



POLICY PAPERS

INTEGRATION
OF NATIONAL
MINORITIES IN
GEORGIA

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INTEGRATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES IN GEORGIA

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Kristine Margvelashvili, Ana Tsiklauri (Center for Social Sciences)

2. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL MINORITY WOMEN IN GEORGIA

Levan Kakhishvili

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PREFACE

Dear reader,

The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) helps Georgia in creating the political environment where diversity and pluralism are rightly seen as strengthening the country as opposed to representing the destructive gap of polarization and confrontation. Georgia belongs to all of its citizens – irrespective of their differences. This is why the participation of national minority citizens in the country's social and political life is one of the most important issues in determining our future.

In 2014-2016 with financial support of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (OSCE-HCNM), NIMD worked with political parties to enhance the representation of national minorities, increase their interest in politics and reflect these interests or needs in political party programs. There is a damaged bridge between people and political parties and as our mission, we seek to help Georgian politicians strengthen it. We have conducted a substantial work to realize this mission: NIMD hosted ten meetings of political leaders in Tbilisi – enabling them to discuss the issues that often require a consensus; hosted eight meetings in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti to better connect political parties with local population; facilitated a one-month internship program for young ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani citizens of Georgia at headquarters of political parties and in partnership with the Georgian Public Broadcaster, we developed and aired four TV shows in order to disseminate political party positions and views to the public.

With these activities, we have contributed to raising the issue of national minorities' participation higher on political agenda and facilitated discussions on how to resolve related problems. This publication has been developed for this very purpose as well: to offer the expert analysis of existing

problems that citizens of Georgia from various regions are facing and to come up with some ideas for solving them.

There is a lot more to be done. Considerable efforts will be required from all of us together to build a country where, to paraphrase Martin Luther King, the most important thing will be not the national origin, but the content of one's character. This is exactly the country and international environment we are aspiring to.

Levan Tsutskiridze

Executive Director, NIMD Eastern European Neighborhood Office

ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND NATIONAL MINORITIES

Kristine Margvelashvili, Ana Tsiklauri

Executive Summary

National minorities make up a substantial portion of the entire population of Georgia. However, the level of their participation in social and political life is limited. From the legal perspective, the Georgian legislation and the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities ensure the equality of opportunities for national minorities. Nevertheless, the quality of minority participation in political decision-making still remains a great challenge.

The current mixed electoral system fails to ensure the full-fledged political participation of national minorities. They are underrepresented in the legislature which causes and is also caused by the low level of political participation of national minorities.

The electoral system is one of the instruments to ensure participation of national minorities in political life. To this end, there is a need to develop an optimal electoral system and additional mechanisms in the light of Georgia's political and cultural landscape, to promote maximum participation of every Georgian citizen in socio-political life including national minorities. Diversification of party politics, consistent transition to a proportional electoral system and introduction of additional mechanisms during the transition period are required to achieve these results. This policy paper explores the concerns of Armenian and Azeri minorities identified as a result of the focus group discussions. The low level of their representation is generally determined by the inadequate knowledge of the Georgian language, socio-economic environment, insufficient civic education, and lack of the political participation, as well as the mistrust in electoral and political systems.

This policy paper provides recommendations for the political parties and the Government of Georgia on how to increase the level of political participation of national minorities through the electoral system; pointing to the need for the establishment of regional offices of political parties; and recommending the government to offer additional incentives to political parties to promote the national minority participation.

1. Methodology

A range of qualitative research methods (desk research, in-depth interviews, focus groups) were used to explore the participation level of national minorities in Georgian political life. Initially, a desk research was conducted. In parallel, a schedule for focus groups discussions was developed. The target population of this study are the two largest national minorities (Armenians and Azeris) of Georgia. Accordingly, two regions – Kvemo Kartli (City of Marneuli) and Samtskhe-Javakheti (City of Akhalkalaki) the most compactly settled with national minorities were identified for conducting focus groups. In total, four focus groups were conducted: two in Marneuli and two in Akhalkalaki. Each focus group was composed of eight participants with different socio-demographic profiles. The target audience was distributed across the two age groups: 18-40 years old and 41-65 years old. To avoid homogeneity of the focus group participants, in addition to classifying by age categories, they were also selected based on the type of their education (secondary, vocational and higher) and employment status. Each focus group session lasted for approximately one and a half hours and was tape-recorded and transcribed. The transcripts of the records were summarized.

The desk-research analysis was followed by fourteen in-depth interviews with the leaders and other members of political parties (Georgian Dream, Free Democrats, Democratic Movement – United Georgia, Labour Party, Republican Party, United National Movement, and New Rights Party) and experts working on minority issues. In addition, the in-depth interviews were conducted with the representatives of the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, the Central Election Commission (CEC) and the Public Defender (Ombudsman). Each interview lasted for one hour and was tape-recorded.

2. Introduction

The full-fledged participation of national minorities is critical to democratic state-building. Human rights, freedom of expression and participation play a fundamental role in the process of democratization. Therefore, the state and non-state actors should ensure equal opportunities for all citizens.

In view of the Post-Soviet political systems, and Georgian among them, it is extremely important to implement democratic values because of the historical experiences that influenced the political culture of the country. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of independent states were followed by the rise of ethno-nationalism inflicting ethnic discrimination in Georgia and other countries. Even though the political and cultural landscape has been radically changed and improved, the integration of national minorities still remains a challenging issue. According to the 2014 census, ethnic Georgians make up 86.8%, Azeris 6.3% and Armenians 4.5% of the entire population of the country.¹ The population configuration has been changed when compared to the 2002 census. In addition, the portion of the ethnic population has been also decreased. The ethnic Azeri population has been insignificantly reduced from 6.5% to 6.3%, while the national Armenian population decline has been much more dramatic – from 5.7% to 4.5%.

The structures and types of electoral systems determine the representation patterns and the quality of democracy on the whole. The engagement of the two largest national minority groups in political life is crucial for the democratization process. The low level of political participation of national minorities points to their inadequate integration, potentially leading to ethnic conflicts. Optimization of the electoral system would play an important role in ensuring the fully fledged participation of ethnic Azeri and Armenian population in the country's political life and addressing integration issues.

Given the cultural and political similarities, this study focuses on the analysis of the European and in particular, Eastern European practices of developing electoral systems and instruments for fostering the engagement of national minorities. The proportional electoral system is established in the majority of the European states (about 70%). The mixed system is the

¹ National Statistics Office of Georgia. General Population Census 2014, p. 9

second popular electoral system, while the majoritarian system is used only by a few countries.²

Croatia, which serves as a very good example of the active involvement of national minorities in state building, has a proportional electoral system with ten voting districts. A total of fourteen persons from each voting district to be elected in the representative body should include five national minority representatives. A separate voting district is created for the Croats who are living abroad. National minorities in Romania and Slovenia also exercise similar privileges.

To increase the representation of ethnic or religious minorities the so-called ‘reserved seats’ approach is broadly used by many countries worldwide: Colombia (for Afro-Americans), New Zealand (for Maoris), Pakistan (for the non-Muslim population) and Taiwan (for Aborigines).³

The Georgian electoral system does not provide any additional mechanisms to increase representation of national minorities. The Central Election Commission, the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civil Equality, the Public Defender and several government agencies actively cooperate with the non-governmental sector to ensure the equality of opportunities for national minorities. In this regard, it is important to meet an obligation that Georgia took under the Association Agreement (AA) to ensure the full-fledged participation of national minorities. Protecting human rights including minority rights is a fundamental European value.⁴ Encouraging good governance and democratic principles are key elements for becoming a developed nation and therefore, should be promoted.

The next chapters of this paper provide an overview of the state strategy and action plan to address the national minority issues and describe the challenges of political participation of national minorities along with different models of electoral systems. The final recommendations for political parties and other actors about fostering political participation of national minorities through both existing and new mechanisms developed as a re-

² International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Electoral System Design Data. European States, 2016: <http://www.idea.int/esd/field.cfm?field=156®ion=50>

³ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Electoral System Design: New International IDEA Handbook, 2005.

⁴ Association Agreement 2013. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. Article 3, 349.

sult of the electoral reform are based on the analysis of the focus groups and interviews.

2.1. State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and Action Plan for 2015-2020

The Government of Georgia has developed a five-year strategic action plan to address the national minority issues.⁵ The strategy aims at promoting civic equality and integration to enable the citizens of Georgia, regardless of their ethnic origin, to make contributions to the economic and democratic development of the country, as well as to the social and political life.

One of the mid-term objectives of the strategy is to encourage participation of national minorities in political decision-making. More specifically:

- to ensure voting and making informed decisions by national minorities;
- to encourage involvement of national minorities in electoral lists and activities of political parties;
- to increase representation of national minorities in the civil service.

The Action Plan specifies the agencies assigned to carry out the mid-term objectives. The Central Election Commission has the major responsibility for dealing with the issues related to participation of national minorities in political decision-making. In addition to protecting the voting rights of national minorities, it is important to attract national minority representatives to political parties. During the interview, the representative of the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality shared the ministry's plans to take special actions for encouraging political parties to nominate more representatives of national minorities in their party lists.

For the purpose of improving the legal framework, the Government of Georgia will establish an inter-agency working group to explore the legal mechanisms and the best international practices for promoting political participation of national minorities and to discuss the possibilities of their

⁵ State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and Action Plan for 2015-2020. Action Plan. Tbilisi, 2015: http://new.smr.gov.ge/Uploads/_a5f10e90.pdf

implementation in Georgia, and if necessary, initiate corresponding legislation.

During the in-depth interview with the representative of the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, the respondent declared that the ministry plans to establish a working group to facilitate the participation of national minorities in decision-making processes. The working group, in close cooperation with non-governmental organizations, will develop conclusions and recommendations, initiate specific projects and monitor and evaluate governmental decisions and initiatives that are addressing the needs of national minorities. Moreover, it is planned to establish a Civic Advisory Committees (CAC) which will be composed of NGOs/CSOs, community members and government representatives.

The majority of the interviewed experts working on minority issues positively assessed the state strategy document. However, they also pointed to the lack of a number of topics related to the integration of national minorities. They suggested that the strategy document should focus more on media and other communication channels as well as on the cultural aspects which are important instruments for integration. *“Culture, as such, is not used to facilitate integration. It is perceived as a means of ethnic self-expression and not more. Nevertheless, culture has a great power and a crucial role to play”* (Expert interview with the representative of the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, Tbilisi).

The experts also expressed their concerns about the implementation of the Action Plan which might be partially and/or inefficiently implemented. Some of the interviewed experts believe that to effectively implement the Action Plan it would be necessary to have certain indicators for observing the changing of the situation before and after its implementation in 2020.

As previously mentioned, the CEC has a major role in ensuring the political participation of national minorities. During the interview with the CEC representative, the respondent declared that the CEC has been working on ethnic minority issues since 2012. Establishing an inclusive electoral environment is a key priority under the Action Plan for 2015 – 2020. The CEC provides translation of all election-related materials in the Armenian and Azeri languages. According to the CEC, there is no need to translate the documents into the Russian language. *“Our approach is to provide*

equal services to all voters. If there is a need to have ballot papers as well as other electoral documents, e.g. the voters list in minority languages because of the language barrier in some regions, we make them available. The list of electoral documentation is quite long but all of the documents are made available in Georgian-Azeri and Georgian-Armenian languages” (Expert interview with the CEC representative, Tbilisi).

In addition, the CEC Training Centre delivers trainings for the national minority members of the district election commissions, including those to overcome language barrier. The training materials and educational video clips are made available in their languages.⁶

According to the CEC representative, the CEC cannot identify the ethnicity of the district and regional election commission members, as such information is no longer provided on ID cards. Therefore, the CEC does not have any statistics about the representation of national minorities in district and regional election commissions. In addition, the CEC representative declared that the activities implemented by the CEC (e.g. translation of the election-related documentation, provision of learning materials and delivery of trainings in minority languages) ensure the integration of voters and the development of the electoral culture. More specifically, the CEC fulfils its obligations under the Action Plan: translating electoral and voting materials; disseminating information in audio and video formats in minority languages; and awarding small grants to different NGOs for professional development activities (e.g. delivery of training for CEC administration staff).

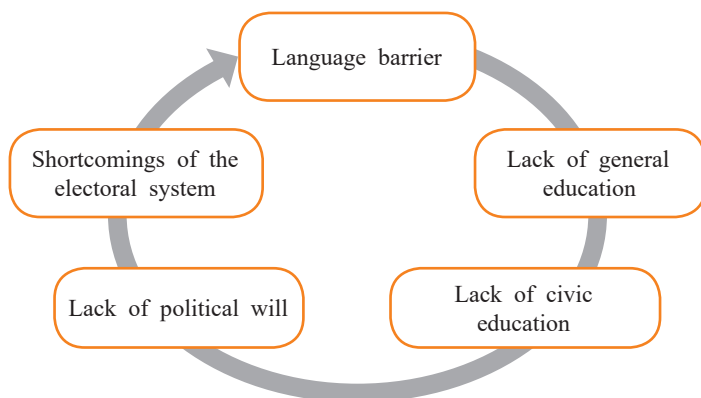
The majority of the experts interviewed in the course of the CSS study positively assess the work of the CEC. However, some of them believes that the CEC’s efforts in terms of the delivery of the professional development trainings is not sufficient and that the district election commission members often lack the knowledge of procedures to be followed on the election day. The study conducted by the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) in 2015 in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region also identifies the same shortcomings. The majority of ethnically Armenian respondents interviewed by the

⁶ Report on the Planned and Implemented Activities for Simplified Electoral Procedures for Minority Electorate. CEC, Tbilisi, 2012: http://www.cesko.ge/files/2012/ETNIKUREBI/shualeduri_angarishi_etnikurebi_geo.pdf

ECMI were satisfied with the work of the CEC (56.5%) and the district election commissions (58.3%). Moreover, 44.5% of respondents believed that their electoral environment is the same as that of the Georgians, 13% believed that it is better and the percentage of respondents who were not satisfied with the electoral environment was very low. The majority of respondents were also unsatisfied with the level of professionalism of the members of the district election commissions.⁷

3. Main Challenges of Political Participation of National Minorities

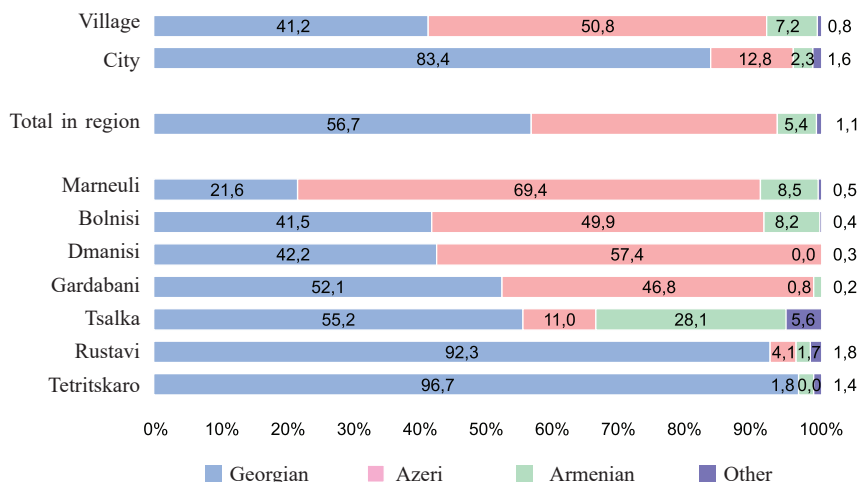
The study has identified several major hindrances to integration, political participation and national minority representation. The current electoral system in Georgia fails to ensure political participation of national minorities. In view of the complexity of the problem, there is a need to address several issues at a time. The diagram below summarizes the interrelated problems and points to the possible solutions.



The language barrier (Armenians and Azeri minorities often do not have an adequate command of Georgian) creates difficulties in communication between the individuals and the state as well as hindering the process of integration. According to Articles 4.3 and 7.1 of the Law on General Education, every citizen of Georgia has the right to education in the state

⁷ Electoral Behavior of Ethnic Armenians in Georgia. European Center for Minority Issues, Tbilisi, 2015: <http://electionreforms.ge/files/library/453.pdf>

or native languages.⁸ The study conducted by the Institute of Social Studies and Analysis in 2012 shows that in the Kvemo Kartli region, 71.5% of national minorities older than six years old are not proficient in the Georgian language. Moreover, a great portion of the ethnic Azeri population – 78.3% and a sizeable portion of Armenian population – 36.6%, do not speak the state language. The table below illustrates the population of Kvemo Kartli region broken down by their knowledge of the Georgian language. The table shows the proportions of the population of Kvemo Kartli region who speak Georgian, Armenian and Azeri languages. The number of people speaking the Georgian language in the cities is much higher than in the villages.⁹



The general trend in the case of Samtskhe-Javakheti region which is settled with ethnic Armenians is that the Georgian language proficiency level is very low.

In her analytical paper Angela Ulman, a researcher at the Centre for Security Studies in Zurich, explores the challenges of cohabitation of ethnic

⁸ Law of Georgia on General education, 2005. Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia: <http://www.mes.gov.ge/uploads/Licenzireba/kanoni%20zogadi%20ganatlebis%20shesaxe.pdf>

⁹ Socio-economic Situation and Attitudes of Kvemo Kartli Population. Institute of Social Studies and Analysis, Tbilisi, “Universal”, 2012: http://www.issageorgia.com/sites/issa/files/uploads/attachments/A4_01_GEO.pdf

Georgians with national minorities in Georgia and identifies the two characteristics of the Georgian national identity: religious affiliation (Orthodox) and ethnic affiliation (Georgian). Accordingly, the citizens beyond these two categories face integration difficulties as they are not perceived as fully fledged members of the society.¹⁰ The Minority Rights Group International, in its publication, also recognizes the marginalization of national minorities and their inadequate participation in the political decision-making and points out the widespread perception of national minorities as “invisible citizens.” The Minority Rights Group International indicates that given legislation is not available for national minorities because of their poor command of the Georgian language that makes them completely powerless before the state.¹¹

According to the results of the fieldwork carried out by the CSS and the analysis of different analytical papers, the current electoral system in Georgia fails to ensure the fully fledged political participation and representation of national minorities. There are only seven representatives of national minorities in Parliament, while based on the census data national minorities made up 16% of the total Georgian population in 2002 and 13.2% in 2014. Giorgi Sordia, an expert working on national minority issues, believes that the lack of engagement of national minorities is greatly determined by the low political culture in the country. According to ECMI data, the representation of national minorities in Parliament was lowest in 1992-1995 (4 MPs) and highest in 1995-1999 and 1999-2004 (16 MPs). Current statistics show that their representation (7 MPs) almost equals the number of minority representatives in Parliament in 1991-1992. With regard to the minority regions, the level of political participation is much higher e.g., national minority representatives have 28 out of 32 seats in the Akhalkalaki Sakrebulo (City Council) and 20 out of 29 seats in Marneuli

¹⁰ Ullmann A. (2016) Challenges to coexistence in Georgia, CSS analysis in security policy, №186, Editor: Matthias Bieri. http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/publications/css-analyses-in-security-policy/details.html?id=/n/r/1/8/nr_186_herausgeforderte_koexistenz_in_ge

¹¹ Breaking the cycle of exclusion: minority rights in Georgia. Minority rights group international. London, United Kingdom, 2009. <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4b698a592.pdf>

Sakrebulo (City Council).¹² The ethnic Azeris and Armenians are more or less engaged in political activities in the regions compactly settled by national minorities.

4. Overview of Electoral Systems: International Experience and Practices

The Handbook of Electoral System Choice (Colomer J., 2004) provides the basic information about the electoral systems. In the introduction, Colomer points out to a global trend of transforming electoral systems. In the long-run, the inclusive electoral formula that focus on the active engagement of the electorate will be encouraged, as opposed to the restrictive or exclusionary systems. This will lead to more sustainable systems which will create a firm institutional balance. In other words, proportional representation will be a priority in developing inclusive and less perilous electoral laws and procedures. Once electoral systems are more focused on producing multiple winners, it would be highly risky for the latter to introduce alternative rules in favour of a single absolute winner and many losers.¹³

In order to characterize the mixed electoral system in Georgia with regard to the political participation of national minorities, in the table below we identified the following factors which greatly determine the fallacious practices:

Use of administrative resources	Electoral system does not reflect political diversity/lack of opportunities for the development of political parties
Changes made to the Election Code create unfavourable conditions for ensuring minority representation	High number of lost votes

¹² Sordia G. (2014) Challenges of Minority Governance and Political Participation in Georgia. Caucasus Analytical Digest №64, 9 July 2014. Tbilisi, Georgia: <http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CAD-64-2-5.pdf>

¹³ The Handbook of Electoral System Choice. The Strategy and History of Electoral System Choice, pp. 3-81. Editor: Colomer J. M. Palgrave Macmillan, United Kingdom, 2004.

To have a clear picture of the problems indicated above, there is a need to analyse the characteristics and the history of development of the electoral system.

Elections in Georgia are ensured by the country's Constitution and held through universal, equal, and direct suffrage by secret vote. The Georgian electoral legislation is based on the five core principles: universal suffrage, equal suffrage, direct suffrage, secret vote, and freedom of choice.

As an independent state, Georgia has a short history of evolution of its electoral system. The first free elections in Georgia were held based on the "Regulations on the election of the Constituent Assembly" of 22 November 1918, which provided for the election of 130 members (through party lists) with the proportional electoral system on the basis of universal, equal, and direct suffrage, by secret vote. The parliamentary elections held on 28 October 1990 were governed by the Organic Law on Parliamentary Elections. In 2001, the Organic Law was replaced by an Election Code, which was itself replaced on 27 December 2011 by adopting the Organic Law of Georgia – Election Code of Georgia.¹⁴

It is worth noting that according to the Law on Ethnic Minority Representation in the National Council of Georgia, dated 13 September 1918, "ethnic minorities residing on the territory of Georgia and are the citizens of Georgia" were entitled to seats in the National Council.¹⁵

The 1990 parliamentary elections were held through the mixed system: 125 candidates were elected through the proportional and 125 candidates through the majoritarian system. Only two parties managed to pass the 4% electoral threshold for parliamentary representation. Through the majoritarian system, the political mandates were distributed among the five political entities (parties). Each of the following elections was held based on the same approach. Accordingly, the electoral system has not undergone a real transformation and the existing patterns and trends, especially in terms of minority participation, have not been modified. In the 2008 elections, only 24 ethnic Aze-

¹⁴ Electoral Systems, Handbook for students of higher education institutions. (CEC, Center of Electoral Systems Development, Reforms and Trainings, pg. 8-15). 2014-2015: <http://electionreforms.ge/files/library/415.pdf>

¹⁵ History of the South Ossetia Conflict, Parliament of Georgia, Office of the Parliament of Georgia http://www.parliament.ge/files/617_8236_358700_samxret_oseti.pdf

ris and 16 ethnic Armenians were among a total of 1,767 candidates. It was practically impossible for them to get elected because of their positions in the electoral lists, e.g. the United National Movement ranked national minority representatives in the 29th, 31st and 50th places, the Republican Party – 9th and 11th places, the united opposition – 85th place. Moreover, only 15 representatives of national minorities (10 Azeris, 4 Armenians, and 1 Abkhazian) were among the 434 majoritarian candidates. The coalition Georgian Dream included only 9 national minority candidates in its party list in 2012 elections. In the absence of a special campaign focusing on the minority needs, opposition parties did not attempt to get the votes of national minorities.¹⁶ The analysis of the electoral programs of the political parties running in 2012 elections showed that only the two political parties, the Georgian Dream and the New Rights addressed national minority issues in their electoral programs. The 72-page electoral program of the coalition Georgian Dream included only one sub-section on the civic integration and protection of the rights of national minorities, which was focusing on the needs of national minorities. The 108-page electoral program of the New Rights party had a separate section dedicated to the rights and needs of national minorities.¹⁷ The overview of the electoral programs shows that the minority issues are not a priority for the political parties in Georgia.

Yet it should be noted that political parties have made significant efforts to change the electoral system in recent years. Starting from 2010, in the format of the “eight parties” or other formats, they have been discussing opportunities of substituting a mixed electoral system with a proportional one, and the distribution of mandates between the candidates selected through proportional lists and regional proportional lists. However, the electoral system has not undergone any fundamental change, in spite of the consolidated efforts of political parties, except for the legislative changes (2015) related to the boundary delimitations of constituencies to ensure the equality of votes. The main distinguishing features of the electoral systems include:

¹⁶ Gedenidze I., Role of Ethnic Minorities in 2008 and 2012 Elections. Radio Freedom, 5 June 2014; <http://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/content/article/25412637.html>

¹⁷ Center for Civic Culture. Electoral programs of political parties for the 2012 Parliamentary Elections, Tbilisi, 2016; <http://www.ivote.ge/archevnebi/saparlamento-archevnebi/archevnebi-2012/monatsile-partiebi-da-blokebi/partiis-programebi/2453-nomeri-41-saarchevno-bloki-qbidzna-ivanishvili-qarthuli-ocnebaq.html?lang=ka-GE>

scale of electoral districts (single-mandate/multi-mandate); structure of electoral ballot (categorical/preferential); and electoral threshold – barrier.

The most important characteristics of electoral systems are the election formula, which determines the number of mandates based on the received votes. There are three major electoral systems: Pluralist majoritarian (Plurality, Majority); Mixed (Mixed); Proportional (Proportionality); and other.

In the light of these considerations, it is important to examine each component of the Georgia's electoral system and evaluate its positive or negative impact on the minority representation.

4.1. Majoritarian Electoral System

The majority principle is intrinsically associated with the dominance of the majority will. According to Colomer, a dominant party with the optimistic expectations for the next elections will tend to prefer electoral formula like multi-mandate constituencies with 'bloc' closed lists.¹⁸ Yet the threats to the dominant party that may arise when it entrenches its incumbency should also be noted. The failure of the legislature to ensure minority participation in the political life, at least to some extent, puts the power of the dominant party at a certain risk, undermining its stability in the long run by small political groups protesting their unexercised, passive electoral rights. Accordingly, the risks of majoritarian system are too high to preserve such a system.

While highlighting the disadvantages of the majoritarian electoral system, lost votes is a major concern. Another concern is that a party may not gain representation (or gain only a few seats) in the legislature, even if the difference between the number of received votes between this party and the winning party is insignificant, if the supporters of both parties are equally distributed across the electoral districts.¹⁹ Under the majoritarian system,

¹⁸ The Handbook of Electoral System Choice. The Strategy and History of Electoral System Choice, pp. 3-81. Editor: Colomer J. M. Palgrave Macmillan, United Kingdom, 2004.

¹⁹ Electoral Systems. (Legal Drafting Department, Parliament of Georgia): http://www.parliament.ge/files/1055_16721_957521_saarchevno_sistemebi.pdf

it is possible to ensure national minority representation through additional mechanisms or by transforming the boundaries of the electoral districts.

4.2. Proportional Electoral System

The core factor to ensure proportionality is the formula defining the number of seats and quotas. There are various mechanisms to ensure proportionality:

Single Transferable Vote (STV) is a voting system applied in multi-mandate constituencies. Under STV, a voter has many votes but uses them as a single vote. Voters can rank candidates on the ballots according to their preferences. This ensures prioritization of more than one candidate.

Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) is a system used in multi-mandate constituencies. Under SNTV, each voter casts one vote for a candidate. Those candidates with the highest votes fill the seats.

Limited voting is also used in multi-mandate constituencies. Voters can vote for several candidates. However, the number of votes is limited and should be less than the number of seats. The seats are awarded to the candidates who receive the most votes in absolute terms.

Borda count is a preferential voting system used in both single-mandate and multi-mandate constituencies. Voters rank candidates according to their preferences (1, 2, 3, 4 etc.). Each candidate is given a number of points. For example, a candidate gets 1 point for every first-place vote, 2 points for every second-place vote, etc. Once all votes have been counted the candidate with the most points is the winner.²⁰

The major advantage of the proportional system in terms of ensuring the participation of national minorities is the efficiency of additional mechanisms. Small political groups which mainly represent the interests of the local population have more opportunities to gain seats in the legislature.²¹

²⁰ Electoral Systems, Handbook for students of higher education institutions. (CEC, Center of Electoral Systems Development, Reforms and Trainings, pg. 8-15). 2014-2015: <http://electionreforms.ge/files/library/415.pdf>

²¹ Kighuradze K., Parliamentary Election Rules. Analysis of Electoral System and Recommendations (research findings). EMC, Tbilisi, 2013: https://emcrights.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/book_geo_web1.pdf

Many international organizations in Georgia also underline the need for electoral reform, including the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), which has developed recommendations under the project financed by USAID for reforming the current electoral system, which are focusing on the necessity of such changes. The mixed electoral system represents a historical relic and if the political elite intends building an effective state than the current electoral system should be replaced by the regional multi-mandate proportional system.²²

4.3. Promoting Political Participation of National Minorities: International Experience and Practices

There is a need to introduce additional mechanisms which are largely used by European countries to ensure a fully-fledged participation of national minorities. Some of these additional mechanisms could be successfully implemented in Georgia including quotas for national minorities in party lists; quotas, or the so-called “reserved seats” for national minorities in the legislature; and financial incentives for political parties to include national minorities in their lists. For example, Bosnia-Herzegovina has introduced additional mechanisms on all three government levels (local, regional and federal) to facilitate national minority political participation through: 1) seats in the legislature, 2) the proportional system, and 3) special lists for national minorities. Participation of national minorities in Hungary and Croatia is ensured by the constitution, making the system even more efficient.²³

There is no universal electoral model. The Georgian political elite needs to make a choice. In this regard, it is important to choose a system which ensures that the minority rights are duly respected and protected.

²² Dahl R. Legal Policy Advisor, Georgia’s Parliamentary Electoral System: Options for Advancing Voter Equality, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, USAID or the United States Government, 2011.

²³ Report on Electoral Rules and Affirmative Action for National Minorities Participation in Decision-making Process in European Countries. Venice Commission. Strasbourg, 2005.

5. Study Findings

5.1. Data Analysis of the Focus Groups with Armenian and Azeri Minorities

The analysis of the focus group discussions shows that the major challenge for the ethnic Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti region and the ethnic Azeris in Kvemo Kartli is an inadequate proficiency level of the Georgian language leading to a lack of the awareness, general education and civic engagement, as well as unemployment and the low-level participation in social and political life.

The absolute majority of ethnic Armenian and Azeri participants of the focus groups organized in Marneuli and Akhalkalaki regularly go to vote in the elections. They believe that it is their civic duty to vote. However, both young and elderly focus group participants in Akhalkalaki and Marneuli treat elections with some scepticism, as they are not confident that their votes will affect the final results of the elections. In both cities, the level of trust in government institutions of the participants in the 18-40 age group is higher than that of the participants in the 41-65 age group, which reflects on their electoral behaviour – youths are much more motivated to vote in elections and express their opinions. 40-65 year old participants living in Marneuli are more engaged in social life at the local and regional levels than participants of the same age category in Akhalkalaki. By “integration,” participants mean their active participation in the social life together with Georgians. Moreover, they often travel to the capital of Georgia which is very close to Marneuli. Some of the focus group participants regularly travel from Marneuli to Tbilisi as they go there to work or to university. In Akhalkalaki, in contrast, the focus group participants are more likely to stay and work in their community, except for students who study in the capital.

In both cities, the scepticism of the majority of the focus group participants about the government institutions is caused by the non-fulfilment of election promises and reluctance of the political parties to continue interaction with minorities after the election period. *“They care about us before the elections and then they forget about us”* (Female respondent, Akhalkalaki, 41-65).

The participants of both age groups in Marneuli and Akhalkalaki declared that their decision to vote for a particular candidate is much predetermined

by the meetings held with voters by this candidate. With regard to the electoral programs of the political parties, the majority of the population is not aware that such programs exist. Only few participants of the focus groups who are mostly employed in the civil service and more often come across the public information were informed about the electoral programs of the parties. However, they usually don't read electoral programs as they are uninterested in them. Moreover, the focus groups participants in Akhalkalaki were concerned that the local political elite does not change over time, regardless of the change of the ruling party.

In contrast to Akhalkalaki, the participants of the focus group conducted in Marneuli point to the improvement of the local political culture, which is reflected in voters' behaviour, they no longer make uninformed decisions and ask for meetings with the candidates. *"People just went to the polling stations to put the ballots into the boxes. Now people ask for meetings with the candidates to raise their problems and then they want to see the results of candidates' work. Many NGOs helped to raise awareness of people. 3-4 people from each village ask for meetings with the candidates. Isn't it a sign of progress?"* (Female respondent, Marneuli, 18-40).

Both in Marneuli and Akhalkalaki the focus group participants demonstrated a high level of interest towards current political developments in Georgia; however, they cannot obtain information from national media for a variety of reasons, primarily because of the language barrier (the lack of an adequate Georgian language proficiency). The lack of information about recent developments in the country makes them think that the problems they face in their regions are unique and the overall situation in other regions of Georgia is much better. *"They never mention Akhalkalaki in the weather forecast. We have to predict the weather. They mention Akhaltsikhe, but never Akhalkalaki. No matter how insignificant this issue might seem, it is very important for us. Don't we exist? Why is there no information available about us?"* (Female respondent, Akhalkalaki, 41-65).

The participants of both focus groups knew the name of the Member of Parliament elected in their single-mandate majoritarian constituency. Moreover, on different occasions they have met or interacted with their MP through written communication. Nevertheless, they are not satisfied with the work of their MP. *"Generally speaking, what they could do within*

their mandate and what they actually do, is not sufficient neither for me nor for the others” (Male respondent, Marneuli, 41-65).

Only few participants of the focus groups, both in Marneuli and Akhalkalaki, were aware of the amendments made to the Organic Law of Georgia – Election Code of Georgia in 2015 as a result of the Constitutional Court’s decision, which provide for boundary delimitations of majoritarian districts, including those in the regions with compactly settled national minorities. However, they were not informed about the changes by the relevant authorities and therefore, had a very poor understanding of this issue. *“It has been just rumoured. Nobody met with us on purpose”* (Female respondent, Akhalkalaki, 18-40).

According to the focus group participants, the major issue is the lack of professionalism and relevant education of the members of the council and the executive body. Moreover, they believe that knowledgeable staff is not maintained in local government. *“I know a man in my village, who has a Master’s and PhD degrees. He was appointed to the council chairman position, but then was dismissed within ten days. They say he was over-qualified”* (Male respondent, Marneuli, 18-40).

The focus groups’ participants believe that the local authorities are informed of the problems in the region, but do not take effective actions in order to address them. Since the level of civic engagement is very low in both regions, the participants of focus groups are reluctant to participate in local political life. With regard to their representation in the legislature, Akhalkalaki focus group participants believe that their interests are not represented at the national level (ethnic Armenians are represented by two members of their community in the Parliament). In Marneuli, by contrast, the focus group participants believe that their representation is ensured at central government level (ethnic Azeris also have two representatives of their community in the Parliament, one elected through the proportional system and one in a single-mandate constituency).

The majority of participants of both focus groups have an inadequate command of the Georgian language. In the 18-40 age group, participants expressed a great interest in learning the state language, as opposed to the participants in 41-65 age group, who were uncertain about that issue. Different attitudes can be explained by the age difference – the younger population is more inclined to learn the Georgian language, get educated

and employed, while the elderly population believes that it is too late for them to study new things.

There is a low level of civic awareness among national minorities in the country. Moreover, there is a lack of civic education programs especially for the benefit of the elderly population. When asked whether they go to vote in elections or not, the majority of focus group participants refused to answer or demonstrated extreme scepticism about politics. Voting is perceived as a civic duty, but none of them points out the need of expressing their opinions, especially because they are convinced that their participation does not make any change, as their votes do not count. *“It does not matter. Elections will be rigged anyway”* (Female respondent, Akhalkalaki (41-65); *“I never go to the elections, they come to me. They sent a car to go to the polling station. That is how the elections are held”* (Male respondent, Akhalkalaki, 41-65).

As previously mentioned, the participants of Marneuli and Akhalkalaki focus groups were not informed of the amendments made to the Organic Law of Georgia – Election Code of Georgia in 2015, which envisage changes in the configuration of electoral districts. More specifically, the electoral districts of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda as well as the electoral districts of Akhaltsikhe and Adigeni were merged, while the relatively larger Bolnisi district was split into two districts to achieve the equality of votes. In addition, the majoritarian constituencies of Borjomi, Aspindza and Akhalkalaki were merged into one electoral district.

5.2. Analysis of In-depth Interviews with Political Parties

5.2.1. Views of Political Parties about the Current Electoral System and Political Participation of National Minorities

The majority of the interviewed political parties indicated that the Georgian electoral system ensures only a minimum level of national minority participation in the political life. Some representatives of political parties also declared that the current electoral system neither prevents nor encourages the political participation of minorities. Only a very small number of respondents believe that the electoral system is sufficient and that minority interests are duly protected.

Respondents are dissatisfied with the reluctance of minority MPs to participate in the legislative decision-making. They noted that, in contrast, a few years ago, while having more representatives in Parliament, the level of national minority participation was the same, as well as their overall engagement in the parliamentary activities.

The majority of the interviewed political parties agreed that the majoritarian system is completely ineffective. Moreover, they believe that it often serves as an instrument for retaining the government power. Thus, the government is not in favour of abolishing it. *“In fact, they see the majoritarian system mainly as an instrument to retain power. The majoritarian MPs are just their obedient subjects to ensure quantity balance of the ruling power”* (In-depth interview, member of the political party, Tbilisi).

The respondents underscored the shortcomings of the current electoral system. A frequent betrayal of the political party values by the majoritarian MPs are considered the main insufficiency of the majoritarian system. Furthermore, the majority of the political parties declared that they should be entitled to the withdrawal of such MPs. Another shortcoming indicated by the respondents was that 51% of voters could control the other 49%. In fact, a candidate can win elections with 51%, while 49% of the citizens' votes are lost.

The majority of the political parties negatively evaluated the amendments related to the rearrangement of electoral districts²⁴, mostly because they believe that such rearrangement is only a technical solution and that it will not have a positive impact on the participation of national minorities in the decision making and political life. Nevertheless, while discussing this initiative, some of the respondents pointed out that by merging the Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda electoral districts, it would be possible to increase ethnic Armenian representation districts through party lists. *“International standards provide for having one majoritarian constituency in both Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, especially when the latter is a high-mountainous region. The recommendations of the Venice Commission and*

²⁴ Draft law on amendments to the Organic Law of Georgia “Election Code of Georgia”, Dzidziguri Z., Zhorzholiani G., Tkemaladze Z., Vakhtangishvili M., Khmaladze V., Kobakhidze I. The Parliament of Georgia, 2015. <http://info.parliament.ge/#law-drafting/11031>

the OSCE provided for such opportunities. However, the Constitutional Court imposed very inadequate limitations to Parliament through different wordings” (In-depth interview, member of the political party, Tbilisi).

5.2.2. Common Challenges of Political Participation of National Minorities

While speaking about the challenges of the political participation of national minorities, the representatives of political parties declared that national minorities involved in the political decision-making have always been the government-affiliated candidates and the inevitable change of the government (which occurred three times) was not followed by the change of the majoritarian MPs.

Respondents believe that majoritarian MPs always seek for greater financial resources, which are usually at the disposal of the government. The ruling party majoritarian candidates always manage to win seats in the Parliament as a result of misuse of a great portion of administrative resources for election purposes, strong support from the law enforcement agencies (LEAs) and bullying civil service employees into voting for a “desired” person.

The representatives of several parties indicated that the local population refrains from interaction with the opposition parties, as they fear the government. Furthermore, the interviewed respondents declared that the representatives of both the State Security Service of Georgia and the Constitutional Security Department are bullying local population into voting for a particular candidate.

5.2.3. Models of Electoral Systems to Ensure Political Participation of National Minorities

The interviewed political parties also pointed to alternative electoral systems, which would lead to an increased participation of national minorities and the improvement of the overall political situation in the country. They agreed that only through the proportional system it is possible to ensure the proportional representation and fully fledged political participation of the electorate. However, political parties were of different opinions about the type of proportional system which would be the most suitable in view of the Georgian social and political landscape. The majority of respon-

dents believe that the proportional electoral system is the best model to be implemented in the regions to promote national minority representation and even to double minority seats in the Parliament. One of the respondents declared that, hypothetically, if a quota for the Samtskhe-Javakheti region would comprise of 10 seats in Parliament, half of the quota list could be made up of national minorities (multi-ethnic list). This additionally would encourage the political parties to engage the ethnic population by including national minorities in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli in their party lists. *“For example, the party will try to include at least one Azeri in party list to receive the votes of his electorate”* (In-depth interview, member of the political party).

“At this point, probably, the most acceptable solution would be to have the regional (proportional) rather than national lists. This will create more incentives for developing multi-ethnic regional lists in Kvemo Kartli embracing both Azeris and Georgians” (In-depth interview, member of the political party).

The majority of the interviewed political parties believe that the open/preferential lists will provide more opportunities for voters to classify the candidates. They also agreed that the proportional system would contribute to the development of political parties and that the parties themselves would be interested in establishing permanent offices in the regions. *“Our [...] party has expressed the political will to move to a proportional system after the 2016 elections and the constitutional amendment bill was initiated by the parliamentary majority”* (In-depth interview, member of the political party).

Parties also underscored the importance of demarcating constituencies through the country for the purposes of the regional (proportional) system. They underlined the need to create a number of small electoral districts as well as larger regional (proportional) multi-mandate electoral districts. The study showed that this issue, along with others, such as developing the party lists, could be contemplated in different variations and would be a matter of political discourse. However, political parties were more concerned with the systemic changes rather than the detailed content of each change.

5.2.4. Additional Mechanisms to Ensure Representation of National Minorities

The majority of political parties are against incorporating additional mechanisms into the electoral system in order to increase the political participation of national minorities. They argue that a regional proportional electoral system would ensure the fully fledged participation of minorities. Accordingly, the implementation of this system would be sufficient enough to increase the political participation of national minorities. Only a few political parties indicated the possibility of incorporating financial incentives or certain type of additional mechanisms. They advocated a quota system, as they believed that this would lead to an enhanced sense of responsibility among the MPs who gained quota seats in the legislature.

“A regional (proportional) electoral system will provide a clear picture of their resources and potential and will enable parties to use western approaches while selecting candidates. The quota seats will be gained by the national minorities based on merit and internal competition. Quotas are not a mechanical distribution but a special privilege for the national minorities who consider themselves as ‘politically Georgians’ and are ready to contribute to the progress of the nation” (In-depth interview, member of the political party).

5.3. Analysis of Interviews with Experts

With regard to the representation of national minorities, the interviewed experts firstly spoke about the local governments. They stated that ethnic Azeris and Armenians are relatively proportionally represented at the local level – in Councils and Executive Bodies. However, they are largely under-represented in the capital (Tbilisi), although different national minorities make up about 20% of the Tbilisi population.²⁵

The majority of experts interviewed in the course of the study believe that although national minorities are employed in high positions in local self-governments, their participation in decision-making is limited for many reasons: poor qualification, lack of education and political activity/

²⁵ National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia. List of Council Members, retrieved 15 June 2014: <http://nala.ge/uploads/files/5416f23e0d2a6.pdf>

activism. The experts indicated that while being reluctant to express their own political views, the political activism of national minorities has been very low for years. *“First of all, it is either the lack of or poor quality of participation. National minorities cannot deliver their messages in the appropriate format and are less engaged in interactions, though they have necessary skills for participation”* (Expert, non-governmental organization working on national minority issues, male respondent, Tbilisi).

Some experts noted that during Shevardnadze’s presidency, more minorities were represented in the local self-governments.

As for their involvement at the national level, national minorities are represented only by seven MPs in Parliament. The experts pointed out that the number of national minority representatives in the legislature has constantly decreased since the 1990s. Moreover, the national minority MPs almost never engage in active political discussions, and therefore, the level of their participation in legislative discussions and in the overall political decision making process is very low. The experts believe that being almost always unavailable for the local population, MPs do not even raise regional concerns. According to the experts another problem is that political and social elites have not changed through the years and there is a lack of new faces and political leaders. By moving from one ruling party to another, the same majoritarian candidates and local high officials manage to stay in power. *“Except for the ruling party, all parties have the same problem, they are not likely to spend many funds on their representatives in the regions. However, they take on more or less prominent local community members into their parties as a matter of course”* (Expert, NGO working on national minority issues, male respondent, Tbilisi).

Moreover, the interviewed experts pointed out the support of the ruling party by the local population. They declared that in the regions compactly settled by minorities, governmental candidates/parties usually win the elections. On the one hand, the electoral behaviour of minorities is determined by a sense of being protected by the government in response to their loyalty and willingness to maintain the status quo; on the other hand, they do so by fear of the government and the law enforcement authorities intimidating the electorate into making a particular choice.

The majority of experts are convinced that this was a far greater problem in earlier years, when the police and law enforcement authorities regularly misused their powers during the electoral process to influence the voters' decisions. However, marking a slight improvement during the last elections, the experts believe that the support of opposition parties by national minorities has also increased. The NGOs have made a great effort to change the attitudes of the younger population so as to make up their minds more freely in their decision for whom to vote – not necessarily in favour of the ruling party.

With regard to the interaction between the political parties and national minorities, both focus groups' participants and experts pointed out their inefficiency, more specifically, because of the non-availability of enough funds for the political parties to work in the regions, usually available only during election campaigns. Moreover, in general political parties tend not to have permanent offices in the regions.

The majority of experts and representatives of political parties interviewed in the course of the CSS study advocate the same electoral model – a proportional electoral system to be used in the next parliamentary elections, according to which half of the legislature is elected in single-mandate constituencies and half through proportional representation (candidates nominated through regional party-lists).

Yet it should be noted, that they also believe that in the long run it is almost impossible to ensure the representation of national minorities in light of the Georgian political and cultural landscape without fully implementing the proportional electoral system.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed based on the results of this study:

Recommendations for the Government of Georgia

- Foster national minority participation in decision-making through a discussion platform bringing together the government representatives along with non-governmental organizations working on minority issues and political parties;

- Raising the civic education level in the regions compactly settled by national minorities through specially designed educational programs. In this regard, Zurab Zhvania Georgian School of Public Administration delivers such programs but they are available only for civil servants;
- Develop a Georgian language course available to all comers; develop vocational training courses available to a wide audience; deliver trainings to local self-government employees to improve their professional skills;
- Consolidate political efforts to make changes to the electoral system; carrying out institutional changes to fully implement a proportional electoral system; in the long run, develop a transition plan to establish a regional proportional electoral system;
- Implement additional mechanisms to increase the representation of national minorities during the transition period in parallel to changing the electoral system; provide financial incentives to political parties to encourage them to include national minorities in their electoral lists; and allocate minority quotas (“reserved seats”) in the legislature.

Recommendations for the Political Parties

- Strengthening the structures of political parties by establishing permanent offices in the regions and encouraging the renewal of political/partisan elites in the regions compactly settled by national minorities;
- Recruit and train new party staff members in the regions compactly settled by national minorities in order to balance the party structure and promote the political participation of national minorities;
- Include national minority candidates in party lists to promote their political participation;
- Strengthening intra-party democracy through establishing transparent procedures for developing party lists, selecting/training of candidates and making decisions, with the aim of facilitating the participation of national minorities in decision-making;

- Incorporate goals and objectives in parties' electoral programs for the next parliamentary elections specifically addressing the needs of national minorities on the basis of the needs assessment conducted in the regions compactly settled by national minorities;
- Interacting and sharing information with the electorate on a regular basis; disseminating and translating electoral programs and brochures in minority languages in municipal centres and villages;
- Establish consensus between political parties on the number and size of electoral districts within the model of a proportional electoral system; create multi-mandate electoral districts and demarcate constituencies without splitting regions settled by national minorities to ensure proportionality/representation.

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POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL MINORITY WOMEN IN GEORGIA

Levan Kakhishvili

Executive Summary

The goal of this paper is to analyse the degree of political participation of women belonging to national minorities in Georgia, to identify the factors hindering their higher level of involvement in politics and to develop recommendations for various stakeholders interested in increasing the role of minority women in Georgian politics. Based on focus group discussions with participants from Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions as well as in-depth interviews with representatives of political parties and experts in the field of minority issues, this paper concludes that minority women's involvement in politics is extremely limited and that there are two types of impeding factors. First, structural factors include the type of electoral system, recruitment practices within the political parties, and knowledge of the state language. Second, cultural factors include perceptions of and fear of politics among minority women, and gender prejudice and stereotypes within the minority communities and generally in Georgian society.

First, the paper argues that reforming the electoral system and establishing regional proportional representation with closed lists is likely to provide a better institutional framework for minority women's political participation. Second, institutionalisation of recruitment practices and establishment of women's councils within political parties will promote minority women's representation in politics. Third, ensuring that minority women know the state language will be a step forward in this process. Fourth, it is necessary to address the problem of how politics is perceived among minority women. The frustration and fear currently present should be eliminated in order to ensure that these women are willing to participate more. Finally, gender prejudice and stereotypes that keep minority women under pressure have to be eradicated in order for minority women to enjoy the opportunity of involvement in politics.

1. Introduction

The European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership (EaP) Countries evaluated Georgia's advancement in deep and sustainable democracy as the greatest among the EaP countries for the second consecutive year in 2014.¹ Although this is indeed a positive development, it is always necessary to bear in mind the complexities of the process of transformation. One important aspect of this process is participation, without which it is hard to imagine a working democracy. Women, especially those belonging to minority communities, are far less likely to show high level of political participation in Georgia than their male counterparts. The problem is exacerbated by a range of factors including the fact that minorities are compactly settled in the regions of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. This paper investigates the degree of political participation of minority women in these two minority-populated regions.

Conceptualizing and operationalizing political participation is a hard task. The paper adopts the definition of Verba, Scholzman and Brady, according to whom, political participation refers to “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies.”² These direct and indirect forms of political participation are operationalized into five types of behaviour: engagement in political discussions, voting, advocacy, party membership and activism, and running for office.³ However, accurately measuring political participation in Georgia is hindered by a deficiency of available data.

The paper draws on quantitative data provided by the Caucasus Research Resource Centre (CRRC) and Central Election Commission (CEC) of Geor-

¹ See: Lovitt, J., 2014. “European Integration Index 2014 for Eastern Partnership Countries,” p. 16. Accessed on December 5, 2015: <http://www.eap-index.eu/sites/default/files/EaP%20Index%202014.pdf> Kvashuk, O., 2013. “European Integration Index 2013 for Eastern Partnership Countries,” p. 16. Accessed on December 5, 2015: http://www.eap-index.eu/sites/default/files/EaP_Index_2013_0.pdf

² Verba, S., Scholzman, K.L. and Brady, H. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

³ For the detailed discussion on how to operationalize the concept of civic engagement, which includes political participation, see Adler, R.P., and Goggin, J. 2005. “What Do We Mean By “Civic Engagement”?” *Journal of Transformative Education* 3, pp: 236-253.

gia as well as the fieldwork conducted throughout the course of this research. From May to June 2015, four focus group interviews were conducted in the minority-populated regions of Georgia – Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. Two focus groups were conducted in Marneuli, Kvemo Kartli, with participation of twelve minority women six of whom had completed higher education and the other six did not have and were not planning to complete higher education. Two more focus groups were conducted in Akhalkalaki, Samtskhe-Javakheti, with participation of fourteen minority women. Out of the fourteen participants, seven had completed higher education, while the other seven had not. The age of the participants was diverse and the date of birth varied from 1945 to 1992, which gives a sufficiently broad picture for the purposes of this paper. Furthermore, seven in-depth interviews were conducted with experts and representatives of five Georgian political parties including: Free Democrats, New Rights Party, Republican Party, United Democratic Movement, and United National Movement.

Given the methodological framework, the research has certain limitations. The paper is not aimed at measuring and generalizing the level of minority women's political participation. However, the focus group discussions as well as the in-depth interviews represent a solid basis for identifying trends and the nature of political participation of minority women in Georgia. The collected data are analysed to detect major structural and cultural factors keeping minority women from being politically active in Georgia. The factors, of course, may not be an exhaustive list and require further study for a more in-depth understanding of the situation. However, the findings of this research are still relevant for the Georgian political parties that are trying to increase the number of minority women in the ranks of their members. The discussion of the factors influencing the level of political participation of women belonging to minority communities provides important insights for all stakeholders who want to tackle the problem.

First, the paper briefly provides an overview of the general patterns of political participation in Georgia with a focus on minority women. Then, it moves onto the analysis of the described situation accounting for the low level of involvement in politics among minority women. The section views political participation as a two-way process where the major actors are citizens and political parties. It is assumed that a high degree of political participation can only be achieved when both actors (women belonging to minorities) and

political parties, are willing and able to work together. Finally, the paper elaborates recommendations in order to improve the current situation.

2. Indirect Forms of Political Participation

Indirect forms of participation include: discussing politics and voting at the elections. These activities are simple in nature and do not take much effort from the citizens but provide important insights into what level of political engagement the participants of this study stand. Of course, discussing politics is a much easier, albeit more frequent, way of one's involvement in politics than voting at the elections. The following two sections respectively discuss the trends regarding these two types of behaviour of minority women in Georgia.

The data of the focus group interviews conducted throughout the research demonstrate that indirect forms of political participation are much more likely to be practised by minority women than direct forms. The simplest form, however, is discussing political affairs. As expected, all participants reported to have discussed politics. The environment where such discussions take place include everyday situations such as family, workplace, gatherings with friends and/or neighbours, etc. One trend that emerges, especially among the participants from the Kvemo Kartli region, is that often husbands have a final say in such discussions. The influence of husbands on the way minority women form their opinions on politics is particularly vivid among women who do not possess any higher education and are more often than not unemployed (yet not necessarily seeking employment). On the other hand, minority women who have a higher education are more likely to have an independent opinion on political matters. However, the level of political participation still remains low even in this category of research participants. The data retrieved from focus group discussions are consistent with the general trends of voter turnout through the prism of gender (further discussed below). Considering that the subjects of this research are minority women, it can be argued that they are even less likely to be politically active either directly or indirectly than their ethnic Georgian counterparts because minority women unlike ethnic Georgia women belong to disadvantaged sex as well as disadvantaged ethnicity.

Over the past few decades, scholars have been observing a trend of decreasing voter turnout in established democracies, which has led to debates wheth-

er representative democracy has lost public confidence.⁴ In Georgia, as an emerging democracy, voter turnout is expected to be high but counter to this expectation the figure has been below 61 per cent in the last few elections from 2008 to 2014. Over the six-year period Georgians have voted six times; at two parliamentary, two presidential and two local elections. The data show that at crucial points, against the background of highly polarized political events or a high level of public dissatisfaction manifested in protest rallies, turnout is higher than average, yet still quite low even compared to other South Caucasian states.⁵

In the voters' list prepared by the CEC for the 2014 local elections, female voters are in a majority and represent 53.7 per cent of the total number of voters.⁶ However, analysing the voters' turnout can be done in two ways. The first option includes calculating the percentage share of female voters from those who actually voted at the elections. A second way to examine the issue is to estimate what percentage share of female voters went to the elections to vote. These two ways provide slightly different pictures. In terms of the overall turnout females represented a total of 50.2 per cent of all voters in 2014, which can be attributed to the slightly higher number of women in the electorate.⁷ However, female turnout *per se*, i.e. the number of women who voted divided by the number of women in the electorate, is about 6 per cent lower than the same figure for men: 40.4 per cent and 46.6 per cent respectively.⁸

⁴ See: Dalton, R.J., 1998. *Citizen Politics in Western Democracies*. New Jersey: Chatham. Pippa Norris (Ed.), 1999. *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

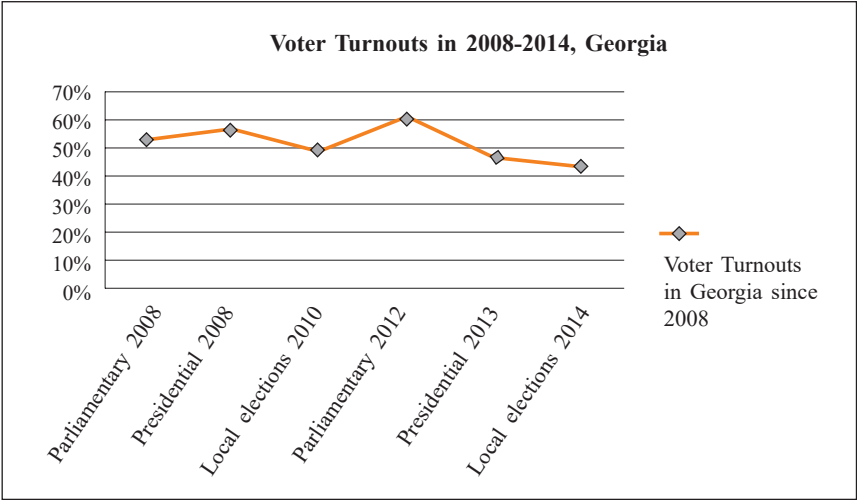
⁵ See: The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, "Voter Turnout," accessed September 27, 2014, <http://www.idea.int/uid/fieldview.cfm?field=224®ion=145>

⁶ INFO სივრცე ქალი ამომრჩევლებისთვის, n.d. „ადგილობრივი თვითმმართველობის არჩევნების გენდერული ანალიზი“, მოპოვებულია 17 ივლისი, 2015, <http://qaliskhma.ge/uploads/survey.pdf>

⁷ ცესკო: საქართველოს საარჩევნო ადმინისტრაცია, 2014. „2014 წლის 15 ივნისის ადგილობრივ თვითმმართველობის არჩევნებზე მისული ამომრჩევლების გენდერული შემადგენლობა“, მოპოვებულია 21 ივლისი, 2015, <http://www.cesko.ge/uploads/other/29/29182.pdf>

⁸ ბაგრატი, თ., 2015. 2014 წლის ადგილობრივი თვითმმართველობის წარმომადგენლობითი და აღმასრულებელი ორგანოების არჩევნების გენდერული ანალიზი. მოპოვებულია 17 ივლისი, 2015, http://www.qaliskhma.ge/uploads/survey_report_final.pdf

Chart 1: Voter Turnouts in Georgia since 2008



Source: Adapted from the data of the Central Election Commission of Georgia, www.cec.gov.ge

As for the minority-populated districts specifically, the data are shown in Table 1. In every case the share of female voters in the electorate is above fifty per cent. The high number of female voters in absolute terms determines a high share of females out of the total turnout. However, examining the share of women who voted at the elections demonstrates that men are more likely to vote than women. There is only a single case of Dmanisi when female voters showed slightly higher electoral activity than their male counterparts. On the other hand, women’s participation in the elections ranges from a disturbingly low 21.5 per cent in Marneuli to 51.5 per cent in Dmanisi. On average, however, in the minority-populated areas men are 5.7 per cent more likely to have voted at the 2014 local elections than women. These numbers have to be analysed carefully, however. They reflect the situation in minority populated regions but these regions are not exclusively populated by national minorities. There are ethnic Georgians and they are also part of the statistics. Although the data is not perfect for the purposes of the research, it does still provide an opportunity to have an approximate idea of what the voter turnout may look like among minority women.

Table 1: Electoral Activity of Women in Minority Populated Areas by City

City	Female voters (%)	Female turnout (% of the total)	Male turnout (% of the total)	Female turnout (% of the female voters)	Male turnout (% of the male voters)
Gardabani	52.2	44.7	55.3	31.1	42.1
Marneuli	51.3	32.4	67.6	21.5	47.1
Bolnisi	51.4	46.5	53.5	34.3	41.9
Dmanisi	50.3	50.8	49.2	51.5	50.6
Tsalka	53.1	53.1	46.9	43.7	43.8
Akhalkalaki	57	56.3	43.7	48.2	49.6
Ninotsminda	54.2	53.8	46.2	51.2	52

Source: Adapted from: ბაგრატია, თ., 2015. 2014 წლის ადგილობრივი თვითმმართველობის წარმომადგენლობითი და აღმასრულებელი ორგანოების არჩევნების გენდერული ანალიზი. მოპოვებულია 17 ივლისი, 2015: <http://www.galiskhma.ge/uploads/survey-report-final.pdf>

The analysis of the data provided in the two sections above demonstrates the low level of indirect political participation of minority women even though indirect participation is a more simple form of political activity. This suggests that the direct forms of political participation should be even lower. The data collected over the course of this research confirm this expectation and is analysed below.

3. Direct Forms of Political Participation

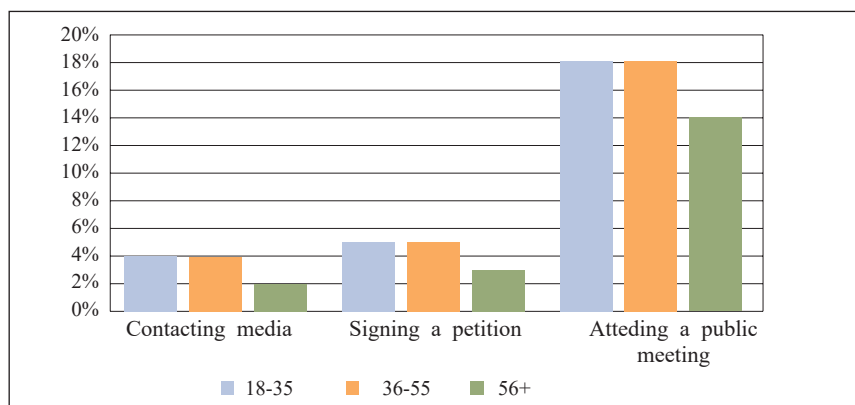
When it comes to direct forms of political participation such as advocacy and participating in elections as a candidate, the situation is exacerbated. The data from focus group interviews suggest an extremely low level of political participation of minority women. The cases when they are involved in activities related to policy advocacy are limited in number and if present are almost exclusively related to formal work that minority women undertake. For example, some research participants are employed at NGOs and because of their type of job sometimes they have to be involved in those advocacy campaigns that the employing organization is conducting. Such a situation is understandable because of the overall low level of political participation in Georgia. Even the analysis of the data about the whole

population of the country suggest that citizens of Georgia are unlikely to be active in politics in direct forms.⁹

Policy advocacy can be measured in various ways but this paper analyses: attendance at a public meeting, signing a petition, and contacting the media. The data of the Caucasus Barometer shows that the level of political participation among Georgian citizens is very low (see chart 2 below).

The survey data suggest that the share of the respondents who had signed a petition including an online one over the six-month period prior to the interview is extremely low at only 4 per cent. The figure is so low that there cannot be any significant difference between age categories or other societal groups. Yet the figure for younger generations stands at 5 per cent while for those over 56 it is at 3 per cent. Moreover, the same goes for contacting media. According to the data, only 4 per cent of the respondents reported to have written a letter or called a newspaper, TV, or radio during the previous six months before the interview. Again, younger generations report a slightly higher figure in comparison to the older generation but the difference is not significant.

Chart 2: Citizens' Policy Advocacy in Georgia in 2013



Source: Adapted from The Caucasus Research Resource Centres, 2013, "Caucasus Barometer". Retrieved through ODA, www.caucasusbarometer.org

⁹ See: Kakhishvili, L., 2015. "Patterns of Participation in Georgia", in M. Sully (ed.), Governance and Participation: the Black Sea. Vienna: Institute of Go-Governance.

Although signing a petition and contacting media is not what many Georgian citizens do, it seems that a more popular activity is attending a public meeting. In fact, an average Georgian citizen is over four times more likely to have attended a public meeting than to have signed a petition or contacted the media. 17 per cent of respondents reported that they had attended a public meeting. Again, the figure for younger generations – aged 18-35 and 36-55 – is four percentage points higher at 18 per cent in each case than that of those aged over 56.

The considered three variables to measure to what extent citizens are engaged in policy advocacy provide an important insight about the practices Georgian citizens adopt. It is clear that the level of engagement among citizens in Georgia is low.

4. Factors Influencing Political Participation of Minority Women

The demonstrated low level of political participation among minority women in Georgia is determined by a set of structural and cultural or behavioural factors. The former includes the type of electoral system in the country, the nature of Georgian political parties – especially the process through which members are recruited, and the lack of state language knowledge among minorities in general and minority women in particular. Moreover, the degree of internal democracy of political parties largely defines who gets selected to become a candidate for the majoritarian elections or who gets on the proportional lists of candidates, especially in leading positions. How this process of selection is conducted may hold the key to understanding why minority women do not tend to find themselves represented in the top positions of the proportional lists. On the other hand, the problems also lie in the degree of readiness of minority women to be actively involved in the affairs of political parties, which refers to the cultural constraints to political participation of this segment of the society. These cultural constraints, as focus group data suggest, include two major factors. First, minority women tend to view politics as a “dirty affair,” of which they do not wish to be a part. Second, even if minority women are willing to participate in active politics, more often than not they experience pressure from their immediate environment, including family members as well as the local community, to suppress their willingness. This pressure is

highly dependent on the gender stereotypes, prejudices and the way men view the role of women in a largely patriarchal society. The following sections examine the influence of these structural and cultural factors on the level of minority women's direct political participation.

4.1. Structural Factors

Structural factors determine the objective reality in which minority women have to operate and represent the institutional aspects of a system that is perilous for the degree of political participation. These factors, however, limit not only the representation of minority women in Georgian politics but also of ethnic Georgian females and other marginalised groups of society. The following sections analyse the electoral system, party recruitment practices and state language knowledge and their influence on the level of political involvement of women belonging to minority communities.

4.1.1. Electoral System

Georgia has a mixed electoral system. There are 150 seats in the legislative organ out of which 77 are elected through proportional lists and the other 73 are elected through a majoritarian system. There is a lot of disagreement among political scientists who study electoral systems which of the two reflects the opinion of the voters better. Normative arguments about electoral systems additionally refer to other important factors as well. Blais (1991)¹⁰ summarizes the advantages of each of the two types of electoral systems as follows: proportional representation systems are accurate and fair, can ensure diversity and responsiveness of the elected, and have a solid basis for legitimacy and order; on the other hand, majoritarian systems ensure strong support for the elected officials, rule out strong extremist parties and also have a strong basis for legitimacy and order. These normative aspects of the proportional and majoritarian election systems along with the specificities of the political culture of a particular country can reveal in what cases marginalized groups can enjoy the opportunities of a higher degree of involvement in active politics.

¹⁰ Blais, A., 1991. "The Debate over Electoral Systems". *International Political Science Review*. Vol. 12. №3, pp: 239-260.

In proportional election systems, it is the political parties that decide the composition of lists, while the voters simply vote for the party of their choice. One can assume that usually, and this is particularly true about the countries with an underdeveloped political culture like in Georgia, most voters are not aware of who the specific personalities are on the list of the party for which they are voting. Therefore, elections run under the proportional system can ensure a higher degree of representation of women, national minorities or other types of marginalized groups in the legislative organ. If political parties decide to include more women or more minorities on their lists, it will be easier for such groups to get into parliament. Assuming that political parties are more advanced in terms of their political education and do agree with the idea that representation has to be diverse and that all groups of society have to be represented in a representative organ, then proportional election systems can help.

On the other hand, proportional representation is not a sufficient condition to ensure female representation, especially when females belong to minority communities. It is necessary to consider the impact of national proportional as opposed to regional proportional representation as well as the specific types of voting systems, e.g. open versus closed lists. There is a general agreement among scholars that regional proportional systems with closed lists are optimal for promoting female representation. This is because regional proportional systems enjoy the benefits of both proportional and majoritarian systems (see below on the benefits of the majoritarian vote) as voters and candidates are closer to each other than in the case of a national proportional system. As for open and closed lists, in patriarchal societies closed lists are more successful in increasing female representation. This is because usually fewer females are nominated when voters are given the opportunity to select their preferred candidates from party lists. On the other hand, closed lists require the political parties to include women on the lists in the first place, which in turn require political parties to be ready and willing to nominate more minority women as their candidates. This discussion leads to the question of whether or not gender quotas are necessary to ensure better female representation.

On the other hand, majoritarian systems, although they ensure a strong connection between voters and elected officials, generally disadvantage minority groups. The reason behind this is that a given constituency will

not vote for a candidate who belongs to a minority community simply because they will not feel the connection that the majoritarian system favours. Furthermore, given the degree of gender-based prejudice and stereotypes it will be harder for women, not to mention women who belong to national minority communities, to win against their male counterparts belonging to the ethnic majority. For example, a study commissioned by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in Georgia in 2013 found that 61 per cent of Georgia's population believes that "men are better political leaders than women" and 66 per cent agrees with the statement that "politics is more appropriate for men than for women."¹¹ Such attitudes are not only limited to politics. In fact, 58 per cent of Georgians think that in general men are better business leaders than women.¹² Similarly, 50 per cent of society agrees with the proposition that "men are usually better at *any activity* [emphasis added] than women".¹³ Given such perceptions of women, it is hard to believe that voters would easily bond with female candidates in order to vote for them. Therefore, the normative advantage of the majoritarian system is capable of hindering women's active direct involvement in politics.

Georgian political parties are aware of this problem, which is why they do hesitate to present a female candidate in majoritarian contests unless they are completely confident that the candidate will win the ballot. As it is usually unlikely for women to win majoritarian elections, political parties have to put their female candidates in the proportional lists. In fact, in the 2012 parliamentary elections, only 28.74 per cent of all candidates from all electoral subjects were female.¹⁴ When examining the share of

¹¹ UNDP Georgia, 2013. "Public Perception of Gender Equality in Politics and Business", Accessed on July 22, 2015: http://www.ge.undp.org/content/dam/georgia/docs/publications/GE_UNDP_Gender_%20Research_ENG.pdf

¹² UNDP Georgia, 2013. "Public Perception of Gender Equality in Politics and Business", Accessed on July 22, 2015: http://www.ge.undp.org/content/dam/georgia/docs/publications/GE_UNDP_Gender_%20Research_ENG.pdf

¹³ UNDP Georgia, 2013. "Public Perception of Gender Equality in Politics and Business", Accessed on July 22, 2015: http://www.ge.undp.org/content/dam/georgia/docs/publications/GE_UNDP_Gender_%20Research_ENG.pdf

¹⁴ OSCE International Elections Observation in Georgia, 2012. "Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions", Accessed on July 22, 2015: <http://www.osce.org/ka/odihr/elections/94617>

female candidates in proportional ballots and majoritarian ballots, the difference between the two electoral systems becomes apparent: only 13.75 per cent of majoritarian candidates were women, while the figure for proportional lists was 31.52 per cent.¹⁵ However, there were a total of only 202 women among the top fifty candidates of the sixteen electoral subjects, which means that on average each political party fielded less than thirteen women in their list out of the top fifty candidates.¹⁶ It has to be noted as well that the UNM fielded only 16 women on their proportional list of 155 candidates with only nine women in the top fifty, while the Georgian Dream (GD) presented 33 women in their proportional list of 200 candidates with eight women in the top fifty.¹⁷ Therefore, “only 6 of the 16 electoral subjects met the voluntary quota, which entitles parties to a 10 per cent higher state subsidy, by including 2 members of the underrepresented gender in each 10 positions on their lists” and neither UNM nor GD was among those six subjects.¹⁸ However, overall, 20 per cent of all candidates fielded in the first positions of proportional lists were women.¹⁹ On the other hand, there were no female candidates at all in the 46.5 per cent of majoritarian districts.²⁰

¹⁵ OSCE International Elections Observation in Georgia, 2012. “Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions”, Accessed on July 22, 2015: <http://www.osce.org/ka/odihr/elections/94617>

¹⁶ ბაგრატი, თ., 2013. „საქართველოს პარლამენტის 2012 წლის 1 ოქტომბრის არჩევნების ანალიზი გენდერულ ჭრილში“. ქალთა ჩართულობის გაძლიერება საქართველოს პოლიტიკურ ცხოვრებაში: ექსპერტული ანალიზის კრებული. მოპოვებულია 12 ივლისი, 2015: http://www.nimd.ge/uploads/files/5318Women_Political_Participation_Expert_Papers_Canda_fund_2013.pdf

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ OSCE International Elections Observation in Georgia, 2012. “Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions”, Accessed on July 22, 2015: <http://www.osce.org/ka/odihr/elections/94617>

¹⁹ ბაგრატი, თ., 2013. „საქართველოს პარლამენტის 2012 წლის 1 ოქტომბრის არჩევნების ანალიზი გენდერულ ჭრილში“. ქალთა ჩართულობის გაძლიერება საქართველოს პოლიტიკურ ცხოვრებაში: ექსპერტული ანალიზის კრებული. მოპოვებულია 12 ივლისი, 2015: http://www.nimd.ge/uploads/files/5318Women_Political_Participation_Expert_Papers_Canda_fund_2013.pdf

²⁰ Ibid.

The causes for such a situation are closely connected to the degree of internal democracy of political parties. Considering that the party system in Georgia is not highly institutionalised, it is understandable why recruitment practices across political parties often lack a procedural framework.

4.1.2. Recruitment Practices

One of the major aspects of internal democracy of political parties is the recruitment of new members as well as the selection of candidates for both majoritarian and proportional elections. The lack of institutional development of Georgian political parties implies that these two procedures are unlikely to be conducted in a way that would favour female candidates.

The major problem with the recruitment and candidate selection processes is that Georgian political parties seem to have no rules of how to undertake these procedures. The party representatives interviewed over the course of this study were not able to provide specific measures of how recruitment is done in their respective parties. The recurring response included an idea that the party does not accept all of those who may want to become a member but that a potential member has to agree with the general ideological line of the party. Although this is not unreasonable, it is hard to grasp this idea because of two major issues. First, more often than not, it is a hard task to identify an ideological line of a Georgian political party. Second, the parties do not seem to have any credible working mechanism to evaluate an ideological stance of a potential member. They mostly rely on the recommendations of existing members. Considering the low level of political participation among minority women, it is hard to imagine how these recommendations are going to increase women's active engagement in politics. As one respondent from a political party stated: *"We have quite a strict system when it comes to accepting new members in the party. The mere fact that someone is willing is insufficient for them to be recruited. They should be in line with the values pursued by the party. ...This emerges in the process after the acceptance of the new member. It has to be seen as a great honour when a citizen is willing and supports you but it is natural that during the working process, if they are clearly against the path taken by the party, of course, there is no room for such a person within the party."*

Consequently, such recruitment practices can be considered to be passive. However, attracting minority women and increasing their engagement requires a more proactive approach from the political parties. Even though representatives of Georgian political parties maintain that the political participation of minorities is an important challenge and that minorities represent an important source of human resources for Georgia, most political parties still remain unlikely to reach out for minority women. The same respondent, however, showed gender-related stereotypes. According to the respondent, it would be an ideal scenario if in all self-governance structures there was a quota for women as heads of social care units because it would be related to *“the caring nature of mothers.”* Such an attitude from politicians, of course, should be unacceptable and political parties need to understand that socially constructed gender roles must not be the basis for division of responsibilities among men and women in politics.

Even though political parties face a lot of challenges, there are a few successful cases. Some parties have women’s councils. However, the importance of these councils varies from party to party. On the other hand, it is hard to judge to what extent these councils do or will benefit women belonging to minorities, as they are targeted at women in general. However, it is perhaps safe to assume that the creation of such councils represents a step forward in the direction of promoting participation of minority women. One of the more successful cases is the United National Movement (UNM). The women’s council in the UNM has fifteen members – one from each regional organization. The council manages a multi-stage process of recruitment. Local organizations select potential candidates, with whom representatives of the central party office conduct trainings to develop and enhance women’s skills as politicians, after which with the help of experts, e.g. psychologists, it is decided which candidates have the most potential as leaders. From the selected candidates the women’s council makes a decision on an all-female list. The order of the women in this list cannot be altered either by the political council or by the chief council. However, the chief council may use its veto power to remove one or more candidates but the argumentation has to be extremely credible. The only issue is how these women will be placed in the final proportional list of the party. However, the members of the women’s council who also are members of the political council serve as lobbyists for their female candidates and try to make sure

they appear as high as possible on the final list. In the case of majoritarian ballots, if the women's council decides to have a female candidate in a district and there is also a male candidate, then the local party organization will have primaries between the two potential candidates. However, according to the representative of the UNM, *"men are always afraid to participate in primaries against women simply because women outnumber men in local party organizations."* The reason for this imbalance, according to the respondent, is that everywhere in Georgia *"men are leaders but at lower levels women are more in numbers, because that is where the job is actually done."* Such a mechanism ensures that women not only formally appear on the lists but are also actively engaged. That is the reason why, according to the respondent, in the last local elections the UNM managed to have forty female members in Sakrebulo, out of whom six won majoritarian ballots. On the other hand, it is perhaps understandable why the UNM has a more elaborated mechanism for increasing women's political engagement – it is a party that served two terms and had both time and resources to develop as an institution. Other parties that are small and/or new may not enjoy the same opportunities but they do need to develop proper mechanisms to promote the participation of women in their ranks.

4.1.3. The Language Barrier

Another objective condition that affects most of the national minorities, especially those living in compact settlements in border regions, and specifically minority women, is the lack of knowledge of the Georgian language. Although young people with higher education tend to have some command of the state language, this still remains an acute problem. There is little recent data about the fluency of minorities in the Georgian language. However, data from the 2008 survey conducted by the European Centre for Minority Issues do not look promising. The share of the minorities in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions who are fluent in the Georgian language is extremely low when persons belonging to minorities live in the so-called non-Georgian environments, i.e. where ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis are in a majority (see Tables 2 and 3 below).

Table 2. Fluency in Georgian amongst Minorities in Four Districts of Kvemo Kartli

Level of Georgian	Gardabani	Marneuli	Dmanisi	Tsalka
No knowledge	24.5%	42.2%	8.1%	19.3%
Can only understand a few basic words	47.0%	35.1%	47.5%	49.5%
Can understand nearly everything but can express only basic needs verbally	14.0%	12.8%	32.3%	22.6%
Can understand and speak well but cannot write	6.9%	6.2%	7.1%	2.8%
Can understand, speak and write fluently	7.7%	3.8%	5.1%	5.7%

Source: Wheatley, J., 2009. "The Integration of National Minorities in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli provinces of Georgia: Five Years into the Presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili". ECMI Working Paper №44. Accessed on: June 29, 2015 http://ecmicaucasus.org/upload/publications/working_paper_44_en.pdf

Table 3. Fluency in Georgian amongst Minorities in Four Districts of Samtskhe-Javakheti

Level of Georgian	Borjomi	Akhaltzikhe	Akhalkalaki	Ninotsminda
No knowledge	0.0%	6.7%	47.2%	28.2%
Can only understand a few basic words	11.9%	28.9%	30.3%	52.6%
Can understand nearly everything but can express only basic needs verbally	4.8%	37.0%	16.5%	14.1%
Can understand and speak well but cannot write	11.9%	3.7%	0.8%	1.3%
Can understand, speak and write fluently	71.4%	23.7%	5.1%	3.8%

Source: Wheatley, J., 2009. "The Integration of National Minorities in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli provinces of Georgia: Five Years into the Presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili". ECMI Working Paper №44. Accessed on: June 29, 2015: http://ecmicaucasus.org/upload/publications/working_paper_44_en.pdf

Despite a number of reforms in the education field (e.g. the “1+4” programme for university entrants, multilingual education, etc.), with an emphasis on state language education, the situation is far from satisfactory. In fact, representatives of political parties point out that it is often difficult for them to find and recruit qualified candidates who know the Georgian language at a satisfactory level. Therefore, knowledge of the state language remains a structural problem for minorities in general to be actively involved in politics.

Finally, although structural circumstances do play a significant role in determining the level of minority women’s political participation, there are other important cultural factors that affect the willingness of minority women to be politically active. Moreover, sometimes there may be willingness from both a political party and a female member of the party to select her as a candidate but certain societal and cultural issues put the prospect under a question mark. Such problems are discussed in the following section.

4.2. Cultural Factors

Structural factors outlined above are not the exclusive cause for the low level of political participation of minority women. Additional reasons for this, as revealed through focus group interviews, lie in the cultural underpinning of the situation. The data suggest that, on the one hand, minority women’s perceptions of politics are extremely negative, which is why they see no point in being involved in what they call “governmental politics”. On the other hand, however, in rare cases when minority women want to participate in politics, although indirectly such as by voting in elections, they experience pressure from their husbands not to get engaged in politics. This is particularly the case with those minority women who do not have a higher education. These two attitudes determine the willingness of minority women and their opportunities to participate in politics.

4.2.1. The Perception and Fear of Politics

First of all, the participants of the focus group discussions identified two types of politics. The first and more important kind of politics refers to what participants called “governmental politics” and was viewed almost exclusively negatively. The second type of politics was labelled as “public

politics” and was viewed much more positively. Governmental politics includes the activities of politicians and political parties, while public politics refers to the activities of civic society. In other words, the participants defined politics in its broad sense but made this distinction for the purpose of evaluating normative aspects of the two. As one participant from Kvemo Kartli put it: *“Why do people go into politics? The idealised goal is that politicians should work on the protection of people, identify problems and solve them. Right now I am working at an NGO and I think I can be of better use here than if I go into politics when I may not even get a chance to speak my mind because of some limitations [of party membership]. ... If there were any results possible to achieve through politics, why not, but our politics [in Georgia] is not like that.”*

Another participant aged 24 also discussed her opinion about being involved in governmental politics: *“When I was a student I wasn’t interested in politics at all because I had heard so many bad things about it. So I wanted to continue my work in the field of education. There are so many problems in education so we have to start from here.”*

Consequently, the perception of governmental politics in many ways plays a decisive role in determining whether minority women are willing to get involved in active politics. Overall, perceptions associated with governmental politics can be classified into seven categories: power, conflict, deceit, money, interstate relations, actors, and other, which were named by participants as “nothing good.” Power was associated with politics negatively as it is perceived as one of the primary goals of those involved in politics. In this category there were associations such as public office, influence, personal authority, and state authority. These associations were described as manipulation of those who hold less or no power at all. The category of conflict included arguments and scandals, which were also viewed negatively. These associations were an illustration for the research participants of the fact that people involved in governmental politics have to be ruthless towards their peers and also be ready to face defamation. Similarly, deceit, according to the participants, was an integral part of governmental politics. They described how they perceive politicians have to act and assumed that those involved in governmental politics are like actors faking their feelings and trying to deceive people around them. Gambling, double-dealing and lack of trust were all suggested to be characterizations

of political processes. As one participant argued, *“a politician has to be a double-dealer; if you are naive you can’t become a politician.”* Yet another participant argued for the destructive effect of the involvement in governmental politics on one’s own integrity: *“I don’t want to go into politics, because everything’s artificial and politics can ruin my inner self.”* Other strongly negative associations fall under the category of “nothing good”: dirty affairs, personal interests and nepotism, these were all associated with governmental politics.

Relatively neutral and in rare cases positive associations included money, business and economy. However, money and protection and/or expansion of one’s own business were viewed as a reason why some people enter governmental politics. This makes these associations negative. Actors in politics, i.e. politicians and political parties were also named among the associations and can be considered neutral ones but judging from what the participants said about the nature of politics, they become a part of the “dirty affair” which also damages the reputation of political actors. Finally, the only positive association about governmental politics fell under the category of interstate relations and it was peace, meaning that politics should serve as the means to achieve peace among states. Other associations under the same category included NATO and the European Union. Some of the participants reported changing their opinion about politics over time: *“five years ago I didn’t think so [negatively of politics], when I was a student I really wanted to be actively involved in different processes but in reality everything goes differently [than one can imagine] and you don’t want to participate any more. Only you and your friends will not be able to change anything, everything’s already set in a way that all your opinions do not matter and then you don’t want to do anything. ... The change was caused by just living in Georgia and by seeing what is happening in reality. The things that happen around you affect your opinion. Even though it may not be possible for a person to achieve their goals without being involved in partisan activities, I don’t really want to become a member or an activist of any party.”*

Such experiences demonstrate the high degree of frustration and disillusionment of minority women about politics. They do not feel that governmental politics is a way of changing the social environment around them. Rather they see governmental politics as a way to gain personal benefits

and wealth. Therefore, those who do not consider themselves selfish and oriented exclusively towards their personal interest are not willing to have anything to do with the “dirty affairs” of governmental politics.

While such associations were recurrent across the Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti participants, there was one more factor that was reported in Samtskhe-Javakheti to have influenced the readiness of ethnic Armenians in general to be involved in politics either directly or indirectly. The research participants from this region talked about fear that they argued prevented them from being active in political affairs. The fear of political repression has seemingly been playing an important role in the political lives of these ethnic Armenians. The participants reported that there is fear, particularly of the political authorities, and that people do not have an opportunity to express their opinions simply because “everyone is afraid.” Explaining why and of whom ethnic Armenians are afraid, one young lady said: *“This is a very delicate question and it is impossible to say that you are afraid of someone specific. People are generally scared. If for example she complains about something with someone, she will be afraid that the next day the whole town will know about it, including those in a position of power. And she has a husband, children, relatives, so she will be scared for them. Besides, such complaints are not going to help anyway. People are frustrated so why speak up? Isn't it better to keep silent? Keep silent and live along. The only thing we are told when we complain is to leave: there [Armenia], go if you are complaining about anything.”*

The participants were unanimous about the idea of fear and its influence on people's willingness, or lack thereof, to simply talk about problematic issues. Therefore, they argued that it is highly unlikely for them to participate in any protest actions or demonstrations. Nevertheless, the participants reported holding a peaceful demonstration commemorating the centennial of the Armenian genocide of 1915. Regarding the genocide issue, the interviewed experts reported that government institutions have been interested in knowing who supports and demands the recognition of the Armenian genocide from the Georgian government. There allegedly has been at least one specific case of investigation of the motives of the author of a petition asking the government of Georgia to recognize the genocide.

4.2.2. Gender Prejudice and Stereotypes

Apart from the perception of politics and the fear factor that national minorities may be experiencing, gender prejudice further hinders women's involvement in politics. There were two patterns emerging from the focus group discussions about the influence of gender prejudice on minority women's political participation. First, gender prejudice seems to be more vivid in the Kvemo Kartli region in comparison to the Samtskhe-Javakheti region (although one representative of political parties argued the opposite²¹). However, the latter is not free from the negative influence of stereotypes on minority women and their opportunities for political engagement. Second, minority women without higher education tend to be more affected by gender prejudice and socially constructed gender roles than minority women with higher education.

Minority women from Kvemo Kartli reported about "family conditions" that determine whether they will go to vote in the elections or not. These conditions have various aspects. Some participants reported about their husbands not wanting them to leave home on Election Day. Others explained their behaviour with the lack of time on the specific day due to the amount of housework. Considering the overall frustration with politics, it is understandable why these women will not challenge the views of their husbands about the importance of voting or find time during the Election Day to vote. Moreover, women without higher education tend to perceive politics as a field for men's activity, which is an additional layer of reasons why they are reluctant to be politically active, even if it takes as little effort as voting.

There were three major reasons suggested by the research participants to argue why politics is not for women. First, the participants supposed that women have to take care of the family and there is simply not enough time to be involved in politics because both of these take up a lot of time and it is extremely difficult to combine the two. Second, politics seems

²¹ According to this respondent, the respective party had problems finding women to formally include in the proportional lists just to meet a gender quota, while in Kvemo Kartli young and educated women are so active that they have multiple candidates for the same position. The respondent could not explain the reasons behind this difference.

to be “scary” for some minority women. And finally, research participants emphasised the difference between men and women in their “ways of thinking,” which for them implies that women cannot be as successful in politics as men or at least most of the women cannot.

Gender roles seem to be strongly embedded in the worldviews of the research participants. For them, it is exclusively a woman who assumes the role of the family person in order to take care of housework and children. As one participant suggested, *“for women it [being active in politics] is difficult because a woman will have to refuse to have a family in order to be involved in politics. It just takes too much time.”* Consequently, when it comes to a choice between family and politics, minority women will choose family.

Some participants perceived politics as “scary” for women. Such an attitude, perhaps, deters minority women from thinking about political participation: *“Politics is a bit scary, you have to think about everything and you will have lots of enemies.”* Avoiding “enemies” is important for minority women because of their views on the nature of women. Research participants claimed that women are weaker and have a different way of thinking: *“Women are weaker, men have to be men, and women have to be women. Women are weaker even physically. Mathematics is for men too. Scientists, mathematicians are always men.”* One participant argued that there are no female scientists in the world because of the way women are and that it is all about nature.

Although politics is viewed as a man’s world, minority women do accept the idea that there can be particular women who can be successful politicians. However, the explanation for such a phenomenon, according to their view, is that these women are more like men than women. However, if a woman is like a man, then, participants, claim that she will be even better: *“Men and women can never be equal. Only particular women can be like men and they will be even better than men. Remember Queen Tamar, Catherine the Great, etc.”* Consequently, the research participants accept the idea that it is possible to be involved in politics but also maintain that such a career path is not for every woman because successful female politicians are more “like men not like women.”

On another note, however, there are sometimes cases when minority women are indeed willing to actively participate in politics but they face preju-

dice from the members of their families, especially from husbands. One respondent representing a political party reported about several cases when she had supported minority women as potential candidates in local elections but the women's husbands were not willing to let their wives become politicians for various reasons, including the possible lack of time or availability of men for the same positions. The respondent described how she had to travel to the regions in order to discuss the matter with the husbands. Although it seems possible to change the opinion of men about women's political participation, these cases emphasize an important aspect. It is insufficient only to reach out for women while men maintain their prejudices and the best strategy is to work with both women and men and explain to them why it is important to have more women in politics.

One final aspect of women's involvement in politics is again connected to frustration, but in a different light, which is more related to gender roles than to the nature of politics. The research participants tended to make a distinction between two types of female politicians and the way they are involved in politics. First, it can be quality involvement and this is the case of the "manlike" women who either refuse families or somehow miraculously manage to combine politics and family. Second, a more interesting view was held by women who happen to be involved in politics solely on the basis of the reason that they are women. The participants were aware of gender mainstreaming in politics and that it is necessary to publicise that there are women public officials, women politicians, etc. As one participant put it, *"when women are appointed to public office they are all puppets."* Minority women take it as a personal insult to see women in politics who are not in fact doing much and have simple "decorative" purposes.

As a result, it is clear that cultural factors influence the willingness and readiness of minority women to participate in politics. The negative image of politics seems to be so widespread among minority women that it influences to what extent they want to be part of what they call a "dirty affair," while the fear factor in Samtskhe-Javakheti directly affects minority women and their willingness to complain about their problems openly. On the other hand, gender prejudice, held both by minority women themselves as well as their community, and leads them to thinking that politics is not their business and that they had better leave it to men because it is more "natural" that way.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The research has demonstrated an alarmingly low level of minority women's political participation. Judging from the focus group discussions, minority women are mostly involved only in political discussions and their level of political participation does not go far beyond. However, even this is affected by gender prejudice. The reasons for the low degree of involvement are two-fold: structural and cultural. Structural factors include the type of electoral system, political parties as institutions, and their practices, and the lack of knowledge of the state language. Cultural factors represent the other side of the coin and refer to minority women's perception of politics, the extent of fear to speak up about their own problems, and gender prejudice, which convinces minority women that they have to take care of their families and that this is incompatible with a career in the field of politics.

Judging from the situation that persists in terms of the level of minority women's political participation, there are several types of action that could be undertaken by various stakeholders in order to improve the overall picture.

Electoral Systems and Political Parties

- The type of elections can play a decisive role in undermining minority women's representation in politics. The research showed that majoritarian election systems are more perilous for the possibility of increasing minority women's political participation. Therefore, it is important to change the electoral system and adopt regional proportional elections with closed lists. This would increase representation of minority women in the legislature and at the same time keep close ties between voters and their elected MPs. Additionally, a regional proportional system would increase representation of other marginalized groups in the society.
- Political parties play an important role in determining the degree of political participation of minority women. If the parties are not ready and open for this segment of society, the efforts coming from minority women will be mostly pointless. Therefore, political parties should reach out for minority women, recruit them, and include them in their electoral lists.

- Political parties should refine and institutionalize their recruitment practices. This will be useful for parties in general and in particular for minority women who are willing to get involved in active politics. It is only through institutional development that parties can become more democratic in nature and more competitive from within, which in its turn will give active and motivated minority women institutional mechanisms to become successful party members. For example, amending party statutes and adopting voluntary gender quotas may prove extremely efficient in promoting minority women's representation. Often, such an approach from political parties can lead to a higher degree of female representation, without additional regulations. A successful case in this regard is Belgium, where good-faith compliance of political parties is the primary mechanism of ensuring female representation. Coupled with a regional proportional, closed list electoral system, party compliance can guarantee a higher degree of minority women's political participation.
- Political parties should establish special mechanisms to promote women and especially minority women within their ranks. Such mechanisms may include one-to-one mentorship, skills-based trainings, institutions that would lobby the interests of minority women within the particular party and outreach organizations for recruiting more females in minority populated regions. With such clearly defined institutional frameworks, it will be easier to protect the interests of minority women once they are members of a party.
- Gender quotas for women are often viewed in negative terms including by the respondents and participants of this research. Therefore, making gender quotas for women on the national level may be counterproductive. However, political parties should have their own self-imposed gender quotas encouraging minority and other women's active participation. In the case of adopting mandatory gender quotas, however, it is necessary to ensure that the rules are clear and straightforward, that there are sanctions in case of non-compliance and that elected women are not treated as second-class citizens.

State Language Knowledge

- National minorities still suffer from a lack of knowledge of the state language. Although there have been many programmes implemented by the government, the results are still far from satisfactory. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct evaluative policy studies to have a clear idea about which programmes have worked and which have not and then direct the limited available resources to those programmes that have yielded the highest results.
- Political parties should pay attention to national minorities and, given the lack of knowledge of the state language in many cases, parties should feel responsible to translate their programmes and other promotional materials into minority languages.

Gender Prejudice and Stereotypes

- Issues related to gender equality are very complex and it is no surprise that ordinary people have prejudices and stereotypes. However, the internalization of gender equality is an important step to make for many political parties and their members. Parties and their members should be aware that socially constructed gender roles do not represent a credible basis for sharing responsibilities among men and women. To this end, gender-sensitive trainings for political parties will be important; equally important will be identifying and condemning sexist statements that politicians might sometimes employ so that the gender sensitivity of politicians increases over time.
- Gender prejudice is often a hindrance for minority women's political participation. Cooperation between all important actors, i.e. the government of Georgia, donor organizations, civil society organizations, etc., is necessary to tackle the issue. However, the target group should be not only minority women but also their male counterparts.
- Success stories of minority women who have established themselves as leaders are important to affect the popular attitude that national minorities cannot be successful and that women cannot be leaders or politicians. In this regard, the role of media is important:

identifying successful minority women and publicising their work will contribute to a shift in the mainstream attitude among the public. Moreover, providing opportunities to raise a new generation of such women is no less important: trainings for girls in minority communities to develop their leadership skills or internship programmes for them within political parties, in parliament or at local governance institutions, will contribute to achieving this goal.

Perceptions

- Minority women are frustrated with politics, which determines their willingness to participate. This perception should be changed by cooperation between the authorities, donors, NGOs, and political parties. Awareness raising campaigns and projects dedicated to developing political culture should be implemented.
- Minority issues in Georgia should be removed from the security discourse and de-securitized. Viewing minorities as a potential threat to national security or territorial integrity contributes to the fear under which minority communities live. Such fear in turn prevents minorities from being willing to actively participate in politics. De-securitization of minority issues will additionally benefit society at large and make ethnic Georgians more accepting of minorities.

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SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STANDING OF NATIONAL MINORITIES IN GEORGIA

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1. Introduction

According to Article 31 of the Constitution of Georgia, the state shall ensure the equal socio-economic development of the country's whole territory. Article 2.3 of the Labour Code of Georgia prohibits any kind of discrimination in labour relations based on race, skin colour, language or ethnic and national affiliation. Discrimination is qualified as a direct or indirect oppression of a person with the goal of creating a hostile, degrading or humiliating environment or else creating conditions that would make the standing of the person inferior to that of other persons in similar conditions (Article 2.4), with the exception of cases when inequality of treatment is conditioned by the essence of the performed duty and is serving the lawful goal (Article 2.5). According to the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Ljubljana Guidelines for successful societal integration, it is essential that all members of the society equally participate in social and economic life. OSCE member states shall provide every individual, regardless of their ethnic origin, with the means to enjoy equal opportunities to participate and contribute to the economy and benefit from the resources and shared wealth of the country.¹

Surveys² show that the economic condition of national minorities in Georgia is poor and employment barriers exist in both private and public sectors.

¹ Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies: Publisher: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); Date 7 November 2012: <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/96883?download=true>

² Gogsadze G., Kachkachishvili I., Basheleishvili L.: Integration of Minorities in Georgia: Main Challenges and Opportunities, (example of Javakheti) Levan Mikeladze Foundation, January 2014: http://www.mikeladzefoundation.org/multimedia/ups/1/Minority_Integration_in_Georgia_geo__Levan_Mikeladze_Foundation.pdf

The issue of poverty in Kvemo Kartli is most acute in Marneuli, Bolnisi, and Gardabani regions, in the localities of highest concentration of ethnically Azeri population.³

According to the study⁴ carried out in the South Caucasus with the financial support of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Office, economic conditions are also unfavourable in Javakheti, a region populated with Armenians, conditioned by lack of skilled labour force, linguistic divide barring entry to public administration, scarcity of private sector opportunities and nepotism. Language related barriers and limited access to new business information impairs competitiveness of local businessmen, as they fail to expand and compete with large non-local industries. Significant part of the population, men in particular, is facing economic hardship and migrating to Russia for labour.

According to the most recent data by the National Statistics Office of Georgia, in Samtskhe-Javakheti (see Table 1) and Kvemo Kartli (see Table 2), economic turnover is the highest (GEL, millions) in the processing industry, trade, maintenance of motor cars, household appliances and personal belongings repair sectors. Comparatively lower are the figures for the agriculture, education, healthcare, welfare, and personal services' sectors. Many more people are employed in sectors with higher indicators in Kvemo Kartli, then in the same sectors in Samtskhe-Javakheti (see Table 3).

According to the most recent data by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (see Table 4), the highest wages in Kvemo Kartli are being paid in mining and processing industries, energy generation and distribution, gas and water production and distribution sectors.

According to the statistics of the National Statistics Office of Georgia, distribution of wages in Samtskhe-Javakheti is similar to Kvemo Kartli: by economic sectors, highest wages are being paid, electric energy generation, natural gas and water production and distribution, as well as in the construction and processing sectors (see Table 5).

³ Institute of Social Studies and Analysis, 2012, Study of Social and Economic Condition and Public Sentiment among Population of Kvemo Kartli, Universali Publishing House, 2012

⁴ Gogsadze G., Kachkachishvili I., Basheleishvili L. Ibid.

The study carried out within the scope of the following Policy Paper aims to establish the main employment fields and employment related difficulties in minority populated regions; also, to demonstrate to what degree information on employment and state programs is available and, finally, what are the prospects of developing an employment sector in these regions.

2. Methodology

In order to study the social and economic standing of national minorities in Georgia qualitative research methodology has been applied, including analysis of secondary sources – in particular legislation (desk research), focus groups and in-depth interviews. Secondary sources have been studied first, conditioning discussion topics for focus groups. Since the target group of the survey was represented by ethnic Azeris and Armenians living in Georgia, focus groups were planned in two central cities of the most tightly minority-populated regions – Marneuli for Kvemo Kartli and Akhalkalaki for Samtskhe-Javakheti.

Four focus groups were conducted overall – two in Akhalkalaki and two in Marneuli. Each of the groups was made up of eight participants of a diverse social and demographic background. The target audience has been divided into two age categories – 18 to 40 years of age and 41 to 65 years of age. In order to retain heterogeneity of the group participants, apart from age categories, selection was based on education level (secondary, vocational, higher) and employment status (employed, unemployed) as well. Focus group discussion lasted for approximately hour and a half and was audio-recorded. Following deciphering of the audio recordings and processing of the materials, ensuing proper analysis, the follow-up stage was planned for, incorporating seven in-depth interviews with members of political parties (one respondent from each of the parties). Locally, in Marneuli and Akhalkalaki, six in-depth interviews were conducted with local authorities (chairperson of the Sakrebulo (local council), chairperson of Gamgeoba (local authority), Economic and Infrastructure Development Office, Social Security and Labour Office, Analysis and Public Relations Office, Economic Development and Municipal Property Management Office); one interview with a local business representative (Akhalkalaki); three interviews with local non-governmental sector representatives and

one interview with a representative of Kvemo Kartli regional Office of the Ministry of Agriculture. A total of eighteen interviews have been conducted. Audio-recording and transcript of each of the interviews have been prepared, serving as the basis for content-analysis.

3. Review of Current Legislative Framework

European Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities⁵ – was adopted in Strasbourg in 1995 and ratified by the Parliament of Georgia in October, 2005. Prior to restoration of territorial unity of Georgia, the Convention extends only to territories under direct jurisdiction of the central Government of Georgia.

As per Clause 1 of Article 4 of the Convention, Parties undertake to guarantee to persons belonging to national minorities the right of equality before the law and of equal protection of the law. Thus, any kind of discrimination based on ethnic affiliation is prohibited. According to the Clause 2 of the same Article, the Parties undertake to adopt, where necessary, adequate measures in order to promote, in all areas of economic, social, political and cultural life, full and effective equality between persons belonging to a national minority and to the majority. In this respect, they shall take due account of the specific conditions of the persons belonging to national minorities.

By virtue of Article 15 of the European Framework Convention, The Parties shall create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social, and economic life and in public affairs.

State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2015-2020⁶ – With regards to national minorities, Georgian Government has elaborated a five-year long strategic Action Plan in pursuit of enhancement of civic equality and integration, in order to enable citizens of Georgia, regardless of their

⁵ European Framework Directive for the Protection of National Minorities (ratified by the Parliament of Georgia on October 13, 2005, by virtue of Resolution №1938-II): <http://www.diversity.ge/files/files/ec-157-geo.pdf>

⁶ State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration, Action Plan 2015-2020, Tbilisi, August 2015: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2958879>

ethnic origin, to participate in political and social life, and the country's economic and democratic development. One of the interim goals of the Strategy is to provide national minorities with equal social and economic conditions and opportunities.

The Action Plan highlights that the legislation of Georgia guarantees social and economic equality for every citizen, however, due to certain reasons (lack of knowledge of the State language, geographic location of the region, low level of social and political involvement) there is some risk of national minorities finding themselves in unequal conditions from the standpoint of the ability to enjoy economic rights and benefit from social policies. The very reason for the Strategy is to provide for specific actions towards that end.

Within the scope of the Action Plan and Strategy for 2015-2020, higher priority is being assigned to social and economic programs of the kind that would enhance communication between national minorities with the Georgian-speaking population and state authorities, making the system of social services more available. In order to achieve the interim Goal of the Strategy for 2015-2020 (Establishment of Equal Social and Economic Conditions and Opportunities), the following two tasks are provided for:

- Enhancement of social and regional mobility. With this goal in mind, in national minorities populated regions, the infrastructure should be developed and employment opportunities supported, as well as access to information (in a language they understand) on social programs and services provided by the state (2.1 On Support of Social and Regional Mobility).
- Support of professional development and life-long education, enhancing national minorities' adaptation ability for the labour market and eventually, employment. In pursuit of the said goal, the Strategy for 2015-2020 provides for expansion of vocational education institutions' network and provision of high-quality vocational education. Apart from that, according to the Strategy, it is important to provide different professional groups of the adult population with State language education, applying methodology conditioned to fulfil the needs of those groups; it is also important to carry out professional programs aiming at economic development of the region appropriate for the labour market (2.2 Professional Development and Adult Education).

4. Study Findings

4.1. Current Social-economic Situation in Akhalkalaki and Marneuli

4.1.1. Main Employment Sectors and Employment-related Hurdles in National Minority Populated Regions

Focus groups with local population

Akhalkalaki respondents assessed the social and economic standing of Samtskhe-Javakheti as difficult. Due to lack of employment, the local population is forced to leave the region and migrate for labour abroad, to Russia, mainly. *“Not everybody can afford to go to Russia; many citizens of Georgia lost their citizenship in order to be able to go to Russia. Even if they do come back, they can’t stay for longer than three months.”⁷ Also, with regards to employment, I would like to note that in order to get a job in Akhalkalaki, you should be well connected. If you have somebody, consider yourself employed, regardless of the fact whether you are qualified or can speak the language”* (Akhalkalaki, woman of the 18-40 age group).

According to Akhalkalaki respondents, the main employment sectors in Akhalkalaki are schools, kindergartens, administrative bodies and trade – selling their own or third-party produce in the market; a small portion of the population owns shops. Other employment opportunities named by the respondents were the police, university, banks, and the hospital, employing, mainly, workforce from Tbilisi and Aspindza, as, according to the interviewed, they are well-skilled and have good knowledge of Georgian language. *“Jobs are taken up by the outsiders and there is no more employment for locals. Newcomers have Georgian education and find jobs easily”* (Akhalkalaki, man of the 18-40 age group).

In the opinion of young respondents, political views often condition employment opportunities: *“my wife’s relative was supporting his man at the elections, and after the elections, since they knew who was whose man; he failed to find a job”* (Akhalkalaki, man of the 18-40 age group).

⁷ By virtue of Governmental Decree №255 of June 5, 2015, citizens of 94 countries (Russian Federation included) are granted entry and one year long stay in Georgia: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2867361>

Another barrier to their employment mentioned by Akhalkalaki residents were investors mainly engaging their own personnel in the projects carried out in the region. The majority of the respondents considered it as a problem requiring some solution. It has been noted that they are ready to discuss the issue, but do not know with whom, as they do not trust local authorities enough, believing that the Akhalkalaki government will not help them. *“What government are we talking about here, we have even paid for roofing from our own pockets; there is no government in Akhalkalaki”* (Akhalkalaki, man, age group of 41-65).

Marneuli respondents also mention a high level of labour migration in the region. Locals are mainly going to Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Russia. However, in their opinion too, the migration process has become more complicated of late. It's much more expensive for them to go to Azerbaijan nowadays, while moving to Russia is harder because of the tensions between Russia and Georgia and introduction of visas.

According to Marneuli respondents, because of the economic hardships, the population of Kvemo Kartli is often borrowing money from banks, quite often pledging their own houses and cars, too, and, when failing to pay up, is losing their property. According to older residents of Marneuli, young people are frequenting casinos in the hope of winning money.

In the opinion of Marneuli respondents, there are no openings fit for Marneuli residents. According to their information, most of the vacancies are opening in the Marneuli House of Justice and banks. Just like in Akhalkalaki, these jobs are being taken up by people coming from Tbilisi, as, in the opinion of the respondents, locals do not have the required qualifications and sufficient knowledge of the Georgian language. Among the sectors with highest employment farming, animal husbandry and trade were named, however, even in these sectors there are certain problems experienced by population of Kvemo Kartli in relation to the issue of distribution of land in the region. *“There are two potential places for employment in the village – the village school, employing up to 30 teachers at most, and ‘Gamgeoba’ (local municipality), if the village does have one. They say there are problems in animal husbandry too. There are no pastures, because there are problems with the land. Land issues are a headache both for the peasant and the state. Because of the unemployment, youngsters are leaving the country, the country is losing specialists. They go to Azerbaijan mainly,*

but going there is no longer reasonable, it is too expensive in there, people are hiring accommodation, more than a half of their income is wasted on that. There is no stability in Turkey, and Russia is economically squeezed too” (Marneuli, man of the 18-40 age group).

Older respondents in Marneuli report that there are some in the region owning more than 100 hectares of land and some whose land plots are less than one. According to them, back when the land was being distributed, being informed was what counted. Those who learned about the Law on Land in time, did apply timely, those who remained ignorant, or could not act quickly were left landless. Marneuli respondents shared their opinion as to possible solutions as well. *“It might be solved, – let’s say, those who have 100 hectares of land, they should give up say, 20 hectares of it, sell or something. Here’s the job for the government. For example, there are places that have not yet been privatized. Municipal and local authorities should study social condition of the population and distribute land plots based on need. But there is not only that, the Ministry of Economy has this general rule that land tax is 100 GEL, add to that tillage and irrigation expenses that come separately, that will amount to 1,000 GEL that one would need to lease the land and work it. Whence the poor peasant would bring 1,000 GEL from? Or retiree? You should not forget also that profit, the harvest you might get, is very meagre, or it even might get ruined by the hailstorm. I personally had a land plot in lease that I worked, and there was one year when I had to use my own salary to pay the land tax. I did not gain anything then. There are thousands of hectares of land, very fertile land, not worked at all. If it were distributed among peasants, they would have worked that land, and so agriculture would have prospered” (Marneuli, man of the 41-65 age group).*

Marneuli respondents also mentioned water issues. According to them, if there were no water related problems in Kvemo Kartli, there would be more motivation and opportunities to work the land. Respondents do not believe the state will be able to establish factories and plants to employ people, and so see at least a partial solution to their problems in farming. But given high taxes and general poverty of the region, land and water related problems remain acute, unless the state changes something – for instance, lowering taxes.

Apart from farming, respondents see employment opportunities in development of small business as well; however, the existing system of fines restricts them considerably. They would wish for a freer environment, to be established, naturally, with the support of the state. According to the respondents, small business is underdeveloped in Kvemo Kartli, the reasons being: too much bureaucracy, fines, high taxes and complicated procedure of borrowing from banks.

Interviews with local governmental sector of Akhalkalaki

According to Akhalkalaki local authorities, the main income for local population comes from working their own land. Hence, local authorities consider agricultural development as the main way to improve the economic condition of the population, pointing out an ongoing process of rehabilitation of the irrigation system as one of the steps towards that end. As noted by the personnel of the Gamgeoba (local municipality) the irrigation network of the region is outdated, failing to deliver water to the fields in adequate quantity, but the process of restoration is advancing gradually.

As explained by Akhalkalaki self-governance representatives the main agricultural plant cultivated in the region is potato, however, sales are not high: farmers have to look for potential buyers, as there is no organized system of sales. Apart from that, local produce has to compete against imported potatoes, making sales even harder. According to self-governance representatives, the problem might be solved by the state purchasing local potatoes for its own structures, such as the army or to feed the inmates in penitentiary institutions. The chairperson of Akhalkalaki Sakrebulo (local council) indicated that negotiations on giving local produce preference in state tenders are already taking place.

In the view of Akhalkalaki self-governance representatives, employment problem is quite acute in the region. Labour migration is quite high, especially to Russia. Self-governance representatives consider local unemployment and higher income opportunities abroad as the main reasons causing labour migration.

Apart from agriculture and small business, in the opinion of self-governance representatives, employment opportunities in the region are created by considerably large-scale construction works, such as expansion of the motorway network and the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku railway

construction. However, as has become evident through focus group work, more often than not these jobs are not available to the locals, as the tender-winning companies bring in their own personnel. This trend is especially evident when the tender is won by the company originating from the capital or another region of the country or some foreign company. According to self-governance representatives, this problem is hard to solve, and, regardless of the fact that self-governance is always recommending to winning companies allocating appropriate quotas to employ locals, there is no legal leverage to have the practice implemented. Apart from that local government representatives note that even when locals are being employed, their labour rights are not protected, leading to different issues, including backdated wages etc., though interviews with self-governance representatives did testify to the fact that qualifications of the local population are not up to scratch and additional training would be in order – as locals acquire technical skills mainly in an ad hoc manner. Apart from that, the younger generation is less interested in skills of this kind and local specialists are, mainly, older people.

In the opinion of the respondents, lack of education and knowledge of the State language significantly impedes job-seekers in pursuit of paid jobs. At the same time, according to Akhalkalaki self-governance representatives, younger people currently doing their studies in higher educational institutions aren't acquiring professions that would find them employment locally; whilst the region is in need of veterinarians, engineers, teachers, craftsmen (electric welders, electricians etc.), majority of young people go for professions like economists or lawyers. More so, those graduating in Tbilisi rarely come back. As a consequence, Akhalkalaki self-government representatives believe it feasible to have a vocational education institution locally, caring for education and professional development of local manpower.

Interviews with non-government sector representatives of Akhalkalaki

Akhalkalaki non-governmental sector representatives believe the economic standing of the region to be quite grave. In their opinion, majority of the population is burdened with different types of bank loans, but because of the failure in business or farming they fail to pay up and lose their property. Locals fail to find employment in construction sector as well, as construction companies are importing their own personnel; hence the level of labour migration is quite high.

In the opinion of business sector from Akhalkalaki, the main reason causing social and economic problems is isolation of Samtskhe-Javakheti from the centre. Due to the lack of representation of regional interests in central political structures, the central government is less informed about local needs, and the Samtskhe-Javakheti region is not considered a priority. Apart from that, in the opinion of the respondents, additional problems are posed by lack of communication with central governmental structure. Due to the lack of personal connections the attitude toward Akhalkalaki officials is more formal in comparison to other regions. In the opinion of those interviewed, the isolation from the centre is one of the main factors preventing the region from keeping pace with innovations in agriculture and industry.

According to representatives of the business sector, mainly trade-oriented small and medium businesses are developed in Akhalkalaki, while local traditional agriculture and crafts fall short of modern standards. Among factors hindering development of the local processing industry one of the respondents named lack of business-education. At the same time, according to the representatives of the business sector, locals shy from registering as individual entrepreneurs as they are unsure of their footing in filling out forms in Georgian, aggravated by the fact there very few accountants in the region skilled in operating electronic financial systems.

Business and non-governmental sectors' representatives from Akhalkalaki stress the lack of a professional workforce in the region. According to them, the region is in need of accountants with modern education, as well as agricultural professionals (veterinaries, agronomists, machinery operators, and so on). Non-governmental sector representatives note that the State should provide the youth with incentives to select professions in higher demand in the region rather than going for trendy professions. However, it has also been noted by respondents that those of the students who have received their higher education in Tbilisi and came back are not left unemployed either – thanks to their knowledge of the Georgian language they usually get employed in schools and self-governance.

Within the scope of the current study, meetings were held with representatives of non-governmental organizations engaged in life-long education and professional development programs and public awareness issues. It should be noted that in Akhalkalaki, there is Zurab Zhvania State School, providing trainings for public servants and offering courses in Georgian language

among other subjects. According to respondents, universally available educational courses of a different kind (both pre-school and school age and life-long education) are mainly offered by independent non-governmental organizations that depend on grants. Consequently, once the program funding is over, the project is also interrupted. Lack of sustainability was indicated as inherent to state-organized projects too. For instance, a bilingual Georgian-Armenian program for kindergartens was named as an example in Akhalkalaki – initiated by non-governmental sector, taken up by the state and then stopped.

Interviews with local governmental sector of Marneuli

Agriculture was named as the main income source for the population by representatives of governmental sector in Marneuli. Respondents believe that, compared to every other region of Georgia, agriculture is better developed and social and economic conditions are more favourable. According to representatives of Marneuli self-governance, selling is not a problem either, as agricultural produce, – fruit, vegetables and so on, – is usually purchased in Marneuli wholesale. Cross-border trade is also well-developed. Nevertheless, unemployment and labour migration are still acute problems. On the other hand, respondents indicated the problem of land registration, in particular, complications related to the Public Registry due to language barriers and misspellings of place names and private names in documents.⁸

The issue of local employment in construction projects in the region is specifically acute in Akhalkalaki, and is considered less pressing by Marneuli self-governance representatives. Implementing companies might bring in some specialists for specific tasks, but the main workforce is still hired locally. On another hand, it has been noted that here as well, there are no legal levers at the disposal of the authorities, confining themselves with verbal recommendations.

According to Marneuli self-government representatives, factors hindering paid employment include both lack of education and poor knowledge of the State language. On the other hand, a lack of people with specific skills

⁸ Land registration procedures have been simplified by the law enacted on 1st of August, 2016. Apart from that, appropriate service of the House of Justice offers citizens correction of measurement mistakes free of charge.

was also noted, for instance, there are no agronomists and other agricultural specialties in sufficient numbers. Apart from that, according to respondents, while new technologies are being implemented in agriculture, there are no operators capable of using them in the region. Consequently, professional development courses for personnel employed in the field would be required. The best solution, in the opinion of self-governance representatives would be to establish branches of Technical and Agricultural Universities in Marneuli. The desirability of establishing a tailored vocational education institution was also stressed.

Interview with local non-government sector representatives of Marneuli

Labour migration was considered a problem also by non-governmental sector representative. The main reason was given as more opportunities to find “cheap and unskilled” employment abroad. In the words of the respondent, paid employment is a problem for Marneuli residents, however, self-employment in agriculture and trade is much more profitable and cross-border trade also has significant potential.

Non-governmental sector representatives also stressed the scarcity of necessary skill sets and lack of education. Even establishment of cooperatives is hindered by a lack of modern business and accounting skills, while cooperative business might have been one of the best ways to increase the profits of the locals. At the same time it has been noted that even today “medieval economic practices are still widespread” in the region, not suitable for the application of modern technologies.

Main Findings: Focus groups and interviews demonstrate that the population in minority populated regions is mainly engaged in agriculture, trade, and small business. Large-scale construction projects afoot in the regions also create jobs. Apart from that, locals get employed in various educational and administrative units.

Among issues impeding paid employment the following have been named: poor knowledge of the state language in the majority of the population, lack of appropriate qualification, education mismatched with the local labour market demand, nepotism; large construction companies bringing in their own labour force and shying away from hiring locally; political discrimination in employment policies as pursued by various bodies.

The agricultural sector bears the following issues: complicated situation with land ownership/registration, high taxes, worn irrigation system (currently being rehabilitated), agricultural practices falling short of modern standards, lack of skills necessary to master modern technologies, poorly organized sales (peasants have to look the buyers up themselves).

In discussion of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development, both lack of business education and overall lack of development in the region was mentioned, as well as sophisticated bureaucracy (even more complicated given a lack of knowledge of the state language); high taxes and fines and bank loan related issues.

4.1.2. Availability of Information on Jobs and State Programs in Minority Populated Regions

Focus groups with local population

Young respondents are learning about job openings in Akhalkalaki mainly through word of mouth, news ticker of the local TV and internet (jobs.ge webpage). In their opinion, in order to get employed “you should be well connected.” New vacancies are announced in the local Gamgeoba (local municipality) most frequently. One of the requirements is a good knowledge of Georgian and Armenian languages. Seekers are passing examinations too. According to younger respondents, there are cases when officials already holding positions fail to pass the tests and still retain their jobs. There are other cases when the job-seeker would pass the test successfully and still would not get the appointment.

The older generation of Akhalkalaki respondents rarely learn about job openings. According to them, news of this kind are spread only in very narrow, closed circles.

Younger respondents from Akhalkalaki are informed about the internship programs. According to them, internships are usually open at banks and Social Security Services. They believe there is no reason to really get interested in prospective job, since: *“If you know that the job is already taken, what’s the point in internship? If you know they won’t take you anyway. (...) it’s all being done in a very hush-up way, the job openings are just for show”* (Akhalkalaki, woman of the 18-40 age group).

In addition, focus group members were less informed about the grants issued by the state within the scope of agriculture and small business support programs. For instance, since 2014 the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Agriculture are carrying out “Produce in Georgia” program, aiming to support start-ups and help existing entrepreneurs expand.⁹ Apart from that, there are other programs and projects initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture, such as “Small Farmers Spring Works Support Program”, “Preferential Agro Credit Project” (part of “Produce in Georgia” – agricultural component), “Co-Financing of Agro-Processing and Storage Enterprises”, “Plant the Future” program, “Agro-Insurance” program, restoration of tea plantations (Georgian tea), “Industrial Tangerine Realization Support Program” (seasonal), “Project of Facilitation of Apple Sale” (seasonal).¹⁰ There are cooperation supportive programs providing agricultural cooperatives with machinery and seeding material.¹¹

Relatively well-informed respondents are sceptical towards programs of these kinds. Part of them believes that in order to succeed and get the funding you need to have “good contacts.” Apart from that, knowledge of Georgian is a must. Because of the language barrier, information is less accessible to the locals, whilst successful participation in state programs hangs on being well-informed and filling out necessary forms – mainly in Georgian. In the opinion of one male-respondent, it would be nice to have some information centres where those interested to learn about state programs would gather and receive all the info they would need in the language they understand. According to the same respondent, it is important to have financial support programs for start-ups. If there would be such financial support, respondents mainly envision their employment in agriculture. *“It would be nice to have financial support programs for start-ups. Or maybe to have some enterprise established to have people employed. I cannot afford to borrow any more money, but if I were to have some financial support I would continue to farm the land. Even if it were some aid to afford loans. There should be programs helping people to develop.*

⁹ Program “Produce in Georgia”: <http://www.qartuli.ge/>

¹⁰ Agricultural Projects’ Management Agency: <http://apma.ge/>

¹¹ Agricultural Cooperatives Development Agency (ACDA): <http://acda.gov.ge>

It is very hard, all of this, here, rates are high and they ask for collaterals” (Akhalkalaki, man of the 18-40 age group).

Similar to Akhalkalaki, in Marneuli respondents are learning about job openings from their acquaintances, mainly. In their assessment, positions are filled out only through liaisons and connections. They believe it would be proper to establish in the region some employment agency that would collect and disseminate information about job openings and job-seekers. *“(...) there is no database. There are some sites, but we need our own, for the young people to know where to look for a job. The solution would be to ask the municipality to create such a database. Then people would get employed by pharmacies, even by the House of Justice. Many people are living here, Georgians, Azeris, Armenians, it is most important for them to get employed, those who studied and mastered an appropriate specialty” (Marneuli, woman of the 18-40 age group).*

Grants allocated by the state in support of agriculture and small business development are viewed with scepticism by Marneuli respondents too. Disapproval is mainly caused by perceived bias of the projects, as they are “for their own people” who “always have preference.” According to respondents, fulfilment of requirements as set down by the programs is too hard. Project proposals are often turned down and then implemented by somebody else. Once learning about the requirements, would-be-grantees often believe participation in grant program would bring losses rather than profit and refuse to participate. *“I am interested in things like this... the other day, the Ministry of Agriculture allocated 10,000 GEL worth of grant for agriculture development. But I should tell you these programs are rather more in the red than profitable. For example, they tell me, you should have so many hectares of land, and all of these hectares, all of them I should fence in. Fencing that land in, it would cost me 3,000 GEL. Now the land itself, worth tilling, soil should be 40 cm deep, and that’s rare. When you use tractor for ploughing, you need at least 40 cm deep soil there. So it all costs me 5,000 GEL, and it’s not worth it, so I don’t take part in it” (Marneuli, man of the 41-65 age group).*

Interviews with Akhalkalaki governmental sector

State programs to supply farmers with machinery and seedlings were mentioned both by Marneuli and Akhalkalaki self-governance representatives

(programs mentioned above). As for means of spreading the word about the programs, Akhalkalaki self-governance representatives mainly, indicated coverage of meetings between the governmental officials and farmers on local TV news.

In the words of governmental officials of Akhalkalaki, no communication or exchange programs on agriculture and entrepreneurship in pursuit of experience-sharing take place between the regions. At that, they believe such an exchange unnecessary, for natural conditions and local experiences between the regions are mismatched. Agriculture and entrepreneurship related mutual cooperation among regions would be a waste of effort. It would be more profitable to focus on attracting businesses and investment.

As for access to information on paid jobs, in the words of Akhalkalaki self-governance representatives, job openings are announced through the internet only. Interviewed were sceptical towards the very idea of establishment of an agency or database that would connect employers with job-seekers. Self-governance representatives noted that such an agency would be pointless.

Interviews with Akhalkalaki non-governmental sector

As stated by business and non-governmental sector representatives, state funded programs (mentioned programs) reach Akhalkalaki sporadically, as the population is not thoroughly informed. For instance, printout materials might be in insufficient quantities or leaflets might not be distributed universally. State program related news usually reaches only socially active people, and so the same old faces make their way into the program. Apart from that, as mentioned by the representative of the business, agriculture support programs mainly aim at cultures irrelevant for Samtskhe-Javakheti, such as wine, tea, citruses etc., while there is nothing of the kind for potatoes, and yet this is the cultivated plant of the highest significance for the region and, given proper support, Akhalkalaki would be able to meet the demand of a considerable share of Georgia. As stated by the same respondent, the problem is aggravated of the fact that land privatization is yet ongoing, making it impossible to work most of the land, consequently hindering further development of potato production and increasing prices. In addition to the above, in the words of the respondent, when dealing with small-scale state grants for small business and agriculture develop-

ment, lack of business skills and a language barrier makes even filing an application to participate complicated affair. As a solution to this problem, a representative of the business names establishment of special centres, where, in return for small fee, the population could get aid in formulating their business-ideas and plans in Georgian.

According to non-governmental sector representatives, there are problems with different kinds of internship programs in the region too, which, according to non-governmental sector representatives, are mainly provided for in schools and public-political institutions. It was noted that these positions are continuously taken up by one and the same people; others are, as a rule, turned down.

Interviews with Marneuli local governmental sector

According to Marneuli governmental sector representatives, informing the population on state agriculture and small business support programs is the job of Rtsmunebuli (village plenipotentiaries), who, in their own turn, are being preliminarily trained by representatives of the ministries.

Just like in Akhalkalaki, the population is less informed about or sceptical towards state programs. In order to acquire more thorough information about access to state programs, Marneuli Office representative of the Project Management Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture was interviewed. According to the interviewed, information on state programs is disseminated through local TVs and face-to-face meetings with the population. Apart from that, informational leaflets are being published and distributed among the resident and through Marneuli House of Justice. Other means of communicating with the population, according to the respondent, include electronic channels, such as social networks (Facebook) and e-mail, though the respondent indicated that locals are less inclined to rely on electronic communication means.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture representative, apart from scarcity of information on state programs, the non-Georgian speaking community is also hindered by a language barrier. The main bulk of the informational leaflets are in Georgian (even if some are in Russian and in minority languages), and more so, filing an application for a grant is only possible in Georgian. In the opinion of the respondent, the latter is not an issue as applicants often bring Georgian-speaking relatives along, or are being helped

by agency officials themselves. However, as assessed by the respondent, this kind of help will not solve the problem and a language barrier will remain an issue, especially in cases when applicants are required not merely to submit documentation but also elaborate on their business-idea, prepare a plan and budget. Hence, in comparison with the Georgian-speaking population, national minorities are on unequal footing, as their majority does not speak the state language.

Focus group participants perceive state program requirements as irrelevant. The Ministry of Agriculture Regional Office representative considers them based on scientific research (in this case, agricultural studies) and so reasonably easy to comply with. Apart from actual agriculture support programs, co-funding of processing and storage facilities was stressed. In the opinion of the same respondent, regardless of the wealth of Marneuli district, problem of sales of the produce is evident here too, whilst network of storage facilities would solve the problem of perishable goods enabling their full sales. From this standpoint, the importance of exports was also mentioned, respondent expressed the view that Georgian products should gradually improve in order to comply with European standards and reach European markets.

Lack of communication and experience-sharing exchange programs between the regions in agriculture and entrepreneurship was mentioned in interviews with Marneuli governmental representatives too.

As for information on paid employment job openings, according to Marneuli self-governance representative, given the small size of the town, it is being spread through word-of-mouth by the residents themselves. The respondent believes establishment of an agency to connect prospective job seekers and employers would not be particularly useful.

Main Findings: Research results indicate that the population is learning about available jobs through personal liaisons, local TV ticker, and employment web-sites. However, there is no specialized agency that would help the locals in finding jobs matching their qualifications.

Information on State programs supporting development of agriculture and small business is lacking – through insufficient quantity of leaflets, while those available are usually in Georgian. Apart from a slow spread of information about State programs, other impediments have been named,

including: lack of suitability of the programs to the local particularities, while assessment criteria might be irrelevant, and the population lacking in business skills and failing to file applications in Georgian.

Scepticism towards both announced jobs and initiated programs is evident – as per opinion expressed by focus groups, nepotism excludes common people from getting employed or funded.

4.1.3. Prospects of Development of Employment in Minority Populated Regions

Focus groups with local population

Apart from agriculture, Akhalkalaki respondents see employment opportunities in other sectors as well, however indicating the difficulties associated with them. *“There are already people employed in agriculture, those who are not lazy to try, but you can grow as many potatoes as you like and then fail to sell them, somebody will import from Turkey cheaper. Or the railway, that would employ our people. If the railway is opened, there would be many hotels, we have a National Park, and tourism might be developed here. There are certain sectors worth developing, but we do not have professionals in tourism”* (Akhalkalaki, woman of the 18-40 age group).

In the opinion of Akhalkalaki respondents, development of construction, railway and energy sectors would really enhance employment opportunities for locals. They indicate that none of the locals are employed on the construction sites of the railway or HPP. Consequently, they believe that the state should use its leverage and get more actively engaged in designing and implementing projects of this kind, for instance, making it mandatory for tender winners to hire locally. *“Even if it is merely 50/50 (When 50% of the labour force is constituted by local population and 50% by staff brought in by the winning company – author’s note). They will not hire locally even for simplest jobs, like driver. Everybody who was working there, they have conned them all, not paying their wages”* (Akhalkalaki, man of the 18-40 age group).

“The state is overly loyal towards Turkish companies, yes, there is a call for bids, we know, whoever wins does the job, they are coming down here bringing their own cheap labour, and locals remain without jobs. There were cases when locals got jobs, but there were no labour contracts

signed, folks were using their own machinery, and yet at any moment the employer might have told them they will not be paid. The state loses all legal power in this case and the company does as it wishes. Many people suffered from that, those who got hired for a while and then went to Russia again” (Akhalkalaki, woman of the 18-40 age group).

According to Akhalkalaki and Marneuli respondents, there is scarcity of professionals with appropriate background and skills in their regions, hindering development of new sectors.

Akhalkalaki and Marneuli respondents consider elaboration and implementation of various exchange programs on agriculture and other economic fields as one of the ways of helping business expand. In their opinion, exchange programs would facilitate learning of the Georgian language and experience-sharing among residents of different regions of Georgia. The majority of respondents both in Marneuli and Akhalkalaki are of the opinion that locals need more connections and communication with the rest of Georgia.

Interviews with Akhalkalaki local governmental sector

The main source of income for Samtskhe-Javakheti population is agriculture, consequently, according to local self-governance, agricultural processing industry might be considered as prospective employment sector for the population as well. It should be noted that several processing facilities are already operating in the region, though their number is nowhere near sufficient. Prospects of establishing local meat and dairy processing integrated plant were mentioned, as well as potential for producing potato chips locally.

At the same time, self-governance representatives hope that along with assignment of “highland region” status, region will become more attractive for business and production, as enterprises will be exempt from taxes.¹²

Apart from agriculture, Akhalkalaki self-governance representatives consider tourism as worth putting efforts for regional development. Gradual

¹² Law on the Development of Mountainous Regions, July 16, 2015: <http://mof.ge/images/File/alpine/kanoni-magalmntiani-regionebis-ganvitarebis-sheaxe.pdf> Law on the Development of Mountainous Regions

construction of the road to connect Akhalkalaki with Bakuriani was mentioned, also, restoration works on Akhalkalaki fortress will be completed by 2017. At the same time, part of the self-governance representatives notes, that, regardless of the presence of hotels, tourism-development related infrastructure is not yet fully set right – there are no direction signs, no guides and so forth.

Interviews with Akhalkalaki local non-governmental sector

According to the business and non-governmental sector representatives, apart from agriculture there are other prospective sectors whose development would drastically improve social and economic situation of the region. Among prospective sectors, bottling drinking water, granite extraction and fishery were mentioned. Consequently the necessity of state support for development of mentioned fields was underlined.

Interviews with Marneuli local governmental sector

Kvemo Kartli local self-governance representatives were stressing the importance of agricultural processing facilities. On the one hand, the need for vegetable and fruit processing plants (producing tomato paste, dried fruit and so forth) was underlined, on the other hand – development of storage refrigerators and hothouses was underlined. Animal husbandry was also mentioned as a potential area for development.

Apart from agriculture, prospective development of tourism was also discussed. Marneuli self-governance representatives believe that tourism development would require promotion of ancient vine sorts as well as stressing the multi-cultural environment of the region as much as possible.

Main Findings: Focus group members and respondents see the prospect of employment development mainly in agricultural production, storage and processing, as well as tourism. Need to exploit alternative resources specific to the regions was also mentioned, such as bottling potable water in Akhalkalaki as well as mining granite and so on.

4.2. Georgian Political Parties' Stance on the National Minorities' Issue

Among priorities for economic development of minority-populated regions agriculture, animal husbandry, energy and cross-border trade were men-

tioned. However, it should be noted that politicians were stressing specificity of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli natural resources. In their opinion, Samtskhe-Javakheti, as opposed to Kvemo Kartli lands, is barren and less suitable for agriculture. Hence it's much more feasible to care for animal husbandry, tourism, and cross-border trade there. Most part of the politicians also discussed necessity of support of agricultural processing and canning industries in both regions. According to one of the politicians, agriculture is in poor state, while Georgia can boast of inexhaustible agricultural resources. In their words, today, peasant living in the mentioned regions uses 86% of the harvest for their own consumption and brings only 14% for sale to town, while 90% of the agricultural goods are being imported from abroad. As one of the necessary preconditions for solving the problem, politicians named development of the demand-oriented labour market, providing for support of sales of local agricultural produce, both locally and on foreign markets.

Representative of one of the political parties focused on land-related problems in minority-populated regions. In their opinion, Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions both support great potential in animal husbandry, vegetable farming and silk manufacturing, but any progress in those fields would require the population to have land at their disposal. In the view of the respondent, lands in those regions, especially in Kvemo Kartli, have been unfairly distributed among the residents. Consequently, land reform would be required in order to redistribute leased lands. Among the most significant steps, reduction of lease fees were mentioned by the respondent, as well as cheap-loans for development of entrepreneurship and cooperatives, helping to solve unemployment issue at least partially.

As per assessment of the part of politicians, the unemployment issue in minority-populated regions is less pressing, as the majority of the locals are self-employed enjoying a moderately good income. Politicians also confirmed that to be employed in minority-populated regions, one would require good personal connections, ascribing the situation to years' long lack of rotation in local self-governance. In order to suppress nepotism and corrupt dealing in employment, politicians believe of uttermost significance pursuit of proper staff policies, including selection of personnel based on objective criteria.

According to politicians, labour migration might be suppressed through elaboration of comprehensive strategies and plans would be necessary. Some politicians believe that there is a need for reasonable regulations in the employment policy. The state should properly define economic development policies, enhancing employment potential of the local population. There were some specific proposals discussed too, for instance, imposing employment quotas for local or foreign investors, making it mandatory to hire workers or engineering personnel locally, at least in part. As per politicians' conclusion, this would be the topic for the Ministry of Economy and local self-governance authorities to work on. According to politicians, similar requirements are being applied in the energy sector, where the potential number of a locally employed workforce is preliminary defined. As per part of the politicians, similar regulations should be applied to other sectors as well.

Another part of the politicians would be against restricting investors with regulations of the kind. Anything beyond protection of human rights would smell of protectionism and ethnic quotas and, therefore, would not be the best of solutions. In their opinion, we should not be hindering foreign investors in deciding themselves whom to employ in their own business. Otherwise, introduction of additional regulations might hinder inflow of investment. In their opinion, competences of the local professional manpower should be checked, against the requirements of the investor; in case of incompliance, to ensure appropriate training, and if found that local personnel was up to scratch but was deliberately denied employment, situation should be thoroughly studied and responded. In the opinion of one of the politicians, issues of this kind should be taken care of first and foremost by trade unions.

Representatives of the political parties also focused on the problem of informing the local population about state services. In their opinion, local self-governance should be equipped with a database on economic activities the local population is pursuing and needs it has. Regions lack information on available agricultural land and capacities, walking blindly. According to politicians, it would be necessary for self-governance bodies to be informed about the needs of peasants and farmers in their own region only; on this basis establish knowledge-based communication with the central government, ministries of economy, agriculture of infrastructure. As stated by

politicians, it is important for separate ministries to organize informational meetings with specifically selected audiences. A necessary condition, in the opinion of the politicians, would be for Gamgeobas (local municipalities) to be fully informed about the needs of their district or settlement and what kind of aid might be provided. According to politicians, in minority-populated regions there are agricultural offices that should have access to information of this kind. Programs implemented by the ministries of Agriculture, Economy and Education in minority-populated regions are good enough, but, according to politicians, they are not properly delivered to the locals.

In order to improve access of the population to necessary information, one of the parties recommends launching a “Village House”¹³ program in the minority-populated regions, in order to have so called Village Houses established in every settlement, large or small, giving residents a place to receive every kind of state services and information.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The conducted study has shown that unemployment is the most pressing problem in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, forcing part of the population to leave the region and go abroad in search of work. Because of the economic hardships, locals quite often have to borrow money from banks and later, failing to pay back, lose their own property.

The main employment sectors in the regions are: agriculture, trade, also schools, kindergartens and administrative bodies. The main hindrances to employment are posed by:

- Lack of knowledge of Georgian language (because of the poor command of state language, national minorities, for the most part, fail to find jobs in fields like police, banks, hospitals, universities; it is harder for them to find information on available vacancies, to prepare the business plans, to submit appropriate application forms in state language, and so on).

¹³ Construction of „Village Houses“ was initiated by the Government in January 2015 and is afoot in almost every region of Georgia.

- Lack of information on existing job openings, specific state projects being implemented in the regions, or improper delivery of such information.
- Mismatch between demand and supply on the labor market, leading to scarcity of needed professions in the region.

The following recommendations are based on the analysis of the current situation:

Main employment sectors and employment related hurdles in minority-populated regions

- In order to reduce the problem of unemployment, active development of agriculture would be necessary. From this standpoint it would be useful to support cooperatives of small-scale farmers (financial and/or technical support), facilitating production and sale, helping to include farms into production chains. The process would also need development of infrastructure;
- In order to forecast job openings and demand on the labour force, it would be necessary to regularly study labour markets of both regions; it is important to make a registry of job-seekers in the regions; it would also be desirable to order and organize internal (migration of the workforce towards urban areas within the country) and external (migration of the workforce abroad) flows of the workforce, based on a proper employment policy and elaboration of employment support long-term strategy and specific action plan;
- It would be necessary to establish vocational education institutions and train local population in professions in high demand on the labour market (technical professions, agriculture and financial sectors – especially, from the point of application of modern technologies);
- It would be desirable to establish and develop employment related internship programs and trainings, enhancing employment opportunities and competences and skills of the locals.

Access to information on job openings and state programs in minority-populated regions

- Organize informational meetings with specifically selected audiences (population groups, self-governance structures, businessmen and so on), enhancing availability of information. Targeted communication between local and central authorities;
- Provide the population with more information on state supported programs on small business and agriculture: it would be desirable to print more informational leaflets in Armenian and Azeri languages and distributed among the local population; the banners in languages locals understand should be placed in public spaces; it would be desirable to use local media for dissemination of information. Local TV and radio stations should be regularly inviting specialists of the fields important for the region, also, local and central authorities;
- Establish specific centres aiming at helping locals in development of business ideas and filling out application forms in the Georgian language. The local population should be informed about these centres as widely as possible;
- Elaborate special state programs most suitable for local conditions, in order to support development of small business and agriculture; development of projects supporting production and sales of potatoes in Samtskhe-Javakheti; expansion of already existing co-funding projects for processing and storage industries in Kvemo Kartli; also, in pursuit of support of entrepreneurship and development of cooperatives, it would be desirable to take certain steps towards facilitation of cheaper loans for the population;
- Establish a labour market office in the region, whose consultants would be helping job-seekers in elaboration of an individual employment plan. The plan would incorporate information on job-seekers background, skills, and experience. Detailed information contained in the plan would make the process of employment-seeking easier.

Prospects of employment sector development in minority-populated regions

- Pay more attention to the tourism development. With this goal in mind, the first task would be to develop an appropriate infrastructure in the regions, taking into account tourism-related professions and preparing appropriate study courses for vocational schools and universities of the region; given the task of tourism development, it would be desirable to advertise sights and cultural diversity of the regions, taking them into account while organizing tourism oriented advertisement campaigns for the whole Georgia, preparing appropriate video clips and so forth;
- Reform of vocational education system is in order to provide locals with an opportunity to study those specialties most fitting the demand of the labour market of these regions. In pursuit of this goal it would be necessary to implement professional development programs in cooperation with the private sector to restore the balance between supply and demand on the labour market; it would be desirable to increase the number of vocational schools in minority-populated regions, especially putting some effort into motivating local youth to gaining skills in higher demand in the region. A life-long education system should be developed as well in close connection with employment programs;
- Alternative resources available in the national minority-populated regions should be focused on (e.g. fisheries in Samtskhe-Javakheti region), incorporating them in co-funding programs offered to the population.

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Annex 1

Table 1: Turnover by Economic Sectors in Samtskhe-Javakheti

	Turnover, GEL millions				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Samtskhe-Javakheti	260,4	367,2	468,6	620,1	635,8
Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry	0,8	1,4	1,1	2,7	1,0
Fishery, Fishing	0,2	0,0	0,1	0,3	0,0
Mining Industry	2,6	3,0	2,7	2,2	3,0
Processing Industry	112,1	140,9	187,7	249,7	312,5
Generation and distribution of electric energy, production and distribution of gas and water	4,2	8,1	14,1	13,2	18,1
Construction	32,0	57,4	63,1	101,0	39,8
Trade; Maintenance of motor cars, household wares and personal items	82,5	131,6	163,4	211,8	226,6
Hotels and restaurants	7,3	6,8	14,7	18,4	19,0
Transport and Communication	2,1	3,2	4,5	5,4	4,6
Real estate activities, lease, consumer services	7,1	7,1	2,2	5,1	4,0
Education	0,2	0,1	0,5	0,5	0,5
Healthcare and Welfare	7,7	6,9	7,5	6,2	3,5
Communal, social and private services	1,5	0,9	7,0	3,5	3,2

Source: GeoStat

Table 2: Turnover by Economic Sectors in Kvemo Kartli

	Turnover, GEL millions				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Kvemo Kartli	1726,2	2302,4	2506,4	2661,8	2830,1
Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry	40,3	51,5	68,2	69,1	95,5

Fishery, Fishing	0,2	0,2	0,4	0,1	0,3
Mining Industry	158,4	182,4	124,9	149,4	169,4
Processing Industry	964,5	1162,1	1122,2	1209,5	1160,3
Generation and distribution of electric energy, production and distribution of gas and water	162,6	354,3	370,8	293,7	326,1
Construction	45,3	65,3	155,3	112,2	134,3
Trade; Maintenance of motor cars, household wares and personal items	284,7	398,2	543,3	697,2	785,1
Hotels and restaurants	2,5	6,8	11,3	11,3	16,4
Transport and Communication	20,1	21,2	28,4	29,2	32,6
Real estate activities, lease, consumer services	12,0	27,2	44,3	41,8	47,9
Education	3,3	3,6	4,0	5,8	8,4
Healthcare and Welfare	15,8	14,0	11,3	16,6	18,8
Communal, social and private services	16,5	15,7	22,0	26,2	34,9

Source: GeoStat

Table 3: Average Annual Number of Employed and Economically Active in Samtskhe-Javakheti and in Kvemo Kartli

	Annual number of employed, units				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Samtskhe-Javakheti	7392	8200	8745	9188	7925
Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry	154	205	185	126	124
Fishery, Fishing	20	9	3	24	-
Mining Industry	95	141	67	60	70
Processing Industry	1394	1369	1622	1568	1629
Generation and distribution of electric energy, production and distribution of gas and water	263	251	331	307	217

Construction	994	1559	1829	1201	1108
Trade; Maintenance of motor cars, household wares and personal items	1200	1393	1474	1721	1913
Hotels and restaurants	537	697	1007	1417	1285
Transport and Communication	308	473	334	371	316
Real estate activities, lease, consumer services	390	700	298	667	287
Education	47	13	203	173	144
Healthcare and Welfare	1725	1263	961	971	407
Communal, social and private services	265	128	430	582	426
Kvemo Kartli	28411	32268	33509	34214	34864
Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry	2387	1326	1592	1920	1767
Fishery, Fishing	27	25	39	23	44
Mining Industry	1924	1952	2241	2505	2369
Processing Industry	9902	11446	10959	11243	10794
Generation and distribution of electric energy, production and distribution of gas and water	1868	1928	1962	1850	1512
Construction	1497	2653	3494	2825	2844
Trade; Maintenance of motor cars, household wares and personal items	2959	4688	5588	5525	5917
Hotels and restaurants	425	785	814	934	1391
Transport and Communication	1009	812	1170	912	1064
Real estate activities, lease, consumer services	1157	1527	1632	2041	1691
Education	830	820	943	1062	1402
Healthcare and Welfare	2995	2685	1617	2116	2096
Communal, social and private services	1432	1621	1458	1259	1973

Source: GeoStat

Table 4: Average Wages of Employed per Month in Kvemo Kartli by Sectors of Economy

	Average monthly wages of the employed, GEL				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Kvemo Kartli	571,5	547,5	663,0	679,6	690,2
Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry	357,2	374,4	541,4	583,7	619,5
Fishery, Fishing	423,9	160,8	532,4	381,3	330,4
Mining Industry	1051,4	1021,8	1140,0	1094,2	1087,2
Processing Industry	742,9	697,6	823,4	838,4	908,5
Generation and distribution of electric energy, production and distribution of gas and water	752,8	929,5	920,4	939,2	1123,7
Construction	606,9	590,5	887,8	903,4	872,4
Trade; Maintenance of motor cars, household wares and personal items	206,6	197,4	266,9	287,7	353,2
Hotels and restaurants	114,6	110,8	161,4	211,3	142,2
Transport and Communication	472,7	355,8	419,1	567,3	387,0
Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry	260,5	345,6	615,3	603,7	459,6
Fishery, Fishing	179,5	271,0	195,4	209,8	244,7
Mining Industry	271,2	271,2	317,3	344,3	432,3
Processing Industry	456,3	440,7	505,4	684,0	677,2

Source: GeoStat

Table 5: Average Wages of Employed per Month in Samtskhe Javakheti by Sectors of Economy

	Average monthly wages of the employed, GEL				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Samtskhe-Javakheti	350,8	372,1	441,3	591,4	587,5
Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry	284,5	166,7	358,5	1209,2	198,5
Fishery, Fishing	67,2	106,7	133,3	100,0	-

Mining Industry	304,1	307,3	404,3	419,1	488,1
Processing Industry	636,6	687,3	768,6	725,7	817,1
Generation and distribu- tion of electric energy, production and distribu- tion of gas and water	257,9	333,7	934,9	623,2	1951,4
Construction	483,5	453,3	481,8	1642,4	1048,2
Trade; Maintenance of motor cars, household wares and personal items	176,2	289,2	228,6	245,5	291,2
Hotels and restaurants	127,1	133,0	163,9	272,4	311,9
Transport and Commu- nication	140,8	232,4	379,2	515,1	524,2
Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry	510,8	342,9	274,6	392,8	357,4
Fishery, Fishing	189,4	277,2	115,7	144,0	90,5
Mining Industry	263,3	270,8	431,2	396,0	384,3
Processing Industry	248,7	446,9	243,9	245,7	364,9

Source: GeoStat

ACCESS TO INFORMATION FOR NATIONAL MINORITIES IN GEORGIA

Diana Bogishvili, Ana Tsiklauri

1. Introduction

Improved access to information for national minorities living in Georgia is crucial for promoting their engagement in the civic integration process. The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities' Ljubljana Recommendation 48 highlights two important roles of the media in this regard. First, the media should be a key forum for persons belonging to minorities to exercise their rights, including the rights to use their language and promote their culture. Second, as a tool for receiving and transmitting information, the media should play an essential role to foster a conducive environment for intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding, including countering stereotypes, prejudices, and intolerance in society.¹

During 2009-2014, the Government of Georgia carried out certain activities in this direction which are also reflected in the Action Plan for Tolerance and Civic Integration for 2009-2014. The above-mentioned Action Plan envisaged annual revamping of the Public Broadcaster coverage to increase the number of programmes, swiftness of dissemination of news and reach in the regions (the Action Plan envisaged producing TV news programmes in five minority languages, annually. On a weekly basis, the Public Broadcaster would air TV programmes in Abkhazian, Ossetian, Armenian, Azeri, and Russian languages). According to the evaluation document of Tolerance and Civic Integration Action Plan for 2009-2014, the performed activities proved to be inadequate. The issue being that often neither the residents of Kvemo

¹ The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies: Publisher: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); Date: 7 November, 2012: <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/96883?download=true>

Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions nor the majority of local NGOs and government agencies were aware that regional and national TV channels aired those news programmes daily. The problem with the provision of the information to the residents of the above-mentioned regions was exacerbated by the fact that the Public Broadcaster TV Channel signal did not cover all areas of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti.²

The evaluation document of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and the Action Plan for 2009-2014 notes that, although the Public Broadcaster has changed the format of news programme a number of times, the interest towards these programmes in minority-populated areas remains low. Furthermore, 2012³ and 2014⁴ studies conducted in Javakheti (2014 study was conducted in Javakheti, specifically, in Aspindza, Akhalkalaki, and Ninotsminda) and Kvemo Kartli evidence that due to the lack of the command of the state language, minorities' access to national mass media is low. Therefore, they primarily receive information from Russian, Azeri, Turkish (Kvemo Kartli) and Armenian (Samtskhe-Javakheti) channels. Georgian press and radio is also not in great demand in national minority populated areas in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti.

The evaluation document of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and the Action Plan for 2009-2014 provides an overview of the situation during that period. In this regard, the results of focus group discussions conducted in 2014 are interesting. According to the results, the times when news programmes were transmitted were inconvenient, their running time was short and international news coverage was longer than domestic. All of these factors resulted in low rating of the news programmes. According to the 2014 study, even the degree of national minorities' awareness of

² The Office of the State Minister on Reconciliation and Civic Equality: The National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and the 2009-2014 Action Plan Implementation Evaluation Document. June, 2014: <http://www.smr.gov.ge/Uploads/cd492646.pdf>

³ The Institute for Social Studies and Analysis: The Study of Social-Economic Conditions and Attitudes of Kvemo Kartli residents: Tbilisi, Publishing House Universal, 2012: <http://www.csogeorgia.org/uploads/publications/80/2-geo.pdf>

⁴ Gogsadze, G., Kachkachishvili, I., Basheleishvili, L. Integration of Minorities in Georgia: Key Challenges and Opportunities (Javakheti example). Levan Mikeladze Foundation, January, 2014: http://www.mikeladzefoundation.org/multimedia/ups/1/Minority_Integration_in_Georgia_geo_-_Levan_Mikeladze_Foundation.pdf

the developments/news was inadequate even where access to news was not an issue. Several reasons were listed to explain this problem. For instance, national minorities were locked into their “regional realm” and did not show interest towards the developments in the rest of the country; at the same time, national minorities, in general, had a lower degree of trust towards the national media since, according to local residents, regional news was covered only in a negative and biased context.⁵

In addition to the above-listed problems, in 2012, according to the ECMI Fifty-second Working Paper (National Minorities and the Media Situation in Georgia), access to information for national minorities was complicated by technical or procedural obstacles, for example, refusal to issue TV or radio frequency licenses. The same paper mentions that the National Communications Commission of Georgia is the state body in charge of oversight over electronic media publications and issuing licenses. Suspension of broadcasting licenses or delaying their issuance creates a significant problem for a broadcaster, since government bodies are authorized to close down a TV station or a radio if they operate without a license. Such a precedent took place back in 2008, when two radio stations were closed down in Marneuli and Ninotsminda, for not having licenses.⁶

To ensure safeguarding the rights of national minorities, and their integration in the society, a new State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and 2015-2020 Action Plan was developed under the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia, in 2015. One of the intermediate objectives of this Strategy is improved access to media and information for national minorities. A more detailed overview of this intermediate goal is provided in sub-chapter 2.2 of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and 2015-2020 Action Plan.

⁵ The Office of the State Minister on Reconciliation and Civic Equality: The National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and the 2009-2014 Action Plan Implementation Evaluation Document. June, 2014: <http://www.smr.gov.ge/Uploads/cd492646.pdf>

⁶ Akerlund, T., National Minorities and the Media. Situation in Georgia: ECMI Working Paper №52. January, 2012: http://www.ecmicaucasus.org/upload/publications/working_paper_52_geo.pdf

Based on the above-mentioned problems, the goal of the present policy paper was set – to study the current situation regarding the access to information in national minority populated regions of Georgia, and identify difficulties related to access to information.

2. Methodology

The following qualitative research methods were used for the study of the situation concerning access to information of national minorities living in Georgia: analysis of secondary sources, specifically, of legislative acts (desk research), focus groups, and in-depth interviews. First, secondary sources were analysed and a discussion plan was produced for the focus groups. Since the target group of the study was comprised of ethnic Azeris and Armenians living in Georgia, focus groups were planned in large cities of the two regions that are most compactly settled with national minorities: in Marneuli – Kvemo Kartli and in Akhalkalaki – Samtskhe-Javakheti (the central city of Kvemo Kartli is Rustavi).

Four focus group interviews were held – two in Akhalkalaki and two in Marneuli. Each focus group was made up of eight participants with different social-demographic profiles. The target audience was divided into two age categories – 18 to 40 years old and 41 to 65 years old. To ensure heterogeneity of focus groups composition, in addition to the age factor, participants were selected according to education (secondary, vocational and higher) and employment status (employed and unemployed). Focus group discussions lasted for about one hour and half and were audio recorded. Next, these recordings were transcribed and their content was processed. After their analysis, the next stage of the research was planned and it included seven in-depth interviews with political party representatives (one respondent per party). Furthermore, eight interviews were held with experts: representatives of international and local organizations working on national minority issues; two interviews with media representatives from Akhalkalaki and two from Marneuli; an interview with the Head of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics and another one with the Public Broadcaster representative. Moreover, in-depth interviews were held with representatives of the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality. A total of twenty-three in-depth interviews were conducted. Each interview was audio recorded, transcripts were produced, and their content was analysed.

3. Review of Current Legislation Framework

Ensuring access to information for national minorities is prescribed as an imperative in the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities. Furthermore, according to the State Strategy on Integration and Civic Equality of Georgia, the media has a special role in supporting successful civic integration. The first stage of the empirical study of the present document is to analyse the international and national legislation related to media and national minorities. Based on the study of existing legislative acts, a discussion plan was designed for focus groups, experts and Georgian political parties, in particular specific topics and relevant questions were developed. This section of the document provides an overview of the legislative regulations related to national minorities' access to information.

European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities – The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities was adopted in 1995 in Strasbourg and ratified by the Parliament of Georgia in October 2005. Until the restoration of territorial integrity of Georgia, the Convention is applicable only throughout the territory covered by the jurisdiction of the Central Government of Georgia.

Pursuant to Article 9 of the above-mentioned Convention, “the Parties undertake to recognize that the right to freedom of expression of every person belonging to a national minority includes the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas in the minority language, without interference by public authorities and regardless of frontiers. The Parties shall ensure, within the framework of their legal systems that persons belonging to a national minority are not discriminated against in their access to the media.”

National minorities shall have the possibility to obtain licensing, without discrimination and based on objective criteria, of sound and television broadcasting, or cinema enterprises. The Parties shall ensure that “persons belonging to national minorities are granted the possibility of creating and using their own media. The Parties shall promote tolerance and permit cultural pluralism.”

State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and 2015-2020 Action Plan – The Government of Georgia has developed a five-year Strategy and Action Plan on National Minorities. Its goal is to promote civic equality and

integration, so that citizens of Georgia, irrespective of their ethnic origin, can make their contribution to the political and public life of the country in the course of its economic and democratic development. One of the intermediate goals of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and the 2015 – 2020 Action Plan is an improved access of national minorities to media and to information. The Action Plan highlights that mass media plays a special role in a successful civic integration process; it should provide relevant coverage of national minority issues and their involvement in the developments in the country; at the same time, it should not allow the use and transmission of hate speech. As part of this Strategy, the government plans to cooperate with media organizations and to contribute to the promotion of the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters through joined forces. This Code mandates all broadcasters to adhere to the principles of equality and tolerance. Furthermore, in the process of civic integration of national minorities, it is important to improve the access to information in their mother tongue or a language they understand and to engage them in a common information space. According to the above-mentioned Strategy, the Public Broadcaster has a significant role in improving the access to information and media. It has to contribute to better information of national minorities about developments in the country, as well as raise awareness of the public at large regarding the issues related to national minorities. The Public Broadcaster is required to introduce high professional standards in the coverage of national minority issues. Significant objectives for the achievement of the above-mentioned intermediate goal – improved access to mass media and information for national minorities, are:

- facilitate access to broadcasting programmes and electronic/printed media in national minority languages;
- ensure coverage of national minority issues and participation of minority representatives in broadcasting programmes;
- support tolerance and cultural pluralism in mass media.

The Law on Broadcasting and Code of Conduct for Broadcasters – In Georgia, broadcasting is regulated by the Law on Broadcasting, which entered into effect in 2004. Pursuant to Article 16 of this Law, substantive obligations of the Public Broadcaster include a clear requirement of the Public Broadcaster to ensure that the proportion of programmes in minority languages, those concerning minorities and the programmes produced by minorities is adequate. According to Article 50 of the Law on Broadcasting,

in 2009 the National Communications Commission of Georgia issued the Decree the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters. This Code envisages equal obligation of all broadcasters operating in Georgia to adhere to the principles of equality, impartiality, and tolerance clearly stipulated in the document.

According to the Code of Conduct of Broadcasters, broadcasters shall refrain from publishing such content that will incite hatred or intolerance based on race, language, gender, religious, political, ethnic, geographic, or social origin. Broadcasters should avoid drawing unjustified parallels between ethnic or religious identity and negative events, including associating activity of an individual with the entire group. It should also refrain from making wrong statements about minorities and social problems, shall not contribute to the formation of stereotypes, shall not mention ethnic origin and religious beliefs of an individual, unless necessary. Broadcasters shall avoid insulting any groups based on religious, ethnic, or other basis, including avoiding the use of certain wording or image. This requirement does not prohibit broadcasters from facilitating informed and unbiased discussion about intolerance or discrimination, or transmitting factual content or opinion actually prevalent in the society.

The Charter of Journalistic Ethics – The Charter of Journalistic Ethics is based on Article 10 of the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and Declaration of the Principles on the Conduct of Journalists recognized by the International Federation of Journalists. These principles have been established as professional standards of conduct for journalists. In 2009, 139 Georgian journalists voluntarily affixed their signatures, vouching that they will respect the general standards of professional conduct.

Article 7 of the Charter sets out a standard of journalistic conduct when reporting on minorities issues. “Journalists must understand the dangers of encouraging discrimination on the part of the media; therefore, she/he must exert every effort to avoid discrimination of any person on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political and other opinion, national or social origin, or any other grounds.”

4. Study Findings

Based on the review of the relevant legislative acts, the second stage of the empirical research was planned: focus groups, in-depth interviews with local media, experts on national minority issues, as well as, representatives of political parties of Georgia. Based on the problems identified as a result of focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews, meetings were also held with representatives of the Communications Regulatory Commission, Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics and Public Broadcaster of Georgia. Finally, research results were analysed and arranged by topics as follows:

- **Access to information in national minority populated regions:** key sources of information in national minority populated regions; barriers in access to information; awareness of national minorities about the processes underway in the country.
- **Coverage of national minority related topics in national mass media outlets:** national minorities in Georgian-language media outlets; cooperation between national and regional mass media outlets.

4.1. Situation in Akhalkalaki and Marneuli – Analysis of Information Obtained from Focus Group Discussions

4.1.1. Access to Information in National Minority Regions

Respondents from Akhalkalaki were critical on access to information. Poor command of the Georgian-language was listed as a key problem; therefore, the population receives the information mainly in Armenian and Russian languages, from neighbouring countries. According to the respondents, Georgian-language newspapers are available for Akhalkalaki residents, but due to the language barrier they are not reading those either. Young respondents obtain information about the situation in Samtskhe-Javakheti primarily from Russian and Armenian language news website (jnews.ge). Young respondents said that they also use social networks as a source of information (Facebook, Odnoklassniki). The primary source of news for elderly residents of Akhalkalaki is Russian-language channels. Focus group participants expressed the desire for news programmes in Russian language: *“I wish they were transmitted at least once a day”* (Akhalkalaki, male, 41-45).

It should be mentioned that some of the respondents from Akhalkalaki were not even aware that the Public Broadcaster of Georgia aired news programme

in their languages. During focus group interviews, participants mentioned the transfer to digital broadcasting as one of the reasons for their lack of awareness; since, following this shift, they are no longer able to watch the majority of Georgian-language TV channels. According to the respondents, to receive Georgian-language channels they need to buy special equipment (satellite receivers), which is connected with certain financial resources.

Respondents stated that the quality of Akhalkalaki local television and its news transmission is poor. The transmission of information by the local TV channels is delayed since translation of Georgian-language programmes takes time. The respondents say that often translation is of low quality and distorted. Effectively, residents use local television only for listening to obituaries. *“Since the move to digital broadcasting, local television was cut off, only ‘Imedi’ and First Channel were on, some residents have installed ‘Magtisa’ and other satellite dishes, otherwise they were not able to receive other channels. Local television is not well developed, the level of reporting on local news is very poor: ‘ATV 12’ and ‘Javakhia’, which have an agreement with one of the TV channels, transmit their programmes; mainly, these are commercials and obituaries”* (Akhalkalaki, Female, 18-40).

Respondents expressed criticism concerning the time and duration of the transmission of news programmes. According to elderly respondents, they liked the prior practice of simultaneous translation of ‘Moambe’ (news programme).

When assessing the degree of awareness about developments in Georgia, respondents from Akhalkalaki regard themselves as under informed. According to them, they primarily get information from one another. According to them, information exchanged during private conversations acquires various interpretations, ultimately it is distorted and is disseminated further on. In fact, according to one of the local male respondents, they are better informed about developments across the world than the situation in Georgia. *“We are aware of the developments in the world, but we live in Georgia and we are not informed what is going on in the country. This is very painful”* (Akhalkalaki, Male, 41-65).

Akhalkalaki respondents feel that it is also important to be better informed about their rights, on-going reforms, new legislation, and even about traffic fines. Due to the lack of adequate command of Georgian language, sometimes Akhalkalaki residents find it difficult to receive basic information. One

male respondent said that he often faces problems in Akhaltsikhe and Tbilisi, since residents there are not willing to answer in the Russian language (or do not speak Russian). He explains that Georgians demand from him some knowledge of the Georgian language, otherwise are not willing to respond. *“Not knowing the language is a very significant factor, when we travel to Akhaltsikhe or Tbilisi for some business, we cannot manage ourselves, we either have to take someone who speaks Georgian, or we have to speak Russian, and in this case, too, often we are unable to receive a positive answer, since a person may not have a good command of the Russian language. Sometimes people tell us that we have to talk with them in Georgian, otherwise they will not respond. There are number of people who demand that we address them in Georgian. Maybe they truly do not understand Russian”* (Akhalkalaki, Male, 41-65).

According to the respondents from Akhalkalaki, primarily the younger generation is interested in learning the Georgian language. In their opinion, since they live in Georgia, they are obliged to know the state language. With regard to learning the Georgian language, young respondents note that there have been cases when even the Georgian language teacher did not know Georgian at a required level. Such situations are prevalent especially in secondary schools. According to the older generation respondents, in terms of learning the language they say that “their train has already passed” and that youngsters have to be more active in this regard.

Respondents from Marneuli state that the situation with regard to access to information in Marneuli and in villages is different. Young respondents say that in the villages, access to Georgian television and radio is relatively low and they obtain information mainly from Azeri TV channels. Marneuli city residents primarily listen to Radio Marneuli that broadcasts in both languages, Georgian and Azeri. There is a programme in the Azeri language on Georgian television as well, but, according to respondents from Marneuli, they are not watching this programme often since they do not know the time when the programme is broadcasted (often the programme broadcast time falls during working hours).

Marneuli residents also receive information through the Internet. However, it should also be mentioned that the elderly people do not use Internet, while minors mostly use it for entertainment; therefore, the respondents think that

the number of Internet users who use it for “information purposes” is extremely low.

Respondents have stated that rural residents in Kvemo Kartli obtain information about developments in the rest of Georgia primarily at teahouses, weddings, and funerals. They also state that the command of the Georgian language is a problem when it comes to accessing the information. In their view, the problem of language and receiving information is especially problematic in villages near Marneuli, where they do not even have qualified teachers to teach the Georgian language. They do not even have access to Internet in these villages; they watch only Turkish and Azeri TV channels, which, naturally, rarely report on Georgian news. Along with the lack of an adequate command of the Georgian language, rural residents face technical problems as well – effectively Georgian media channels do not transmit there. Respondents from Marneuli think that residents of Marneuli and nearby villages are better informed about international news than developments in Georgia. The quality of news transmitted by the Public Broadcaster has been assessed especially negatively. *“As for the Azeri language programme on the Public Broadcaster, it is more like a brief summary. They list news very briefly. This is merely stating a fact and not expanding on it. In general, when I watch TV, I can tell that a journalist has not prepared a topic, more could have been said or I am not satisfied, I always switch to another channel and am interested how that channel reports on that problem. All this depends on a journalist’s professionalism”* (Marneuli, Male, 40-65).

According to one of the elderly female respondents, she wished the number of Russian or Azeri language news programmes in Kvemo Kartli were doubled, saying that the older generation residents need this like an “air.”

Respondents from Marneuli, too, are complaining about the quality of translation. In their opinion, the quality of translation of Georgian news reported by Marneuli TV into the Azeri language is poor – interpretation is simultaneous and a lot gets lost in translation. According to respondents from Marneuli, since the Kvemo Kartli population primarily receives information from Turkish and Azeri channels, their perception of context for various facts is formed based on the information transmitted from these countries. Therefore, Georgian reality, as a context, is effectively unknown to Kvemo Kartli residents; this, naturally, makes it difficult for them to adequately perceive information received from Georgia. They are not aware as to what the rest of

Georgia thinks about various topical issues. *“98% of rural residents watch Azeri television to receive information, while they watch Turkish channels primarily for soap operas. Several individuals watch Russian channels, although not on a massive scale. Thus, the main sources for news are Internet and television. When they watch Azeri channels, their opinion is formed based on the coverage of that channel. For example, developments related to Socar,⁷ Azeri television reports on this topic as a betrayal of Azerbaijan and this is how we perceive it. Although, we do not know whether this is good or bad for Georgia. They say it is bad. Opinion is formed through those television. Afterwards, during discussions people declare opinion formed as a result of information obtained from these channel”* (Marneuli, male, 18-40).

According to elderly respondents from Marneuli, the lack of command of the Georgian language is the principal barrier for access to information. A person who has a good command of a language has access to media and is not in the informational void. The knowledge of the State language helps local residents to get familiar with the public and political life of Georgia. Elderly respondents, too, think that since they are citizens of Georgia they have a duty to be more or less aware about the developments in the country. They manage to do so with the help of their children and grandchildren, asking them to translate news. Due to their age, elderly respondents do not demonstrate eagerness with learning a language. Information about developments in the country is exchanged primarily through acquaintances and neighbours in Marneuli.

Marneuli respondents also listed the ways for addressing the problem – development of existing media resources and transmission of new TV and radio broadcasting channels in the region.

4.1.2. Coverage of National Minorities Related Topics in Georgian Media

Both Akhalkalaki and Marneuli, respondents expressed criticism towards the national broadcasting. In their view, in Georgian-language television channels, there are many journalists who are not professional and their reporting on the developments in the minority regions are often superficial and

⁷ This refers to the statement made by Kakha Kaladze, Energy Minister, concerning the need to purchase Russian natural gas. See: <http://www.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=29790>

inaccurate. In their words, the problem is that journalists do not visit the locations and do not get first-hand information about the existing situation from residents, or they select inadequate target groups, which, naturally, has a negative bearing on the reporting and the quality of information. Due to superficial coverage of the issues about national minorities in the Georgian-language media, residents of other regions of Georgia develop stereotypical opinions about them. *“Unfortunately, here, on Georgian television channels, there are very underqualified journalists, very often they report on such events that do not really take place in Akhalkalaki. This has a very bad impact on the stereotypes of the population. A reporter does not visit the place, hears a rumour and makes a report or takes an interview from certain individuals. All people have their specificity, their own opinion and if this one person expressed their view this does not mean that the rest of the population is of the same opinion. This issue is still outstanding. Therefore, other regions sometimes have of low opinion of us and are aggressively disposed towards us”* (Akhalkalaki, female, 18-40).

In the opinion of respondents, national minorities are reported in Georgian media from a negative perspective, since primarily they report on issues such as early marriages, murders and divorces and not everyday problems of regions, as for example, social-economic problems, land related issues, unemployment and infrastructure. In their words, there are villages in Kvemo Kartli where transportation stops after 4 p.m. Furthermore, there are a number of problems with receiving social assistance that are not reported on at all. *“Our region is primarily agricultural, although they do not report on this in any manner. Therefore, agriculture remains underdeveloped. Furthermore, people have problems with banks and there is also a problem with irrigation water. They remember these problems only during the pre-election period”* (Marneuli, Female, 18-40).

Respondents from Marneuli said that a higher degree of interaction between majority and minority groups would be the solution to the problem. In their view, more intercultural projects should be designed to contribute to overcoming existing stereotypes.

Based on information received from focus groups held in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli it may be said that there are effectively identical problems in both regions in terms of access to information. The lack of adequate command of the state language is the key barrier, which hampers them in

receiving information. In both regions, the difference in terms of the awareness across generations can be observed – the young generation is better informed. This is also due to the fact that youth, unlike older residents, have a better command of the Georgian language. Furthermore, they use the Internet more actively. If a young person does not have an adequate command of the Georgian language, she/he is usually willing to learn the state language. Residents realize that the knowledge of the state language, awareness about the developments in the country, education, and link with other regions of the country is also the key to integration in the society.

The situation with the transmission of information is really challenging. It should be underlined that it is not only Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti residents who receive limited information about the developments in the rest of Georgia, but according to the respondents of both regions, other regions of Georgia also receive scarce information about the situation in the mentioned regions. Information received from news programmes of neighbouring countries usually does not reflect Georgian reality accurately either, as the context is often changed. Akhalkalaki and Marneuli residents are under-informed about reforms underway in the country, as well as their own rights. All this, naturally, renders it difficult for them to interact with the rest of country's population. The lack of information gives rise to a void that contributes to inaccurate assessments and the emergence of stereotypes. Provision of information in a timely and quality fashion should be regarded as an additional concern. According to the respondents, due to translation, reporting on topical events is delayed; furthermore, the quality of translation is often poor.

Similar to Samtskhe-Javakheti, in Kvemo Kartli the issue of issuing licenses to broadcasting channels and technical equipment has been listed as one of the principal problems. A representative of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics has attested to this problem saying that there was inadequate information related to digital broadcasting in national minority regions and the provision of such information was delayed. Furthermore, malfunctioning of the broadcasting network, poor quality equipment, unsuitability of TV sets has also been listed as significant problems.

4.2. Akhalkalaki and Marneuli Media Outlets – State of Affairs based on the Analysis of Information Obtained from Local Media Representatives

Akhalkalaki respondents listed jnews.ge, Russian and the Armenian language website as the news media source that is used most often. Therefore, as part of this research, meetings, and interviews were held with the representatives of this news media outlet. The local NGO “Open borders” founded the mentioned website. Currently, jnews.ge, it can be said, is the main mass media outlet for Akhalkalaki and nearby areas and its audience is mainly composed of youth and middle-aged residents of the region. The website primarily covers social problems of the region. Journalists report based on first-hand information obtained locally. Political issues of the region are usually not covered. According to media representatives, political life in the region is given free reign. They say that in terms of news, there are no significant political events in the region. However, according to the representatives of Akhalkalaki jnews.ge, there are controversial issues which may be of interest to the population, but focusing on such topics will likely cause confrontation; therefore, according to Akhalkalaki Jnews.ge representatives, they refrain from reporting on the mentioned topics. Information posted on the website is primarily disseminated and shared using Facebook. National news about Georgia is posted on the website as brief news. Therefore, the void of information about developments in the country cannot be filled completely. Due to the lack of finances, they are unable to hire a full-time journalist with a good command of the Georgian language who would be able to regularly produce quality information about the developments in the country.

In the opinion of jnews.ge representatives, Samtskhe-Javakheti region residents are under-informed about the developments in the rest of Georgia; they are not familiar with the main government figures of the country. Conversely, it was also mentioned that the residents of other regions of Georgia are also under informed about the situation in Samtskhe-Javakheti and that the role of national broadcasters in such mutual estrangement is considerable.

As part of the present research, a meeting was held with the Akhalkalaki television ‘ATV 12’ director as well. According to the director, in Akhalkalaki television operates within constraints, or it can be said, it effectively is not functioning. He said that this is due to the lack of relevant staff, equipment, and license. According to the ‘ATV 12’ director, after moving to digital broadcasting, the local television ‘ATV 12’ almost ceased functioning; they

are broadcasting only through cable television, and that is for a limited time. Due to financial problems, they almost failed to retain the journalists. He said that the ten-minute Armenian-language 'Moambe' programme produced by the Public Broadcaster, aired twice a day, is the main source of information for Armenian-speaking residents of Akhalkalaki. The director would like to see this 'Moambe' format increased to twenty minutes a day.

For raising access to information, active cooperation of Akhalkalaki media representatives with the national broadcasters is necessary, to ensure effective exchange of information. They expressed criticism about communication with state institutions. In their view, the government attitude towards them is superficial because they represent regional media.

During an in-depth interview held under this research, the Marneuli television director noted that local self-government actively cooperates with the television station and does not shun away from journalists. Reportedly, in general, Marneuli is a very active city in terms of its NGO sector, and its residents are engaged in public life. The director noted that for the past two years the television station has been experiencing financial problems, although it continues broadcasting. A Georgian-Azeri news programme is broadcasted three times a day. The key priorities of the news programme are coverage of local government activities and social-economic problems of the local population. They report on the countrywide developments in cases of some very significant news.

According to the TV Channel Director, the creative team had good projects, including live legal and medical TV counselling, when viewers could ask questions to invited lawyers and doctors. These programmes were broadcast in two languages with simultaneous interpretation. These programmes have been suspended due to financial issues. According to the director, they primarily rely on commercials and funds from grants as their primary sources of funding. Moreover, they used to cooperate with the Public Broadcaster, as part of which the Public Broadcaster would send the Azeri language version of the 'Moambe' programme two hours after its broadcasting on the Public Broadcaster, and it was broadcast by Marneuli television without alteration. Such cooperation ceased in 2014.

The Marneuli television station also actively cooperates with the Samtskhe-Javakheti media centre. They had a joint project involving the joint transmis-

sion of three television programmes via Skype. According to the television director, Marneuli problems are not reported in the Georgian mass media; this is due to the fact that, in general, Georgian media is not interested in the regions, and not by the fact that the majority of Marneuli residents are national minorities. According to the director, journalists visit Marneuli and other regions only in case of a major event. Otherwise, none of the television reports on regional issues.

As part of the research, a meeting also was held with the director of the Marneuli community radio. According to the director, they have not received a license yet and currently are broadcasting only via the Internet. Coverage of local problems is a priority for the community radio, however, they pay equal attention to the developments in the country in general. All news reported by the national mass media is translated into the Azeri language and is posted on their website.

The director of the radio has observed that Marneuli residents are primarily interested in information that would provide details about state services or various procedures in the banking field. As for cooperation with other mass media, the radio director hopes that after they broadcast on the FM wavelength, they will receive various offers and they express full readiness for cooperation.

When speaking about obtaining information, the Marneuli radio director said that the local government actually is not closed and inaccessible for radio representatives, on the contrary, they always actively cooperate. However, in the opinion of the director, the problem lies in the peculiar approach of most journalists and the population towards the local self-government authorities – there is a certain fear among the society towards the local authorities. Journalists take information provided by the local authorities without criticism and do not challenge it even in case of controversial issues.

As for the representation of national minorities in Georgian media, according to the respondent, unfortunately, Georgian media pays attention to the matters related to national minorities only in two cases, and specifically, to those related to Marneuli residents – either in case of the Novruz Bayram celebration or any major event, like a murder, robbery, etc. Most of the time, national mass media reports on national minorities in a negative context, which may cause the emergence of certain stereotypes among the rest of the society or intensify the existing ones.

In the opinion of the Marneuli radio director, national mass media outlets, and especially, the Public Broadcaster, should not produce isolated specific programmes or reports about national minorities only, but they have to establish the practice of inviting national minorities to any type of programme. Such a practice, enabling national minorities to express views through national broadcasters, would further promote integration.

4.3. Communications Regulatory Commission, Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics and the Public Broadcaster of Georgia about the Coverage of National Minorities Issues

4.3.1. National Communications Commission

As part of this research, in relation to the listed problems concerning licensing, several questions were asked of the Communications Regulatory Commission. According to a written response from the Commission, pursuant to amendments to the Law on Broadcasting enacted on 17 June 2015, the complicated regime of issuing licenses for TV broadcasting was replaced by a simple authorization procedure. Hence, any entity willing to obtain the right to TV broadcast, upon filing an application with the Commission, will be briefed about the information required for authorization to broadcast, as well as about subsequent procedure. The Law envisages seven days for the above.

The National Communications Commission stated that across the entire territory of Georgia, under the digital aboveground TV-broadcasting network, twenty-one broadcasting channels have live broadcasts. Moreover, throughout Georgia, two channels are available live, using satellite aboveground systems. Furthermore, three national radio broadcasters are available across Georgia. As for the Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions:

- In Kvemo Kartli, there are three local televisions (‘JSC Kvemo Kartli Tele-Radio Company’, Ltd. ‘Bolneli’, and Ltd ‘Marneuli TV’); as for radio broadcasting, in addition to three local radio broadcasters, four other national radio broadcasters are also transmitting.
- In Samtskhe-Javakheti, there are two local television companies (Ltd ‘Tele-Radio Company Borjomi’, and Ltd ‘Imperia’); one local radiobroadcasting license was issued in February. Furthermore, other national radio broadcasting is also accessible for local residents, a total of six radio stations.

In Akhalkalaki, until 24 April 2014, Ltd. ‘Spectre’ had a TV broadcasting license, and this license was revoked⁸ under the Commission Decision №218/4, although, the mentioned decision of the Commission does not relate to the process of transfer from analogous aboveground broadcasting to digital aboveground TV broadcasting in Georgia.⁹ The Company was in breach of the license terms that ultimately became the grounds for revoking the license. According to a representative of the Commission, the company is authorized to apply to the Regulatory Commission any time to request broadcasting authorization to be able to resume broadcasting.

According to the Regulatory Commission, an application has been filed for a community radiobroadcasting license in Marneuli and the Commission will announce a competition in the nearest future. There was a certain delay due to a prolonged survey to determine radiobroadcasting priorities (such public opinion survey is stipulated in Article 4 of the Law on Broadcasting). The document has already been approved and the Commission has resumed the issuance of broadcasting licenses. Pursuant to the Law on Broadcasting, when issuing licenses, the National Communications Commission is guided by its own decision concerning radiobroadcasting priorities (Determined through public opinion survey).

4.3.2. Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics

Focus group participants and the representatives of regional mass media expressed criticism concerning the coverage of matters related to national minorities in national media outlets. One interview was taken from a representative of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics in relation to this issue. According to the respondent, the share of coverage of national minorities in the national broadcaster of Georgia broadcasts is low. The representative of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics did not go into specifics, but mentioned that most often, media is in breach of Articles 1 and 7 of the Charter. According to Article 1, journalists shall respect truth and the right of society to receive accurate information. According to Article 7, journalists

⁸ Georgia National Communications Commission, 2014: <http://gncc.ge/ge/legal-acts/commission/solutions/2014-218-4.page>

⁹ Georgia National Communications Commission, 2015: <http://www.gncc.ge/ge/regulation/digital-broadcasting/ra-unda-vicodet-cifruli-mauwyeblobis-shesaxebe.page>

should be aware of the threat of inspiring discrimination by media; hence, they have to try their best to avoid discrimination of any person based on race, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, political and other views, national or social origin, or any other basis. According to the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics, Georgian media understates its own responsibility; its duty is to assess whether it stimulates discrimination and the formation of stereotypes. One of the important functions of media is to minimize the distance between ethnic Georgians and national minorities living in Georgia. In the opinion of the representative of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics, the Public Broadcaster does not have a set strategy about the coverage of issues related to national minorities; nor what should be the airtime and running time allocated to such programmes. A number of technical problems caused by the transfer to digital media were listed. Firstly, poor quality equipment and the incompatibility of TV sets; Furthermore, poor quality of the broadcasting system in the regions and delayed provision of information, as well as provision of inadequate information (although, access to information has relatively improved, once the technical fault related to the provision of information was partially resolved). The lack of preliminary empirical studies has been listed as the key problem – prior and current situation in regions, the number of customers who managed to move to digital broadcasting and what difficulties remain in this regard is unknown.

The representative of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics stated that in borderline regions a broadcasting signal from a neighbouring country that blocks the signal of national broadcasters is another issue. Neighbouring countries have not transferred to digital broadcasting, therefore, in borderline regions residents can easily receive analogous broadcaster's signal from neighbouring countries.

4.3.3. The Public Broadcaster of Georgia

Focus group participants and representatives of local media were critical of the coverage of matters related to national minorities in national media. As was mentioned in Section 2.3 of the document, the Public Broadcaster is required to dedicate time to minorities living in Georgia, respect ethnic, religious, or other minorities, their cultures, prevent the use of abusive speech or image towards them, etc. In this regard, during the discussions in focus groups and conversations with local media representatives, specific problems

were listed; these topics were the main discussion points during the meeting with the Public Broadcaster's representative (this meeting was held as part of the present research). The respondent noted during the interview that currently their broadcasting (Public Broadcaster Channels 1 and 2) does not adequately cover the issues of national minorities. The only news programme, 'Moambe' at Public Broadcaster Channel 2, is translated into five languages (Russian, Azeri, Armenian, Abkhazian, and Ossetian) and is aired daily at 8:00 p.m. The duration of the news in each language is about twelve minutes.

The Public Broadcaster has nine regional correspondents, among them, one in Rustavi, who reports from Kvemo Kartli region and one in Akhaltsikhe, who reports from Samtskhe-Javakheti. The Public Broadcaster agrees that this is not sufficient. Although, as necessary, the Akhaltsikhe correspondent provides a comprehensive coverage of events in the Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts, while the Rustavi correspondent reports on developments in Marneuli, Gardabani, Bolnisi and adjacent districts.

As for cooperation with regional media outlets, according to the representative of the Public Broadcaster, they cooperate with several televisions. On an annual basis, they select regional televisions and buy their airtime. As part of the cooperation, the Public Broadcaster sends to regional televisions brief versions of news programmes translated into national minority languages.

The representative of the Public Broadcaster regarded that, in general, representatives of national minorities, due to the language barrier, are not integrated into the mainstream information space of Georgia and they are not adequately informed about developments in the country. Furthermore, another problem is that other regions of Georgia receive no information about them either. Hence, due to this lack of information, national minorities often have a feeling that various major events happen only in their region and the situation in other regions is better. According to the representative of the Public Broadcaster, according to modern media standards, good news is not regarded as news and the focus is mostly shifted to the coverage of negative events. Respectively, that is why Georgian media focuses on scandalous or negative events and national minorities are often presented from this perspective.

The Public Broadcaster representative has stated that in terms of terminology or information structure, they are not breaching the Code of Journalistic Conduct and do not discriminate against national minorities. In their view, in

general, national media cannot be blamed for stereotypical or discriminatory approaches towards minorities, except for several small-scale media outlets that are distinguished by radicalism.

The representative of the Public Broadcaster stated that, in general, national minorities seldom appear on television. At this stage, the television is being reorganized and it is planned to produce such programmes that will not focus solely on national minorities; rather, their problems will be presented in an integrated manner along with other current issues of the country. They also note that the Public Broadcaster does not select invited experts and guests based on their ethnicity. In their view, the general problem is that representatives of minorities that would speak about various topics are not seen in the public space. *“Therefore, no one can blame us that we are not bringing someone on air because they represent an ethnic minority.”* An additional problem is that only minorities speak about minority issues and others show less interest in such issues.

As part of the reorganization, along with the move to digital broadcasting, the Public Broadcaster plans to introduce an Azeri and Armenian language audio signal to news programmes, which will enable national minorities to receive a parallel broadcast of news transmitted nationwide in a language understandable to them. Furthermore, there are plans to have simultaneous interpretation of any aired programme into national minority languages and also include an audio signal with a Russian language translation in parallel mode for all programmes. However, currently, the television lacks the necessary human and financial resources for implementing this.

4.4. Assessments of Experts on National Minority Issues

According to experts on national minority issues, access to information has great importance for their integration in society. Experts explain that integration involves various processes, the success of which should be measured using certain indicators. Furthermore, for supporting integration processes, the state should focus, primarily, on teaching the Georgian language and raising civic awareness. State policy in this field should in the first place be directed at future generations. However, teaching the Georgian language should not be forced. In the view of the experts, school textbooks (their content as well as the quality of translation) and the qualification of teachers educating national minorities is especially important. The integration process also envis-

ages ensuring equal opportunities for national minorities and their involvement in all fields, in politics, economics, mass media, and etc.

At the current stage of integration, according to the experts, a difference between generations can be observed within national minorities; this, firstly, is due to a different level in the command of the Georgian language, cognitive, and civic awareness. Experts note that due to these factors, in terms of integration, the younger generation is ahead of the older generation. Experts are of the opinion that the problem of the lack of adequate command of the Georgian language among national minorities is prevalent only in the regions – in the capital the language barrier does not exist. In the regions, where there is a lack of information about processes in the country, national minorities live in their “mini world.” They are almost fully cut off from Georgian reality and due to the lack of the adequate command of Georgian language; they primarily watch Azeri, Armenian, and Russian television channels. Moreover, the older generation has its own historical memory that determines the degree of their integration.

According to the State Strategy for Integration and Civic Equality and its 2015-2020 Action Plan, one of the important points in the integration process is improved access to information for national minorities. Relevant state agencies are implementing specific activities in this direction. However, according to the experts, they, too, face numerous obstacles in this process. Often, the major problem is the implementation of already designed plans. According to the experts, numerous researches have been conducted for addressing these problems; discussions were also held at various levels, but actual progress is awaited. Several experts also noted the lack of a state vision in this direction; they criticized the Government Action Plan (2015-2020). They think that, although the document is good, the lack of relevant indicators hampers measuring the effectiveness of the planned activities.

The interviewed experts deem that the activities of the Public Broadcaster towards informing national minorities are inadequate. The rating of the Public Broadcaster itself is a problem. Furthermore, fifteen-minute news programmes aired by the Public Broadcaster are often not interesting for viewers. The duration of the airtime is also an issue – how many hours may be reasonable for a news program designed for national minorities? For Georgian-language space, it is difficult to also increase the time for non-Georgian language news programmes. They are considering creating a Russian-lan-

guage channel, which is associated with costs. Training of journalists is also difficult, since it is an additional cost.

In the opinion of the experts, regional mass media outlets must be furnished with relevant equipment. They listed the development of regional mass media as one of the primary problems for the improvement of access to information.

One of the problems listed by the experts is the dissemination of Georgian-language magazines and newspapers in national minority regions (printed or Internet publications). Here too, the language barrier creates the highest problem. In this regard, the case of Azeri-speaking residents should be underlined, since here there is also the problem of script. Older generation uses the adapted Cyrillic script and the younger generation uses the adapted Latin script. Given the listed problems, one of the key recommendations provided by the experts is the promotion of the teaching of the Georgian language, and boosting the motivation of local residents to learn the state language. The experts deem that learning of the state language should start from kindergarten, since bilingual education is more effective from preschool age. In schools, in turn, there is a problem with regard to the lack of qualified teachers. Having an inadequate command of the state language creates obstacles for teachers as well. Therefore, in the opinion of the experts, it is necessary to promote the teacher's profession, triggering the interest of youth towards this profession.

The experts also spoke about the problems at the local self-government level. According to them, the importance of the state language is prescribed under the regulations and these regulations are breached on a daily basis, since at local self-government level public discussions for national minorities are held in their mother tongue and not in the state language. According to the experts, using the same language (the State language) is an immediate priority. The second priority, in their view, is active dialogue between the national majority and minorities; the realization by all that national majority and minorities of the country are representatives of one society, one country. The experts think that such an approach towards the issue, the presence of such a vision, is the most important precondition for integration. According to their assessment, it is necessary to improve the civic integration policy, which implies dialogue with each other, and frank conversations about each other's problems. In their view, the best means for civic participation is speaking the same language and using a common information space. The experts explain that the level of civic education of the society is not a problem specific to

national minorities, but is an issue for the majority as well. Some experts said that ethnic Armenians, Azeris, Jews, Kurds, and others have been living in Georgia for centuries and an intolerant attitude towards them has been observed. People are often discriminated based on their ethnicity. The experts explained that it is necessary for the entire society to agree that Georgia is a multi-ethnic country and that such an approach should become the norm. *“We have to accept it, even in a very distant perspective, so that ethnic Armenians do not speak only about the problems faced by the Armenian minority, or Azeris do not speak only about the problems of the Azeri minority, but rather, these issues should become part of Georgian policy in general”* (Expert on national minority issues).

Lastly, it can be said that the experts expressed criticism about the situation in Georgia in terms of national minorities’ access to information. The present problem, in their view, is not one-sided. National minorities, as well as the majority are not well informed about one another; an existing informational void between minorities and the majority must be filled through dialogue.

4.5. Georgian Political Parties’ Views on National Minorities Issues

Political parties, too, listed integration as the main problem in relation to national minorities – integration in society, public life and the decision-making process. Georgian politicians agree that, largely, cognizance of the developments in the country is a basis for integration. In terms of receiving information, politicians listed the lack of command of Georgian language as a principal obstacle. In their view, it is necessary that all information related to official statements and the public decision-making process, should be well communicated with residents. However, according to them the problem is not specifically connected to national minorities. In the opinion of interviewed politicians, participation of the Georgian-speaking population in the political decision-making processes is very low, and they also are not well aware of the developments within public institutions.

To improve the access to information for national minorities, some politicians listed the development of “rural halls” programme, where rural residents could receive public services and all types of information. The mentioned programme should be best adapted to the wishes and demands of rural citizens. Furthermore, politicians listed regional media development as one

of the key recommendations for the improvement of access to information for national minorities.

The interviewed politicians think that much more should be done towards national minorities' integration. And, prior to the implementation of specific activities, it is necessary to properly determine the problems, develop a relevant strategic vision, methodology, and based on it take relevant steps. According to these politicians, despite of the 2009-2014 and 2015-2020 State Strategies for Integration and Civic Equality, radical changes cannot be observed, while challenges remain great. In their view, the problem cannot be resolved in a short span of time, since national minorities have long been isolated from public and political processes.

Some politicians think that a new concept that would be acceptable to everyone and based on which national minorities will feel as fully-fledged citizens has not been developed yet. Such a perception is being gradually introduced among the majority of the country that national minorities should be (are) fully-fledged, equal citizens of the country. Among national minorities, especially in compact settlement regions, the involvement in public life is low, there is a lack of the feeling that they are citizens of the country. Some politicians with such views of the problems related to national minorities deem it necessary to develop a general concept for national minorities and the majority that will be directed toward the enhancement of civic awareness. This concept should help the majority population to realize that national minorities do not pose a threat to Georgia in terms of losing territories and national identity, but that they are equal citizens of the country. In this respect, it is also necessary to determine government discourse, specifically, establish a discourse based on civic awareness which would underline multi-ethnicity and equal citizenship rights for representatives of all ethnicities. In the opinion of politicians, the most important fields that can be employed to accelerate the integration process are: education, culture, sports, and any fields that will maximally help national minorities to become more active.

Politicians assessed government targeted strategies and action plans directed at the facilitation of integration process positively. However, actual implementation of these strategies and action plans remains an issue, in their view. This is related to the national level institutional difficulties and frequent inconsistencies in the course of the implementation of developed plans. In the opinion of some politicians, the government should convert strategies,

visions and wishes into realistic plans and complete their implementation through consistent efforts. The government strategy (2015-2020) proposes specific responsibilities for each ministry. Politicians think that a state commission should regularly monitor and control these obligations. In their view, this commission formed under the government strategy should include top officials of agencies responsible for the implementation of these programmes, as well as NGOs and experts. Otherwise, the implementation of these action plans will remain at the level of some division, where this process gets lost in everyday business and ultimately useful initiatives remain unimplemented.

As for communication of political parties with national minorities, the majority of politicians interviewed under the research stated that they primarily visit the regions and meet the population during the election campaign period. According to them, the residents of national minority regions are provided with brochures, booklets and other campaign material by parties, translated into the Armenian, Azeri, and Russian languages. Moreover, several politicians mentioned that for the improvement of interaction with the local population, their parties have opened their own offices in the regions. Some politicians mentioned that they try staffing the party structures with local residents, among them, national minority representatives. However, parties believe that such a form of outreach, involving translation of brochures and booklets into national minority languages during the pre-election period is not sufficient for full-fledged political participation of national minorities. The majority of interviewed politicians link the lack of regular interaction with national minorities with financial difficulties.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The situation with regard to access to information in national minority regions is challenging. The lack of command or inadequate command of the state language should be listed as a key problem. This is linked to the underdevelopment of local media, a low level of provision of information and, respectively, a low awareness of residents about developments in the country.

Access to information in national minority regions is also complicated by a poor broadcasting network and the lack of functioning equipment. It should also be mentioned that national minorities criticized the information provided via Georgian-language media outlets, since, in their view, developments in

the region are covered in a superficial manner, without first-hand assessments of the situation. This, according to them, affects the degree of awareness on national minority issues by the majority population.

With regards to the improvement of access to information, national minorities express certain wishes that are mainly comprised of the following issues: a) a higher level of professionalism of national media journalists and a higher level of cognizance of local problems; b) a dominance of Russian-language news programmes in national media; c) intensive cooperation between local media and the Public Broadcaster; d) simultaneous translation of news programmes; e) increasing the running time of news programmes; f) development of regional media.

The problem related to access to information, according to respondents, is not one-sided, i.e., the level of awareness of the developments is low among national minorities, as well as the majority population. They deem that it is necessary to fill the information void between the minority and majority through the promotion of active dialogue between them.

The following recommendations have been developed based on the analysis of the status quo.

Access to information in national minority regions (key sources of information in national minority regions; existing barriers with access to information; raising awareness of national minorities about the developments in the country)

- Political parties should inform national minority populated regions about their activities on a regular basis;
- Translation of official information websites of state institutions into the languages accessible for national minorities;
- Translation of news websites of mass media outlets (television, radio, print and electronic media) into any language accessible for national minorities;
- In-depth study of technical deficiencies related to digital broadcasting in national minority regions and eliminate identified problems (it is desirable to offer telephone hotline 24-hour service to provide counselling to residents);

- Along with the switch to digital broadcasting, the Public Broadcaster should be able to provide not only news programmes to national minority regions in a language understandable to them, but also educational, cultural-educational and entertainment programmes. This implies the provision of a simultaneous interpretation audio signal of such programme in parallel mode, which will enable representatives of national minorities to get involved in unified national media space more actively.

Coverage of national minorities related issues in national media outlets (national minorities in Georgian media space; cooperation between national and regional media)

- Mass media outlets should mobilize more human resources (correspondents, interpreters, filming crews) specifically in regions with compact national minority settlements;
- Increase the participation of national media, produce special reports from national minority regions on a regular basis;
- Frequently invite national minorities to the Public Broadcaster and hold open discussions around the matters that are important, current for their regions, as well as for the entire country;
- Support the development of local media; at the same time, more cooperation is needed between local media and national broadcasters, which implies, on the one hand, exchange of information about processes in the country and region, and secondly, sharing professional skills (study of the standards of journalistic ethics; maximum use of modern technologies, etc.). Moreover, introduce distant live broadcasts between local and national televisions.

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