall of the Soviet Union, and nowadays in Georgia there are still several minority-language schools, although Georgian language is part of the curriculum. There have traditionally been 2 types of schools: Georgian language schools and non-Georgian language schools (or minority language schools). In 2010, a bilingual pilot programme was developed⁴⁵ for the first time for non-Georgian language schools, which is still ongoing and be improved on a yearly basis.

A. PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Access to pre-school education is guaranteed by art. 35.3 of the Constitution of Georgia⁴⁶. Nevertheless, in Samtskhe-Javakheti there have been many problems reported in this regard. A concerning problem is the lack of infrastructure and the bad conditions of buildings, many of which have poor sanitation conditions, often making it hard for young children to attend⁴⁷. The nursery schools are financed from the local budget, which means that the limited amount of funding usually goes to other projects and thus most of them are not being improved⁴⁸.

According to the last data collected, in Samtskhe-Javakheti there are 54 pre-schools, 17 of which are non-Georgian language⁴⁹, mostly in urban areas⁵⁰. There are no kindergartens in the villages, which is rather problematic as it hampers access for those children who live in remote areas. This is added to the fact that the Armenian minority tend to have high rates of not sending children to pre-school education. According to the information provided by the regional administrations and local municipalities, out of the 4,322 preschool aged ethnic minority children in Samtskhe-Javakheti, only 1,116 were attending pre-school education⁵¹.

⁴⁴ Salome Mekhuzla and Aideen Roche, "National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia", ECMI Working Paper #46, September 2009, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Teresa Wigglesworth-Baker, "A research Study into Multilingual Education in Georgia", HCNM OSCE, 2015, p.4.

⁴⁶ Article 35.3, Constitution of Georgia, 1995.

⁴⁷ Interview with the Ministry of Education (MoES), November 2015.

⁴⁸ European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), "Needs Assessment of Ethnic Minority Women in Georgia", commissioned report for UN Women, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 47.

⁴⁹ SMR, "Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014", June 2014, p. 40.

⁵⁰ ECMI, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

⁵¹ SMR, "Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014", *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.

This can lead to problems when accessing primary schools, as not all children start at the same level⁵².

Pre-school education has probably been the part of education that has been neglected for the longest period in Georgia, with no clear policies and regulations. In recent years this has changed and pre-school education is becoming a priority for the government. In early 2014, the Law on Early and Pre-school Education was drafted jointly with UNICEF⁵³, which will be discussed at Parliament in the spring session 2016⁵⁴.

In 2015, the first policy for standardisation was developed⁵⁵. It was aimed at 5 year-old children, in order to prepare them for accessing primary education⁵⁶. It is expected that it will be implemented with a year delay in non-Georgian language schools, due to an initial year for piloting, as well as for the time the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) needs to translate it into minority languages⁵⁷. However, there is no current regulation on pre-school education, and therefore institutions function following their own experience and training. Usually, administration and teachers have not been trained in new teaching methods and have no access to methodological manuals due to the lack of translations into Armenian⁵⁸. At present, there are 15 pre-school teachers being trained at the local Samtskhe-Javakheti University, none of which are ethnic Armenian⁵⁹. Subsequently, the quality of pre-school education, particularly in minority-language schools, remains inadequate.

B. GENERAL EDUCATION

The Law of 2005 on Education stipulates that Georgian is the language of national instruction (art. 4.1). Nevertheless, it is also stated that “[t]he citizens of Georgia, whose native language is not Georgian, shall have the right to acquire a complete general education in their native language in accordance with the National Curriculum, as provided for by the legislation. Teaching of the official language in such general education institution (...) shall be mandatory” (art. 4.3). In Samtskhe-Javakheti, there are 96 Armenian-language and 4 Russian-language (public) schools at present⁶⁰.

Up until 2007, textbooks in minority languages were supplied by kin states, that is, by Armenia in the case of Armenian language schools. However, this was never satisfactory for the Georgian government, as the history of Georgia was not included and the curriculum was not adapted to Georgia. For that reason, the MoES decided that Georgian textbooks should be translated into minority languages, to increase the inclusion of minorities within society.

The last curriculum was developed for the period 2011-2016, and many Armenian schools complained that they had still not received it. According to the MoES, these will not be distributed as the new curriculum is currently being developed⁶¹, which means that non-Georgian schools are still working with the old curriculum and therefore at a disadvantage to

⁵² Interview with the MoES, November 2015.

⁵³ UNESCO, “Education for All 2015 National Review: Georgia”, 2015, p.1.

⁵⁴ Agenda.ge, “Early and pre-school education will see major changes”. Available at: <http://agenda.ge/news/49822/eng>

⁵⁵ Interview with the MoES, November 2015.

⁵⁶ UNESCO, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ Interview with the MoES, November 2015.

⁵⁸ SMR, “Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014”, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁵⁹ Interview with Pre-school Education Department at the Samtskhe-Javakheti University, February 2016.

⁶⁰ Shalva Tabatadze, “Textbooks for Minority Schools of Georgia: Problems and Challenges”, *International Journal of Multilingual Education* #5, 2015, p. 3.

⁶¹ Interview with the MoES, November 2015.

most of the students across the country. For the last curriculum, a new approach was taken towards the translation of minority languages. There was a switch into “bilingual education”, and therefore the content of the books was changed. This switch required not only that Georgian language and literature be taught in Georgian, but also history, geography and other social sciences be taught in Georgian⁶². However, the system developed for textbooks was that 30% of them would be in Georgian, and 70% in Armenian, instead of just Armenian for those subjects⁶³. This type of bilingual education system “is not based on any scientific and methodological evidence and does not correspond to any learning principle on the integrated study of subjects⁶⁴”. Many question this system and even the assessment made by the SMR states that “the mechanical percentile division turned out to be absolutely ineffective and to have only a negative effect⁶⁵”.

Here are some of the problems that have been identified and that are currently affecting general education in Samtskhe-Javakheti.

Textbooks

There have been many complaints about the poor quality of the Armenian translations. This has meant that, for example, due to the constant editing of translations, the translation process was halted and, in the end, translations of textbooks for grades 7-12 were not carried out⁶⁶. As a consequence, local schools received some textbooks in Georgian only, thus forcing Armenian-speaking teachers with little or no knowledge of Georgian to use old textbooks or books from Armenia⁶⁷.

Another concerning problem with textbooks, is the inclusion of stereotypes of national minorities and the lack of any reflection of the multiculturalism of the country in primary and secondary schoolbooks. This makes minority groups feel excluded⁶⁸. For example, in the book called *Our Motherland – Georgia*, the different parts of Georgia and the peoples living in them are explained, completely neglecting groups that are not part of the Georgian ethnic group and including minorities like the Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti with other migrant communities⁶⁹. This example shows damaging attitudes towards Armenians, teaching Georgian children that they are a foreign nation which could in turn develop into prejudices towards minorities. Reflecting a country’s multiculturalism in textbooks is of great importance “on the one hand in terms of creating an anti-discriminatory learning environment for minority students, and on the other hand to engrain intercultural sensitivity and tolerance in students of the majority, an aspect which is essential for the civil integration process where the wish for integration from minorities is just as important as the high level of acceptance from the majority⁷⁰”.

⁶² Salome Mekhuzla and Aideen Roche, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

⁶³ Shalva Tabatadze, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.9.

⁶⁵ SMR, “Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014”, *op. cit.*, p.52.

⁶⁶ Shalva Tabatadze, *op.cit.*, p.8.

⁶⁷ SMR, “Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014”, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁶⁸ Shalva Tabatadze, *op.cit.*, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.7.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.8.

Qualification of teachers

As mentioned above, since 2011 only 70% of the textbooks were translated into Armenian. The main problem with the bilingual education system is the lack of qualifications of local teachers, as many of them do not speak Georgian. These teachers found themselves having to teach partially in Georgian and also to explain that 30% of the textbooks were written in Georgian. In practice, this entails that 30% of the content is ignored, which hampers the quality of the education the children receive, rendering them less prepared in comparison with Georgian-speaking children.

In 2009, Order No. 1101 was issued by the MoES, approving the regulations for teacher certification exams. According to this, these exams could be conducted in Georgian (and in Abkhazian in Abkhazia), and in Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani languages for those who want to teach in non-Georgian schools. However, for the period 2009-2013 no tests in minority languages were provided, leaving non-Georgian language teachers without the opportunity to get the certification⁷¹. Non-qualified teachers were entitled to repeat the examinations as many times as they needed up until 2013 in order to maintain their positions⁷². In practice, those who did not pass the tests (or did not have the chance to take them) still hold their positions, as there are no other teachers available for substituting them⁷³.

The Government is currently developing the idea of offering a training course for ethnic minority students from any university degree willing to become teachers of their subjects⁷⁴. The idea is to create an incentive for these specialised graduates to go to the regions and improve the level of teaching of different subjects in the Georgian language. An added problem that the schools in the regions are about to face is the lack of teachers of any kind. 70% of the teachers in non-Georgian language schools are over 41 years-old, while 20% are over 61⁷⁵. This suggests that within the next 20 years almost all teachers will have to be replaced, leaving education in the region in a worse situation if new teachers are not trained.

Aside from bilingual teaching, the quality of Armenian language teaching remains problematic. There is no curriculum at present for minority languages (as it is not included in the Georgian national curriculum or stipulated in the Law on General Education), which means that no standards for minority-language teaching have been developed⁷⁶. The Action Plan (NCAP) 2015-2020 envisages the inclusion of a Concept for native language education that would be included in the National Curriculum to improve the situation, but it is not expected to be complete until 2019⁷⁷. The Advisory Committee on the FCNM stated in its last opinion on Georgia that the lack of standards for minority language teaching is hampering the quality of education in minority language schools⁷⁸.

In 2015, the ‘Secondary School Teacher Development and Career Support Programme in Regions Densely-populated with Ethnic Minorities’ was approved by the Teacher’s Professional Development Centre (TPDC). It aims to provide non-Georgian-speaking

⁷¹ SMR, “Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014”, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁷² Salome Mekhuzla and Aideen Roche, *op. cit.*, p.34.

⁷³ Interview with the MoES, November 2015.

⁷⁴ *Idem.*

⁷⁵ SMR, “Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014”, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁷⁷ SMR, “State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and 2015-2020 Action Plan”, Tbilisi, 2015, p.29.

⁷⁸ FCNM, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

secondary school teachers with materials in their minority languages, as well as to improve their qualifications. So far, 2933 Armenian Language Secondary Schools benefited from it⁷⁹.

C. HIGHER AND TECHNICAL/VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Just a few years ago, it was not uncommon for ethnic Armenians willing to continue with their education to choose to do so in Russian or Armenian universities, due to the language barrier they had in Georgian universities⁸⁰. However, the new 1 + 4 programme has stopped that trend and it has dramatically increased the demand for higher education in Georgia among ethnic minority students. The programme establishes 5% quotas for ethnic minority students for accessing university⁸¹. Azerbaijani and Armenian applicants have to take a general ability test in their native language, instead of the 4 exams that ethnic Georgians are required to take⁸². After this general language skills exam, ethnic minority students are expected to undergo a one year intensive Georgian language training educational programme, in order to attain an adequate academic level of Georgian language⁸³. Only after passing this course can they officially enrol in a Bachelor's degree of their choice⁸⁴.

Even though the number of ethnic Armenians applying for Georgian universities at present has certainly increased, it is still lower than that of the ethnic Azerbaijani. For example, for the year 2013, 1,068 ethnic Armenians registered for the programme (of which only 707 actually passed the test), whereas 2,423 ethnic Azerbaijani registered (and 1,560 passed the test)⁸⁵. Nevertheless, this programme has certainly been a success, as for the year 2013, 130 ethnic Armenians graduated from Georgian universities, compared with only two in 2006⁸⁶. A problem that has to be taken into account is the high cost of living in Tbilisi, which is where most universities participating in the programme are. In many cases it seems to be too expensive for students coming from the regions, and despite the fact that there are scholarships, the majority of students do not receive any help. For the 2015 national exams, out of 556 ethnic Armenian students who passed the test, 94 received national education grants⁸⁷.

This programme has had criticisms and it certainly needs to be monitored and upgraded on a yearly basis. However, since it has been successful, no official assessment has been carried out⁸⁸. Many questions remain unanswered: for example, what happens to those ethnic minority students who do not attain the adequate level of Georgian language after the one year course, as has proven to be the case for many Armenian-speaking students⁸⁹. It is up to the universities to decide how they assess the students and what happens to those who are behind when it comes to knowledge of the Georgian language. Some might just allow ethnic minority students to pass, in order for the university to claim their success in regard to ethnic

⁷⁹ SMR, 'Report on the Implementation of State Strategy for Civic Equality and 2015 Action Plan', February 2016, p. 15.

⁸⁰ The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD), "The Reform of the Georgian National Education System and Non-Georgian Schools", Policy Paper, 2009, p.15.

⁸¹ Eurasianet, "Post-Crimea, Phantom of Armenian Separatism Haunts Georgia", 9th April 2014. Available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/68253>

⁸² UNESCO, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

⁸³ *Idem.*

⁸⁴ SMR, "Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014", *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 73.

⁸⁶ Eurasianet, *op.cit.*

⁸⁷ SMR, 'Report on the Implementation of State Strategy for Civic Equality and 2015 Action Plan', February 2016, p. 17.

⁸⁸ Interview with MoES, November 2015.

⁸⁹ SMR, "Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014", *op.cit.*, p. 76.

minority graduates, but it certainly remains a problematic topic. In addition, some experts on minority issues criticise the fact that ethnic minority students are put together in the same residences, which means that they do not live with ethnic Georgians⁹⁰. This not only creates segregation, but it is a missed opportunity for ethnic minority students to improve their language skills.

Vocational education and training (VET) is not widespread in Georgia. The new Development Strategy for 2013-2020 is therefore a positive development. Within its strategic priorities, it includes ensuring the participation of ethnic minorities in VET-related activities⁹¹. The strategy acknowledges the fact that accessibility is particularly constrained for ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups⁹², and for that reason their particular needs should be taken into account, although no activities directly targeting ethnic minorities are envisaged. Nonetheless, the NCAP's action plan for 2015-2020 does include activities seeking to develop mechanisms to increase the number of ethnic minorities accessing VET for the period 2015-2017⁹³.

With regards to adult learning, there is the Alkhaltshikhe Professional Development College, which currently offers 16 courses for adults. However, they are all in Georgian, and Armenian-speaking adults wishing to attend them are unable to do so due to the language barrier⁹⁴. The same problems exist for the technical courses offered by the Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration⁹⁵.

D. GEORGIAN LANGUAGE LEARNING

The promotion of the Georgian language among minorities has certainly been one of the main concerns for the Georgian government in the past years, and at present it still represents one of the priorities in its policies towards minorities. Lack of knowledge of the state language has been seen (and has been) one of the main barriers to the integration of national minorities in Georgia. Aiming at improving the situation, different programmes have been implemented at different levels in areas densely populated with minorities to overcome the language barrier.

In 2009, a programme called 'Teach Georgian as a Second Language' started. It aims at improving the professional development of the Georgian language teachers who teach the state language at non-Georgian schools. The selected teachers who passed the test had to undertake a number of modules: 50 hours of "Georgian as a second language teaching methods"; 5 hours of "ethnic and religious tolerance"; and 50 hours of minority language (in the concerning case, Armenian)⁹⁶. After the trainings, teachers were assigned to 15 schools in Akhalkalaki⁹⁷. During 2009-2013 more than 1,000 candidates participated in the selection process, but only 92 them passed the exams and interview. Currently 72 teachers are deployed in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions⁹⁸. Within the framework of this programme,

⁹⁰ Interview with expert on minority issues, February 2016.

⁹¹ MoES, Vocational Education and Training (VET) Development Strategy for 2013-2020, p.5.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁹³ SMR, "State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and 2015-2020 Action Plan", Tbilisi, 2015, p. 32.

⁹⁴ ECMI, p. 48.

⁹⁵ SMR, 'Report on the Implementation of State Strategy for Civic Equality and 2015 Action Plan', February 2016, p. 18.

⁹⁶ SMR, "Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014", *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁹⁷ ECMI, *op. cit.*, p. 11

⁹⁸ MoES, National Center For Teacher Professional Development, "Georgian as a Second Language". Additional information at : http://tpdc.gov.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=214&lang=geo

an exchange among Armenian language and Georgian language schools took place in order to promote tolerance and multiculturalism⁹⁹.

Another programme created to improve the quality of teaching of Georgian in areas populated by minorities was “Georgian Language for Future Success”, developed in 2011-2012 by the TPDC. To date, around 600 participants have been involved in the programme¹⁰⁰. This programme targeted not only teachers, but also students and local community members in Samtskhe-Javakheti. Also, textbooks have been developed for pre-school and primary levels with audio materials¹⁰¹.

In early 2015, these two programmes, ‘Teach Georgian as a Second Language’ and ‘Georgian Language for Future Success’ merged into one programme, which now carries the name of the latter.

In 2011-2012, the MoES together with the UN Children’s Fund implemented the project “Supporting Georgian Language Learning in Ethnic Minorities and Preschool Education Level”¹⁰². As the same name states, the programme targeted preschool age children, as language learning at an early age has great advantages for children, because they can learn it at a native level and therefore not struggle so much at later stages of their learning process. In 2013, 3 kindergarten directors were trained with 9 educationalists, and the programme reached 147 children. Unfortunately, the MoES is no longer involved in this project and therefore it no longer runs¹⁰³.

In regard to teacher training, a new programme has been piloted recently. The European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) has developed “Twinning of teachers”, where teachers from Samtskhe-Javakheti stayed with Georgian-speaking host families in the Georgian speaking cities of Batumi and Kobuleti. The aims of the project were two-fold: firstly, to provide an intensive course of Georgian language to Armenian-speaking teachers; secondly, to promote multiculturalism and mutual understanding between different groups in Georgia¹⁰⁴. Developing innovative programmes with the involvement of CSOs – and in particular, those working with ethnic minorities – is of paramount importance in order to bring about change.

The situation with Georgian language teaching for adults remains unsatisfactory. In 2004, *Language Houses* were created in order to promote state language education for adults and to support the teaching of Georgian in minority language schools¹⁰⁵. At present, there are 2 *Language Houses* in Samtskhe-Javakheti dedicated mostly to adult language training.

⁹⁹ SMR, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰⁰ National Centre for Teacher Professional Development (TPDC), “National Center for Teacher Professional Development (TPDC) holds a presentation on Program ‘Georgian Language for Future Success’ to Ethnic minority students”, 4th June 2015. Available at: <http://tpdc.gov.ge/?action=news&lang=eng&npid=399>

¹⁰¹ ECMI, *op.cit.*, pp.66-67.

¹⁰² ECMI, *op.cit.*, p. 1

¹⁰³ Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, homepage of the project: http://preschooleducation.ge/?lang=eng&link=allnews&sec_id=30

¹⁰⁴ The pilot was presented at the Eastern Partnership Minority Network concluding conference, on 7th December 2015 in Tbilisi.

¹⁰⁵ SMR, “Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014”, *op. cit.*, p. 79

However, according to local CSOs, access to language courses is very limited and not continued, which hinders the learning process of attendees¹⁰⁶.

Since 2011, the so-called *Language Houses* created for adult language learning have been administered by the ZZPA¹⁰⁷, an institute created to train public officials in different directions and to increase their competences. Although the ZZPA also organises language courses, unfortunately in practice this merger implied that both institutions were dedicated to the same¹⁰⁸. In 2014, the ZZPA launched the State Language Teaching Programme for public servants representing ethnic minorities. Their two centres in Samtskhe-Javakheti (Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki) launched programmes on April 2014¹⁰⁹.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports carried out an initiative of online Georgian language learning (www.teach.ge). This is a free portal for language learning, with all information available in Armenian and Azerbaijani, and it includes a special learning module for ethnic minorities living in Georgia¹¹⁰. Unfortunately, its existence is not widely known and, as stated above, access to internet in certain regions is still problematic.

Other programmes developed to promote Georgian language learning have been quite successful, such as essay competitions or school summer camps¹¹¹, but the situation remains worrying. Adults do not have a command of the Georgian language, which makes it harder for children in the region to learn it properly. If teachers do not adequately speak Georgian, they will not be able to use Georgian as a language of instruction. This in turn will hinder children's learning process with regards to the state language. It is important to raise the social status of teachers in order to promote ethnic minority graduates who are fluent in Georgian to become teachers in minority language schools.

Despite all the problems and the low level of state language knowledge in Samtskhe-Javakheti, the general attitude towards Georgian language learning has become more positive in recent years. Young generations see the added value in learning the state language, i.e. better employment perspectives, and therefore they are eager to learn and look for opportunities.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with local NGOs, November 2015.

¹⁰⁷ SMR, "Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014", *op. cit.*, p.78.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁰⁹ ECMI, *op.cit.*, p.5

¹¹⁰ SMR, "Report on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and 2014 Action Plan", *op.cit.*, p. 11.

¹¹¹ *Idem.*

V. MEDIA

A. NATIONAL MEDIA

Legislation

Media legislation in Georgia complies with international standards¹¹². The Constitution guarantees freedom of the media under article 24, where censorship is also prohibited, together with the monopolisation of mass media by individuals or the state¹¹³. Freedom of speech is not only guaranteed through the Constitution (art. 19), but also through the Law on Freedom of Speech adopted in 2004. Nevertheless, in the past year the situation of media pluralism and independence has been questioned. For example, numerous recommendations on the topic were issued at the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in the 23rd session of its Universal Periodic Review in November 2015¹¹⁴.

The 2004 Law on Public Broadcasting sets out the rules for the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) and other license holders. It also sets a range of requirements toward minorities. Article 16 (h) states that the Public Broadcaster shall “[r]eflect in the programs the ethnic, cultural, language, religious, age and gender”, and section (l) adds that it shall “[a]llocate with due proportion the programs in the language of minorities, on minorities and prepared by minorities diversity in the society”¹¹⁵. In 2006, the GPB’s Code of Conduct was adopted. Its article 15 explicitly underlines the need for reflecting Georgia’s diversity, avoiding discriminatory attitudes and also contributing to the development of minority cultures, and showing a clear understanding of the role of media in the integration of minorities¹¹⁶. The media not only needs to reflect the diversity of the country, but it must also avoid broadcasting any discriminatory, xenophobic or hateful comments towards any group. Even though there is no specific legislation for hate crime, Article 53.3 of the Georgian Criminal Code establishes that hate will be considered an aggravating circumstance in cases where an offence is committed because of the membership of the victim (or perceived membership) to a particular group.

The role of the FCNM is of high relevance in the promotion of minority rights in the media. Article 9 refers directly to media and the prohibition on using it to discriminate against minorities; and at the same time it highlights the importance of the use of minority languages in the media for the preservation of their identity.

Minority-related programmes

The programme priorities set up by the Board of the GPB for the period 2015-2016 mentions special attention to be paid to the needs of minorities; although it has not been reflected in practice. It establishes that programmes of political analysis will be translated into minority languages (point 1.2), that historical shows will include the contribution of ethnic minorities to Georgia’s history (point 2.1) and that TV shows shall show the diversity of the country and the role of minorities in its cultural development, as well as to discuss the problems currently

¹¹² Tobias Akerlund, “National Minorities and the Media Situation in Georgia”, ECMI Working Paper #52, January 2012, p. 7.

¹¹³ Article 24, Constitution of Georgia, 1995.

¹¹⁴ Human Rights Council, “Draft report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Georgia” (A/HRC/WG.6/23/L.12), November 2015.

¹¹⁵ Article 16 (h), Law on Public Broadcasting, 2004.

¹¹⁶ Article 15, Code of Conduct of the Georgian Public Broadcaster, 2006.

affecting such diversity (point 2.6)¹¹⁷. In addition, the GBP has a special department in charge of preparing national minority programming¹¹⁸.

Due to the low level of knowledge of the state language that minorities have, it is important for the government to produce programmes in minority languages, in order to keep them within Georgia's scope of information. Channel 2 of the GBP offers a daily (on week days only) 15 minute brief of Georgian news called "National News" in 5 minority languages: Abkhazian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Ossetian and Russian¹¹⁹. It is worth noting that it actually just represents a summary of the real news programme available in Georgian, which lasts for an hour, which means that minorities only receive the information partially and that they are not as aware of the country's issues as the Georgian-speaking population. Channel 2 also offers a Russian language programme called "Nastojascheye Vremja" (Real Time) which provides daily (week days only) information and analysis of current political developments worldwide¹²⁰. News is also offered at *Radio One* once a week in minority languages¹²¹.

The talk show "Our Yard" used to broadcast four times a week and its aim was to talk about diversity in Georgia, bringing people from different minority groups to talk. This programme was cancelled in July 2015 and at present there are no programmes for or about minorities, although the Parliament is at present debating the opening of an entire channel in Russian in order to reach minorities¹²².

TV coverage in Georgia has certainly improved thanks to digital TV; although it remains problematic, particularly in mountainous areas in Samtskhe-Javakheti. The Advisory Committee for the FCNM mentions the reports of a "concerning mediocre quality of cultural programmes in minority languages and a considerable need for more professionalism and training among journalists working in minority languages to reach out minority communities"¹²³.

Notwithstanding the efforts made by the government, these news programmes and the occasional documentaries are not enough to keep minorities updated with what happens in the country. In addition, the lack of representation of minorities in Georgian media makes minorities feel that their cultures are excluded from Georgia's cultural wealth. Since the news programmes are far too short for minorities to know what is happening around them, and due to the language barrier, many people belonging to national minorities prefer to use the media from neighbouring countries. It is not uncommon for Armenians from Samtskhe-Javakheti to watch Armenian or Russian channels. According to a qualitative research conducted by the NGO 'Friendship of People of Samtskhe-Javakheti', among people belonging to the Armenian, Azerbaijani and Greek minorities in 2012, 65% of the respondents said they do not watch Georgian channels, and use Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani media instead to obtain information¹²⁴. This raises a problem for societal cohesion, since minorities receive the main information on topics such as geopolitical affairs from neighbouring countries and this can

¹¹⁷ Georgian Public Broadcaster, "Programme Priorities for 2015-2016, approved by the Board", pp. 5-8. Available at: http://gpb.ge/uploads/documents/65402a71-2b26-442c-bd42-064764b5d7b1gadackvetileba_14.pdf

¹¹⁸ FCNM, 2nd Report Submitted by Georgia Pursuant to Art. 25, para. 2 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ACFC/SR/II(2012)001), *op.cit.*, p. 21.

¹¹⁹ SMR, "Report on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and 2014 Action Plan", *op.cit.*, pp. 12-13.

¹²⁰ *Idem.*

¹²¹ *Idem.*

¹²² Interview with the department dealing with ethnic minorities in the GPB, February 2016.

¹²³ *Idem.*

¹²⁴ Seda Melkumyan, "Mnogoobrazie kak vozmozhnost'", NGO Friendship of People of Samtskhe-Javakheti, 2012, pp. 13-14.

polarise opinions. In addition, a vacuum of information is created that can further isolate minorities.

The Georgian-based Russian language channel *Pervy Informatsionny Kavkazsky – PIK* (in English, First Caucasus News) used to broadcast news and cultural programmes in Russian, concerning issues from the Caucasus¹²⁵. This programme was very successful among national minorities, but it closed in 2012¹²⁶. It seems that there are plans to start broadcasting again, which is a good development for an inclusive approach toward Georgia’s minorities.¹²⁷ However, minority activists are reluctant to believe it will happen, as there have been talks about it since its closure and no one seems able to provide specific information about it¹²⁸.

With regards to radio, there used to be a programme called “Our Georgia” which was quite popular among minorities, but had to close down in 2012 due to lack of funding¹²⁹. At present, there are no programmes other than the transmission of the news programme broadcasted on Channel 2, once a day¹³⁰. In regard to private radio, since October 2015, *Aliq Media*, a Tbilisi-based organisation, has been partnering with the Samtskhe-Javakheti-based *Radio NOR*. *Aliq Media* prepares daily 10-20 minutes news-packages in Armenian, broadcasted in FM by *Radio NOR*. They also make the material available online through ‘Soundcloud’ and ‘Youtube’ in order to distribute the content more widely. They also broadcast programmes in Georgian about the Armenian community in Georgia.¹³¹

The Ministry of Culture supports the publication of the weekly newspaper *Vratsan* in Armenian¹³².

The new Action Plan of the NCAP for 2015-2020 refers to the remaining problems with regards to media and minorities. It mentions “increasing access to media and information” as one of the four areas where work has to be done¹³³. It also envisages consultations with minorities and the GPB, in order to analyse the problems with the current programmes being broadcast and to tailor them to the real needs and interests of minorities. It also sets as one of the activities the creation of new programmes in minority languages with the GPB¹³⁴.

C. REGIONAL AND LOCAL MEDIA

Overview: TV, Radio and Newspapers

In Akhalkalaki, there is one TV channel broadcasting in Armenian: *Javakh*. However, the channel only shows advertisements, with the exception of obituaries once a day. There used to be *ATV 12*, broadcasting news in Armenian 5 minutes a day and other programmes from central television, but it closed down in 2015 due to financial difficulties. The same fate befell *Parvana*, Ninotsminda’s local TV channel. This mostly broadcasted programmes from central television, but it also included news, advertisements and some local programmes. The

¹²⁵ RFE/RL, “Georgia Offers Russian-Language Alternative To Kremlin TV”, 25th January 2011. Available at: http://www.rferl.org/content/georgian_russian_tv/2286802.html

¹²⁶ Vestnik Kavkaza, “Georgia’s PIK TV channel closed down”, 20th October 2012. Available at: <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/news/politics/32812.html>

¹²⁷ FCNM, *loc.cit.*

¹²⁸ Interview with expert on minority issues, February 2016.

¹²⁹ FCNM, *loc.cit.*

¹³⁰ Interview with the department dealing with ethnic minorities in the GPB, February 2016.

¹³¹ Interview with *Aliq Media* founder, June 2016.

¹³² FCNM, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

¹³³ SMR, “State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and 2015-2020 Action Plan”, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p.19.

situation in Akhaltsikhe, the capital of the region, is slightly different, as there is not an Armenian majority (36.59%, vs. 61.72% of Georgians¹³⁵). *Channel 9* covers the whole of Samtskhe-Javakheti region. Although it offers both news and other programmes in Georgian, some new programmes are being subtitled in Armenian as well¹³⁶. There are more private channels appearing, but this does not necessarily constitute a positive development with regards to lowering the information vacuum in the region, as some of them seem to be more for political purposes than for providing news or entertainment¹³⁷.

As previously stated, the recent switch to digital TV in 2015 has had an impact for the regions as it has meant a greater possibility to obtain access to channels that were hard to access previously. Nevertheless, the reception of some channels is still problematic, especially in Akhalkalaki.

Radio is not very popular in Samtskhe-Javakheti, but there is an independent local radio station in Ninotsminda, *Radio NOR*, broadcasting in Armenian only, which also has a website both in Armenian and Russian. There are also some news websites, such as *Jnews* in Akhalkalaki (in Armenian and Russian) and *Samkhretis Karibche* (South Gate) in Ninotsminda, publishing in Georgian only. Online media can be a good substitute for newspapers and provides a free source of information; however, access to internet is not always available in the rural areas.

Despite the fact that there are some possibilities with regards to media choice, there are not enough for the local population to keep informed and entertained. It must be said that most of the local Armenians use the Russian channels *ORT*, *Rossija 24* and *NTV*, as well as the Armenian channels *Armenia TV*, *Shant TV* and *Yerkir*¹³⁸.

D. PROBLEMS

Lack of relevance of programmes

The programmes on national TV seem not to satisfy the local population, as according to the aforementioned study conducted in 2012 about media usage among minorities, these programmes do not cover topics of interest to ethnic minorities, such as history, social problems or their celebrations. It also reflects that 88% of the people interviewed belonging to the Armenian-speaking minority do not watch such programmes¹³⁹. In addition, many complaints are often raised by CSOs that people are not aware of the programmes broadcasted, or that the news programme in Armenian is too short for them to keep up with what happens in the country. Other complaints have been made with regards to the time that news is broadcasted, which is not convenient for anyone, or that the scheduling is constantly being changed¹⁴⁰.

The need to seek information elsewhere

The fact that minorities do not have relevant media within Georgia, or that the content dedicated to them is not appropriate, means that they have to look for other sources. Since

¹³⁵ Jonathan Wheatley, *op.cit.*, p.5.

¹³⁶ Interview with General Producer of TV9, February 2016.

¹³⁷ Interview with Media Development Foundation, December 2015.

¹³⁸ Interview with *Jnews* journalist, January 2016.

¹³⁹ Seda Melkumyan, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with *Jnews* journalist, November 2015.

most ethnic Armenians from Samtskhe-Javakheti also speak Russian, both Armenian and Russian channels are quite popular among them. This has two main effects: there is a vacuum of information concerning their own country; and the political views from other countries might influence their own.

Using media from different countries can be a good way to keep a critical eye on international politics. However, if minorities only receive information from a country other than their own, it can interfere in their opinions and lead to problems in their integration with the majority of the society. For example, Armenians from Samtskhe-Javakheti know very little about European integration and the Association Agreement signed between the EU and Georgia in 2015. Since many people use mostly Russian media, Armenians are not as keen on the idea of European integration as many Georgians are, and they believe good ties with Russia are a priority - an opinion not widely shared in the rest of the country. This leads to a sentiment of lack of engagement with Georgia, which creates stereotypes and a feeling of minorities siding with outsiders, thus hampering the integration of Armenians into society. Freedom of thought is a basic principle in any democratic state, but lack of access to information from your own country, can certainly lead to a polarisation of opinions and hamper integration.

Armenophobia and hate speech

Although it must be said that *armenophobia* is not widespread in Georgia, a monitoring of hate speech and xenophobia in Georgian media carried out by the Media Development Foundation shows that there are cases in the media where such attitudes have been openly shown, most of them being in print and online media¹⁴¹. For example, in the *Kviris Chronika* newspaper, edition of 24th-30th November 2014, the following statement was made by Giorgi Jikiashvili: “Yes, Ivanishvili’s Georgia is shamed and humiliated, because Ter-Saakyan’s [Armenian surname] bloody butchers, instead of sitting in Gldani and Matrosovo [prisons], are comfortably in the Parliament and have the status of lawmakers!”¹⁴². Most of the discriminatory comments against Armenians in Georgia are linked to political actors. However, it is not uncommon to find comments related to demands of the Armenian Apostolic Church to have disputed religious buildings returned to them, often directly linked to potential threats of secession in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region. For example, in the edition of 17th-23rd February 2014, the *Asaval-Dasavali* newspaper published a statement of dean Rostom Lorkipanidze of the Georgian Orthodox Church, where he claimed as follows:

It is a big mistake to accept Armenian Church and other religions as equals to the Georgian Orthodox Church, it is a big mistake to finance them from the national budget. If three districts – Akhalkaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda unite into one diocese tomorrow and an Armenian bishop makes his seat there, then Samtskhe-Javakheti is lost for us! Does the government consider these threats when it finances Armenian Church from the budget of Georgia?¹⁴³

In addition, Armenians are often portrayed as separatists, which they find particularly offensive¹⁴⁴. There is also a general tendency to call them lazy for not wanting to learn Georgian, and these stereotypes are often seen in the media¹⁴⁵. These forms of hate speech are certainly damaging for the Armenian population, as statements like these and the fact that

¹⁴¹ Media Development Foundation, “Hate Speech and Xenophobia: Media Monitoring Report 2014-2015”, Tbilisi, 2015, p. 65.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p. 66.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 68.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with *Jnews* journalist, November 2015.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with expert on minority issues, November 2015.

many remain either unpunished or without public apologies, show a somewhat widespread opinion that Armenians do not belong in Georgia. This in turn makes the Armenian minority feel further disconnected to Georgian society, which only damages civic integration and peaceful coexistence.

VI. PUBLIC LIFE

Public life is an important aspect of the life of national minorities. The right to access information, medical care, and to engage with local or national authorities, are citizen's rights that any democratic government should guarantee.

Nevertheless, the lack of knowledge of the state language can create serious barriers for the interaction of minorities in Georgia's public life. As mentioned before, Samtskhe-Javakheti has been an isolated region, which posed a challenge to governments not only for the civic integration of minorities, but also for any interaction between central authorities and citizens in the region.

Infrastructure improvement was a good first step to improve the situation in order to "open" the region to the rest of Georgia. The period 2009-2014 saw many projects for infrastructure rehabilitation and other wide-scope economic projects implemented by the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure and local municipalities. A strategy and an action plan were developed, which contributed greatly to the development of the region and the reduction of isolation barriers¹⁴⁶.

A. ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Civic integration cannot be achieved if minorities do not have adequate access to information. Many programmes are being developed in order to improve knowledge of the state language among minorities, but according to the 2002 census, only 31% of persons belonging to national minorities countrywide can speak Georgian fluently¹⁴⁷. This means that while these programmes are still being implemented, the government needs to make further efforts to ensure minorities have access to relevant information, such as news or publications of new legislation, etc: for example, by providing translations into minority languages during this transition period. A good example is the provision of guides to medical services offered in prisons and penal institutions, to keep non-Georgian speaking convicts (including Armenians) informed on their medical rights and the help offered¹⁴⁸.

Concerning legislation, translations into minority languages are not made as a rule – although the Constitution was translated into minority languages in 2012 and distributed to local self-government administrations¹⁴⁹. This means that, for example, when a new law is enacted concerning taxes or any new regulations with regards to business, unless the government or CSOs organise awareness-raising sessions in minority languages in the regions or translate the documents, national minorities have no means to become aware of such legislation and therefore might find themselves making infractions just by doing things the same way they were doing them previously¹⁵⁰. There is a website that offers legislation translations into Russian and English (and also an App): *Sak'artvelos Sakanonmdeblo Mats'ne* (Legislative Herald of Georgia – <https://matsne.gov.ge>); and since most ethnic Armenians speak Russian,

¹⁴⁶ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), "Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 9 of the Convention" (CERD/C/GEO/6-8), 2014, para. 27, p. 7.

¹⁴⁷ Jonathan Wheatley, *op.cit.*, p.6.

¹⁴⁸ SMR, 'Report on the implementation of State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and 2015 Action Plan', February 2016, p. 7.

¹⁴⁹ CERD, *op.cit.*, para.18, p. 5.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with *Jnews* journalist, November 2015.

this could be a good alternative for them to keep up with what is happening. Nevertheless, people in the regions are not aware of this website, and therefore do not use it¹⁵¹.

B. ADMINISTRATION

According to the 1999 Administrative code, all administrative proceedings are to be held in Georgian (or Abkhazian in Abkhazia)¹⁵². However, the new Law on the State Language establishes in its article 9.3 that “the State shall provide communication of persons belonging to national minorities, with public authorities and local self-government bodies in the language of that national minority with the help of an interpreter, in the municipalities that are settled with representatives or national minorities”¹⁵³. According to the same law, public authorities and self-government shall manage all their cases in Georgian, except for in regions where national minorities live compactly, where translations of communication can be provided if they deem it relevant¹⁵⁴.

In the Akhalkalaki region, Armenian is mainly spoken for official purposes, as the majority of the local population is Armenian-speaking. This is not the case, however, in the Akhaltsikhe region, where there is a Georgian majority. There, the Armenian-speaking population still faces problems when communicating with officials, as it depends on whether the person they find speaks Armenian. This causes delays and additional costs for ethnic minority population¹⁵⁵. Although the Law on the State Language envisages the possibility of translating applications and complaints in areas populated by ethnic minorities, the possibility of direct communication with local authorities in minority languages is not included.¹⁵⁶

Since technically all the administration proceedings and communications are to be done in Georgian language, all civil servants are required to speak Georgian. The 1998 Law on Public Service not only establishes that, but also reserves the right for the government to terminate an employment due to low fluency in Georgian¹⁵⁷. Even though this is what the law states, for many years it was not enforced. When Saakashvili came into power, he put into practice language exams to improve the situation, and as a result some contracts were terminated. However, since the number of local public officers who did not pass the exams was high, there was a subsequently a relaxed enforcement of this law¹⁵⁸. Even though civil servants are expected to take a skills and knowledge exam every three years – which are exclusively in Georgian – it seems that language exams have not been enforced in Samtskhe-Javakheti and the situation remains as it was¹⁵⁹.

C. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: AGRICULTURE AND BUSINESS

In 2013, the region’s total GDP amounted to GEL 693.85 mln, with agriculture accounting for almost 30% (GEL 207.7 mln)¹⁶⁰. Aside from agriculture, the other main areas of economic

¹⁵¹ Interview with expert on minority issues, December 2015.

¹⁵² Article 14, Administrative code, 1999.

¹⁵³ Article 9.3, Law on the State Language, 2015.

¹⁵⁴ Article 11.4, Law on the State Language, 2015.

¹⁵⁵ FCNM, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁵⁶ Article 11.4, Law on the State Language, 2015.

¹⁵⁷ Article 98 (d), Law on Public Service, 1998.

¹⁵⁸ International Crisis Group, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with the Civil Service Bureau, February 2016.

¹⁶⁰ GeoStat, Regional ,GDP, Samtskhe-Javakheti.

activity are public administration (GEL 107.7 mln), education (GEL 87.7 mln) and construction (GEL 51 mln). The region relies heavily on agriculture, with about 90% of production being from family farms¹⁶¹. Nevertheless, only 27% of them produce products as a source of income, as around 73% are for subsistence use only¹⁶².

Agriculture is the most developed economic sector in the region and farmers are highly involved in agricultural programmes developed or funded by the government, which are brought to them in minority languages¹⁶³.

However, though there is great potential for the development of small or medium size business, several problems persist: a low level of business education, outdated technologies, and inefficient marketing strategies. This is partly caused by the lack of knowledge of the state language. For example, in 2010 many small businesses in the region were fined due to financial violations, arising from the fact that many people could not access tax laws¹⁶⁴.

D. EMPLOYMENT AND LEGAL STATUS

Georgia had a 12.4% of unemployment in 2014, according to official statistics¹⁶⁵. The regions, like Samtskhe-Javakheti, are highly affected by unemployment. Traditionally, the language barrier has meant that many ethnic Armenians were going to Russia or Armenia for seasonal work. To simplify the process, many Armenians from Samtskhe-Javakheti became citizens of Russia or Armenia. However, many of them are not aware of the implications of acquiring a foreign citizenship. Article 21.1 (c) of the Organic Law on Citizenship stipulates that upon acquirement of a foreign citizenship, Georgian citizenship will be lost¹⁶⁶. This organic law entered into force in 2014, which means as a result of it, a large proportion of the population of Samtskhe-Javakheti were suddenly left in an illegal situation in the country. There is a problem with the interpretation of Art. 12. 2 of the Constitution of Georgia, whereby “[a] citizen of Georgia shall not at the same time be a citizen of another state, save in cases established by this paragraph. Citizenship of Georgia shall be granted by the President of Georgia to a citizen of foreign country, who has a special merit before Georgia or grant the citizenship of Georgia to him/her is due to State interests”. This has led to many locals to believe they are entitled to obtain dual citizenship¹⁶⁷.

In addition to this law, in September 2014 the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons came into force. This further affected the local population that had foreign passports as it reduced the length of visa-free stay from 360 days to 90¹⁶⁸, therefore providing less time for applying for a residence permit. In a meeting held in February 2015 between the Minister of Justice, Tea Tsulukiani and the members of the Council of National Minorities, the Minister stated that out of 2,357 applications, 1,636 had been granted residence permits, 682 were being processed at the time, and 23 had been rejected¹⁶⁹. Nevertheless, in June 2015 the Georgian government issued a decree whereby the length of the visa-free stay for nationals of

¹⁶¹ GIZ, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁶² *Idem.*

¹⁶³ Interview with the Council for National Minorities, November 2015.

¹⁶⁴ International Crisis Group, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁵ GeoStat, “Employment and Unemployment”. Available at: http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=146&lang=eng

¹⁶⁶ Article 21.1. (c), Organic Law on Citizenship, 2014.

¹⁶⁷ Georgia’s Reforms Associates (GRASS), “Declaration of the Coalition of Georgian NGOs on Minority Status in Georgia”, UPR Pre-session on Georgia, Geneva, 7th October 2015, p. 6.

¹⁶⁸ Article 10, Law on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons, 2014.

¹⁶⁹ GRASS, pp. 6-7.

94 countries (including Armenia and Russia) would be 360 days¹⁷⁰. This granted more time to many Armenians to regulate their situation and proceed with their residence permit applications. Nevertheless, even when they are eligible for a permanent residence permit, in order to qualify for many benefits such as pensions, child support, etc., inhabitants of Javakheti will need to be registered in the village they live for a total of 9 months per year¹⁷¹. This means that many of them will actually not be able to leave Georgia for seasonal work, putting them in a vulnerable economic situation.

The rehabilitation and reconstruction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway was supposedly going to be a potential source of employment in the region when it began; however, it has been rather a source of problems for the Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti. Central government and company representatives originally stated that 70% of Georgian residents (around 15,000 locals from Akhalkalaki) would be employed for this project¹⁷². Despite the fact that it proved to be true for the first phase of the reconstruction, the number of locals employed has been significantly reduced. According to a documentary produced by TV3 in May 2014, some ethnic Armenians have been fired and others have not been paid their salaries, while non-Armenian employees have not been affected¹⁷³. The company funding and directing the project is from Azerbaijan, and the Armenian population seem to believe they are being discriminated against due to the bad relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Legal action had been taken, but so far no compensation has been provided. Even though ethnic Armenians claim discrimination over the whole incident, the Ombudsman of Georgia considered that it had no role to play. It was regarded as a geopolitical problem between the Armenian population and the Azerbaijani company, rather than real discrimination¹⁷⁴, since according to the official statements, the real reason behind the restriction of ethnic Armenians has been the requirement for Georgian language proficiency¹⁷⁵.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Zurab Zhvania Public School of Administration (ZZPA) provides training for civil servants. Graduates from the ZZPA do not always find employment, despite their good training. The new NCAP's action plan for 2015-2020 includes the development of new training courses¹⁷⁶; however, it does not include a long term plan to improve the employment prospects of its graduates. The strengthening of vocational and technical training in Georgia in general would certainly contribute to lowering unemployment. In this regard, it is a good development that the NCAP's action plan envisages activities to promote the access of ethnic minorities into vocational and professional education, within the framework of the Vocational Education and Training Development Strategy for 2013-2020¹⁷⁷.

In order to promote the recruitment of ethnic minorities in agencies working under the auspices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), several activities were carried out in 2012

¹⁷⁰ FCNM, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁷¹ Jnews.ge, "Opjat' ne mogut pol'zovat'sja l'gotami", 16th February 2016. Available at: <http://jnews.ge/?p=6334>

¹⁷² Open Democracy, "Is the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway worth the fuss?", 2nd November 2015. Available at:

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/yana-israelyan/is-baku-tbilisi-kars-railway-worth-fuss>

¹⁷³ TV3, "Itogi Nedeli", 5th April 2014. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NinaKIOGip8>

¹⁷⁴ Interview with the CNM, November 2015.

¹⁷⁵ FCNM, *op.cit.*, p.33.

¹⁷⁶ SMR, "State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and 2015-2020 Action Plan", p. 33.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.32.

and 69 persons were recruited – 35 being ethnic Armenian¹⁷⁸. In 2013, there were 456 ethnic Armenians working at the MIA¹⁷⁹.

E. HEALTHCARE

Access to healthcare is a basic right for any citizen; but it is important for minorities who do not speak the state language to be able to access healthcare in their own language. The elderly are a particularly vulnerable group in this regard, as many had no chance to learn Georgian and therefore can become isolated and unable to explain their health problems, potentially aggravating their health situation.

The healthcare system in Georgia is currently undergoing reform. In December 2014, the 2014–2020 State Concept of Healthcare System of Georgia on the 'Universal Health Care and Quality Control for the protection of Patients' Rights' was approved¹⁸⁰, aimed at improving not only the quality of services, but also their access. Despite the rehabilitation of medical establishments and provision of modern equipment, Samtskhe-Javakheti is still behind other parts of the country. For example, the complete reparation and modernisation of Akhalkalaki district hospital, carried out by a company from Tbilisi, has been taking longer than planned, due to delays in funding¹⁸¹. This, together with the fact that there are 2.1 doctors per 1,000 people (the lowest ratio in Georgia), means that many patients go to Tbilisi or even Yerevan for medical treatments¹⁸².

The healthcare system in Georgia functions in Georgian, although in the Armenian-speaking areas of Samtskhe-Javakheti it is conducted in Armenian as most of the staff is Armenian-speaking. Nevertheless, medical records are meant to be officially maintained in Georgian, which usually creates a challenge for the institutions¹⁸³.

Since 2011, the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs has been developing information campaigns for providing ethnic minorities with information on state healthcare programmes and social benefits in minority languages¹⁸⁴. For example, concerning changes in the healthcare system, in 2014 5,000 brochures were distributed in Armenian language about the re-establishment of the prescription drug system (as well as in Georgian – 300,000; and Azerbaijani – 5,000)¹⁸⁵. Other informational campaigns have been developed for ethnic minorities, such as a campaign on maternal health that was successfully brought to Samtskhe-Javakheti, where trainings were provided in Armenian¹⁸⁶. Nevertheless, there is a widespread lack of knowledge in the region about the new co-financing system of healthcare, which in practice means that people are unaware of their rights. Citizens in the region do not know how to use their insurance policies and end up paying for the whole amount of any treatment

¹⁷⁸ CERD, *op.cit.*, para. 19, p. 5.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, para. 119, p. 24.

¹⁸⁰ Government of Georgia, “On Approval of the 2014-2020 State Concept of Healthcare System of Georgia for 'Universal Health Care and Quality Control for the Protection of Patients' Rights”, Ordinance No. 724. Available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/2657250>

¹⁸¹ Jnews.ge, “Rajonnaja bol'nica budet osnaschena novym oborudovaniem”, 3rd April 2015. Available at: <http://jnews.ge/?p=2362>

¹⁸² GIZ, *op.cit.*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁸³ FCNM, *loc.cit.*

¹⁸⁴ CERD, *op.cit.*, para. 26, p.7.

¹⁸⁵ SMR, “Report on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and 2014 Action Plan”, April 2015”, p.16.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with CNM, November 2015.

or medical consultations; when according to the new healthcare system, they are entitled to pay only a part of it while the other part should be covered by the state¹⁸⁷.

The new plans of the Georgian government to improve the quality of medical staff include qualification exams. However, local medical staff from Armenian-speaking regions will not be able to pass these new examinations since they are in Georgian. Instead, Georgian-speaking medical staff will be sent to the regions, which in turn creates a problematic situation with regard to communication with Armenian-speaking patients¹⁸⁸. Lack of a means of communication could instead worsen the quality of healthcare provision, if interpreters are not provided or local staff are not granted an opportunity to take examinations in the minority language.

F. JUSTICE

According to the Law on State Language, all legal procedures are to be held in Georgian¹⁸⁹. The law also stipulates that if the person does not speak Georgian, an interpreter shall be provided, which is also enshrined in the Criminal Procedure Code of Georgia. In practice, interpreters of Armenian are indeed provided; however, there seems to be a widespread opinion that the quality of the interpretation is very poor and that interpreters lack knowledge of the Georgian legal system, which can have alarming consequences¹⁹⁰. According to the Council of National Minorities, there are talks about the potential creation of an office of interpreters in order to supervise the quality of interpretation. However, the NCAP for the period 2015-2020 does not envisage it, which means it has not been considered a priority for the time being.

At a local level, many legal procedures are (unofficially) done in Armenian¹⁹¹ and free legal aid is provided locally in the Armenian language¹⁹².

With regards to law enforcement, many local police officers do speak Armenian, but no requirement is made when they join the forces. Since many locals do not speak Georgian, misunderstandings can easily arise in communications with non-Armenian-speaking officers. The 2015-2020 Action Plan of the NCAP envisages the recruitment of ethnic minority representatives by law enforcement agencies to improve the situation in this regard¹⁹³.

¹⁸⁷ Jnews.ge, “Medicinskie strahovye polisy, o kotoryh malo kto znaet”, 7th July 2015. Available at: <http://jnews.ge/?p=3819>.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with expert on minority issues, December 2015.

¹⁸⁹ Article 12, Law on State Language, 2015.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with expert on minority issues and with the CNM, November 2015.

¹⁹¹ Interview with expert on minority issues, November 2015.

¹⁹² Interview with *Jnews* journalist, November 2015.

¹⁹³ SMR, “State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and 2015-2020 Action Plan”, p.22.

VII. POLITICAL LIFE

Several different factors are currently hampering the participation of ethnic minorities in elections and political processes in Georgia. These include, for example, low knowledge of the state language, a lack of awareness of electoral rights, and a lack of awareness of the electoral programs of the parties and candidates in the campaign. Minorities have often been subjected to political abuse, are easily manipulated and have a tendency to vote for the party in power. These attitudes are a legacy from Soviet times, and they are still quite common in rural areas and in particular in areas where minorities lived compactly, like Samtskhe-Javakheti.

These tendencies to detach from political decision-making processes have become a major barrier for the civic education of Georgia's national minorities. Politicians are aware of this fact, which means that they often do not even campaign in ethnic minority-populated areas¹⁹⁴. Subsequently, it becomes even harder for minorities to find relevant and updated information on campaigns, programmes, candidates and electoral procedures, creating a vacuum of information and a high level of political disengagement.

A. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The low levels of political integration have been aggravated by the fact that the constitution of Georgia forbids the creation of political parties on territorial or ethnic basis¹⁹⁵. This has further lowered the possibilities for minorities to exercise group influence in the political sphere. The efforts made have not been enough and the lack of participation of minorities in political life remains a problematic issue.

At local level (*sakrebulo*), many ethnic Armenians are involved in the day-to-day decision-making in the Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts, and key posts at *sakrebulo* level are held by ethnic Armenians. The same goes for the district administration (*gamgeoba*). A very concerning issue at the local level is the existence of a so-called *clan system*, a heritage from Soviet times, which still plays a big role in local politics¹⁹⁶.

It is worth noting that Armenians are not proportionally represented in the other districts of Samtskhe-Javakheti, nor at regional government level, where the regional chief (*gubernator*) and the administration team are all ethnic Georgians.

The members of Parliament (MPs) from Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki districts are ethnic Armenians. Both members have been two of the most influential people in Javakheti for many years¹⁹⁷.

The language barrier is still hampering access to key positions at the local level, as non-Georgian speakers cannot communicate with national politicians. In order to further engage minorities into politics, not only is a change in attitude required, but they also need to master the state language.

¹⁹⁴ Jonathan Wheatley, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

¹⁹⁵ Article 6 and 11, Organic Law on Political Union of Citizens, 1997.

¹⁹⁶ Jonathan Wheatley, *op.cit.*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

B. ELECTIONS

Compared to other minority groups in Georgia, Armenians tend to have quite high turnouts. For example, in the 2010 local elections, in Samtskhe-Javakheti there was a 73.5% turnout, compared to 49% nationwide¹⁹⁸.

So participation *per se* is not a problem in the region. The most concerning issue with regards to voting attitudes is that the population usually votes for the party in power. The 2012 Parliamentary elections were a clear example of this. Before the elections the party in power was the United National Movement, who overall in Georgia obtained an average of 40.3% of the votes; in Samtskhe-Javakheti it reached 74.6% (and even 80% in the almost entirely Armenian-populated province of Javakheti)¹⁹⁹. It is worth mentioning that, in addition, the Georgian Dream coalition had operated an office in Akhalkalki for campaigning, thus showing a lack of engagement from the local population with political campaigns.

In 2012, the Central Election Commission created the Working Group on Ethnic Minority Issues, in order to promote political participation of ethnic minorities²⁰⁰. For the 2012 parliamentary elections, official agencies including the Public Broadcaster and regional TV channels used the three main minority languages –Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russian. Nevertheless, only one political party presented its programme in minority languages²⁰¹.

The 2013 presidential elections showed a generally low level of engagement in Georgia in general, as the turnout was of 46.1%, and was even lower in the Javakheti province: 40.92%²⁰². A recent study of the “Electoral Behaviour of Ethnic Armenians in Georgia” shows a worrisome electoral attitude: “a relatively high number of correspondents indicated that they do not participate [in the elections] as they do not care about politics in Georgia”, with many Armenians sharing the opinion that their participation is not very relevant as ‘one vote cannot change much’²⁰³.

Local elections have generally showed a higher rate of participation. However, the 2014 municipal elections saw a significant decline in turnout: from 70% in 2010 to 49.8% in 2014 (although it was still slightly higher than in the rest of the country, where the turnout was 43.3%)²⁰⁴. Several steps have been taken by the CEC to address the aforementioned barriers and to ensure minority inclusion in electoral processes, such as awareness-raising campaigns in minority languages²⁰⁵. Nevertheless, many problems still persist and further efforts are required to educate ethnic minorities in political participation in order to ensure they are duly integrated into Georgian society.

¹⁹⁸ International Crisis Group, *op.cit.*, p.11.

¹⁹⁹ Georgia Election Data, “Parliamentary Elections 2012”. Available at: http://data.electionportal.ge/en/event_type/3/event/32/shape/65134/shape_type/1?data_type=official

²⁰⁰ CERD, *op.cit.*, para. 24, p. 6.

²⁰¹ ECMI, “Minorities in 2012 Parliamentary Elections Observatory”. Available at: <http://ecmcaucasus.org/upload/elections/Minority-Languages-in-elections.pdf>

²⁰² Georgia Election Data, “Presidential Elections 2013”. Available at: http://data.electionportal.ge/en/event_type/1/event/38/indicator_type/2/view_type/summary/change_shape/true/parent_clickable/false/shape/69898/shape_type/1?data_set_id=111&data_type=official

²⁰³ ECMI, “A Study of Electoral Behaviour of Ethnic Armenians in Georgia”, Tbilisi, November 2015, p.28.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁰⁵ Central Electoral Commission, “The Central Election Commission Introduced to Media Information on Ethnic Minorities”, 11th June 2014. Available at: <http://www.cesko.ge/en/mediisatvis-4-ge/pres-relizebi-13-ge/the-central-election-commission-introduced-to-media-information-on-ethnic-minorities.page>

C. ATTITUDES TOWARD GEORGIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

The fact that ethnic Armenians in Georgia use mostly media from Armenia and Russia due to the lack of knowledge of the state language has clear implications on how they relate to Georgia's foreign policy.

European integration

Very little information exists about the real meaning of European integration in Samtskhe-Javakheti. There seems to be a general understanding that the European Union could be a better guarantee for the protection of the rights of minorities and of rule of law in general. Improvement of relations with the EU is generally seen as something good, whilst ensuring it is not detrimental to relations with Russia²⁰⁶.

Some CSOs have developed awareness-raising campaigns in the region about European integration and its potential benefits. For example, ECMI delivered a presentation on the EU-Georgia Association Agreement in December 2015 targeting local self-government institutions, and explained its implications for policy-making at the local level²⁰⁷. Others have focused on the general population, by providing discussions about the EU and NATO aimed at raising awareness, while learning the state language²⁰⁸.

NATO

NATO membership is one of the main objectives in Georgian foreign policy. However, Armenians do not seem to share the will for NATO integration and the main reason is that Turkey is a NATO member. Turkey does not recognise the genocide of Armenians at the beginning of the 20th century, which is why Armenians somewhat fear Turkish military forces. If Georgia were to join NATO, there would not only be cooperation with Turkey, which they think unacceptable unless Turkey recognises the genocide, but also there would be the possibility of a Turkish deployment in the region²⁰⁹. There seems to be a general opinion that military neutrality would be a better option for Georgia.

Russia

Georgia's relations with Russia deteriorated with the 2008 war. Although relations have improved with the change in government, they remain somewhat tense. Good relations with Russia are important to Armenians for various reasons. Firstly, many Armenians go to Russia in search for seasonal work, for which they need relatively easy access to the country. Secondly, they see strong cultural ties with Russia, due to their shared past, together with the fact that knowledge of the Russian language is widely spread among the Armenian community in Samtskhe-Javakheti²¹⁰. Armenians also see an improvement of relations with Russia as the only way territorial conflicts affecting Georgia at present can be solved²¹¹. They see a big role of Russia as a powerful neighbour and therefore regard positive relations as highly important.

²⁰⁶ Caucasian House, "Problems of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti and Foreign Policy Preferences of the Local Populations", Research report, 2014, p.32.

²⁰⁷ ECMI, News of Activities. Available at: http://www.ecmicaucasus.org/menu/news_archive.html

²⁰⁸ Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, "Enhancing State Language Knowledge and Raising Awareness on NATO and EU of Ethnic Armenian Minorities in Javakheti". Available at: <http://gfsis.org/index.php/activities/projects/view/125>

²⁰⁹ Caucasian House, *loc.cit.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.31.

²¹¹ *Idem.*

VIII. CONCLUSION

The post-Soviet space poses particular challenges when it comes to the integration of ethnic minorities. Many minority groups settled in different parts of the former Soviet Union found themselves suddenly in very different circumstances, where Russian was no longer the *lingua franca*. This greatly affected their daily communication with the new governments, which has proven to be the case for the Armenian minority in Georgia.

Georgia's internal policy towards its ethnic minorities has improved in the past years; from considering them only as a threat to national security, ethnic minorities are now starting to be included in policy-making as full citizens of Georgia. Civic integration has become the priority of the government with regards to ethnic minorities and the first step taken has been the improvement of Georgian language knowledge among them. Nevertheless, further efforts are required. It is necessary to change the attitudes towards them and not only to integrate them, but to also recognise their culture as a Georgian cultural wealth and heritage.

Despite the efforts made, it can be said that the problems faced by ethnic minorities are not fully understood by policy-makers and often minorities are not as involved in consultations as they should be. This occasionally creates tensions between minority groups and the government, arising from miscommunications and of the feeling of neglect by the government. This paper has tried to analyse the main problems hampering the full civic integration of Georgia's Armenian minority in the region of Samtskhe-Javakheti. It has also tried to provide a broad picture of the current situation with regards to the different main areas of public life, as well as to analyse the steps taken by the government to deal with the issues affecting Georgia's ethnic minorities. After the overview of the problems and barriers, the following section will include policy recommendations for the Georgian authorities with regards to minority integration in Georgia, with particular attention to the protection and promotion of the rights of the Armenian minority.

IX. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

1. To raise awareness among ethnic minorities about relevant legislation, in particular, the new Law on Antidiscrimination, and the mechanisms available to redress discrimination cases
2. To ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in order to reinforce the commitment towards the rights of ethnic minorities

EDUCATION

Pre-school education

3. To improve the conditions of pre-school institutions to ensure sanitary conditions are met and that children have adequate conditions
4. To ensure all children have equal opportunities when accessing pre-school education, by facilitating access to kindergartens in rural areas; for example, by providing free bus rides for children
5. To promote pre-school education among ethnic Armenians by raising awareness of its benefits
6. To ensure that pre-school education teachers receive adequate training with regards to the new standardisation of the system (guidelines and teaching methods)
7. To establish bilingual learning in kindergartens (Armenian/Georgian)

General Education

8. To ensure the new curriculum, when it is developed, is duly sent in time to minority-language schools
9. To update the bilingual education system by researching other successful bilingual systems in order to ensure the quality of education
10. To make sure the quality of the translations in Armenian is adequate
11. To remove all varieties of stereotypes of minorities from school textbooks and to ensure that they reflect Georgia's multiculturalism
12. To develop standards for minority language teaching and ensure teachers are duly trained
13. To provide the opportunity to current teachers to sit their qualification tests in minority languages and to allow a 10-year period for the requirement of Georgian language as a condition to qualify as a teacher
14. To promote the social status of teachers in general; for example, by raising their salary

Higher and Technical/Vocational Education

15. To provide incentives for Armenian-speaking students to become teachers: for example, by offering them scholarships to attend Georgian universities with the condition to go back to the regions to teach
16. To maintain the quota system for the time being until state language knowledge in the region is improved
17. To ensure that those students who do not meet the Georgian language requirements after the one-year university course are provided with further opportunities: either by

- taking and extra year of learning the state language, or by having extra lessons during their first year of a Bachelor's degree
18. To make sure that scholarships are available for ethnic minority students who need them
 19. To establish a reliable monitoring and assessment mechanism for the 1+4 programme
 20. To mix students from all ethnic backgrounds in university residences to promote multiculturalism and avoid segregation
 21. To make sure that programmes are developed to promote vocational and technical education for ethnic minorities; in particular, of those professions that can be of relevance taking into account the economic opportunities in Samtskhe-Javakheti

Georgian Language Learning

22. To evaluate the effectiveness of programmes developed for language learning jointly with CSOs with expertise on minority issues, in order to improve the quality of the programmes offered
23. To create play groups in the Georgian language for pre-school age children, in order to promote early-age learning
24. To continue to promote successful programmes, such as exchanges and summer camps
25. To reinforce Georgian language learning among adults, by providing free courses that include more interactive and participatory approaches
26. To provide incentives to the local population for learning the state language

MEDIA

National Media

27. To provide programmes and news on nationwide TV with subtitles in minority languages, as it is a more cost effective and quicker solution to the lack of programmes
28. To broadcast news programmes in minority languages at more suitable times, in order to promote their popularity
29. To hold consultations with minorities in order to meet their needs
30. To raise awareness among minorities about the programmes done in minority languages
31. To ensure the priorities for minority-related programmes of the GPB are met
32. To effectively investigate and sanction hate speech against minorities and to publicly condemn such acts
33. To develop programmes promoting multicultural values, and which show Georgia's cultural wealth and diversity

Regional Media

34. To provide training of minority language journalists, to improve the quality of media
35. To ensure the continuity of programmes and channels popular among minorities that contribute to their integration, such as *PIK*
36. Increase funding for channels, especially those that contribute to minority integration

PUBLIC LIFE

Access to information

37. Raise awareness of the *Legislative Herald of Georgia* as a tool for finding updated information on legislation in Russian
38. To create regional awareness-raising campaigns when new legislation is developed

Administration

39. To create incentives for Georgian-speaking public officials at a regional level to learn Armenian, i.e. considering it a positive in hiring procedures, or providing free lessons to current civil servants
40. To enhance efforts to increase the representation of ethnic minorities in public administration

Economic Development

41. To continue efforts in bringing campaigns to Samtskhe-Javakheti in order to further develop agriculture, as well as other economic sectors; particularly through the growth of SMEs

Employment and Legal Status

42. To develop an action plan to improve the employment prospects of ZZPA graduates
43. To raise awareness on the consequences of acquiring foreign citizenship
44. To simplify the procedures for residence permits so that residents of Georgia are not impacted negatively, i.e. reduce the amount of months they have to reside in Georgia so that they can have access to seasonal work abroad

Healthcare

45. To ensure there is Armenian-speaking staff or interpreters in all healthcare facilities in Samtskhe-Javakheti
46. To make sure all inhabitants in Samtskhe-Javakheti have access to medical services within their municipality
47. To provide incentives for learning Armenian to those doctors sent to Samtskhe-Javakheti
48. To raise awareness among locals about the new co-financing system of healthcare
49. To make sure the reparation and modernisation of hospitals and healthcare facilities is a priority

Justice

50. To create a regulatory body for interpreter qualification, so that they are adequately trained in legal matters
51. To promote law enforcement careers among ethnic minorities

POLITICAL LIFE

Political Participation

52. To improve efforts to promote a more democratic environment at a local level in order to ensure the clan system is fully eradicated
53. To promote the participation of women in political life, in particular that of ethnic minority background

Elections

54. To ensure all political programmes are translated into minority languages and that they are duly distributed in time
55. To raise awareness of democratic values and the importance of elections
56. To set up discussions between ethnic minorities and politicians in order to build confidence
57. To raise awareness among Georgian politicians about the particular needs of ethnic minorities

Foreign Policy

58. To raise awareness among minorities on topics relevant to Georgia's foreign policy
59. To ensure ethnic minorities are familiarised with the EU in order to promote better integration and counteract external propaganda
60. Improve the popularity of the Georgian army in order to start developing a positive attitude towards NATO integration

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