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საგარეო პოლიტიკის ინსტიტუტი  
GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS



# COMPENDIUM OF POLICY DOCUMENTS



# **Compendium of Policy Documents**

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GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

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## FOREWORD

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s Georgia has been on a steady path of building closer ties with Europe in an effort to “return to the European family” where its rightful place is. Over the course of the last two decades, there have been highs and lows in Georgia’s path to Europeanization. The most important milestones, however, included signing the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1996; European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and launching of Eastern Partnership Initiative (EaP) in 2009; Association Agreement (AA) signed in 2014, including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The AA culminated in a visa-free regime since 2016 that has been used hundreds of thousands of times by citizens of Georgia.

Although these milestones do sound impressive, Georgia still does not have the most important “carrot”, i.e. the membership perspective. There has been a lot of discussion about whether Georgia should apply for membership because the availability of the “carrot” will make the policy of conditionality significantly more effective. This is important in the context of at times questionable implementation of conditions by various governments of Georgia. To an extent, however, this is understandable as the public sometimes reacts to reforms negatively, e.g. in the case of adopting anti-discrimination legislation. In this triangular relationship between the EU, government of Georgia and the Georgian public, it is increasingly important that the public opinion remains consolidated around the idea of Georgia’s European aspirations. What matters for this is tangible and intangible benefits that the process of Europeanization can bring to the grassroots level of the society.

How the public perceives the process of Europeanization is the key for the legitimacy of the government’s adopted course of action. Although it is often argued that building ever-closer ties with the EU is a matter of public consensus, the public opinion data suggests otherwise. There are still segments of the society that are not necessarily aware of Georgia’s Europeanization agenda and/or perceive it differently from the majority of the public. Of course, it is virtually impossible for any political process to benefit every member of the society equally but ensuring that significant parts of the public are not left out of this strategically important for Georgia a process is an important task.

One such segment of the society that, as surveys repeatedly suggest, differs from the mainstream public opinion is ethnic minorities in Georgia. Therefore, understanding of how two of the largest minority communities in Georgia – ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis – feel about Georgia’s Europeanization is a significant task, to which civil society organizations and especially think tanks can contribute through research and analysis.

This compendium is exactly such an attempt. The four policy documents included here are based on a six-month research. We tried to get to the core of the perceptions of Europeanization by ethnic minorities in Georgia. Considering that there is invaluable quantitative data available from various opinion surveys, we took a qualitative approach to explore the attitudes of minorities. To cover as wide array of opinions present within minority communities, as they obviously are not homogenous entities, we conducted focus group discussions in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. Three discussions were

held in each region and criteria for recruiting participants included gender, age, and educational attainment. We had two discussions in each region homogenous in respect of gender and heterogeneous in respect of age and educational attainment. Additionally, we had one more discussion in each region with participants aged 30 or under and mixed in respect of the other two criteria. Overall, this strategy resulted in six discussions and a total of 40 participants in both regions combined.

To enrich our data even further, we conducted 12 in-depth interviews with respondents of various profiles including representatives of government institutions at both the central and local level, experts on minority issues, and representatives of local civil society organizations including media agencies. The interview data was an additional way for the research team to have a balanced approach and incorporate expertise of those who actively work in and for minority communities.

All this effort allowed us to organize our findings into four different areas to produce four distinct but closely related policy documents with respective package of recommendations for relevant stakeholders. The first of the four documents, but by no means in terms of importance, is authored by Levan Kakhishvili and asks an important question: Do ethnic minorities benefit from Georgia's Europeanization? In this document, I explore how minority communities perceive Europeanization and associated benefits tangible and intangible, which is followed by a discussion on what barriers minority communities face to fully enjoy these benefits.

Salome Minesashvili in the following policy

document analyzes the flow of information and provides a comprehensive answer to the question of how it is possible to counter misinformation and disruptive communication ethnic minorities as well as other vulnerable segments of the Georgian public in the context of Europeanization. Although the buzzword of misinformation may lead to negative expectations, Salome Minesashvili concludes that, in fact, minority communities do not have strong opinions about the EU, which she believes can be utilized as an opportunity. With the appropriate approach, it is possible to fill the informational vacuum and thus counter misinformation efforts and/or disruptive communication.

In the following document, the reader will find Nino Samkharadze tackling the issue of skepticism among minority communities with respect to Europeanization. Considering the challenges of integration of minority communities in Georgia, the issue of skepticism can exacerbate the process of Europeanization and building the societal consensus. The document concludes that although perception of Europe per se is rather positive than negative among the members of minority communities, the skepticism towards what Georgia can achieve with Europeanization is largely influenced by the fact that minorities are often isolated from the rest of the society. Nino Samkharadze identifies distinct trends within the communities in terms of age, gender and settlement type and develops recommendations to manage the skepticism with a specific target audience in mind.

Last but not least, Salome Kandelaki analyzes the barriers to political participation of ethnic minorities. Given that political participation is influenced by numerous different factors both structural and cultural, Salome

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Kandelaki has identified a lengthy list of the barriers hindering political participation including the likes of how political parties have often treated minority communities, high degree of centralized decision-making practices, nepotism in local governance structures, etc. Like all other authors, Salome Kandelaki has also elaborated recommendations specific to the issue under question.

This compendium would not have been possible without the generous support of the EU under the framework of Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Projects. We would also like to express our gratitude towards two research as-

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**DO ETHNIC MINORITIES  
BENEFIT FROM GEORGIA'S  
EUROPEANIZATION?**

**LEVAN KAKHISHVILI<sup>1</sup>**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Georgia's Europeanization has resulted in opportunities and both tangible and intangible benefits for Georgian society at large. However, as ethnic minorities are poorly integrated into Georgian social and political life, it is important to explore to what extent minority communities can access and enjoy these opportunities and benefits. This paper views Europeanization as formal rule transfer through a policy of conditionality and investigates how minorities perceive its consequences. The research is based on six focus group discussions conducted in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions and on 12 expert interviews with public officials, experts of minority issues, and representatives of civil society. The data suggests that

there are dividing opinions regarding the accessibility to the benefits of Europeanization among members of minority communities. Some believe that there are significant benefits in the fields of visa liberalization, as well as positive changes in politics and governance, the economy and employment, and education and social issues. However, other research participants reported that it is impossible to access these benefits because of a lack of information, language barriers and the simple disbelief that these benefits are for people like them. This paper discusses all these issues and provides recommendations for the government of Georgia, civil society organizations, European Union (EU) representatives and the international community.

**Key words:** Georgia, Europeanization, ethnic minorities, rule transfer.

## INTRODUCTION

Europeanization, as understood in this paper, implies formal rule transfer to the country wishing to establish closer ties and possibly eventual membership in the European Union. It is widely believed that this rule transfer is beneficial to the third countries for both material and immaterial reasons. However, countries often adopt norms and rules in a formal context only while not caring how these rules are implemented or if the benefits reach the average citizen. Following these considerations, this paper explores Georgia's Europeanization and to what extent ethnic minorities enjoy access to the associated benefits, and, conversely, what bar-

riers they face. Ethnic minorities in Georgia, especially in the areas of compact settlement in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti are still facing problems with integration, e.g. social and economic problems (Bogishvili and Osepashvili 2017), political participation (Kakhishvili 2018) and access to information (Bogishvili and Tsiklauri 2017). As such, minority communities in Georgia are vulnerable to a variety of problems and it is important to ensure their access to the benefits of Europeanization.

There are three main criteria for making sense of Europeanization as a political phe-

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nomenon. First, Europeanization can be divided into two stages: the accession stage and the post-accession stage. Second, Europeanization can be understood as either a top-down or bottom-up process. A top-down process refers to what happens when the EU uses conditionality as an instrument to ensure a third country's compliance. On the other hand, Europeanization as a bottom-up process refers to how political actors try to "upload" their own goals to the European level or in the Georgian context to the agenda of EU-Georgia relations. Finally, Europeanization can be driven by two different sets of factors: cost-benefit calculations, and a process of mutually (re)shaping the norms and interests of political actors. Minority issues can be important to any of these aspects of Europeanization. Rational cost-benefit calculations can influence a given government's decision to adopt required legal changes but it does not necessarily mean that the country has successfully socialized into European norms (Sasse 2008). The government often formally fulfills the conditions required by the EU, but implementation remains questionable (Minesashvili and Kakhishvili 2015). Overall, to achieve increased socialization and a sense of ownership among minorities regarding the setting of a political agenda in the country, the Georgian government should especially focus on public engagement in minority com-

munities.

This paper draws on original data from six focus group discussions conducted in minority-populated regions of Georgia – Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti – as well as 12 in-depth interviews with experts and public officials. An analysis of the data demonstrates that the conditions which makes ethnic minorities special in the Georgian context is that they have problems accessing not only benefits of rule transfer but often basic public services. The reasons for this are many-fold and vary depending on what specific services are considered. At the same time, since the data collection with participation of persons belonging to ethnic minorities takes place in the regions, it is difficult to distinguish whether some of the barriers in terms of enjoying benefits of Europeanization are minority-specific or whether all regions in Georgia face similar issues. Overall, the research shows that minority communities, especially in the rural areas suffer from language barriers, a lack of accessible information, and a disbelief in the accessibility of benefits of Europeanization. Furthermore, the research suggests that the benefits of Europeanization cannot properly be delivered to minority communities in Georgia unless public institutions are as accessible for minorities as they are for ethnic Georgians.

## BENEFITS OF EUROPEANIZATION AND ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN GEORGIA

During focus group discussions, participants were asked to identify any benefits of Georgia's relations with the EU and to what extent they personally or someone they knew could enjoy these benefits. Opinions were divided between those who could identify such available benefits and those who argued that there were no benefits minorities could enjoy. The following sections overview how minorities perceive such benefits as well as the reasons why some believed that there were none.

Focus group participants listed a range of potentially beneficial developments which have been achieved in the context of Georgia's Europeanization. These can be divided into four general categories: visa liberalization, politics and governance, economy and employment, and education and social issues.

### *Visa liberalization*

Visa liberalization was one of the most recurring tangible achievements that research participants thought citizens of Georgia can enjoy. This is not surprising as during the first 16 months of visa-free regime, 255,429 citizens travelled visa-free to the EU (Netgazeti 2018) and by June 2019 the numbers had reached approximately 450,000 (Dolidze 2019). This is over 12 percent of the total population of Georgia. Therefore, even if a person has not yet enjoyed this opportunity, there is a high chance that they know someone who has. The problem with visa liberalization, however, is that it is often used or is perceived as a way to acquire usually illegal employment in the EU. As one 20-year-

old male participant noted in Akhaltsikhe (22.05.2020),

Now people have an opportunity to go to Europe without a visa, get a job there, although illegally but still. It is also easier to get a work permit. I know many people who went to France, Germany and Poland and they work there without a problem. There are plenty of jobs there.

Consequently, the visa-free regime was one of the most frequently recurring responses during the discussions and is perceived as a great achievement which citizens of Georgia can enjoy.

### *Politics and governance*

Some participants identified positive changes in politics and governance as another benefit of Georgia's Europeanization. This normally includes improved governance and better protection of human rights, specifically minority rights. It seems that reforms brought about as a result of Georgia's interactions with the EU are viewed positively, which "made the state [Georgia] improve public services because if it did not, it would have been problematically perceived in the context of the integration" with the EU (Male, 31, Dmanisi, 27.06.2020). Another participant from Ninotsminda (17.03.2020) also positively evaluated the reforms but noted that to see the full results 10-20 years need to pass.

As for the human rights dimension of improved governance, one participant in Gardabani (female, 35, 22.06.2020) emphasized:

For Georgia to become an EU member, some conditions must be met. One of the requirements is protection of ethnic minorities including Azerbaijanis and Armenians. Minorities should be integrated within society without assimilation. Their rights should be protected, sights of their cultural heritage, their native language, [and] cultural values [should be protected] – this is one of the requirements.

This theme recurred in Akhalkalaki, Marneuli and Ninotsminda as well. For example, one participant from Ninotsminda juxtaposed the broader European approach to protecting human rights to that of Russia. He recalled the deportations of Georgians from Russia in 2006 as well as the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) which requested compensations from Russia to the victims (see, *Georgia v Russia* 2009). Similarly, a female participant aged 28 from Marneuli stated that she would like to have European standards of human rights protection in Georgia. This indicates that some members of minority communities understand that human rights, including protection of minorities, is a part of the Europeanization agenda in Georgia.

### *Economy and employment*

Another benefit of Georgia's Europeanization relates to the economy and employment. While this is a broad and complex area, participants understood its implications quite well. For example, the association agreement and the possibility to export Georgian products in the EU were mentioned as an opportunity for the country as a whole but it was also noted that Georgia does not fully utilize these opportunities. Even though some participants mentioned that farmers have undergone trainings in how to meet European standards for agri-

cultural products. The discussions suggest the need to continue such trainings. It was also emphasized that meeting European standards of food production is beneficial not only for Georgia's relations with the EU but also for the improved quality of domestic food consumption.

One of the major problems for minorities is employment opportunities and it was a recurring idea that Europeanization could potentially contribute to a solution. According to the participants of the research, this can happen in three main ways. First, some people use the current visa-free regime to illegally find work in the EU, but this was acknowledged to be sub-optimal. Second, grants that the EU and other international organizations provide has become a means of employment rather activism to promote certain value-driven agendas. And third, Georgia needs to learn from the European countries and their experience how to stimulate creation of new jobs. A female participant aged 23 from Gardabani (22.06.2020) noted:

If I wanted to start my business, there are some programs in Georgia that provide some assistance but getting these grants is difficult. As far as I know, there are such programs in Europe too and they help young people to start business or to expand your farming capacity and self-realize. It would be good if it was the same in Georgia.

As a result, sharing experiences and learning from European success stories was seen by participants as a way for Georgia to improve the job market and create opportunities for the youth.

### *Education and social issues*

Finally, the last area of benefit from Europeanization is education and social issues.

In this regard, participants overwhelmingly singled out educational opportunities that Erasmus+ scholarships provide for Georgian citizens. A 22-year-old male participant from Marneuli (29.02.2020) mentioned his brother studied in Italy with an Erasmus+ scholarship and he also used the opportunity to study for seven months, additionally his brother is active in various projects and travels throughout Europe as a result. Consequently, it is clear that the educational opportunities provided through Erasmus+ exchange programs are a highly valued benefit especially among the younger members of minority communities.

Furthermore, youth trainings and promoting educational standards were other areas in which Georgians, including minority community members, can benefit from Europeanization. In this regard, one male participant, 20, in Akhaltsikhe (22.05.2020) mentioned recognition of Georgian university diplomas in Europe as a significant achievement. A female, 21, from the same group agreed and emphasized that Georgian degree certificates even from vocational schools are accepted in Europe. She also noted that Georgia needs to learn from the EU how to promote youth engagement in so-

cial activities. Similarly, another female, 18, from Akhalkalaki (06.03.2020) emphasized the importance of youth trainings which receive funding from the EU:

I have participated in a lot of trainings that are funded by Europe and USA. In terms of developing education, this is a great help. Without such [a good relationship between Georgia and the EU], we would not have such assistance. We would not be able to study for free and now we can participate in a lot of projects funded by Europe.

Overall, the benefits identified by participants in the focus groups seem to be perceived as important achievements by minority communities, especially their younger members. However, this is an optimistic account of how minorities see Georgia's Europeanization and its associated benefits. Some research participants, on the other hand, reported that they or least some members of their communities are deprived of opportunities to enjoy these benefits. Therefore, the following section overviews the reasons why research participants believe that there is no benefit to them or people like them in the context of Europeanization of Georgia.

## **REASONS WHY ETHNIC MINORITIES CANNOT ENJOY BENEFITS OF EUROPEANIZATION**

Participants of the research identified three primary barriers which prevent minority communities, especially for older generations, from enjoying the benefits of Europeanization. These include a lack of accessible information, language barriers, and disbelief in the idea that minorities can actually receive any benefits from Europeanization. The latter problem indicates a lack of aware-

ness about Europeanization as a process which has a potential to provide tangible benefits.

### *Lack of information*

A lack of information was mentioned in focus group discussions in all six towns as a barrier for minorities. However, it is also em-

blematic of deeper problems. The research suggests that two main factors result in the deficiency of information. The first factor is the settlement type, members of minority communities who live in or close to Tbilisi are better informed about Europeanization and have better opportunities to utilize the benefits of the Georgia-EU relationship than those who live in the regions. However, disparities are not exclusive to center-periphery differences. Even within minority-populated regions, people have less access to information if they live in rural areas as opposed to municipal centers. A female participant, 18, from Akhalkalaki (06.03.2020) mentioned, “even if to some extent people have access to information in the town [Akhalkalaki], in the villages nobody knows anything at all.”

The second factor that results in a lack of information is related to the need for improved communication activities from various actors involved in Georgia’s Europeanization. A male participant, 31, from Dmanisi (27.06.2020) argued that if ordinary people had more information about the opportunities the EU creates for citizens of Georgia, the “strive for Europe would not only be an official state policy but also an individual desire of a lot of people”. This indicates is that minorities raise the issue of participatory agenda-setting when it comes to the Europeanization of Georgia. Local actors from minority communities need to have opportunities to “upload” their interests to the process of determining the political agenda of EU-Georgia relations. If the state authorities and civil society organizations manage to establish a mixture of top-down and bottom-up processes for Europeanization, there will be higher levels of societal resilience and consolidation. Otherwise, Europeanization is often perceived, as one respondent argued, “as foreign and externally imposed”

on minority communities and beyond:

Often, donor support is such that they offer you priorities and you need to adjust but in the case of European integration, there is room for us to create the right agenda. However, we do not always see this. ... In an ideal scenario, ethnic minorities should probably also be contributing to the agenda-setting and the state should be putting sufficient effort in ensuring that this agenda is actually based on European values.

On the other hand, however, public officials interviewed over the course of this research tell about various mechanisms that the state uses to ensure minorities are informed. For example, a representative of the NATO and EU Information Center stated in an interview that the website of the Center will be translated into minority languages and information will be available in an accessible language for minorities.<sup>i</sup> At the same time, there are meetings organized in remote villages under a framework of informational campaigns. A representative of the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality maintained in an interview that

Representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture have conducted meetings and provided information [to minority communities] about various issues, including cooperatives, which resulted in great interest. So they are aware of what opportunities there are [in terms of projects offered by the EU].<sup>ii</sup>

Overall, there are two conflicting narratives about the government’s communication efforts. Interviewed public officials claim that the government is putting a lot of effort into communication but members of minority communities still report accessibility of

information as a major challenge. It is understandable that state institutions cannot reach each and every individual personally, but it seems that the target audience of these communication efforts is far from satisfied. Therefore, there is a need for improved communication, which is something the Government of Georgia has historically not done well at – a timely example being the failure of communication with ethnic minorities about the measures against, and the dangers of the coronavirus.

### *Language barriers*

A lack of knowledge of the Georgian language is a barrier for members of ethnic minorities in a range of different contexts. Europeanization and accessing benefits associated with it is no exception in this regard. However, what is interesting is that often the issue related to the knowledge of the state language led to disagreements among the participants of the discussions. Some participants identified it as a challenge, while others, typically those who reported that they do know Georgian, argued that there is an easy solution to this problem. In 2005, Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration was established which was designed to train officials in local governments to increase their qualifications, including ethnic minorities who could also study the Georgian language (Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration 2020a). Currently, the School provides Georgian courses in ten centers across the three regions of Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli, and Samtskhe-Javakheti: Marneuli, Bolnisi, Dmanisi, Gardabani, Tsalka, Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda, Lambalo, Lagodekhi, and Akhmeta (Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration 2020b). Additionally, the School has mobile groups that provide courses outside these municipal centers in

various villages (Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration 2020b). This is a great opportunity for members of minority communities as the courses are completely free of charge. Therefore, one participant from Akhalkalaki, female, 26 (06.03.2020) stated, “There is [a] Zhvania school and I go there to learn [Georgian], I am very satisfied. ... If people have the interest, everyone can do it.” Similarly, this position was upheld by the representative of the Ministry of Reconciliation who stated in an interview that increasing numbers of minorities are joining these courses.<sup>iii</sup>

Overall, the Zhvania Schools are a rare opportunity for ethnic minorities in Georgia to learn the state language. However, another problem in terms of teaching and learning Georgian is that schoolchildren are unable to acquire the necessary language skills in public schools. The quality of teaching the state language is very low in schools and this remains a challenge for the state. Relying on Zhvania Schools and leaving it to an individual to choose whether to seek out opportunities to learn the state language is not the most efficient policy if Georgia wants all its citizens to know the state language. Poor quality of teaching Georgian at schools, due to the lack of human resources, especially in rural areas, was a recurring problem identified by research participants across all discussions. This means that a person graduating from high school may not have a sufficient level of state language skills and must find other ways to acquire the language knowledge. This should not be necessary and improving the quality of Georgian language instruction at public schools should be a high priority for language policy.

### *Disbelief in benefits of Europeanization*

The final barrier which was identified by research participants is perceptual. Some members of minority communities do not believe that there are any benefits to Europeanization or that benefits can be accessed by minorities. According to a female participant from Akhalkalaki, 18 (06.03.2020), “people do not believe [that there are benefits associated with Europeanization]. Even when you tell them that there are such and such opportunities, they just do not believe it... Especially the older generation.” Similarly, others do not recognize the opportunities or misperceive them and get scared, as a 31-year-old male participant in Dmanisi (27.06.2020) put it:

If they [ethnic Azerbaijanis] take their agricultural products to Europe, how are they going to sell it? They are scared, [and] do not want to do it. Therefore, [the] Russian

market is more comfortable and familiar for them because Russia does not have any standards – it is more acceptable. So, to sum up, we think locally and do not want to get involved in competition.

Yet another misperception which was especially present in Ninotsminda, was that even if there are benefits of Europeanization, they are not for ethnic minorities and are exclusively available for ethnic Georgians, or those who live in Tbilisi. Male participants in Ninotsminda (17.03.2020) claimed that “visa liberalization is for [ethnic] Georgians. They go to Europe; we cannot afford it anyway” and that “they [the EU] help the center [Tbilisi] only. As for the visa, you cannot benefit from it if you want to go for work.” Consequently, these beliefs and conceptions are predispositions which challenge the effectiveness of communication efforts undertaken by state authorities and civil society organizations.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ethnic minorities in Georgia who live in compact settlements in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti are in many ways similar to ethnic Georgians living in small towns and rural areas. Possibly the primary difference that sets minorities apart is the lack of knowledge of the state language, which results in inability to access relevant information or enjoy public services to the extent of ethnic Georgians. Other factors such as disbelief or misperceptions about Europeanization are not minority specific. If ethnic minorities feel that the benefits of Europeanization are only available to ethnic Georgians and those living in Tbilisi, rural population of ethnic Georgians could easily argue that

these benefits are exclusive to the wealthiest members of the Georgian society and the people living in the capital. If the self-other nexus in suppressed-privileged categories for ethnic minorities is an ethnic identity, for Georgians it would be social class. However, this understanding of the self-other nexus in the categories of suppressed as opposed to privileged parts of the society is largely the same. The primary solution to this challenge is applicable to the whole of Georgia, participatory agenda setting, can only happen through promoting bottom-up Europeanization based on European values.

This paper proposes the following recom-

mendations to contribute to the elimination of barriers which prevent ethnic minority communities from enjoying the benefits of Georgia's Europeanization process.

### *To the Government of Georgia*

- **Ensure participation of ethnic minorities (and other local actors from other regions of Georgia) in the process of agenda-setting in the context of Europeanization to promote bottom-up processes and increased ownership of minorities over the foreign policy agenda of the country** – It is important for ethnic minorities to be not only beneficiaries of certain policies or projects but also active participants often giving direction to the development of various processes that concern them. This way Europeanization will not seem to be externally and forcibly imposed over Georgia.
- **Intensify communication regarding the availability of free Georgian language courses even in the comfort of one's own village through the mobile classes of Zurab Zhvania Schools** – research suggests that ethnic minorities understand it is important to know the state language because they feel those who do not speak Georgian cannot easily access the same public services, let alone the benefits of Europeanization, as those who speak Georgian. However, not everyone is aware of this opportunity.
- **Improve quality of teaching Georgian at public schools** – members of ethnic minorities should have an opportunity to learn the state language at the public school. Although Zurab Zhvania

Schools are an important and effective initiative, it is of greater significance to ensure that Zurab Zhvania Schools are not the primary option for those members of minorities that wish to learn Georgian. Research suggests that the program of sending Georgian native speakers as teachers was one way to improve the quality of teaching Georgian as long as these teachers do not make local teachers feel redundant or insecure about their jobs.

- **Continue and increase the efforts dedicated to raising awareness of ethnic minorities (and rural population at large) regarding available tangible and intangible benefits resulting from Georgia's Europeanization** – The research suggests that the government of Georgia has already been undertaking intensive communication activities to deliver information about the opportunities stemming from EU-Georgia relations. However, the fact that members of minority communities report a lack of information regarding these benefits and opportunities is indicative of the need for improved efforts. It is understandable that reorienting local producers from Russian to EU market will take a long time, however, it is important to reach wider audiences especially outside the municipal centers even in remote villages.

### *To Civil Society Organizations working on issues of ethnicity and minorities*

- **Rely on local young people who already have a relatively higher degree of awareness as agents of change** – The EU Delegation and the NATO EU Information Center have been imple-

menting a project of Young European Ambassadors. A similar model can be used in exclusively minority-populated areas so that young generation of minorities who speak Georgian and English and are active members of the society have the means to contribute to the political education of older generations or their own peers regarding Georgia's Europeanization.

- **Adopt a participatory approach when implementing projects about Europeanization in order to avoid encouraging perception of donor-funded projects as externally imposed political agenda** – in general, NGOs do not enjoy high degree of public trust in Georgia. When it comes to imposing values forcibly, those who were targeted as beneficiaries may be alienated completely. Therefore, it is important that CSOs do not go to minority-populated areas with pre-defined agenda of trainings and workshops but let the members of local communities direct the process of agenda-setting.
- **Conduct informational campaigns on issues that are of interest for minority communities** – it is important that those who plan informational campaigns understand what issues are of interest to a specific minority community, e.g. Kvemo Kartli as opposed to Kakheti or Samtskhe-Javakheti, or even within

each region in terms of municipalities. These communities tend to be different from each other with different needs and interests. Therefore, such campaigns should be audience-oriented as much as possible without one-size-fits-all approaches.

*To European Union representatives and the international community*

- **Ensure that rule transfer is not just a formality but also an integral part of socialization with norms** – If the EU is interested in successful rule transfer in Georgia, the focus should be on qualitative evaluations of whether the adopted formal rules are implemented.
- **Ensure an increased bottom-up process of political agenda-setting in the framework of EU-Georgia relations** – Increasing involvement of local actors, especially ethnic minorities who happen to be some of the most Eurosceptic members of the Georgian society, will raise the sense of ownership among local communities about Georgia's Europeanization. Although it is understandable that an entirely bottom-up process is neither possible nor desirable, keeping a fine balance is important for local communities not to perceive top-down Europeanization as externally imposed.

<sup>i</sup> Information Center on NATO and the EU, personal communication, 19 May 2020.

<sup>ii</sup> Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia, personal communication, 20 May 2020.

<sup>iii</sup> Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia, personal communication, 20 May 2020.

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## APPENDIX

### *A list of interviews conducted in the framework of the research*

1. Council on Ethnic Minorities under the auspices of Public Defender`s Office, personal communication, 19 May 2020.
2. European Delegation in Georgia, personal communication, 19 May 2020.
3. Information Center on NATO and the EU, personal communication, 19 May 2020.
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8. Javakheti local NGO, personal communication, 9 June 2020.
9. Ifact media source, personal communication, 20 June 2020.
10. Javakheti local NGO, personal communication, 21 June 2020.
11. Kvemo Kartli local NGO, personal communication, 21 June 2020.
12. Javakheti local government, personal communication, 24 June 2020.

### *A list of focus group discussions conducted in the framework of the research*

#### Samtskhe-Javakheti:

1. Akhalkalaki, women, 9 participants, 6 March 2020
2. Ninotsminda, men, 10 participants, 17 March 2020
3. Akhaltsikhe, mixed, 6 participants, 22 May 2020

#### Kvemo Kartli:

1. Marneuli, mixed, 7 participants, 29 February 2020
2. Gardabani, women, 4 participants, 22 June 2020
3. Dmanisi, men, 4 participants, 27 June 2020

**EU AND ETHNIC MINORITIES IN  
GEORGIA: HOW TO COUNTER  
MISINFORMATION AND DISRUPTIVE  
COMMUNICATION**

**SALOME MINESASHVILI<sup>1</sup>**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

High public support is frequently claimed as a backbone of Georgia's foreign policy direction and especially its ambition for membership in the European Union (EU). However, ethnic minorities in Georgia comprise a group whose unanimous approval the state's foreign policy lacks. In comparison to ethnic Georgians, ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Georgia are significantly less supportive of Georgia's potential mem-

bership in the European Union. This paper outlines possible explanations for this low support among minorities and gives recommendations towards improving their support for EU membership. The paper establishes the extent to which a lack of information and misinformation about the EU account for their position and proposes a more efficient and wider-reaching information campaign.

Key words: Eurointegration, ethnic minorities, Euroscepticism, fake news, anti-western propaganda.

## INTRODUCTION

Integration of ethnic minorities into the rest of Georgian society has been a state issue for decades now. Despite government programs that target the issue, the isolation and detachment of Georgia's minorities populations persist and progress has been slow.<sup>i</sup> According to the last census in Georgia in 2014, around 13.2% of residents belong to ethnic minority groups, the majority of which belong to one of two groups: 6.3% ethnic Azerbaijanis and 4.5% ethnic Armenians (National Statistics Office of Georgia 2016). These two groups mainly live in compact settlements in the southern parts of Georgia – Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti respectively. Unlike ethnic Georgians, they are not unanimously on board with the state's western foreign policy orientation. Only 32% of Azerbaijanis and 48% of Armenians support Georgia's potential membership in the EU compared to 75% of ethnic Geor-

gians (Caucasus Research Resource Centers 2019a). In the Europeanization process, such a gap creates a challenge, especially considering that ethnic minorities are also the most vulnerable to anti-western propaganda, including from Russia (Avalishvili, Lomtadze, Kevkhishvili 2016).

Based on nationwide surveys, interviews with experts, and focus group discussions in the ethnic minority communities, this policy paper examines potential explanations for this low support and gives recommendations to state and civic agents for tackling the issue. The paper argues that despite some Eurosceptic attitudes, most ethnic minorities are actually indecisive or confused about the EU membership question and this is primarily caused by a lack of information about the EU. Therefore, an effective and wide-scale information campaign is deemed essential.

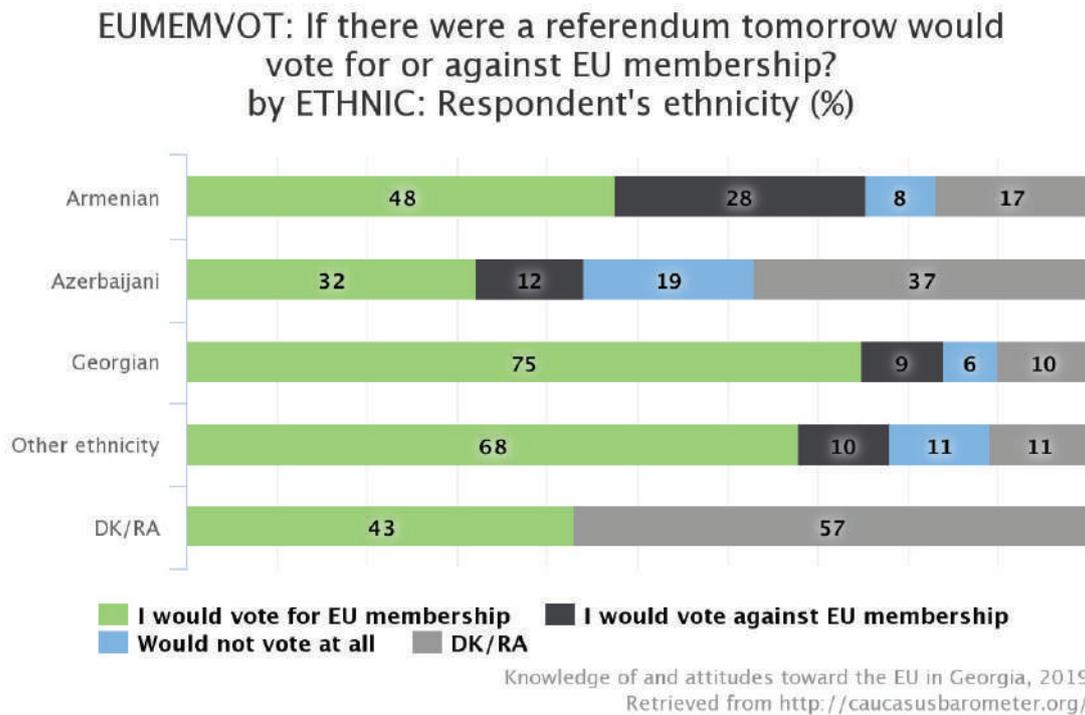
<sup>i</sup> Salome Minesashvili is a policy analyst at the Georgian Institute of Politics. She holds doctoral degree from Freie Universität Berlin.

## MINORITIES AND THEIR POSITION ON THE EU

Even though support for the EU membership is far below a 50% among ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Georgia, a majority among both groups is also not against membership. Only 28% of Armenians and 12% of Azerbaijanis would not vote for EU

membership. In fact, a majority of Azerbaijanis (56%) would either not vote or do not know if they would vote for or against membership. While the same can be said for 25% of Armenians (Caucasus Research Resource Centers 2019a).

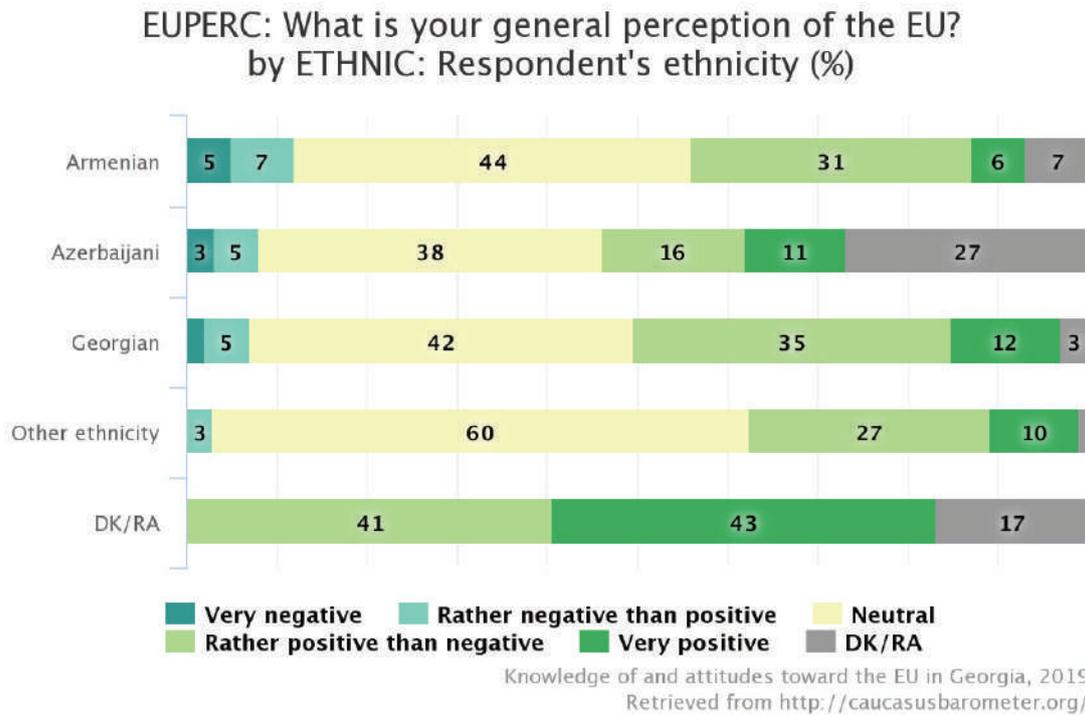
*Graph 1: Support for EU membership by ethnic groups (CRRC, 2019)*



This suggests that the lack of support for membership does not automatically stand for stark opposition to the EU, but is caused more by confusion and indecision. An overview of minority attitudes towards the EU also demonstrates this argument. Every third ethnic Azerbaijani, and more than a

third of ethnic Armenians, have a positive perception of the EU and the largest share in both groups have a neutral stance on the EU (ibid). This in-between attitude creates a room for the state and non-state actors to contribute to the formation of positive perceptions of the EU.

*Graph 2: Perception of the EU by ethnic groups (CRRC, 2019)*



The above leads to the assumption that the lack of information might be explaining their primary position – hesitation and indecision. While the data does not show clearly

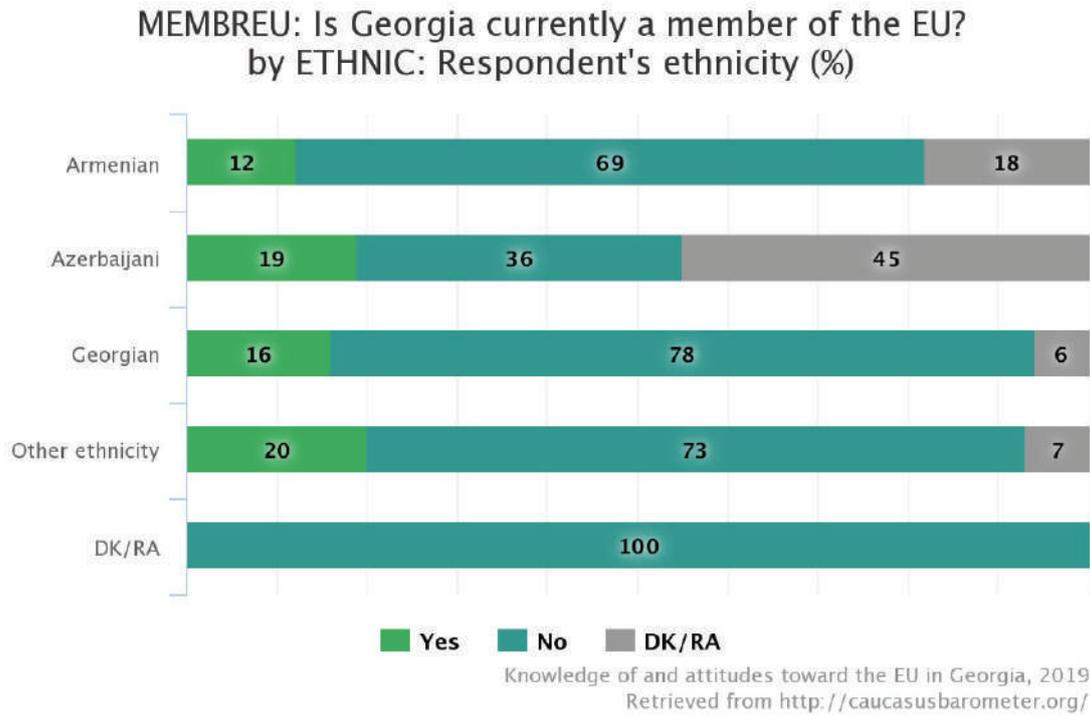
why some Azerbaijanis and Armenians are also skeptical towards EU membership, misinformation can be one possible explanation.

## LACK OF INFORMATION

The Georgian population is generally scarcely equipped with knowledge about the EU, including ethnic Georgians. However, this knowledge is even lower among ethnic minorities. For example, 6% of Georgians do not know if Georgia is a member of the EU

in comparison to 18% of ethnic Armenians and 45% of ethnic Azerbaijanis. While 45% of ethnic Georgians have heard about the Association Agreement, only 15% and 10% of ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis have (ibid).

**Graph 3:** Knowledge of Georgia's membership in the EU by ethnic groups (CRRC, 2019)

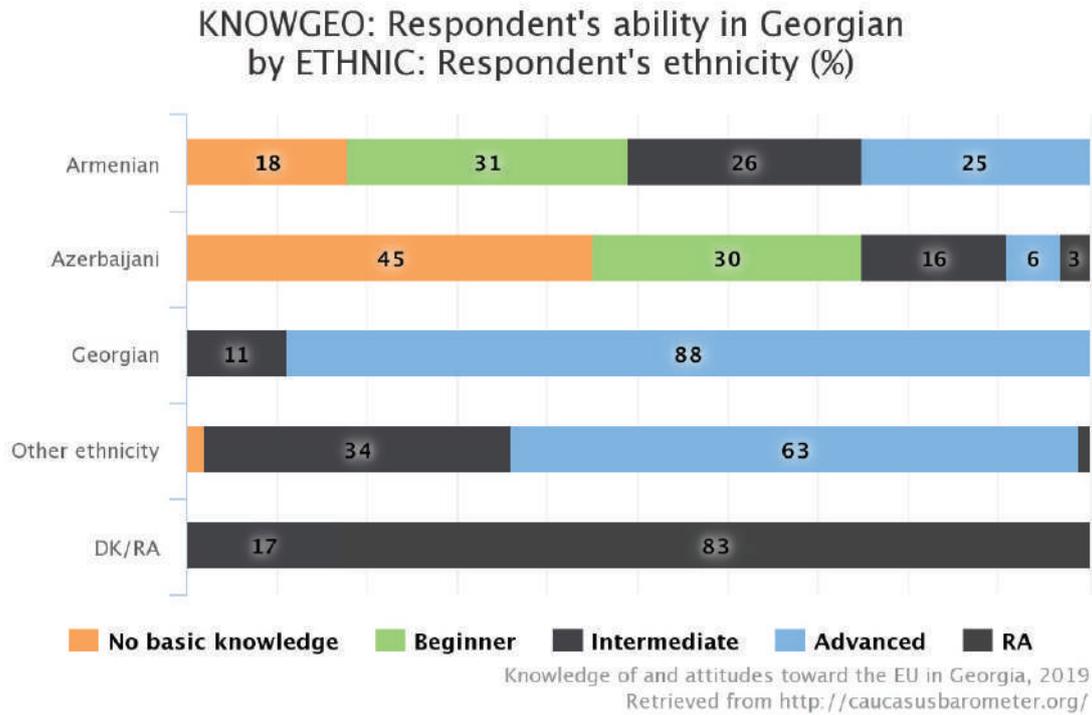


This gap between ethnic Georgians, Armenians, and Azerbaijanis can be explained by the lack of information on the EU available for minority groups in Georgia due. This is due to multiple factors, including: the Georgian language problem; lack of quality information in ethnic minority groups language; the detachment from the center as well as general isolation from the rest of the Georgian society can be noted.

In compact settlements, an absolute majority

of ethnic minorities do not speak the Georgian language (Institute of Social Studies and Analysis 2019). According to Caucasus Resource Research Center (CRRC) surveys, 49% of Armenians note that they have no or just basic knowledge of the Georgian language, while 75% of Azerbaijanis said the same (Caucasus Research Resource Centers 2019a). Knowledge of English is even lower. More than 70% of each population have no basic knowledge of English (Caucasus Research Resource Centers 2019b).

Graph 4: Knowledge of Georgian language by ethnic groups (CRRC, 2019)



However, since a significant share of Armenians live in Tbilisi, and have a better level of Georgian language as well as English, the numbers for Armenians living in the regions (specifically in Samtskhe Javakheti) is expected to be lower than the average. Due to the lack of Georgian language skills, ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis do not have access to most of the information shared on Georgian media about the EU or EU-Georgia relations.<sup>ii</sup> They are also able to access alternative English-language sources on Internet. On the other hand, Georgian media hardly offers information in Armenian or Azeri languages. As an exception, the Georgian Public Broadcaster translates some of its news programs in minority languages<sup>iii</sup>, however, this information is limited<sup>iv</sup> and the share of the programs in the Armenian and Azeri languages is very small (Mikashavidze 2016). Locally produced media sources, including radio programs<sup>v</sup> as well as some centrally

funded print media in their languages are also limited (Piranishvili 2019).

The lack of information about the EU reflects another general problem of detachment and isolation of ethnic minorities from the rest of Georgian society, living in “kind of autonomous regimes” (Institute of Social Studies and Analysis 2019). Their participation in political as well as civic life in Georgia is extremely low and Georgian political parties lack interest in recruiting ethnic minority representatives (ibid). Despite some government programs that promote greater inclusion, specifically in education, these issues have persisted over the years<sup>vi</sup>. In addition, many minority settlements are located rather far from the capital, especially the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, which means generally less activities and opportunities, including those related to the EU and NGOs.<sup>vii</sup>

Issues surrounding language and their general detachment from the major ongoings in the country put ethnic minorities in an information vacuum, which could account for their lack of familiarity with the EU and thus, lack of support for membership. As a journalist from Ifact media source, who works on ethnic minority issues, noted, “knowledge of the EU is so low that it is hard to have an opinion on the EU.<sup>viii</sup>” A representative from the Kvemo Kartli local NGO also mentioned that, “people in the region know that Georgia has a goal of Euro<sup>ix</sup> integration but they do not know why Georgia is striving for the EU membership and what would be the positive sides of this membership.”

This explains why the largest group among ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis hold a neutral perception of the EU. Only 12% of Armenians and 8% of Azerbaijanis express a negative opinion. Our respondents also noted that the EU is widely perceived in positive tones.<sup>x</sup> Focus group discussions conducted in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti confirm these views. The participants’ associations about the EU are overwhelmingly positive. Among other qualities they list: democracy, development, equality among citizens, high level of education, freedom of speech, gender equality, solidarity, economic development, tolerance, good life and work, rule of law and protection of ethnic minority rights.

Despite these positive attitudes, the idea, that the EU or its benefits are unattainable not only for Georgia but especially for them, as minorities, is widely spread among these groups. As an NGO representative from Javakheti noted, “people don’t believe that we can become members, they think that acceptance is unrealistic because of conditions in Georgia.” At the same time, the benefits of

EU membership are also considered as only accessible for small groups and not for ordinary farmers like themselves. This is because minorities believe membership is exclusively the Georgian government’s choice and beneficial for only specific groups of people, especially those who are closer to Tbilisi.<sup>xi</sup> These ideas were also voiced in the focus group discussions. A participant from Akhalkalaki focus group (Female, 18 years old) noted that “people, especially the older generation, don’t believe in the opportunities (such as traveling possibility to the EU).” Another participant from Marneuli focus group mentioned that it is anyway impossible to keep up with EU standards, thus they will “never manage to export their goods” (Male, 31 years old). It was also mentioned that “even though there were a few possibilities, the aid does not reach them” (Female, Akhalkalaki, 6 March 2020) and “it benefits those who are closer to the city and are better informed” (Female, 37 years old, Akhalkalaki, 6 March 2020). Moreover, other focus group discussion participants noted that “ordinary people do not benefit from the EU programs since they don’t know the language and cannot afford to travel to Europe” (Marneuli, 29 February 2020, Male, 25 years old) and “it is ethnic Georgians who receive grants and visa liberalization is a privilege also reserved for ethnic Georgians” (Male, Ninotsminda, 17 March 2020, Male).

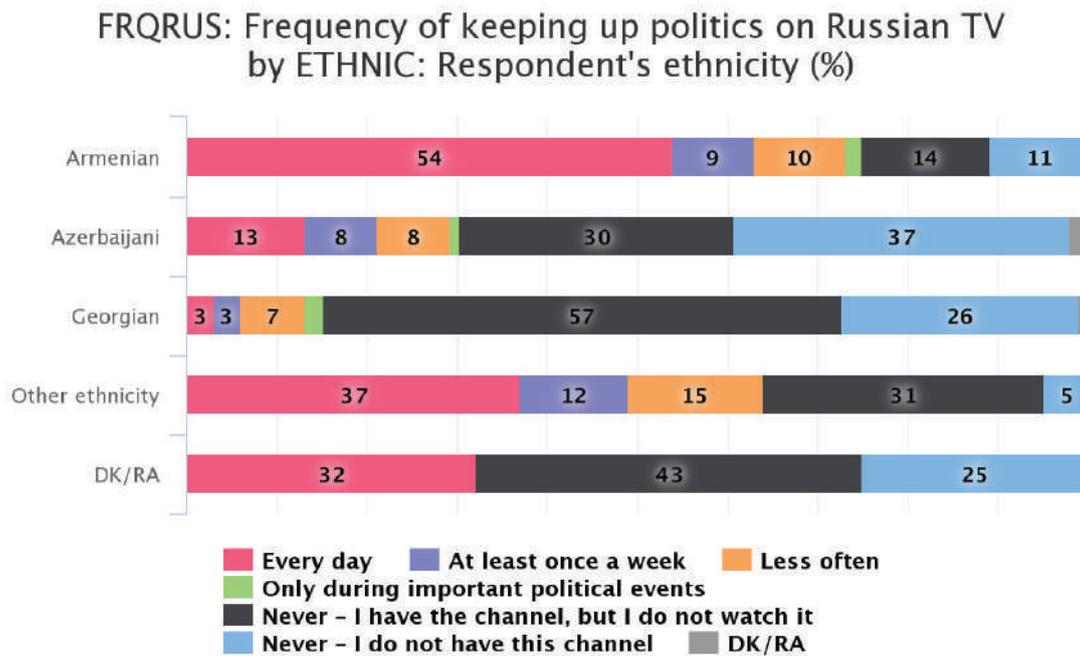
However, this does not exclude the possibility that some of the lack of support is indeed caused by skepticism towards the EU. Despite their mostly undecided position about the EU membership, some of the ethnic minority representatives oppose membership (28% Armenians and 12% Azerbaijanis). Stereotypes, often stemming from alternative sources of information, can lead to skeptical attitudes and lack of support for membership.

## EXPOSURE TO ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Language is the root of another issue, which is exposure to alternative information sources that are often Eurosceptic. Since Georgian media is not the major source of information for minorities, ethnic Armenians and ethnic Azerbaijanis mostly receive information about the EU from Russian media, which includes anti-Western propaganda.<sup>xiii</sup> While they do not speak much of Georgian or English, Russian is in fact the most advanced foreign language among these communities,

as 79% of Armenians and 42% of Azerbaijanis note intermediate to advanced knowledge of Russian language (Caucasus Research Resource Centers 2019a). Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Georgia keep up with politics on Russian TV significantly more frequently than ethnic Georgians. While 54% of Armenians and 13% of Azerbaijanis watch Russian TV every day, this number is only 3% for ethnic Georgians (ibid).

**Graph 5:** Frequency of watching Russia TV by ethnic groups (CRRC, 2019)



Knowledge of and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia, 2019  
 Retrieved from <http://caucasusbarometer.org/>

Kvemo Kartli ethnic minorities also watch Azerbaijani and Turkish TV. A journalist from Gardabani noted that these sources are also heavy on anti-Western propaganda.<sup>xiii</sup> Higher exposure to these neighboring countries, whether directly or by exposure to their news, also shapes their attitudes.<sup>xiv</sup> Since

neither Azerbaijan nor Armenia are striving for relations with the EU, and Armenia is deepening relations with Russia, ethnic minorities in Georgia are also influenced by these choices. For example, a representative of the Information Center on NATO and the EU<sup>xv</sup> noted in the interview how Azerbaijani

ni President, Alyev's rejection of the Association Agreement (AA) also caused some Azerbaijanis in Georgia to doubt Georgia's commitment to the AA. Another representative<sup>xvi</sup> also mentioned the effect of Armenia's pro-Russian policy, but also noted an example of the Velvet Revolution in Armenia, which has increased pro-European attitudes among Georgian Armenians.

As a result of their exposure to different media sources, minorities are more exposed to fake news or negative information about the EU. The threat of Russian propaganda in these regions that portrays the west negatively is also widely recognized among our respondents and those researching the issue, as well as those engaged in EU-related policy-making in Georgia.

Disinformation about the EU revolves around the incompatibility of local values with European values, especially with regards to family, religion and traditions.<sup>xvii</sup> In a few cases, even young people have expressed the idea about excessive freedom in the EU, which they usually dislike (*ibid*). Allowing same sex marriage as a demand from the EU for closer relations is another stereotype (*ibid*). In addition, some think that Europeans are more individualistic and as a result, less family-oriented and the concept of family has lost its value in the EU.<sup>xviii</sup> Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda focus group discussion participants also mentioned these stereotypes. Some participants listed "different mentality", "different way of thinking", "gays" and "different human relations with

less hospitality" when they listed what they associated the EU with. Other stereotypes include the views on the EU's deteriorating economic condition and its material interests in Georgia.<sup>xix</sup> According to CRRC data, 35% of Armenians and 17% of Azerbaijanis believe that the EU supports Georgia because it wants to influence the country. While 43% of Armenians and 29% of Azerbaijanis who would not vote for EU membership believe that membership would worsen life conditions in Georgia, because the EU has its own economic problems (Caucasus Research Resource Centers, 2019a).

The lack of information and misinformation issues are also recognized whether at the state<sup>xx</sup> or the civil society level in Georgia. Several existing programs aim at spreading information on the EU. For example, since 2017 the program of "Young European Ambassadors" has invited young people from ethnic minorities to attend thematic schools on the EU, who later conduct informational meetings with locals.<sup>xxi</sup> The Ministry of Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia and the Information Center on NATO and the EU also conduct meetings with ethnic minority groups and spread information brochures. However, the information campaigns are not enough, which is clear by the lack of information on the EU that the surveys demonstrate.<sup>xxii</sup> Moreover, information spread by the government whether by brochures, informational campaigns or educational videos is criticized for being one-sided without the possibility for these communities to communicate back (*ibid*).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Georgia is persistently following the Europeanization course and bringing all its citizens on board is important. Ethnic minorities should be engaged in this process so they feel they are part of the decision-making processes. Even though Georgia's EU-oriented foreign policy currently lacks majority support among the largest ethnic minority groups, there also exists a window of opportunity to reverse minority attitudes towards European integration. In fact, a majority of Armenians and Azerbaijanis are indecisive about EU membership, rather than opposing it. While negative stereotypes about the EU do contribute to Euroscepticism, lack of information about the EU can explain these attitudes. On the positive side, in the surveys every third ethnic Azerbaijani and almost every second ethnic Armenian noted that they would like to hear more about the EU, especially about the EU-Georgia trade relations.<sup>2</sup>

This paper proposes recommendations to target the problem of lack of information among ethnic minorities taking into consideration the flaws in existing strategies.

### *To the government of Georgia:*

- Ensure that the AA Action Plan has specific mechanisms for delivering EU benefits such as free trade and visa liberalization to ethnic minorities.
- Support and fund the establishment of local media sources in ethnic minority regions.

- Refine information campaigns with the feedback and participation from ethnic minority groups.
- Increase the frequency and intensity of information campaigns and activities on the EU in the regions populated by ethnic minorities.
- During information campaigns, deliver as detailed information as possible in minority languages about using the benefits from the existing programs related to EU-Georgia relations.
- Extend the target group of information campaigns and activities from youth to also include older generations who are usually less informed and more Eurosceptic.
- Target not only the central settlements of each region but also remote villages.

### *To the Georgian media and especially the Georgian Public Broadcaster:*

- Instead of simply translating existing media programs, launch more programs in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages with participation and feedback from the ethnic minorities.
- Encourage journalists with ethnic minority backgrounds to apply for journalist positions.

<sup>2</sup> Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC). (2019). Knowledge of and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia 2019. Available at: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/eu2019ge/EUINFMOR-by-ETHNIC/>

*To civil society and the international community in Georgia:*

- Support and fund training programs for local journalists in ethnic minority communities.
- Increase the frequency and intensity of information campaigns on EU-Georgia relations in the regions populated by ethnic minorities with increased feedback and participation from these groups.
- Increasingly target the most isolated groups among ethnic minorities. For example, those living in remote areas and older generations.
- Encourage and spread information

about the tools with which ethnic minorities can deliver their say to the local or central governments and participate in policy-making.

*To the local governments in ethnic minority regions:*

- Increase the number of informational meetings with locals on state central and local policies and listen to feedback from the participants.
- Invite experts in specific fields of Europeanization to deliver information about using benefits from the EU.
- Encourage and support local NGOs and media outlets in their EU-related programs.

<sup>i</sup> Council for Ethnic Minorities under the Public Defender's Office, personal communication, 19 May 2020.

<sup>ii</sup> Public Defender's Office, personal communication, 19 May 2020; Information Center on NATO and the EU, personal communication, 22 May 2020; 19 May 2020; fact media source, personal communication, 20 June 2020.

<sup>iii</sup> European Delegation in Georgia, personal communication, 19 May 2020.

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<sup>vii</sup> Public Defender's Office, personal communication, 19 May 2020.

<sup>viii</sup> Ifact media source, personal communication, 20 June 2020.

<sup>ix</sup> Kvemo Kartli local NGO, personal communication, 21 June 2020.

<sup>x</sup> Javakheti Local NGO, personal communication, 9 June 2020; Javakheti Local Government, personal communication, 24 June 2020.

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<sup>xv</sup> Information Center on NATO and the EU, personal communication, 19 May 2020.

<sup>xvi</sup> Information Center on NATO and the EU, personal communication, 22 May 2020.

<sup>xvii</sup> Information Center on NATO and the EU, personal communication, 19 May 2020; 22 May 2020.

<sup>xviii</sup> Kvemo Kartli local NGO, personal communication, 21 June 2020.

<sup>xix</sup> Information Center on NATO and the EU, personal communication, 22 May 2020.

<sup>xx</sup> Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality 2015.

<sup>xxi</sup> Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia, personal communication, 20 May 2020.

<sup>xxii</sup> Center for the Studies of Ethnicity and Multiculturalism, personal communication, 21 May 2020.

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**ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE  
CONTEXT OF GEORGIA'S EUROPEAN  
INTEGRATION: IS THERE A ROOM FOR  
SKEPTICISM?**

**NINO SAMKHARADZE<sup>1</sup>**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ethnic minorities in Georgia maintain an ambivalent attitude towards European integration: on one hand, they value the practical improvements to their social and economic conditions which greater European integration promises. On the other hand, a majority of ethnic minority representatives feel skeptical towards European integration, which limits their engagement, including, by preventing various opportunities provided by the EU, such as visa liberalization, educational and economic programs. In this context, it is interesting to examine what structural and value-based challenges prevent ethnic minorities from fully comprehending the EU integration process and whether or not it is possible to manage the skepticism towards EU integration. To explore the issue thoroughly Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) conducted the research in the framework of which the relevant state institutions' representatives, civil society members and

experts have been interviewed. In addition, the given policy brief is based on the focus groups organized in the two regions with the ethnic minorities settlements – Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. Discussions have been taken place in six municipalities totally – Marneuli, Gardabani, Dmanisi, Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda. The research illustrates the following major findings: attitudes towards EU integration vary depending on age, gender and social status. In addition, skepticism is mostly directed towards real perspective of Georgia's successful EU integration, rather than the idea of Europe itself. Those attitudes are fueled by stereotypical perceptions of EU, and Russia, as a “historical partner”. These challenges make it difficult for ethnic minorities to fully comprehend European integration and therefore, prevents them from receiving benefits related to the process.

**Key Words:** Georgia, Ethnic minorities, EU integration, Euroscepticism.

## INTRODUCTION

Societal consensus around European integration is vitally important to receive the maximum benefit from the process and ensure the efficient interaction between Georgia and EU. As such, it is important for all segments of Georgian society to have equal access to the benefits provided by Europeanization. Attitudes towards EU integration in the Azeri and Armenian populated regions of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti are

particularly worthy of attention in this context. To explore the issue thoroughly Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) conducted the research in the framework of which the relevant state institutions' representatives, civil society members and experts have been interviewed.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the given policy brief is based on the focus groups organized in the two regions with the ethnic minorities settlements – Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Ja-

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<sup>2</sup> Check the full list of respondents in the Appendix section

vakheti. Discussions have been taken place in six municipalities totally – Marneuli, Gardabani, Dmanisi, Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda – comprising the discussion groups of women, men and the mixed locals (8-10 participants in each group). These communities talk about structural, bureaucratic, linguistic and other problems in the context of Georgia’s EU integration.

The low level of integration of ethnic minorities in Georgia society is reflected in Geor-

gia’s bilateral relations with the EU: on one hand, Georgia’s ethnic minorities face barriers to fully benefiting from the opportunities provided by the EU; on the other hand, this issue may become damaging as the process of Georgia’s Europeanization continues. The following research attempts to analyze the structural and value-based challenges which prevent minorities from fully comprehending the EU integration process and whether or not it is possible to manage the skepticism towards the EU integration process.

## EU AS SEEN BY THE ETHNIC MINORITIES

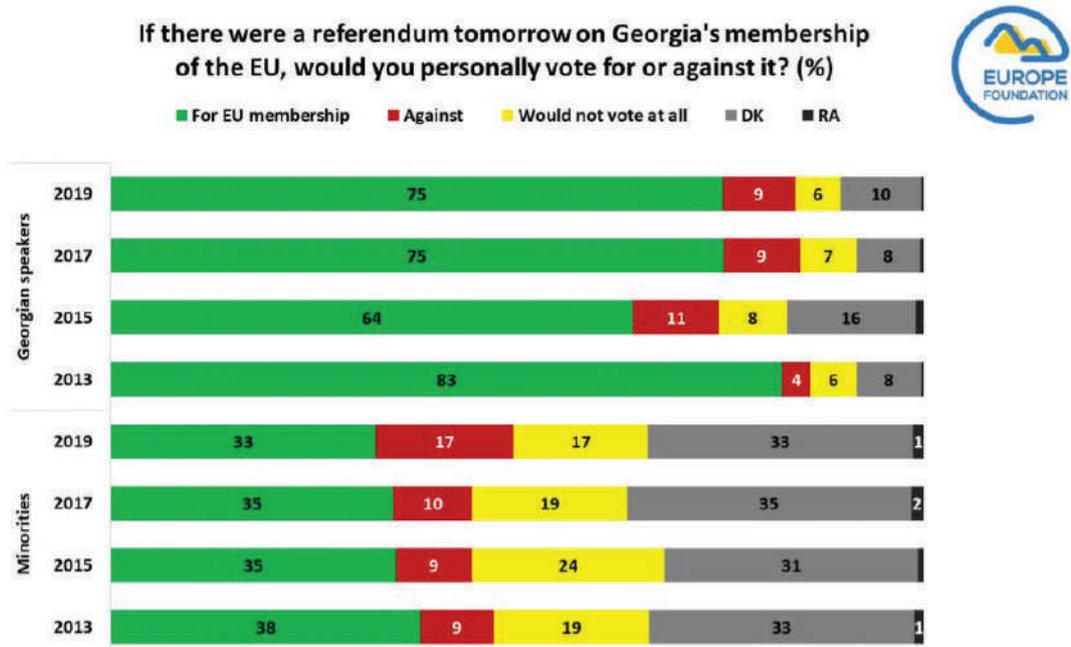
According to the focus group discussions held in both regions populated by ethnic minorities, the EU is mostly associated with positive or neutral concepts for part of the population: solidarity, equality, democracy, guaranteed rights, opportunities for career development, and quality education, healthcare, economic and social sectors. Research shows that according to the locals’ perceptions ethnic minorities living in the EU face fewer daily obstacles than those living in Georgia.

According to the findings of research conducted using focus groups, we can conclude that part of the population feels positive about the EU’s enhanced relations with Georgia. More importantly, they realize the benefits EU can bring to the country and its citizens in terms of the economy, level of democracy, and in spurring an improvement of policies focused on ethnic minorities. Research done by the Europe Foundation in

2019 illustrates that 78% of ethnic minority representatives have positive expectations towards the improvement of healthcare and higher education programs as a result of the EU integration. At the same time, 53% assesses the support provided by the EU as “important” or “very important” (ევროპის ფონდი, 2019). We can determine that there are noticeable incentives and general positive attitudes towards the EU in the regions with ethnic minority settlements.

In parallel, it is important to look at the other side of the bigger picture - skeptical attitudes towards EU integration. It is worth noting that by 2019, only 14% of ethnic minorities had heard of the Association Agreement between the EU and Georgia (ევროპის ფონდი, 2019).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, according to official data, a significant part of those communities are not considered to be supportive of Georgia’s EU membership (See Graph 1).

<sup>3</sup> Association Agreement was signed in 2016



**Graph 1:** Europe Foundation. <http://www.epfound.ge/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-EU-Attitudes-Survey-IV.pdf>

That positive and negative attitudes towards EU integration coexists in regions with ethnic minority settlements may be explained by the peculiarities of daily social-cultural

or value-based experiences which, in some cases, relate to the perception of economic benefits by the local population.

## STRATIFICATION OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EU INTEGRATION ACCORDING TO SOCIAL GROUPS

Mixed attitudes towards the EU integration process are related to various social groups: differences are visible among the young and elderly population, between men and women, and between urban and rural settlers.

In personal communications, local representatives of regional organizations state that elderly minorities who remember the life during the Soviet Union and the wide communication opportunities granted by using Russian as a lingua franca are suspicious about the EU.<sup>iii</sup> Additionally, they do not benefit as much from the educational or economic programs offered by the EU, as the

younger generations can. They cannot enhance professional skills as they have a limited knowledge of the Georgian language and therefore civic engagement and interacting with local officials is not among their priorities. Discussions held in Akhaltsikhe, a community with a significant Armenian population, illustrated that differences in attitudes is particularly obvious during interactions between different age groups, for example, between elderly school teachers lacking training and the new generation of students.

The perceptions of male ethnic minorities

may be different from the attitudes of females due to several reasons. Participants of focus groups held in the Javakheti region focus on practical, economic factors, for instance, men migrating to work in Russia. Moreover, they have a strong nostalgia towards the Russian market, which used to be the sole source of income for many families before Russia withdrew its military bases from the region in 2007 (liklikaZe, 2007). Discussions held in Kvemo Kartli, may imply that there are cultural factors to be considered as well: in Azeri community traditional points of social interactions are tea-houses called Chai-khana which Azeri women usually do not visit. Because of this they miss an opportunity to attend discussions and exchange information and ideas which would impact their understanding of the issue.<sup>iii</sup> As one of the participants of a Marneuli focus group stated, “here women think that they will get in trouble at home if they become active”.

The representative of the Information Center on NATO and the EU points out, Euroscepticism caused by everyday needs is more common in villages and small residential set-

tlements than in regional centers.<sup>iv</sup> Research conducted using focus groups illustrates that the reason is a visibly low level of education and information, a passive civil sector, and the lack of projects for the villages. People living in rural areas have a strong need for trade in agricultural products and cattle, which is not easily offered to them by the greater European integration. The same is evidenced by the findings of the discussions held in Akhaltsikhe and Dmanisi - “there is some level of information [on European integration] in the city, while there is no knowledge of it in the villages.” Similar differences are seen in the communities of Dmanisi and Marneuli as well as in Akhaltsikhe and the surrounding villages.

Based on this, it can be assumed that skeptical attitudes in regions with ethnic minorities are impacted by pro-Russian attitudes caused by Soviet nostalgia, a lack of information due to language barriers, disinformation, economic factors and various levels of intensity in social communication. However, skepticism in these regions is characterized by other peculiarities which shape negative attitudes.

## SELF-PERCEPTION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF GEORGIAN STATE AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Unanimously positive attitudes towards Georgia’s path towards European integration is important for the country. For this to happen it is essential that all Georgian citizens feel they are members of the same society. This is a particularly sensitive issue among ethnic minorities. Perception-based challenges are especially worthy of attention since positive transformation in these regards is a complex and a long-term process,

while negative effects are easier and faster to be seen.<sup>v</sup>

The sense of cultural-political identity towards Georgia and Georgian society is high among ethnic minorities (სარეკომენდაციო დოკუმენტი, 2019). As an illustration, ethnic Azeri citizens voice their discontent about the fact that higher education in Georgia is supported by the Azeri company “SOCAR”,

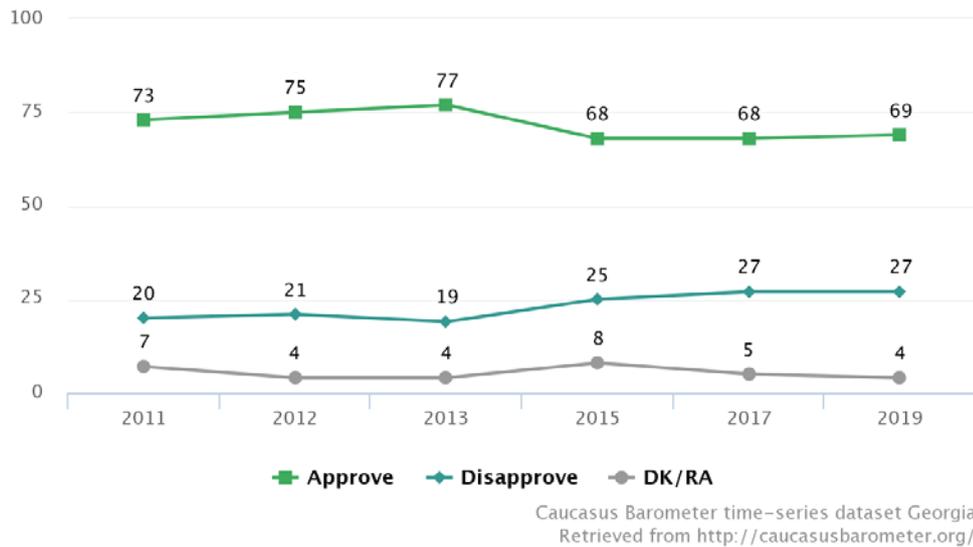
while other mechanisms of financial support for studies are limited. For instance, the attitude of participants involved in discussions in Marneuli expressed the following sentiment: “We are not diaspora, SOCAR must not pay for our education”. At the same time, ethnic Armenians living in Samtskhe-Javakheti region refer to Armenia as a “neighboring country”, which highlights the appeal to consider Georgia as “their country”.

For ethnic minorities, the problem with civic integration is related to the fact that they do not have communication with Georgian society and do not know Georgian culture. The State Strategy of Civic Equality and Integration (2015-2020) is focused on the preservation of local culture, as well as on integration processes (სტრატეგია, 2015). In reality this does not sufficiently support intercultural communication - *coexistence* and *exchange*. According to the report on the policy of Marneuli Culture Center, representatives of the center view cultural integration as a one-sided endeavor, by only putting forward Georgian culture and not as a two-way process, which implies an emphasis on local culture as well (შალვაშვილი, 2019). The deficiencies of state policy in terms of *coexistence* is highlighted by the attempt to use exclusively Georgian visuals during the Azeri celebration - Dmanisoba in 2019 (შალვაშვილი, 2019). When it comes to the practice of exchange, the lack of internal mobility mat-

ters, particularly for the ethnically Armenian population living far away from Tbilisi, majority of whom have never visited other parts of Georgia outside of Samtskhe-Javakheti region. Therefore, communication with Georgian society and the environment is practically nonexistent. According to representative of the Public Defender’s Office, that is why these communities become such closed.<sup>vi</sup>

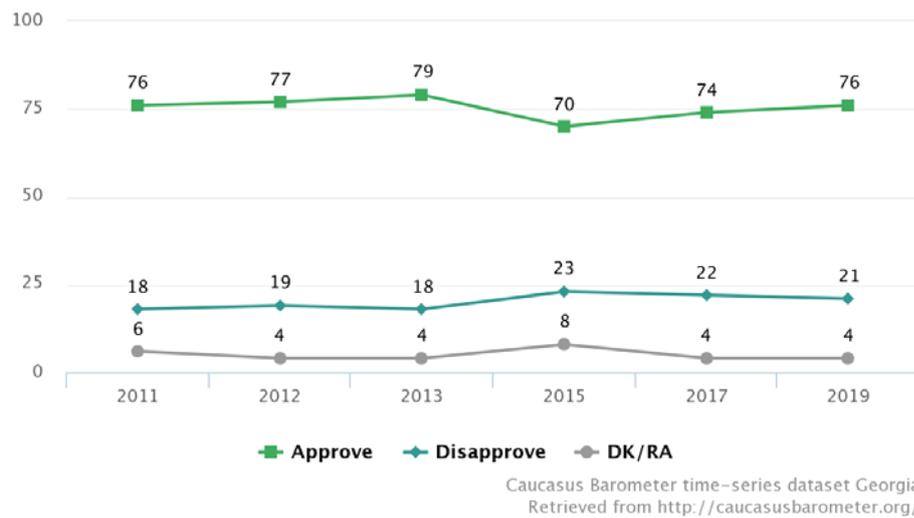
At the same time, two-way integration is no less important - an exchange of information about Georgia among ethnic minorities, as well as an exchange of information on minorities among the rest of Georgia. As the discussions in Marneuli highlighted, ethnic Azeris and Armenians do not see their role in Georgian state-building in textbooks at schools or in other educational institutions. Moreover, personal communications during the research illustrated the problem with media coverage, according to which the media reports on these regions only in negative or political contexts. As a result, a perception is created in Tbilisi that these are “wild regions” as said by the focus group participants. This is a result of lack of communication between two parts of the society in which one views the other as strangers. Indeed, about 20-25% of Georgia’s population does not approve of business relations with ethnic Azeris and Armenians living in Georgia (see Graphs 2 and 3).

### BUSINARG: Approval of doing business with Armenians living in Georgia (%)



**Graph 2.** Approval of Doing Business with Armenians Living in Georgia. <https://caucasusbarometer.org/ge/cb-ge/BUSINARG/>

### BUSINAZG: Approval of doing business with Azerbaijanis living in Georgia (%)



**Graph 3.** Approval of Doing Business with Azerbaijanis Living in Georgia. <https://caucasusbarometer.org/ge/cb-ge/BUSINAZG/>

As such, integration of ethnic minorities into Georgian society is characterized by ambivalence: on the one hand there is some progress in terms of developing multiculturalism and a common sense of self-perception (აბგარიძე, 2019); while, on the other hand, distrust and in some cases aggression towards minorities is evident in the context of state building (სამხარაძე, 2020).

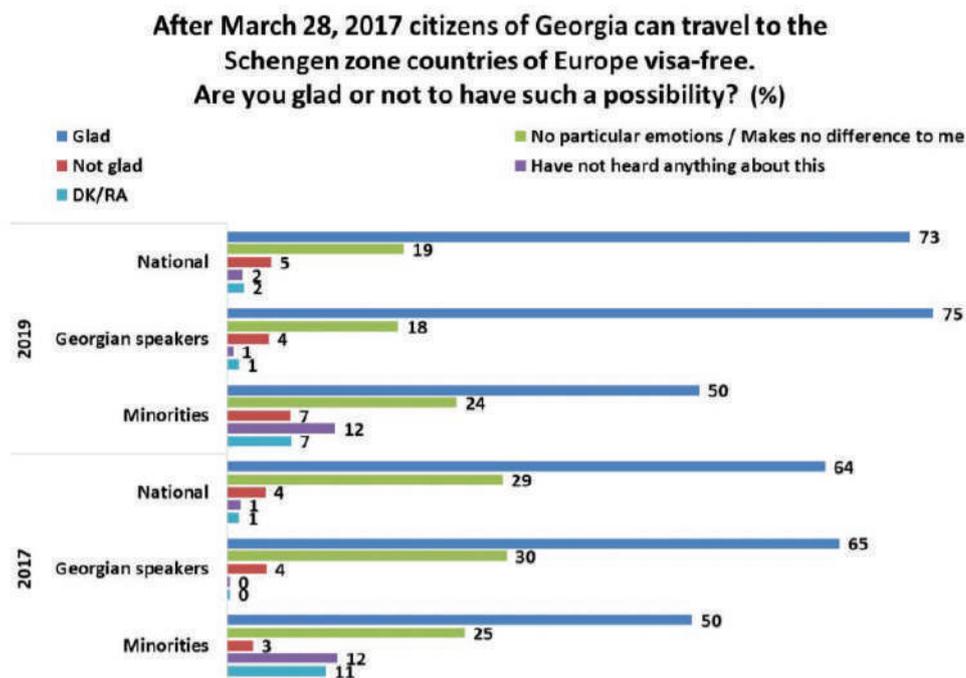
There are fundamental challenges to the civ-

ic integration of ethnic minorities into Georgian society which creates the room for EU integration-related risks in three directions: local communities do not trust the government in terms of its ability to deliver tangible and practical progress to on the path towards the European integration. Secondly, resisting Russia is becoming more complex in isolated societies. Additionally, countering traditional stereotypes is increasingly less effective.

## WHO IS THE (EURO)SKEPTICISM DIRECTED AT?

Based on the tendencies outlined in the research, it may be concluded that ethnic minorities in Kvemo Kartli, as well as in Samtskhe-Javakheti regions more or less realize the benefits which can be achieved in future: justice, improving the quality of production, and forcing the government to im-

plement effective reforms. However, at this stage, access to education and freedom of travel are among the most popular achievements (see Graph 4). Erasmus and visa liberalization are the topics that have been highlighted the most by the participants of the discussions in both of the regions.



**Graph 4:** Europe Foundation. <http://www.epfound.ge/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-EU-Attitudes-Survey-IV.pdf>

Against this background, Eurosceptic attitudes among ethnic minorities is still strong, as had already been evidenced (ევროპის

ფონდი, 2019). Therefore, it is interesting to examine where the lack of trust is directed.

## EXISTING STEREOTYPES AND TRUST OF MINORITIES

One of the major factors feeding skepticism among the Georgian population, and ethnic minorities in particular, are the stereotypes about Europe. The findings of the focus group meetings held in both of the regions demonstrated “excessive freedom”, “perversion”, and a “lack of family relations” to be the most widespread stereotypes. However, representatives of the Information Center of NATO and the EU point out that similar attitudes do not significantly differ from the stereotypes raised by Georgian society, which leads us to the conclusion that stereotypical attitudes are common regardless of ethnic identity.<sup>vii</sup> However, there are peculiarities in terms of countering these stereotypes and the mechanisms for disregarding and replacing them with accurate information. This process is challenged by the lack of information and civic integration

within these communities.

These negative stereotypes coexist with positive perceptions frequently related to economic well-being: according to the discussions, these are “high salaries”, “high quality of life”, and “social services”. Hence, the analysis of stereotypical perceptions enables us to conclude that various segments of Georgian society have similar attitudes, which is illustrated by the fact that the level of distrust towards the EU does not differ greatly among ethnic minorities and the rest of the society (13% and 16% respectively). However, there is a difference between the level of trust towards the EU with minorities groups showing lower levels of trust compared to the Georgian speaking population - 36% and 45% respectively (ევროპის ფონდი, 2019).

## STATE PROGRESS IN EU INTEGRATION PROCESS AND TRUST OF MINORITIES

A significant segment of ethnic minorities cannot benefit from the opportunities provided by the EU to Georgia. According to youth in Marneuli this is due to the fact that both educational programs and visa free travel are designed for higher income groups against whom they cannot compete because of a lack of knowledge of the Georgian language or a lack of information.

An analysis of the focus group discussions

illustrates that skeptical attitudes are directed towards the government, not towards Europe or European integration per se: there is a distrust towards the progress the government has achieved which will prepare the country for greater integration, as well as towards future progress, even in event of membership. Discussions held in both of the regions characterized the government’s efforts to fulfill its commitments as “fictitious”, or superficial.

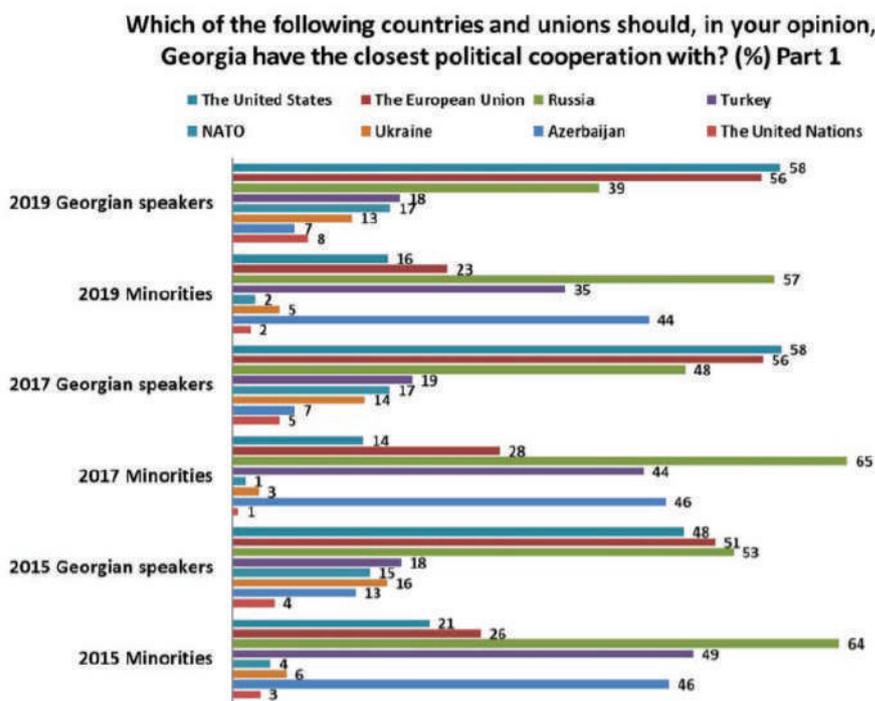
Perception that various standards are not being met by Georgia plays an important role in feeding skepticism towards EU membership (ევროპის ფონდი, 2019). It is especially visible when respondents discuss the commitment to fulfill the provisions of the Framework Convention on Protecting Ethnic Minorities (ზარხო-კონვენცია, 1995).

In this case, skepticism is directed towards Georgia's progress in EU integration more than the EU itself. This context applies not only to the failures of the government, but also to the lack of readiness among the Georgian society. To illustrate this, various conservative approaches were highlighted during the discussions.

## RUSSIAN FACTOR AS CHALLENGE

A number of factors related to Russia have important long-term effects on European integration for Georgian society. 57% of ethnic minorities believe Russia should be the

country or union that Georgia should have the closest political cooperation with (see Graph 5).



**Graph 5:** Europe Foundation. <http://www.epfound.ge/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-EU-Attitudes-Survey-IV.pdf>

Even without Moscow's involvement, common cultural and historical experiences have had a significant impact on ethnic minorities facing the challenge of language barrier (both toward Georgian and English).<sup>viii</sup> Because they speak Russian, and consider Rus-

sia an accessible market for their economic activities, a major segment of ethnic minorities priorities Russia over "distant" Europe. They fear competition on the European market and because of that are hesitant to engage with it. Similar discomfort feeds into

their distrust towards the EU. In addition, youth who are hesitant to pursue higher education in Tbilisi because of the language barrier, go to either Armenia or Azerbaijan for the education programs supported by Russian initiatives like the “Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia” (РФФИУ, 2019), which, according to the representative of the Information Center, has helped over 100 students in 2019 to continue their studies in Russia.<sup>ix</sup> Therefore, Russia’s accessibility and historical-geographic proximity plays an important role in nurturing doubts about

European integration.

It can be concluded that skepticism reflected in research is not necessarily directed towards Europe or the idea of the European Union as certain segments of ethnic minorities approve of enhanced relations with the EU due to various pragmatic reasons. The major source of their skepticism derives from doubts over Georgia’s progress on the path towards the European integration, Russia’s geographic-historical proximity and the dominance of stereotypical perceptions.

### CAN (EURO)SKEPTICISM BE MANAGED?

For ethnic minorities living in Georgia, the perception of European integration is ambivalent: positive and negative attitudes coexist and develop side-by-side. The latter prevents some segments of local society from fully benefiting from the economic, social or educational opportunities offered by the EU. Various components of skepticism do not necessarily imply direct distrust towards the EU, rather they relate to the factors nourishing doubts, such as managed stereotypes, Russia as a counterpart of Europe and a major player, and distrust towards Georgia’s practical progress in the process of the European integration.

As for the positive perceptions, tolerance and solidarity are among the attitudes most frequently associated with the EU by the ethnic minorities as these are the challenges that ethnic minorities face on a daily basis. Freedom of movement and the educational opportunities feed into positive attitudes which creates the grounds for arguing that strengthening pro-European attitudes have

a real and solid foundation among ethnic minorities.

When representatives of ethnic minorities discuss the benefits of the EU, they feel hopeful about the future despite the fact that currently they cannot benefit from educational programs or visa liberalization highlighting the acceptability of Europe. Considering all the factors encouraging (euro) skepticism among ethnic minorities, various mechanisms for managing similar attitudes can be put into action. This includes meetings with people living in villages, intensive intercultural communication and mobility, information policy based on experience, and practical social outcomes which would balance the nostalgia towards the Soviet Union. The government should constantly express its readiness for European integration both in terms of democracy and specifically in its approach to minorities. All of the aforementioned measures will contribute to strengthening positive perceptions on the EU, which will gradually reduce (euro)skepticism.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ethnic minorities' attitudes towards EU integration is important since it provides tangible impact on benefiting from the process and Europeanizing successfully. That is why the issue requires particular attention from both the state and the society. According to the research it can be determined that the skeptical attitudes towards the EU integration in ethnic minorities is highlighted with the distrust towards the government's progress in this process. This factor is catalyzed by lack of opinion-sharing with the rest of the society. Cultural integration particularly influences on the ethnic minorities' attitudes towards the state and its foreign policy vector. This is mostly reflected on the especially sensitive segments of the local communities such as women, elderly people and the rural habitants being particularly vulnerable towards spreading the skepticism about Europeanization. As a result of comprehending these factors it is possible to manage (euro) skepticism by halting its core motivations and implementing relative measures.

### *Recommendations for the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality*

- **Representatives of the civil society members operating in local communities should be involved in discussing the new State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration** in order to reflect their specific challenges, attitudes and needs in the document.
- **Practical activities comprehending the minorities about the state's progress in the EU integration process to be intensified**, especially the ones

about visa liberalization, educational exchange programs and the grant opportunities, which are of the particular interest of ethnic minorities. This will support to enhance public trust towards the state's progress in the EU integration process among the local communities.

- **Internal educational, professional and informational exchange programs must be ensured** for ethnic minorities living in the Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions in order to support information sharing and halt skepticism triggered by isolation.
- **Cooperate intensively with the state institutions responsible for infrastructural and social improvement projects** in the two regions in order to work on locals' daily challenges to make easier for them to have accessibility on the benefits of Georgia's Europeanization.

### *Recommendations for the Local Government*

- Support the local traditional cultural markers to be advanced, **encourage the activities ensuring ethnic minorities to see their role in Georgian state-building process**, which will enhance their trust towards the state's progress in the EU integration process.
- **Encourage locals, more particularly, the youth minorities, to participate in internal exchange camps, professional visits throughout Georgia** helping

to feel themselves being part of the entire society.

- **Increase the intensity of the field visits promoting the successful stories of implemented enterprises and export in EU in the rural areas**, in order to make the agrarian production opportunities created by the Europeanization process more realistic and accessible.
- **Communication with the elderly minorities to be intensified** in order to balance the skepticism triggered by the Soviet nostalgia.
- **Ensure alternative discussion spaces for women** representing minorities providing communication areas to share the opinions about EU integration processes by preventing the social-cultural barriers.

#### *Recommendations for CSOs and Analytical Organizations*

- **It is necessary to enhance the research on the core motivations of (euro) skepticism – Soviet nostalgia, social difficulties and the stereotypes**, which will support to develop the specific result-oriented project ideas.
- **It is necessary to narrow down CSOs' and analytical organizations' attention on specific societal groups – the rural citizens, the elderly and women – being particularly vulnerable towards the EU-integration skepticism and the long-run projects with them to be planned.** It will make the CSOs' activities more focused and bringing more stable outcomes in terms of halt-

ing the sources of skepticism among the local communities.

- **Positive aspects of the EU integration process – visa liberalization, economic benefits and European educational opportunities – currently understood by ethnic minorities should be accentuated strongly** when planning projects taking into the consideration the specific linguistic, human rights-related or other necessities.
- **To keep monitoring Georgia's progress and ongoing challenges during the EU integration process and provide specifically relevant findings to the ethnic minorities in a clear and plain manner.**
- **To develop the trust toward the CSOs and stable communication with them by planning and implementing the local long-run projects**, which can enhance their interest in those organizations' activities and, relatively, successful implementation of the concrete local projects.

#### *Recommendation for International Community and Donors*

- **Projects oriented on the ideas to integrate the minority women's societal-cultural integration must be accentuated** while discussing the project proposals.
- **Attention towards the social and economic projects focused on rural settlers in the regions of Kvemo Kartli and Samktskhe-Javakheti must be enhanced.**

- **Support for the ideas oriented on balancing the Soviet nostalgia among the elderly minorities must be enhanced.**
- **Projects oriented on positive aspects**

**of the EU integration process - visa liberalization, legal improvements and European educational opportunities - must be supported.**

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## APPENDIX

### *A list of interviews conducted in the framework of the research*

1. Exert in ethnic minorities. Online interview, May 21, 2020
2. Representative of the Information Center on NATO and the EU. Online interview. 22 May, 2020
3. Representative of the Information Center on NATO and the EU. Online interview. 19 May, 2020
4. Representative of the Public Defender's Office. Online interview. 19 May, 2020
5. Journalist. Online interview, 20 June, 2020
6. Office of State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality. Online interview, 20 May, 2020

### *A list of focus group discussions conducted in the framework of the research*

#### Samtskhe-Javakheti

1. Focus Group, Akhaltsikhe, mixed, 22 May, 2020
2. Focus Group, Ninotsminda, Males, 17 March, 2020
3. Focus Group, Akhalkalaki, Females, 6 March, 2020

#### Kvemo Kartli

1. Focus Group, Marneul, mixed, 29 February, 2020
2. Focus Group, Dmanisi, Males, 27 June, 2020
3. Focus Group, Gardabani, Females, 22 June, 2020

**INTEGRATION OF ETHNIC  
MINORITIES IN GEORGIA: BARRIERS  
TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

**SALOME KANDELAKI<sup>1</sup>**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The political integration of ethnic minorities is a complex process, and as Georgia remains a transitional democracy it still has a long way to go. Quality political participation of Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities at the national level remains a challenge. In Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions ethnic minorities have negligible impact on political decisions. Particularly, older generations of ethnic minorities, the majority of whom do not speak Georgian, are not informed about Georgia's domestic or foreign policy priorities, and are subject to the unequal treatment. To counteract this, the Government of Georgia should work in a more coordinated manner with the EU

delegation and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to ensure that policies which are designed to strengthen politically disenfranchised groups, do in fact respond to their needs.

The arguments in this policy paper are based on existing literature and official documents, as well as expert interviews and focus group discussions held in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions. The work covers recommendations formulated in response to the challenges described in the research for the Government of Georgia, political parties, the EU delegation and NGOs.

**Key Words:** ethnic minorities, political participation, integration, representation, Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti.

## INTRODUCTION

Proper political integration of ethnic minorities is one of the primary preconditions for Georgia's successful European integration. Despite this, the political integration of these groups remains a challenge. Increasing Azerbaijani and Armenian ethnic minorities' political participation is especially problematic. The majority of ethnic minorities in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions are completely ignored by local political elites. In best-case scenarios, communication with these populations are established prior to elections, with the goal of political instrumentalization; however their voices at the national level are virtually ignored (Akhaltshikhe, Mixed, 2020, May

22; Marneuli, Mixed, 2020, February 29). Effective instruments which would ensure the participation of ethnic minorities in political processes have not been outlined in either the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration for 2015-2020 or in the Law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, adopted under the framework of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement. It is important to determine what factors are hindering the political participation of ethnic minorities at the local and national levels. Additionally, to what extent do structural factors contribute to political participation and what can be done to increase ethnic minority political participation?

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While discussing political participation in dense settlements of ethnic minorities in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe Javakheti regions, this work considers direct (substantive) and indirect political participation. In terms of direct participation, this work is based on the classical definition of political participation, which includes “those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take” (Verba and Nie, 1972). We may define the indirect political participation of

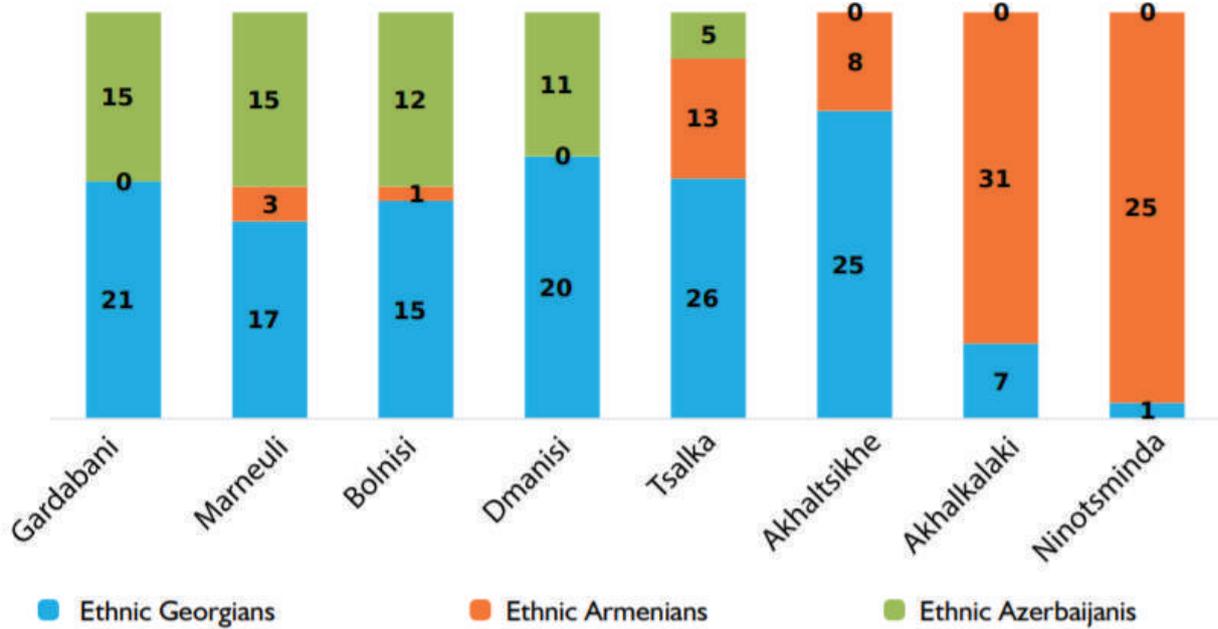
ethnic minorities using a wider definition of political participation which implies influencing the activities of elected officials and taking part in achieving specific political objectives, instead of exerting influence through elections (McCloskey, 1968). This work is methodically based on 12 expert interviews and six focus group discussions involving Armenian and Azerbaijani speaking ethnic minorities in Samtskhe Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions. This work also uses the information from youth summits held in these regions which were focused on youth political participation.<sup>i</sup>

## POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

According to the 2014 census, approximately 13.2% of the Georgian population are ethnic minorities. Ethnic Azerbaijanis living mainly in Kvemo Kartli region make up 6.2% of the population; while ethnic Armenians living primarily in Samtskhe-Javakheti comprise the remaining and 4.5% (Bujiashvili and Sordia, 2018). To achieve integration and peaceful co-existence with ethnic minorities, it is important to guarantee their civil and political participation equally to that of ethnic Georgians. In order to ensure that ethnic minorities are given equal opportunities and their opinions are heard, it is im-

portant that they are actively represented in local government, state institutions and Parliament. According to the results of the 2017 local self-government elections, ethnic minorities are represented in 21 out of 64 local councils (sakrebulo) by total of 165 individuals (Kakhishvili, 2017). However, it needs to be noted that the representation of ethnic minorities is insignificant in all municipalities with ethnic minority settlements (Gardabani, Bolnisi, Dmanisi, Tsalka, Akhalkalaki) except for local councils of three municipalities (Marneuli, Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda) (see Chart 1).

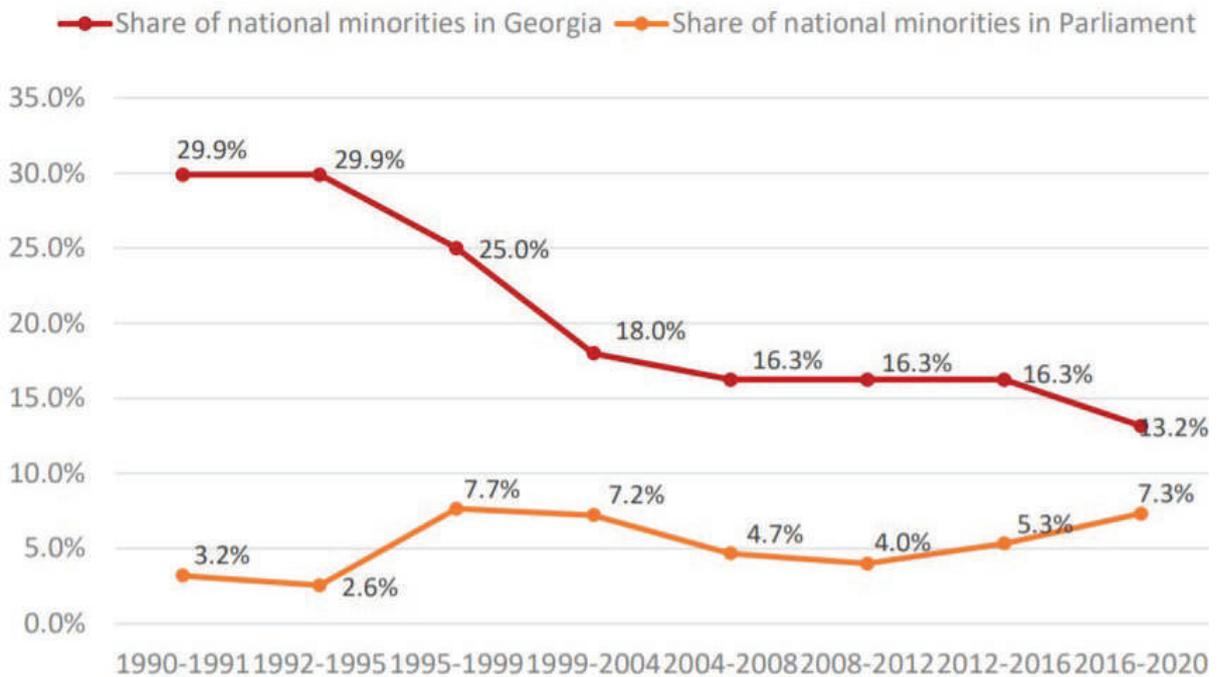
**Chart 1:** Representation of ethnic minorities in local councils, Centre for Studies of Ethnicity and Multiculturalism, Kakhishvili, 2017, Available at: [http://csem.ge/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Competing-for-Votes-of-Ethnic-Minorities\\_Geo.pdf](http://csem.ge/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Competing-for-Votes-of-Ethnic-Minorities_Geo.pdf)



According to the findings of the representatives of the Information Centre of NATO and the EU, in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti region, representation of ethnic minorities is less of a problem at the municipal level, since they take “senior” positions at local levels which ensure significant influence over political decisions. On the other hand, “access to senior positions does not impact political participation.”<sup>ii</sup> Influencing political decisions and supporting citizens’ dem-

ocratic participation in political processes is one of the priorities of the EU. To increase the political representation of ethnic minorities, the EU is allocating significant financial resources to support local initiatives of civil society organizations aimed at increasing political and civil participation. However, more effective measures need to be taken in these areas not just by the EU delegation and NGOs, but by local political elites.

**Chart 2:** Percentage of ethnic minorities in Georgia between 1990 and 2020 and their representation in the Parliament of Georgia, OSGF 2019, Available at: <https://osgf.ge/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Analytical-Report-ISSA-GEO.pdf>



Despite ethnic minorities holding 7.3% of the seats in the 2016-2020 Parliament, their role in decision-making processes at the national level is nominal and<sup>iii</sup>. none of the minority representatives hold the chair or deputy chair of any committees.

According to the representative of the Public Defender's office, ethnic discrimination extends even into Parliament, citing the example of one MP scolding the representative of ethnic minority community who did not speak Georgian and was accompanied by an interpreter suggesting that if they she could not speak Georgian, they should not speak at all<sup>iv</sup>. Similar cases not only impede the integration process but suppress ethnic minorities' motivation to engage in politics more actively. Moreover, such expressions go against the Law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination adopted under the framework of Visa Lib-

eralization action plan between the EU and Georgia (Law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, 2014).

No representatives of ethnic minorities hold decision-making positions in the ministries or other agencies<sup>v</sup>, and, "it has been decades since ethnic minorities were represented in the local council of Tbilisi"<sup>vi</sup>, at the time when ethnic minorities make up 10% of Tbilisi's population. According to research, even when ethnic minorities hold certain political positions, they do not benefit from equal rights in the team when fulfilling their functions<sup>vii</sup>. Therefore, the root of the problem may be found at a much lower level; specifically, a lack of political engagement at the local level, coupled with a lack of transparent and effective governance, makes it impossible to ensure strong positioning for ethnic minorities at the national level.

## INEFFECTIVE STATE POLICY FOR SUPPORTING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

In parallel with the analysis of political participation of ethnic minorities in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti region, it is important to discuss state programs, strategies and initiatives that are being implemented in these regions to stimulate ethnic minorities' political participation and integration at the national level. The integration of ethnic minorities is the responsibility of State Ministry of Reconciliation and Civic Equality, which cooperates with local self-governing entities as well as with the Council of National Minorities of the Public Defender of Georgia<sup>viii</sup> and a number of NGOs. The first out of four major areas of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration for 2015-2020 concerns ensuring "equal and full-fledged participation in civic and political life" with one of the major areas including "encouraging ethnic minorities to participate in the political decision-making process". Considering the fact that the Strategy is in effect until 2020, all the components of the document should already be implemented and the assessment of the action plan published. Therefore, it is interesting to see which programs have been executed. The EU delegation is also interested in the quality of the strategy implemented, since successful execution of state strategies and action plans determines the prospect of Georgia's European integration. The fact that the European delegation receives updates on ethnic minority-related issues from the Public Defender's office is also worthy of attention. The European delegation requested an update on the progress of the implementation from relevant state agencies, yet the requested information was not easily available.<sup>ix</sup> This illustrates the need to

strengthen the monitoring of the execution of state strategies and action plans aimed at ensuring equality and integration of ethnic minorities. Further critical assessments are needed from local and international partners to guarantee inclusive governance.

### *Internship program for ethnic minorities*

Three important programs implemented by the State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia have been identified as supporting political and civic engagement. The first initiative provides internship opportunities for students participating in the 4+1 education program explicitly dedicated to ethnic minorities. It completed the pilot project in 2017 and was fully implemented in 2018. By May 2020, 294 ethnic minority representatives had participated in three to six-month long internships at 20 different state agencies, including local self-governing entities. As the respondent noted, this program supports minority youth to enhance knowledge and skills as well as build a career. From the standpoint of government officials, this program is very popular among ethnic minorities and is assessed positively.<sup>x</sup> For the Council of National Minorities of the Public Defender of Georgia, counting the internship program as a Government's active measure to support political participation of ethnic Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities is unconvincing and only partially effective, since this program only targets a very specific segment of students. Around 80% of the students cannot benefit from this opportunity<sup>xi</sup>, since they have not participated in the 4+1 program, do not know Georgian language, or

do not fall in the specific age group. During the research, only a number of ethnic minority youth focus group and youth summit participants had taken part in the 4+1 program, and none of the participants had mentioned the internship program, which was named as one of the successful projects by the Government (Marneuli, Mixed, February 29, 2020; Akhaltiskhe, Mixed, May 22, 2020). If the internship program covered a wider group of youth, the results will be more visible and tangible.

### *Public Advisory Councils*

The second initiative identified as a success case is the establishment of public advisory councils under the governors' administrations in densely populated settlements of ethnic minorities. The council is staffed with the representatives of local self-governments, regional administrations, local NGOs and ethnic minorities. Per the assessment of government officials a, "Similar advisory format supports the increase and improvement of their [ethnic minorities'] participation in the decision-making process at the local level.<sup>xii</sup>" Non-governmental sectors of Samtskhe-Javakheti region questions the objective functioning of the council, since according to the widespread opinion, the council members are mostly relatives of public officials.<sup>xiii</sup> According to the assessment of the representative of the Public Defender's office, council and townhall meetings are mostly viewed as formalities in the region, since "they know that every decision will be made in accordance to the wishes of one specific group, or more specifically, one specific group of 'men'."<sup>xiv</sup> Local authorities have alternative views on the quality of work done by the advisory councils and think that local authorities are regularly meeting with the population for consultations. One

of them specifies that it happens twice a year – in Spring and in Fall and voices their slogan "not from election to election, but between the elections."<sup>xv</sup> This fact demonstrates that there are different perceptions on effective formats of political engagement or consultations. From the standpoint of local representatives of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli NGO sector, the views of civil society and local authorities concerning political engagement are not in line with each other and to certain extent, there is a problem of communication between them. Local self-government favors passive form of communication with the population.<sup>xvi</sup> This demonstrates that there is a room for improvement in terms of local governments' preferred form of communication with people, as well as its intensity and quality.

### *Information Campaigns*

The third important measure currently being implemented by the State Ministry of Reconciliation and Civic Equality is providing information to ethnic minorities in the Azerbaijani and Armenian languages. The official position of the Ministry is that ethnic minorities "should not have trouble accessing information because of the language barrier."<sup>xvii</sup> Yet, language barriers and access to information is named as one of the biggest and most complex challenges to ethnic minorities. The Ministry is holding information campaigns on state programs, state services and on European and Euro Atlantic integration in cooperation with the Information Center on NATO and EU. However, the primary challenge for local ethnic minorities seems to be access to that information. According to the population in question, local governments invite city hall staff and teachers during the meetings to make it look like their opinions matter, but, in reality, "the

information is not passed down to the population” (Marneuli, Mixed, 7 participants, February 29, 2020). The research findings demonstrate that the majority of ethnic minorities do not have information on basic issues and ongoing events in the country, as was revealed during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. In this context, it is hard to talk about how ethnic minorities should equally and freely benefit from state programs as well as from the opportunities provided by the Association Agreement.

The findings of the research also demonstrate that sometimes even local government

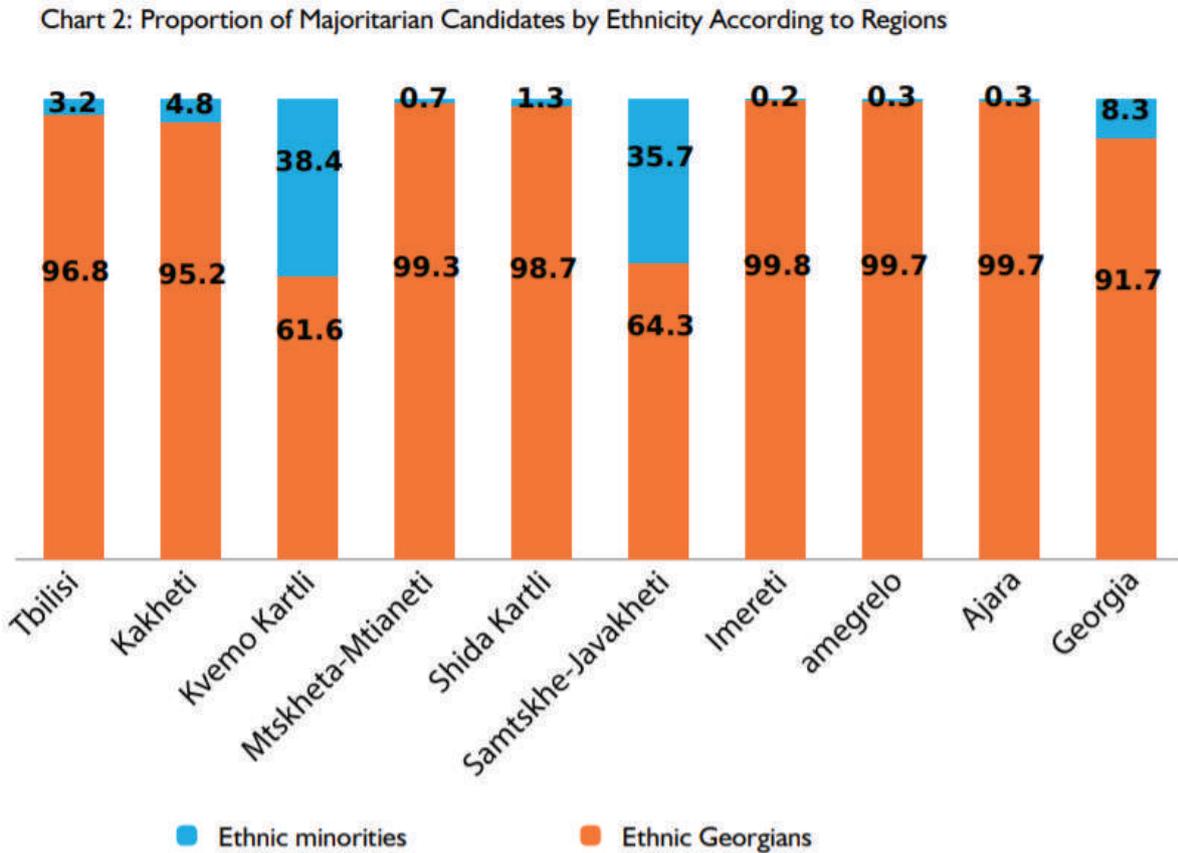
officials do not have sufficient information on state programs and other benefits. Moreover, sometimes they learn about these programs from journalists and do not have a comprehensive knowledge of applicable laws (Akhalkalaki, women, 9 participants, March 6, 2020). The same opinion was voiced by the focus group participants in Marneuli (Marneuli, Mixed, 7 participants, 20 February, 2020). Some focus group participants named the distance from the center as a reason behind the problem of access to information (Ninotsminda, Men, March 17, 2020), which points towards the gap between the center and the periphery.

## THE ROLE OF [POLITICAL] PARTIES IN INCREASING POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

Ethnic minorities are underrepresented in Georgia’s political parties. According to the section 1.4. of the 2015-2020 strategy, the state should encourage parties to include ethnic minorities in party lists. A similar initiative is the internship program implemented by the government for the youth in political parties. The Ministry, Public Defender’s office and Georgia’s international partners agree that active engagement of ethnic minorities in political parties is the responsibility of political parties themselves. Moreover, the government’s objective is not simply an increase in the number of ethnic minorities in the legislative bodies of the government, but it is important to ensure “quality engagement and improvement of existing practic-

es.”<sup>xviii</sup> Georgian political parties do not put much effort in engaging ethnic minorities in political processes, which is demonstrated by the fact that there is no, or just a symbolic representation of ethnic minorities in party lists. During the 2016 parliamentary elections of 850 majoritarian candidates only 34 were ethnic minorities. As for the proportional list of the party, there were only 12 MP candidates (Amirkhaniani, 2017). During the 2017 local government elections, only 399 out of 4796 majoritarian candidates were ethnic minorities (Kakhishvili, 2017). During local government elections the percentage of ethnic minority majoritarian candidates was 38.4% in Kvemo Kartli and 35.7% in Samtskhe-Javakheti (See Chart 3).

**Chart 3.** *Proportion of Majoritarian Candidates by Ethnicity According to Regions during 2017 local self-government elections, Kakhishvili 2017. Available at: [http://csem.ge/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Competing-for-Votes-of-Ethnic-Minorities\\_Eng.pdf](http://csem.ge/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Competing-for-Votes-of-Ethnic-Minorities_Eng.pdf)*



It is evident that Georgian political parties do not spend resources on attracting ethnic minorities into party politics.<sup>xix</sup> It may be due to the lack of party resources; the influence of post-Soviet mentality;<sup>xx</sup> or that some people may be under the influence of stereotypical attitudes, such as discussing ethnic minorities through the prism of security and cultural alienation. In the view of part of the respondents, parties excuse themselves by citing the lack of professional candidates,<sup>xxi</sup> yet nothing is done for their preparation and development. There is also a belief that high representation of ethnic minorities in local governments and city councils is because there is a high concentration of ethnic minorities in some of the municipalities, and not because it is stimulated by either the

state or political parties. It is also worth noting that over the years, there has been a tendency that ethnic minorities support ruling parties, saying “we are where the government and the state is.”<sup>xxii</sup> The fact that ethnic minorities practically equate the government and the state is also problematic. There is a possibility that similar deep-rooted attitudes are precisely the reason why opposition parties do not try to put sufficient effort and resources in the places that are densely populated with ethnic minorities during pre-election campaigns. On the other hand, parties have sufficient time to change these stereotypical attitudes before the pre-election campaign and win the hearts of ethnic minority voters. Yet, the fact remains that they do not or cannot spend time, financial

or human resources on it. The focus group participants named the buy-off of voters or manipulation with various social services as one of the reasons behind ethnic minorities' stable support for the government. According to their representatives, when local governments try to research the needs, they present the voters a choice and for instance, ask if they prefer solving the water problem or the problem of external lightening, which in fact is just a formality (Marneuli, Mixed, 7 participants, February 29, 2020). The population may have more acute needs, but those are not considered. What is more, sometimes populations are being denied social services if they do not agree on the suggestions of local governments (Marneuli, Mixed, February 29, 2020). Some of the participants highlighted pressure on civil servants and teachers including being forced to attend events organized by the local governments by threat of termination. The participants also mentioned the mobilization of acquaintances during elections, driving them to polling stations, and demanding a vote for a specific political actor (Akhalkalaki, Women, 9 participants, March 6, 2020), which points at fallacious electoral policy. Every focus group revealed that the discontent towards the government is growing among ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani populations. In 2017, only 17% of ethnic minorities assessed the government negatively, while in 2019 this indicator had increased to 39% (Caucasus Research Resource Center, National Democratic Institute, Georgia 2017-2019). It needs to be noted that youth with higher education and knowledge of Georgian language, who have an access to the information on domestic political dynamic, are especially critical regarding political processes.

What does the population of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli do to solve local

problems?

The media and civil society organizations are two major actors which locals turn to in order to voice their problems and advocate to the government (Kvemo Kartli, Youth Summit of 18-35-year old individuals, July 5, 2020). For the majority of focus group participants Georgia's close cooperation with the EU is the precondition for their proper participation in the decision-making process. It is important to note that the majority considers the EU to be a guarantor of equality, democracy, good governance and development. However, participants note that elderly and middle-aged populations have lost motivation, they are skeptical towards bottom-up activism or initiatives because they consider them to have negligible outcomes, while some prefer to be politically passive out of fear of the police. The youth are especially active and there are groups which volunteer to help older generations by translating for them so they can receive state services. A number of initiatives were named during the focus group discussions that gathered up to 5000 signatures via online petitions (Gardabani, Women, 4 participants, June 22, 2020); thanks to self-mobilization, community centers have been established in multiple villages in Kvemo Kartli which were active in spreading information during the COVID-19 quarantine and providing financial support to families. Some of the activists organize events for environmental protection and social demands while others attend local council meetings (Akhaltiskhe, Mixed, 6 participants, May 22, 2020). It is evident that youth with higher education and the knowledge of the Georgian language have real potential to increase the quality of political participation for ethnic minorities. However middle-aged and elderly populations remain in an informa-

tion vacuum, because they do not know the official language, they mostly rely on the

goodwill of the youth to support them when receiving state services or voicing problems.

## **BARRIERS TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AS SEEN BY THE ETHNIC MINORITIES**

One of the visible factors preventing civil and political integration of ethnic minorities is inequality between the center and the periphery. Historic hostility between ethnic Georgians and ethnic minorities as well as the lack of cultural and emotional bonds between ethnic minorities and the rest of Georgian society has damaged the prospect of integration. At the national level, participation cannot be increased if the problems are not solved locally and the political participation of ethnic minorities is not ensured. Members of the ethnic minority communities discuss the barriers and the reasons that prevent their direct participation in political processes at the local level. Every focus group participant named the language barrier as the primary challenge for all of their activities, starting with receiving state services (Akhalkalaki, Women, 9 participants, March 6, 2020) and ending with voicing ethnic minority interests and worries at the national level. From their standpoint, without knowing the official language, positioning is it is hard not only at the national level, but it is also hard to ensure effective political participation at the regional level. To a certain extent, this derives from the fact that decisions are mostly made in the center, pointing at the problem of decentralization. Political engagement without knowing the Georgian language is only possible in villages with majority ethnic minority settlements (Dmanisi, Men, 4 participants, June 22, 2020). Language barrier remains to be a challenge due

to a number of circumstances, including the lack of good Georgian language specialists and insufficient financial resources in these regards (Samtskhe-Javakheti, Youth Summit, July 4, 2020). Ethnic minority representatives consider it essential to regularly monitor the quality of teaching Georgian language by teachers from Tbilisi (Marneuli, Mixed, 7 participants, February 29, 2020). The second problem linked to the language barrier relates to access to information. The issue is especially problematic with regards to political participation, as there are cases of misled voters or uninformed voting (Akhalkalaki, Women, 9 participants, March 6, 2020); as well as the problem of quality communication between constituents and political parties. Even the youth who speak Georgian do not have information on the opportunities of engaging with political parties (Samtskhe-Javakheti, Youth Summit, July 4, 2020). Due to the lack of information on free services, the population is regularly lied to, paying additional fees for services which should be provided and is especially true in the healthcare sector (Akhalkalaki, Women, 9 participants, March 9, 2020; Ninotsminda, Men, 10 participants, March 15, 2020). Nepotism, unskilled staff in civil service positions, and inequality are the primary challenges for the local population (*ibid*). It is important to note that similar cases are precisely the cause of mistrust and nihilism in the society towards the government, as well as towards the opposition parties.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The political integration of ethnic minorities remains a challenge in Georgia. Existing state programs and initiatives are not sufficient for the comprehensive implementation of the state strategy and action plan and for increasing the quality of political participation by ethnic minorities. The research findings demonstrate that the role of ethnic minorities in the decision-making process is merely a formality. Ethnic minorities are politically active in the villages of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, where they represent majority, while at regional and national levels, their political representation and quality of engagement is nominal. Negligible measures are implemented on the part of political parties to strengthen ethnic minorities politically and communication with them is weak. The major barrier to political participation for ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani citizens is a lack of information and a lack of knowledge of the Georgian language, which aggravates inequality and seclusion. It will be important for Georgia to consider the best practices of European states in terms of ethnic minority integration; the EU delegation and other international partners can contribute significantly in that regard.

### *Recommendations to the Government of Georgia*

- **The Georgian government should increase the number of qualified teachers of Georgian language** in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions where there are dense populations of ethnic minorities. Georgian language courses should be created and improved not only for youth, but also for middle-aged and elderly populations to ensure that the youth as well as elderly generations have equal opportunities;
- **In parallel to teaching the official language, the government should implement an active information campaign in regions with ethnic minority populations in Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani languages** to raise awareness about their rights to political participation, opportunities and other forms of civic involvement. **During the implementation of information campaigns, the central government should monitor the quality of information delivered by local governments.** This recommendation is based on the communication with the population, which demonstrated that the awareness on state programs and the opportunities for their political involvement is low. Moreover, it was evidenced that sometimes even local government representatives do not have a comprehensive knowledge of state programs, the possibilities for political participation, and relevant laws/regulations;
- In order to make the voices of ethnic minorities living in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti region heard at the national level, **it is important that face-to-face meetings with central government representatives are organized.** These recommendations are based on the discontent voiced by the focus group participants on the quality of local governments' communication and consultations with the population

and doubt that the central government is aware of their concerns.

### *Recommendations for political parties*

- **It is important that political parties take the responsibility of translating election programs into Armenian and Azerbaijani languages**, so that if they desire, ethnic minorities can read the promises in the language they understand as as to make an informed decision;
- **It is desirable that political parties work on the informal education programs with experts** on political, justice and civic matters. It will be the basis for the training program for young ethnic minority party members or potential party members to raise their political awareness and encourage political participation. As the ethnic minorities from focus group discussions and youth summits noted, parties often bring the issue of the lack of skilled candidates as an excuse, yet nothing is done to prepare and develop them. Therefore, if the critical discourse strengthens as a result of this program, the level of ethnic minorities' political participation may increase, and their electoral behavior may be altered;
- It will be a step forward **if political parties formulate their vision and complex action plan through active communication with ethnic minorities to contribute to national integration of ethnic minorities and their political participation**. Documenting these efforts will highlight parties' approach

towards ethnic minority integration and will better inform voters on their vision.

### *Recommendations for the EU delegation and local NGOs*

- **Call for grants announced by the public, business or non-governmental organizations that are in Georgian, should preferably be translated in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages as well**, until the problem of knowing the official language is overcome. This responsibility may be borne by the civil sector in agreement with the EU delegation to ensure timely translation of the announcements and the support of civil and political activities of ethnic minorities;
- In order to improve communication between political parties and ethnic minorities, the NGO sector, in cooperation with the EU delegation, should **coordinate meetings between party leaders and representatives of ethnic minorities twice a year and organize debates** in Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani languages;
- It would be effective if, with the initiative of the EU delegation, NGOs working on ethnic minority issues established a **ethnic minorities-related special common fast response agency**, responsible for timely registering the delays caused by the lack of information and later voicing these issues among the EU delegation, in the Parliament or in local municipal agencies.

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- <sup>i</sup> Youth Summits were held in ten regions of Georgia by the Georgian Institute of Politics and German organisation POLIS180 with the financial support of Federal Foreign Office of Germany. Young ethnic minority representatives were also participating in the events.
- <sup>ii</sup> Information Center on NATO and EU, personal communication, 2020, May 22;  
Information Center on NATO and EU, personal communication, 2020, May 19;
- <sup>iii</sup> Centre for the Studies of Ethnicity and Multiculturalism, personal communication, 2020, May 21;
- <sup>iv</sup> Public Defender's Office, personal communication, 2020, May 19.
- <sup>v</sup> Council of National Minorities of the Public Defender of Georgia, personal communication, 2020, May 19.
- <sup>vi</sup> Council of National Minorities of the Public Defender of Georgia, personal communication, 2020, May 19.
- <sup>vii</sup> Council of National Minorities of the Public Defender of Georgia, personal communication, 2020, May 19.
- <sup>ix</sup> Council of National Minorities of the Public Defender of Georgia has been functioning since 2005.
- <sup>x</sup> The EU delegation in Georgia, personal communication, 2020, May 19.
- <sup>xi</sup> State Ministry of Reconciliation and Civic Equality, personal communication, 2020, May 20.
- <sup>xii</sup> Council of National Minorities of the Public Defender of Georgia, personal communication, 2020, May 19.
- <sup>xiii</sup> State Ministry of Reconciliation and Civic Equality, personal communication, 2020, May 20.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Javakheti, local non-governmental organization, personal communication, 2020, June 21.
- <sup>xv</sup> Public Defender's office, personal communication, 2020, May 19.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Javakheti local government, personal communication, 2020, June 24.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Javakheti local NGO, personal communication, 2020, June 21;  
Kvemo Kartli local NGO, personal communication, 2020, June 21.
- <sup>xviii</sup> State Ministry of Reconciliation and Civic Equality, personal communication, 2020, May 20.
- <sup>xix</sup> Ibid
- <sup>xx</sup> Council of National Minorities of the Public Defender of Georgia, personal communication, 2020, May 19.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Information Center on NATO and EU, personal communication, 2020, May 19;
- <sup>xxii</sup> Centre for the Studies of Ethnicity and Multiculturalism, personal communication, 2020, May 21;  
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## APPENDIX

### *A list of interviews conducted in the framework of the research*

1. Council for Ethnic Minorities under the Public Defender`s Office, personal communication, 19 May 2020
2. Public Defender`s Office, personal communication, 19 May 2020
3. Information Center on NATO and the EU, personal communication, 22 May 2020
4. Information Center on NATO and the EU, personal communication, 19 May 2020
5. Ifact media source, personal communication, 20 June 2020
6. European Delegation in Georgia, personal communication, 19 May 2020
7. Center for the Studies of Ethnicity and Multiculturalism, personal communication, 21 May 2020
8. Javakheti local NGO, personal communication, 21 June 2020
9. Javakheti local NGO, personal communication, 9 June 2020
10. Javakheti local government, personal communication, 24 June 2020
11. Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia, personal communication, 20 May 2020
12. Kvemo Kartli local NGO, personal communication, 21 June 2020

### *A list of focus group discussions conducted in the framework of the research*

#### Samtskhe-Javakheti:

1. Akhaltsikhe, mixed, 6 participants, 22 May 2020
2. Akhalkalaki, women, 9 participants, 6 March 2020
3. Ninotsminda, men, 10 participants, 17 March 2020

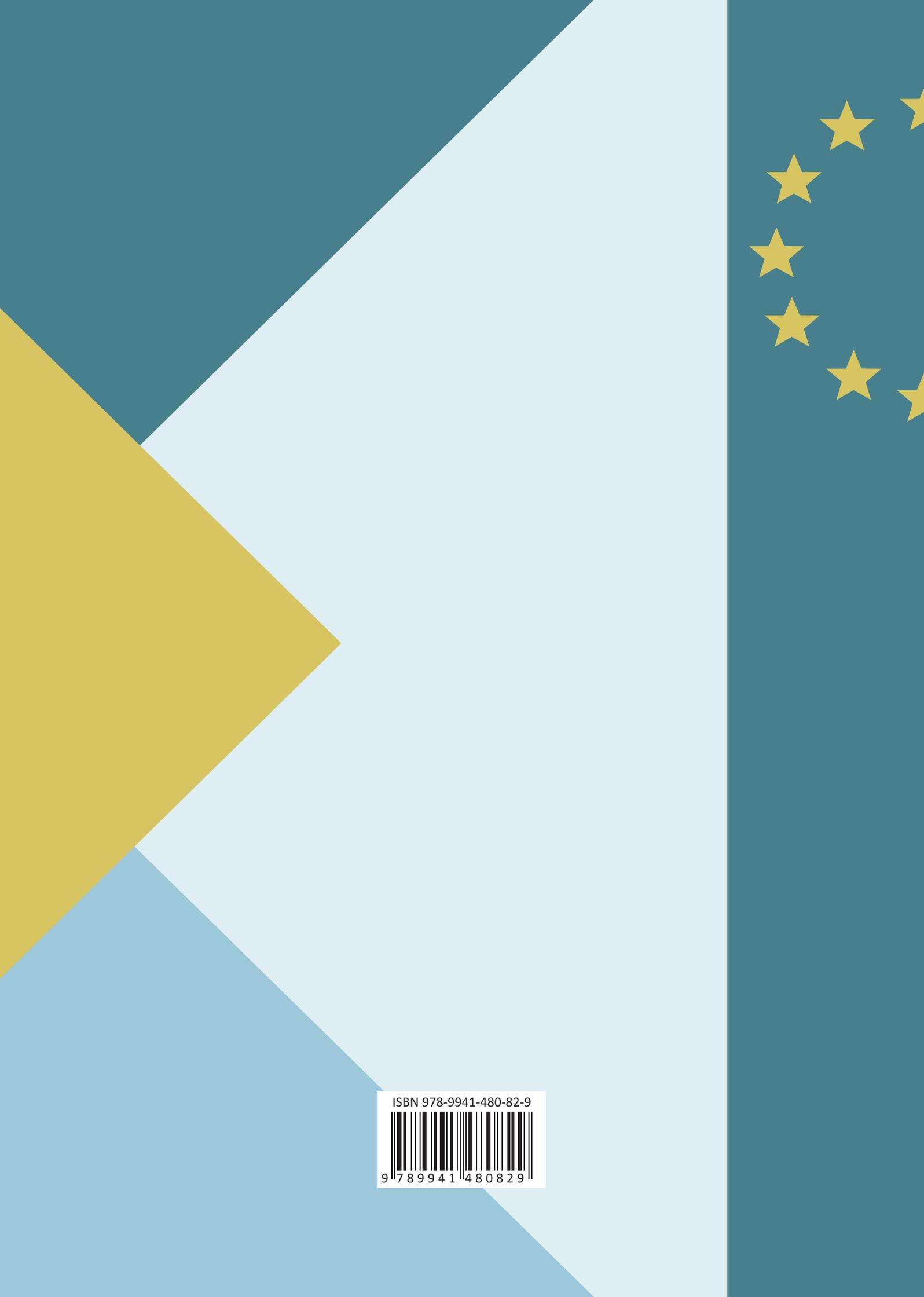
#### Kvemo Kartli:

1. Marneuli, mixed, 7 participants, 29 February 2020
2. Gardabani, women, 4 participants, 22 June 2020
3. Dmanisi, men, 4 participants, 27 June 2020

#### Youth Summits:

- Samtskhe-Javakheti, between 18-35 youth summit, July 4, 2020
- Kvemo Kartli, between 18-35 youth summit, July 5, 2020





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