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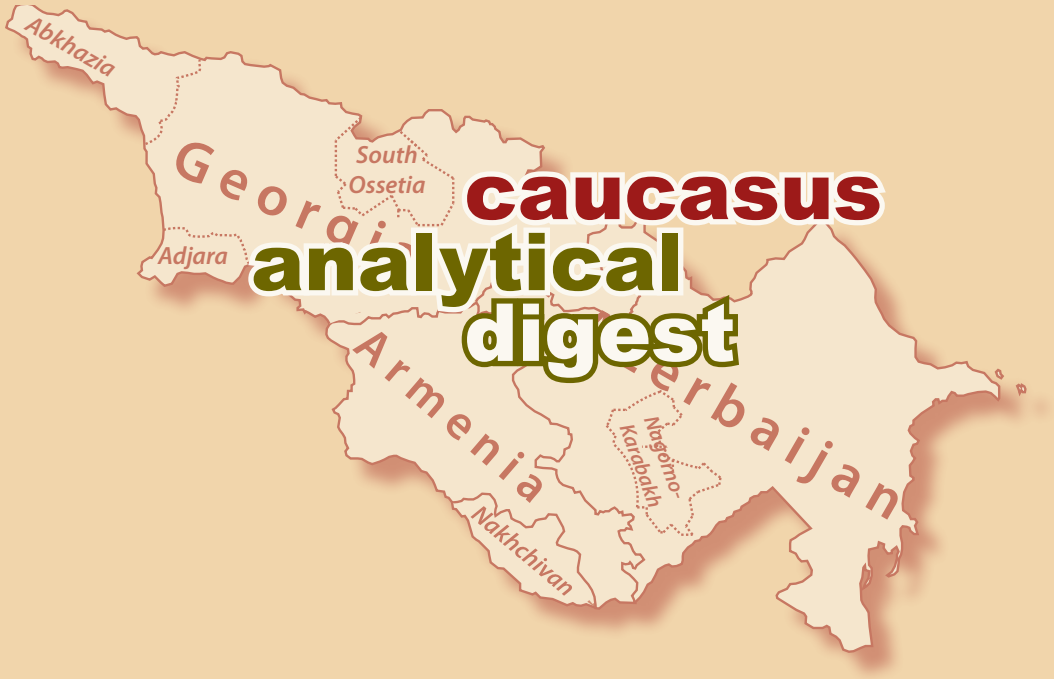

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INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN GEORGIA

Special Editor: Denis Dafflon

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Challenges of Minority Governance and Political Participation in Georgia

By Giorgi Sordia, Tbilisi

Abstract

This article discusses state policies towards national minorities in Georgia. It explores the institutional framework of minority governance and identifies the main challenges the state is facing in the process of civil integration and participation of minorities. The analysis also assesses the National Concept on Tolerance and Civil Integration and Action Plan, the main document which regulates and defines state programs and activities in the field of minority integration.

Mechanisms of Minority Governance in Georgia

Historically Georgia is home to many diverse ethnic and religious groups. According to the latest census, conducted in 2002, ethnic minorities constitute 16% of the population, the largest ethnic groups being Azerbaijanis (6.5%), and Armenians (5.7%). Other ethnic groups, which together account for 4% of the population, include Ossetians, Russians, Greeks, Kurds, Assyrians, Chechens (also known in Georgia as Kists), Jews, Ukrainians, Poles and others. Azerbaijanis and Armenians are mostly concentrated in the regions of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, respectively. However, they are also well represented in the Kakheti and Shida Kartli regions, and the cities of Tbilisi and Batumi.

The level of civil integration of ethnic minorities varies from region to region. In the districts where ethnic minorities are settled compactly, the problem is directly related to the degree of knowledge of the Georgian language. As a Soviet heritage, ethnic Armenians living in the Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts of Samtskhe-Javakheti and ethnic Azerbaijanis living in the Marneuli, Bolnisi, Dmanisi, Gardabani and Tsalka districts of Kvemo Kartli normally communicate in Russian when outside their communities. Russian is also the language of the local administrations, however official documents sent to the central authorities are usually translated into Georgian. The situation has barely changed in two decades since Georgia's independence, and the overwhelming majority of residents in both regions cannot speak the official state language. This remains the main factor hindering their integration.

In the areas where the national minorities are dispersed, especially in Tbilisi, the situation is relatively better. More people are fluent in Georgian and in many cases their level of knowledge is the same as of their native languages. This, however, does not ensure their full integration. While knowledge of the official language is useful for various economic activities, national minorities continue to face significant problems in the main cities with respect to their civil and political participation and representation.

In recent history, the attitude of the state towards the national minorities has not been consistent. In the Soviet period, civil integration was not deemed urgent, as ethnic Georgians and national minorities all were Soviet citizens and the Russian language was their *lingua franca.* Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new Georgian state faced the problem of civil integration of national minorities, but was not able to address this in a constructive manner. Zviad Gamsakhurdia's government not only was unable to implement the politics of civil integration, it identified national minorities as a threat for the newly formed Georgian state, forcing thousands of people of various ethnicities to migrate from Georgia. This process was particularly extensive in case of the Ossetian population, many of whom were forced to leave their homes, villages and settlements. Statistical data from two consecutive censuses (1989 and 2002) unequivocally show that the percentage of national minorities dropped from 23% to 16.2% in little more than a decade.

The intolerant attitude towards national minorities changed significantly after Eduard Shevardnadze came to power in 1992, though his government did not develop any consistent policy for the process of civil integration. Many communities of national minorities became largely isolated, remained non-represented in the political life of the country and their cultural heritage was inadequately protected. Some communities, such as the Roma, were effectively marginalized and became highly vulnerable.

With respect to the improvement of the integration of national minorities, the most important point is the implementation of adequate and effective state policies and the development of institutional mechanisms for the management of cultural diversity. The need for the implementation of such policies by the government was especially apparent after the Rose Revolution, although at the initial stage the policies directed towards the promotion of integration of national minorities was characterized with inconsistency, including the establishment of several parallel structures, frequent changes of their obligations and mandates, and the absence of a comprehensive plan or program for integration.

The first serious and consistent steps were made after 2006, when the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of National Minorities entered into force, giving significant momentum to the formation of a state strategy and the improvement of the institutional management of the national minorities. From 2008, the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civil Equality (former State Minister for Reintegration) has been in charge of implementing the policies of integration of national minorities. Another important step in the direction of integration of national minorities was the adoption of the National Concept on Tolerance and Civil Integration and Action Plan in May 2009. The Action Plan was designed for five years and envisaged the implementation of different activities by state agencies with the financial support of the state budget. The adoption of the Concept could be regarded as a decisive step in providing the necessary conditions for the development of a national policy in the issues of national minorities and integration and for the creation of consistent mechanisms to implement multilateral decisions.

The Concept and the Action Plan are based on both the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Constitution of Georgia. The main goal of the Concept is the "creation of a democratic, consolidated civil society based on common values, which regards diversity as the source of its strength and provides to each citizen, maintenance of his/her identity and opportunity for development." The Concept focuses on six priority tasks: rule of law, education and the state language, availability of media and information, political integration and civil involvement, social and regional integration, and maintaining culture and originality. In spite of the change of government in 2012, the Concept kept its legitimacy; moreover the new government, unlike in other fields, did not fundamentally change the existing state approach towards national minorities. The challenging issue for the current government is to improve and re-define the priority areas and programs of the Concept for future interventions, since the validity of the Concept and Action Plan expired in April 2014. The approval of the new strategy is expected in fall 2014. The draft Concept and Action Plan have not been presented yet; however the Government made a promising step by facilitating the elaboration of an Assessment Report on the Implementation of the Concept for 2009–2014, conducted by independent experts in September–December 2013. It is anticipated that the new state strategy will consider the experts' report on the previous state Concept.

While the government is the main responsible body in minority governance, there are other important supportive agencies and mechanisms relevant to national minority civil integration. The role of the Public Defender of Georgia can be underlined in this regard. Its mission and mandate expanded significantly in December 2005, when the special permanent consultation body—the Council of National Minorities—was established. The Council of National Minorities unifies most organizations of the national minorities operating in the country, especially those that operate in Tbilisi and seek to provide consultations and promote collaboration between the national minorities and the government. The role of the Council of National Minorities further expanded with the adoption of the National Concept on Tolerance and Civil Integration. As the overall structure unifying the national minorities, as well as the main advisory body, the Council of National Minorities is regarded as the monitoring body for the process of implementation of the Action Plan and the advisory body addressing the current issues of integration and protection of the national minorities with the government.

Challenges Facing the State Policy

Political participation and representation is one of the key criteria determining the level of integration of the national minorities in society. Georgian legislation provides a number of norms guaranteeing equal rights for national minorities. The Constitution, the Civil Code, and the Law on Political Associations provide for the membership of citizens in any public and political organization, regardless of their ethnic or religious background. The only restriction imposed by the Law on Political Associations, Article 6, is the prohibition against the establishment of a regional political party.

In addition, the Georgian legislation does not provide for any quotas for the participation of national minorities in government bodies and agencies. According to Article 15 of the Law on Civil Service: "Any citizen of Georgia has the right to be a public servant, provided that he or she has adequate command of the official language (i.e. Georgian), has required knowledge and experience, and is 21 years old." The same norms apply to the participation in self-governing bodies: according to Article 6 of the Code on Local Self-government, Georgian citizens have the right to be elected in local self-government bodies, irrespective of their race, color, language, religion, national or ethnical belonging, though, on the basis of Article 9 of the same law, the working language of local self-government bodies is Georgian.

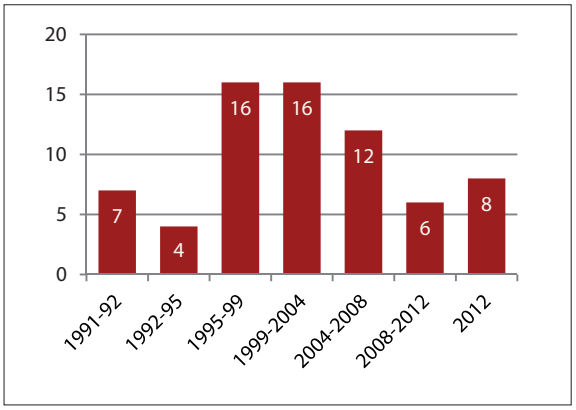
In spite of these protections, the major problem in the implementation of national minority policy is its conceptual and institutional shortcomings. The Assessment Report makes this point clearly by pointing out that while the Concept and Action Plan does acknowledge the existence of the problem that national minorities do not suf-

ficiently participate in political and public life, they do not propose concrete measures to remedy the situation.

This general inconsistency is reflected in following key challenges facing minority governance and political participation:

- Limited representation of national minorities in Parliament and other public services. According to available statistical data, the number of minority MPs has gradually shrunk in the Georgian parliament. Currently there are 8 minority MPs; figures from previous parliamentary terms are: 2008–2012: 6 MPs, 2004–2008: 12 MPs, 1999–2004: 16 MPs, 1995–1999: 16 MPs (see Figure 1). The lack of adequate representation leads to the neglect of minority-related issues among national-level decision makers. National minorities are also barely represented in other public bodies, such as ministries, departments, etc. The issue of political representation is considered one of the priority areas of the National Concept on Tolerance and Civil Integration, however special measures are not envisaged in the activities of the Action Plan.

Figure 1: National Minority Members of the Georgian Parliament



Source: ECMI Caucasus

- National minorities are relatively well represented in local governance units in regions of minority compact settlements. However their influence on local politics is rather limited, because of the centralization of governance in Georgia. Local municipalities lack real power, which prevents minorities from being engaged in local decision-making processes. This issue is directly related to the local self-governance and decentralization arrangements in Georgia. The local self-governance legislation adopted in 2006 did not ensure effective minority participation. The current decentralization reform, which was finalized in February 2014, does focus on increased community participation; however it will only be possible to discuss its real implications on national minorities after the 15 June 2014 local elections. Traditionally, national minorities are properly represented in the areas of their compact settlement, in particular, in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. Compared with the other ethnic groups, the Armenians are adequately represented in Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda, Akhaltsikhe, Tsalka and Marneuli sakrebulos. And while the national number of Azeris is greater than that of Armenians, their representation is much lower, with a total political representation of 3.7% in local councils nationwide. (See Figures 2 and 3)

Figure 2: National Minority Sakrebulo Members in Samtskhe-Javakheti

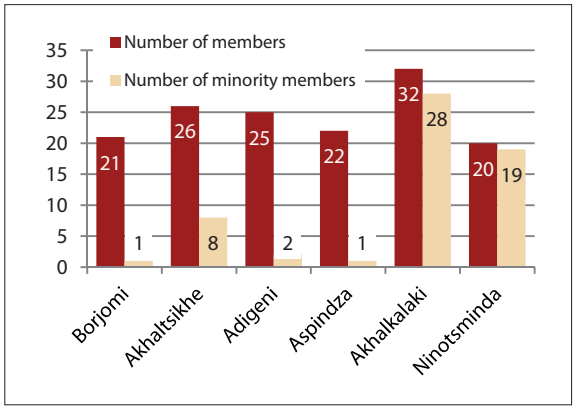
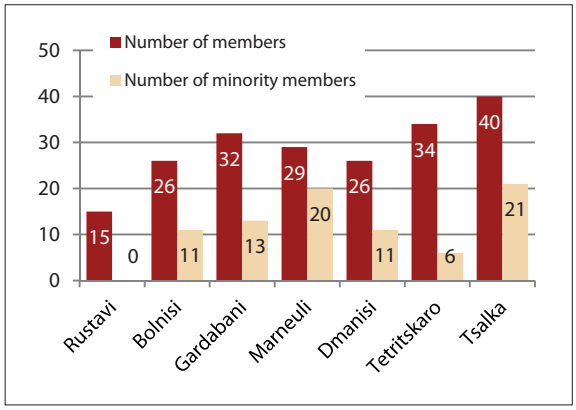


Figure 3: National Minority Sakrebulo Members in Kvemo Kartli



- The low level of Georgian political culture, which does not create appropriate conditions for national minority political activities. Along these lines, special emphasis should be given to Georgian political party activities. The Public Defender's assessment shows that Georgian political parties express very limited interest in working in national minority municipalities, at the same time, they do not typically include minority representatives in their party structures. Moreover only a few political parties offer

the inclusion of minority candidates in pre-election political party lists for proportional elections. This is reflected in the virtual absence of national minorities in the election lists of all political parties.

- Inconsistency of certain measures of the state. On the one hand, the governmental programs, especially the National Concept on Tolerance and Civil Integration and Action Plan, are formally minority inclusive and oriented on increased political participation, but, on the other hand, minority needs are not properly assessed and put into consistent policy. One of the examples of this inconsistency is the failure of capacity building programs for national minority local self-governance staff. In 2006 the government of Georgia established a separate capacity building facility (Zurab Zhvania School for Public Administration in Kutaisi) for national minorities aimed at equipping minority representatives with specific knowledge and skills in the area of public administration. However, despite the initial promise of this new school, it has instead shifted exclusively into state language training and currently there is no special mechanism available for supporting capacity building to build a new cadre of national minority public administration personnel.

Conclusion

Georgia has succeeded in developing a special minority governance model. The minority-related policies are defined and implemented by the government through the State Minister's Office for Reconciliation and Civil Equality. Moreover, the government has initiated and adopted the National Concept on Tolerance and Civil Integration and Action Plan, the main official document regulating state policy on national minority issues. At the same time, the improvement of the institutional framework and the development of a relevant strategy did not ensure a tangible breakthrough, especially in the area of national minority political and social participation. The assessment of the state programs and initiatives demonstrated that inconsistency and inefficiency were the main impeding factors hindering Georgian minority governance. For the time being, the key challenge for the current Georgian government and policy makers is to adequately analyze the shortcomings and inconsistencies of the implemented policy and to develop needs-based, results-oriented and a more efficient state strategy for the forthcoming years.

About the Author

Dr. Giorgi Sordia is Research Associate at the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) and an Associate Professor at the University of Georgia (UG).

Further Readings

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The Georgian State and Minority Relations

By Ekaterine Metreveli, Tbilisi

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine the relationship between the Georgian state and its ethnic minority communities of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. Specifically, the current issues and challenges hampering social cohesion are considered against the background of existing legacies and preconditions caused by the changing international environment.

Introduction

Over twenty years have passed since Georgia went through the initial shock of sudden, unexpected independence, accompanied with the years of turmoil that, among others issues, resulted in two breakaway regions (Abkhazia and South Ossetia). Recent years have seen the country moving beyond the post-Soviet paradigm and switching from a "survival mode" to a new stage of "modernization". Despite these developments and transformations, the country is still struggling through the process of state-building, which also implies, in the case of Georgia, nation-building.

The nation-building process of the post-soviet countries is associated with the issues of ethnicity and citizenship. The legacy of Soviet ethnofederalism and, as Rogers Brubaker puts it, the institutionalization of two mutually exclusive categories of territorial and individual codification, still defines the behaviour of the constituent ethnic groups of the Soviet successor states.[1] Georgia, as one of these successor states, has fully experienced the effects of the Soviet nationality policies in having acquired the two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and two ethnic enclaves of Armenian and Azeri populations, which still are in need of special attention. There are still challenges that must be addressed in order to regulate state minority relations in the country and achieve national unity.

In order for Georgia to succeed in its state building efforts, state strengthening means building a democratic, inclusive state that advocates a national identity rooted in citizenship and unified by common civic ideas. Achieving this ideal is not easy, especially against the background of developments along Russia's borders resulting in Russia promoting a new foreign and security policy doctrine aimed at defending Russian-speaking communities in the post-soviet space and accepting only the limited sovereignty of neighboring states.

Preconditions and the Issue of Securitization

After the break-up of the Soviet Union and Georgia's regaining of independence, the country's ethnic minority community decreased from 29.9 to 16.3 percent. (Table 1: Ethnic Composition of Georgia, 1989, 2002). The socio-economic and political instability of the early 1990s prompted both titular as well as minority populations to leave the country. Georgia's historical profile of a multinational country disappeared with its non-ethnic Georgian population comprising only two main minority communities compactly settled in the regions of Kvemo Kartli in case of ethnic Azeris and in Samtskhe-Javakheti respectively for ethnic Armenians. Currently, Azeris are the largest ethnic minority group (284,600 or 6,5 percent) followed by Armenians (248,900 or 5,7 percent). Both of those ethnic groups reside in the regions of Georgia bordering their kin states, Armenia and Azerbaijan representing a challenge for the Georgian authorities in terms of their integration (see the Tables 2 and 3 for the ethnic composition of the mentioned regions).

For most of the 1990's, the Shevardnadze government considered the minority issue through the national security prism[2] and, as Ghia Nodia argues, followed the policy of "let sleeping dogs lie,"[3] meaning that it is better not to touch the minority question at all, as if it does not exist. The securitization of the issue occurred by removing minority-majority discourse from the public sphere, closing the ethnic enclaves for outside interference, including political party activism, employing governance mechanisms based on a bargain with local authorities, turning them into economic-political elites, and transferring responsibility for education to the kin

1 Rogers Brubaker, Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe. Cambridge University Press, 1996. pp. 26–27.

2 For more on securitization of national minority issue in Georgia see Natalie Sabanadze, "Georgia's ethnic diversity. A Challenge to state-building." The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918–2012. The first Georgian republic and its successors. Edited by Stephen F. Jones. Routledge. 2014, pp. 130–132.

3 Ghia Nodia, "The Poli-ethnicity of Georgia: Fact, Attitude towards the Fact and a Political Strategy", One Society, Many Ethnicities: Ethnic Diversity and Civic Integration in Georgia, Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, Tbilisi, 2003 (in Georgian), p. 72.

states, in many cases resulting in Armenia and Azerbaijan supplying books for ethnic minority schools.

This policy resulted in "positive" developments, such as maintaining stability in ethnic enclaves in the turbulent early 1990s, and, especially in the case of Javakheti, neutralizing local paramilitary organizations that had taken power, thus establishing the state's formal control over the region. On the other hand, this policy excluded the rule of law, did not create space for democratic channels of communication between majority-minority communities, and did not help Georgian citizens develop a common view of the country' future. In the absence of an institutional framework for popular participation and integration policies, these communities continued to lead their own life and move closer to their kin states. Such an approach further strengthened the existence of different operational spaces established and promoted by the Soviet approach to nationality policies.

Against this background, President Mikheil Saakashvili's pronounced ethnic minority policy was a drastic change. As a part of his vigorous state building mission, Saakashvili emphasized civic elements and depicted Georgia as a state for all its citizens. He specifically targeted and appealed to minority communities during his public speeches, often in their own languages, emphasizing the need to improve their integration and fighting stereotypes. The rhetoric in practice meant the ratification of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of Nation Minorities (FCNM) in 2005, taking up and strengthening what had been the OSCE-led initiatives of promoting Georgian language knowledge among minority communities, elaborating a National Integration Strategy and Action Plan (2009–2014), limiting discrimination against minorities by reforming law enforcement agencies, investing in the rehabilitation of road infrastructure considered to be a major contributing factor to isolation, as well as promoting regional projects, namely the Kars–Akhalkalaki–Baku railway aimed at economic integration and the development of the ethnic Armenian minority enclave.

Despite the serious steps aimed at promoting civic identity and decreasing the gap between majority and minority enclaves, the results were not straightforward. The minority communities have definitely come psychologically and physically closer to the mainstream society. For its part, the majority has also acknowledged that ignoring minority issues was hampering the country's development. But the timeframe and resources allocated for integration strategies have not been sufficient to overcome the patterns existing from the Soviet times and solidified by the practice of the first decade of independence. The policies also lacked a coherent and thorough approach and did not promote minority participation in decision-making.

Currently, majority-minority relations can be characterized as stable and peaceful, although as Natalie Sabanadze puts it, mutual mistrust comes up, depending on changing circumstances.[4] Those circumstances have encompassed certain state building and rule of law establishment efforts in the ethnic minority enclaves, such as the state's anti-drug and anti-smuggling activities resulting in the closure of Kvemo Kartli' Red Bridge and Sadakhlo markets, an important source of income for locals. Protests broke out as a result of anti-corruption activities on the Georgian–Armenian border in Ninotsminda (2005), as well as during the closing of enterprises in Akhlalkalaki accused of tax evasion.[5] Actions that were widely publicized and aimed at asserting state power provoked controversial responses in minority enclaves and were viewed through ethnic lenses. At a current stage ethnic Armenians began to consider the building of the Kars–Akhalkalaki–Baku railway and the subsequent influx into the region of Turkish and Azeri workers as a threat to their well-being and security. They feared that they would face efforts to limit the economic benefits associated with the railway construction and subsequent operation for ethnic Armenians.

From the side of the majority, the mistrust towards minority communities appeared in relation to the changing international environment. Often minority communities are perceived to favor the former "colonial master," as Alexander Rondeli puts it,[6] and support foreign and security policy priorities that differ from those supported by ethnic Georgians.

Contributing to this suspicion is the role Russia and the kin-states play in the post-soviet space: effectively, they seek to leverage ethnic minority groups against the titular nation, thereby hampering state- and nation-building processes. Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine confirms the emergence of a clearly formulated foreign and security policy doctrine in connection to the post-Soviet space.[7] Though this approach is not new, this time it has been articulated more clearly, openly and in radical terms. Russia has expanded its role as a kin to the wider

4 Natalie Sabanadze, "Georgia's ethnic diversity. A Challenge to state-building." The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918–2012. The first Georgian republic and its successors. Edited by Stephen F. Jones. Routledge. 2014, p. 119.

5 For more information, see: Georgia's Armenian and Azeri minorities. International Crisis Group. Europe Report 178. Tbilisi, 2006.

6 Alexander Rondeli, The Russian–Georgian war and its implications for Georgia's state-building. The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918–2012. The first Georgian republic and its successors. Edited by Stephen F. Jones. Routledge, 2014, p. 35.

7 Ibid. p. 41

Russian-speaking population of the post-Soviet space through the provision of Russian passports to the citizens of neighboring states.[8] Against the background of these developments, the existence of Russian and Armenian passports among minority communities of Georgia has especially contributed to the securitization of the ethnic issue and created an unhealthy debate in the nationwide media recently. Provision of Russian passports to the ethnic Armenians of Javakheti, initially associated with the military base, is not a new process. In addition, new amendments to the Armenian citizenship law from 2007 simplified the citizenship regime for ethnic Armenians not born in Armenia, making it possible for ethnic Armenians from Samtskhe-Javakheti to acquire Armenian citizenship in order to commute to Russia easily.

The Armenian and Russian policy of providing passports poses challenges to the Georgian state. The Georgian experience from 2008 and Russia's new foreign and security policy as visible in Ukraine has created a context whereby citizenship regimes could be used against a state's territory. Regardless of the reasons why minorities in the ethnic enclaves acquire new passports, the increase in the number of foreign citizens in Georgia puts its territorial sovereignty under threat.

Current Issues

The preconditions and circumstances discussed here shape the current discourse on the minority question in Georgia and define the challenges impeding minority integration into the Georgian state. The various challenges are interlinked and are all part of a vicious circle that is hard to overcome. Addressing these problems is heavily dependent on minority-majority joint efforts to eliminate distrust and improve group security.

Among the most visible issues hampering minority integration into the social-political life of the country is limited knowledge of the Georgian language, a deficiency that limits minority participation in decision-making and hinders social mobility. Language is a vital basis for ethnic identity in the Caucasus and ethnic Georgians attach considerable significance to it. Despite the ardent determination of Saakashvili's government to push forward state language programs, the resources were inadequate and policies inconsistent. Although overall the attitude towards the state language has changed in a positive way, the level of proficiency achieved in secondary schools is not sufficient for equal opportunities and competition. In addition, minorities frequently do not see how language knowledge would contribute to their well-being in the near future.

Several years ago, researchers linked a poor command of Georgian with limited access to higher education. However, the situation has changed positively following the introducing of the 1+4 program in 2010. This program is a kind of quota system helping minority youth access higher educational establishments in Georgia. As a result of the initiative, the number of young representatives of minority communities entering higher educational institutions has increased. The number of ethnic Azeri students from Kvemo Kartli who have passed nationwide exams has increased from 163 in 2010 to 587 in 2013, while from Samtskhe-Javakheti the figures jumped from 96 in 2010 to 139 in 2013.[9] Creating a critical mass of minority community representatives graduating from Georgian educational institutions would definitely have a positive effect on the integration efforts.

The information vacuum is another serious issue resulting from the lack of language knowledge. Likewise, the limited activity of Georgian media outlets in the minority enclaves hampers social cohesion and integration. The only Russian language TV channel PIK was closed down after the Georgian Dream coalition came to power, while the translation of the Georgian Public Broadcaster's (GPB) evening news into local languages is not sufficient to make up for other deficiencies. Due to the lack of news from Tbilisi in languages comprehensible for minority communities, the minorities depend on Russian, Azeri and Armenian news sources, which often provide viewpoints differing from the Georgian perspective, thereby increasing the information gap between majority-minority communities. The information vacuum exacerbates the existing poor horizontal linkages between the center and the regions, which is in general weak throughout Georgia due to the country's uneven political development across rural and urban areas and the limited channels of communication.

The lack of good governance practices, which translates into low rates of participation in decision-making and limited political activism, are other issues common for minority enclaves. Minority representatives are not represented at the central level, neither in the public administration, nor in political parties. Mainstream political parties do not appeal to minority issues in their election campaigns; nor have they campaigned in minority enclaves (so far only with a few exceptions), fueling the argument that the regions have been the domain of the party in power.[10] The inclusion of minority community representatives, in most cases local authorities, in

8 Alexandrova Lyudmila, Russia keeps pressing for reunification of "Russian world". April 02. <http://en.itar-tass.com/opinions/1723>

9 <http://www.naec.ge/>

10 Eka Metreveli and Jonathan Kulick, Social Relations and Governance in Javakheti, Georgia. PDCI, 2009. pp. 20–21.

the governing party lists and their subsequent participation in the parliament is also nominal.

Overall, the absence of democratic channels of communication limits minority participation in the state building process and hence contributes to the lack of social cohesion and unity.

Conclusion

The legacies of nationality policies from the soviet and post-soviet periods have influenced the state of affairs of minority enclaves in Georgia and encouraged mutual distrust among the majority and minority communities, contributing to the securitization of the issue, which is becoming especially acute due to the emergence of Russia's aggressive foreign and security policy in the post-soviet space.

Securitization and social cohesion are closely interlinked. In order to decrease the vulnerability of Georgia's ethnic minorities to outside interference, it is important to introduce mechanisms for inclusion of minority interests into the realm of domestic politics and push forward policies aimed at national unity. But, due to the current international context in Georgia's neighborhood, achieving de-securitization of the minority question would be difficult.

In order to achieve social cohesion, Georgia needs to continue the reform process that started during the Saakashvili government, making it more transparent, inclusive and coherent. The lack of good governance practices and the absence of democratic channels of communication coupled with the lack of Georgian language knowledge and the informational vacuum directly contributes to the lack of unity among the majority and minority communities. Effective democracy cannot exist without a shared sense of civic belonging. Georgia still has a long way to go until such awareness is developed.

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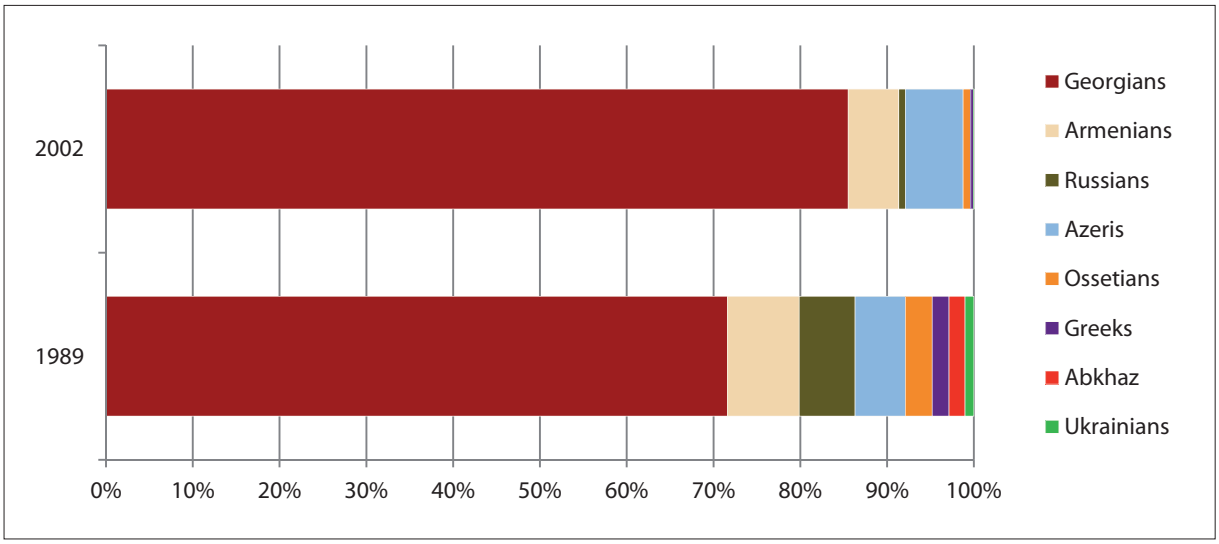
Figure 1: Ethnic Composition of Georgia, 1989, 2002 (%)



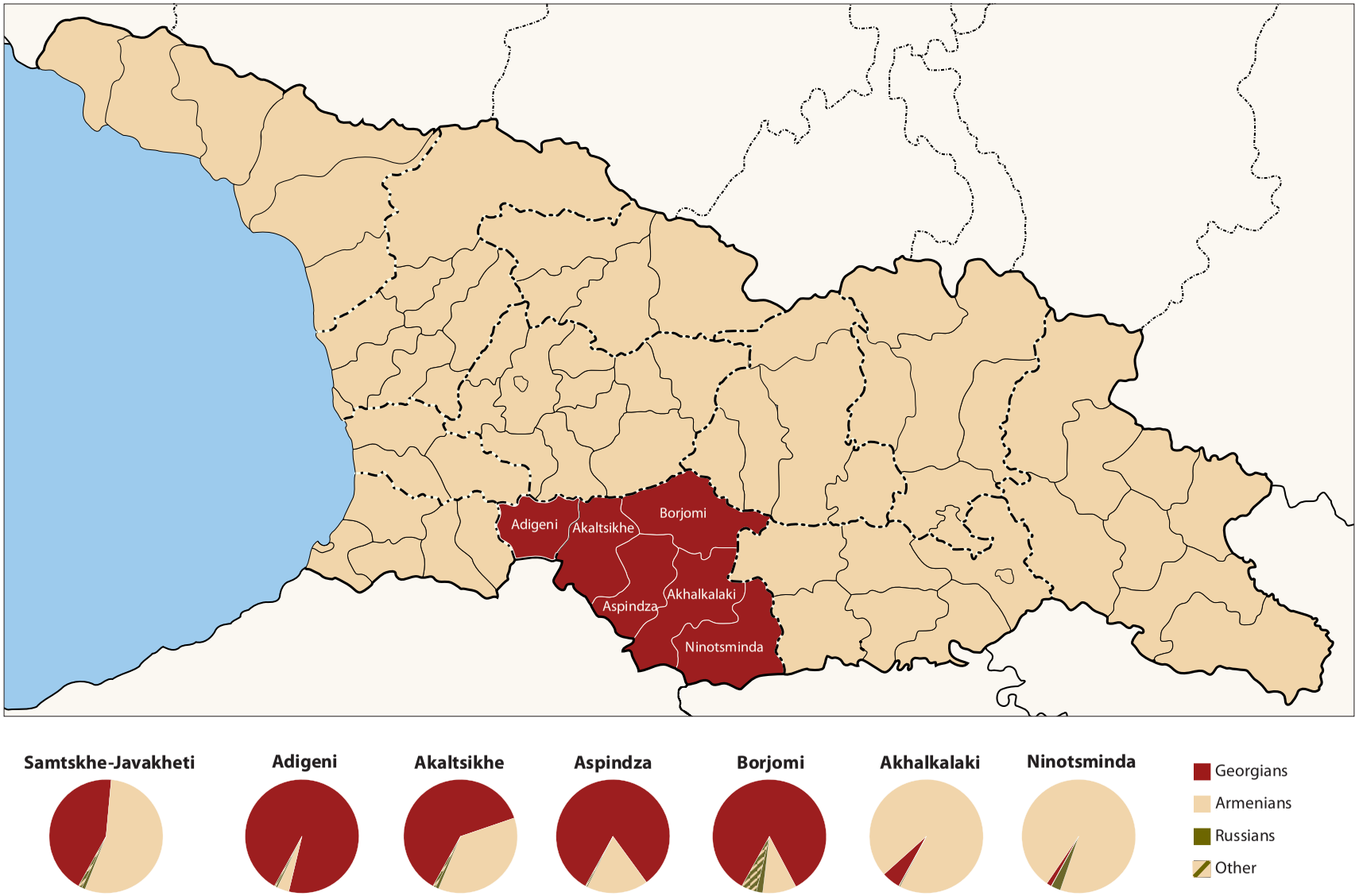
Source: State Department for Statistics of Georgia, "Major Findings of the First General National Population Census of Georgia in 2002", Statistics Booklet, Tbilisi, 2002.

Table 1: Ethnic Composition of Georgia, 1989, 2002

Ethnicity	1989	2002	% of the total in 1989	% of the total 2002
Georgians	3787.4	3661.1	70.1	83.7
Armenians	437.2	248.9	8.1	5.7
Russians	341.2	32.6	6.3	0.75
Azeris	307.6	284.8	5.7	6.5
Ossetians	164.1	38.0	3.0	0.87
Greeks	100.3	15.1	1.9	0.35
Abkhaz	95.9	3.5	1.8	0.0008
Ukrainians	52.4	7.0	1.0	0.0016
Total	***5400.8***	***4371.5***	***100***	***100***

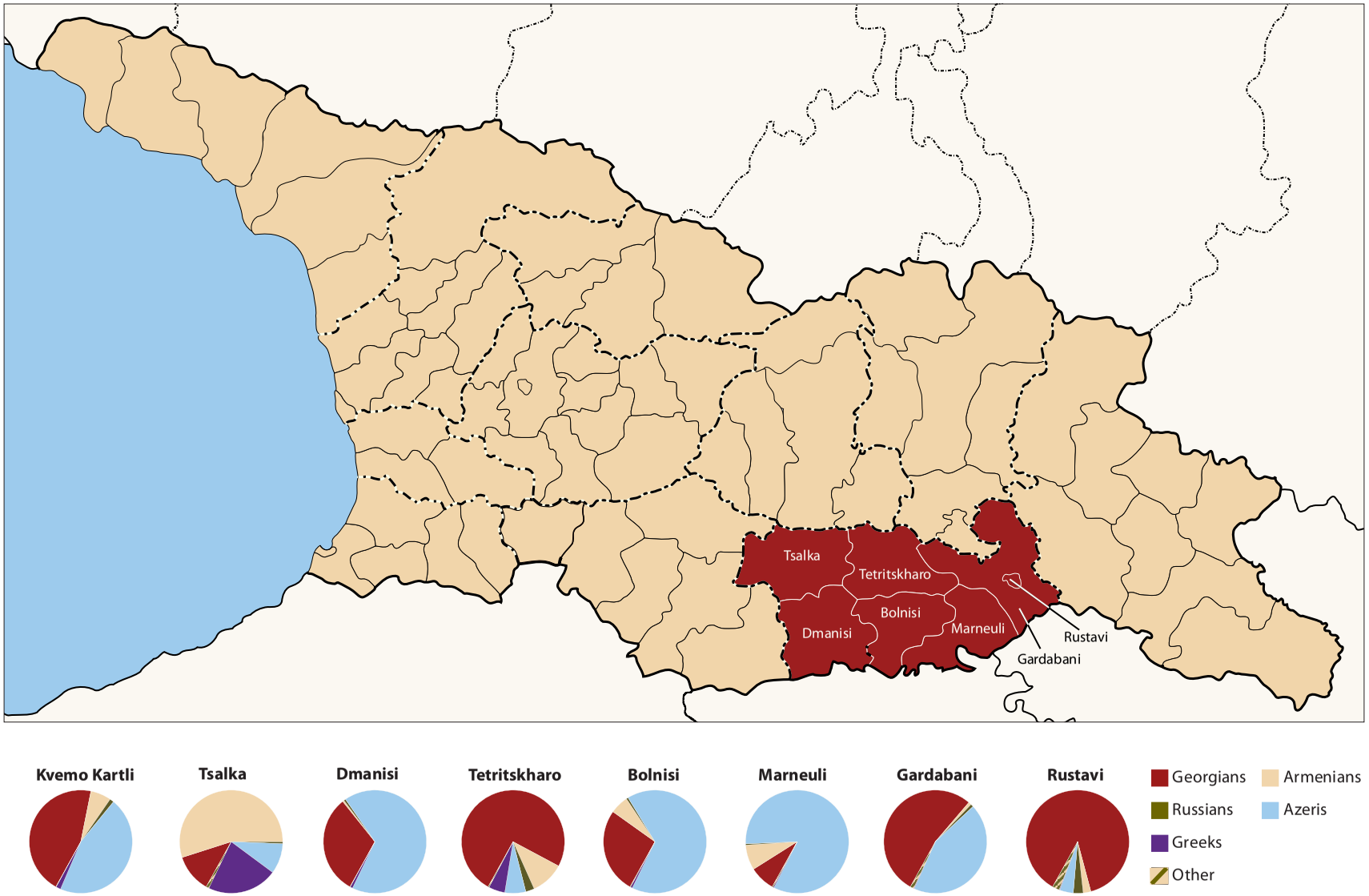
Source: State Department for Statistics of Georgia, "Major Findings of the First General National Population Census of Georgia in 2002", Statistics Booklet, Tbilisi, 2002.

Figure 2: Ethnic Composition of the Samtskhe-Javakheti Region and its Constituent Administrative Districts, 2002



Source: State Department for Statistics of Georgia, "Major Findings of the First General National Population Census of Georgia in 2002", Statistics Booklet, Tbilisi, 2002; map: "George Mel", <http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A4%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%BB:GEO-SJ-AD.svg>

Figure 3: Ethnic Composition of the Kvemo Kartli Region and its Constituent Administrative Districts, 2002



Source: State Department for Statistics of Georgia, "Major Findings of the First General National Population Census of Georgia in 2002", Statistics Booklet, Tbilisi, 2002; map: "George Mel", <http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A4%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%BB:GEO-SJ-AD.svg>

Table 2: Ethnic Composition of the Samtskhe-Javakheti Region, 2002

	Total	Georgians	Russians	Armenians	Other
Samtskhe-Javakheti	207,598 100%	89,995 43.4%	2,230 1.%	113,347 54.6%	2,026 1%
Adigeni	20,752 100%	19,860 95.7%	101 0.5%	698 3.4%	93 0.4%
Aspindza	13,010 100%	10,671 82.0%	34 0.3%	2,273 17.5%	32 0.3%
Akhalkalaki	60,975 100%	3,214 5.3%	157 0.3%	57,516 94.3%	88 0.1%
Akaltsikhe	46,134 100%	28,473 61.7%	410 0.9%	16,879 36.6%	372 0.8%
Borjomi	32,422 100%	27,301 84.2%	585 1.8%	3,124 9.6%	1412 3%
Ninotsminda	34,305 100%	476 1.4%	943 2.7%	32,857 95.8%	29 0.1%

Source: State Department for Statistics of Georgia, "Major Findings of the First General National Population Census of Georgia in 2002", Statistics Booklet, Tbilisi, 2002

Table 3: Ethnic Composition of the Kvemo Kartli Region, 2002

	Total	Georgians	Russians	Armenians	Azeris	Greeks	Other
Kvemo Kartli	497,530 100%	222,450 44.7%	6,464 1.3%	31,777 6.4%	224,606 45.1%	7,415 1.5%	4,818 0.1%
Rustavi	116,384 100%	102,151 87.8%	3,563 3.1%	2,809 2.4%	4,993 4.3%	257 0.2%	2,611 2.2%
Bolnisi	74,301 100%	19,926 26.8%	414 0.6%	4,316 5.8%	49,026 66%	438 0.6%	181 0.2%
Gardabani	114,348 100%	60,832 53.2%	994 0.9%	1,060 0.9%	49,993 43.7%	236 0.2%	1,233 1.1%
Dmanisi	28,034 100%	8,759 31.2%	156 0.6%	147 0.5%	18,716 66.8%	218 0.8%	38 0.1%
Marneuli	118,221 100%	9,503 8%	523 0.4%	9,329 7.9%	98,245 83.1%	296 0.3%	325 0.3%
Tetritskharo	25,354 100%	18,769 74.0%	689 2.7%	2,632 10.4%	1,641 6.5%	1,281 5.1%	342 0.3%
Tsalka	20,888 100%	2,510 12%	125 0.6%	11,484 55%	1,992 9.5%	4,589 22%	188 0.9%

Source: State Department for Statistics of Georgia, "Major Findings of the First General National Population Census of Georgia in 2002", Statistics Booklet, Tbilisi, 2002

Mixed Marriages in Georgia: Trends and Implications

By Milena Oganesyan, Missoula, MT, USA

Abstract

Mixed marriage is often regarded as an indicator of inter-group mixing and a group's status within society. This article will examine major intermarriage trends in Georgia after the fall of the Soviet Union by focusing on some of the key factors affecting mixed marriages and inter-group relations in the country.

Background

Love and affection are often regarded as some of the major factors affecting an individual's decision to marry. Yet, ethnic differences and religious affiliations can also play an important role in people's understanding of love and marriage matters. The following article examines mixed marriage dynamics in Georgia after the demise of the Soviet Union by drawing on recent quantitative data about mixed marriages in the country. Marriage, in general, and mixed marriage, in particular, have varying meanings and are linked to socioeconomic developments, culture, politics, and geography. In the West, "mixed marriage" and "intermarriage" are frequently used to denote interracial marriage and interreligious marriage, respectively (Leeds-Hurwitz 2002:11). In the Soviet Union and following its collapse, the emphasis has been on interethnic and interfaith mixing. In this regard, mixed marriage will be defined as a legal and formal union between two heterosexual individuals from various ethnic groups, religions, or nations. The terms mixed marriage and intermarriage will be used interchangeably in this article.

Numerous sociological studies show that people tend to marry representatives of their own social and religious groups and those who are close to them in status. However, individuals can cross group boundaries through mixed marriage. The latter may decrease cultural and other differences between groups. Mixed marriage occurrences can also serve as indicators of changes in ethnic boundaries separating groups of people. In this sense, the more people intermarry, the weaker the group boundaries (Lee and Bean 2004). High intermarriage rates can also be viewed as indicators of social integration of groups of people, because these rates may indicate that members of different groups accept each other as social equals (Kalmijn 1998:396). However, negative attitudes about ethnic intermarriage are viewed as an expression of "social distance" and unvoiced intolerance.

Country Profile and Statistics

Georgia is described as the most ethnically and religiously diverse country of the South Caucasus. According to the last census conducted in Georgia in 2002, ethnic Georgians constitute the majority of the population (83.8 percent), while Azerbaijanis (6.5 percent) and Armenians (5.7 percent) represent the two largest ethnic minority groups. Other ethnic minorities include Russians (1.6 percent), Ossetians (0.9 percent), Abkhazians (0.1 percent), Greeks (0.4 percent), Yezidis (0.4 percent), and others (0.8 percent). The major religious denominations in Georgia include Georgian Orthodox Christianity (83.8 percent), Sunni and Shia Islam (9.9 percent), Armenian Apostolic Christianity (3.9 percent), Roman Catholicism (0.8 percent), and others (1.5 percent) (2002 Census). The population of Georgia is said to be largely traditional; men are often viewed as breadwinners, while women are responsible for reproduction, domestic chores, and caring for the family. It is estimated that about half of the households in the country contain extended families (Badurashvili et al. 2009).

Figure 1 shows nine major mixed marriage types by ethnicity registered in Georgia between 1994 and 2007. These data reveal an overall decline in intermarriage in the country with 2002–2003 marking the lowest years in mixed marriage occurrences. This drop may be due to the tense political climate in Georgia and the 2003 Rose Revolution. The two most numerous mixed marriage types for the given period were Georgian–Russian and Georgian–Armenian marriages, followed by Georgian–Ossetian and Georgian–Greek marriages. In comparison, Georgian–Azerbaijani, Georgian–Jewish, Georgian–Assyrian, and Georgian–Kurdish marriages were relatively rare. Notably, these data list Kurds, whereas there were many Yezidis in Georgia as well. Thus, compared to previous years, the number of mixed marriage types in the country declined significantly.

While mixed marriages among the major ethnic groups in Georgia declined, the data presented in Figure 2 show an increase in Georgian–Georgian homogenous marriages. In this regard, the early 2000s were marked by the lowest Georgian–Georgian marriage registrations, while the number of these homogenous marriages increased by 2007. Scholars agree that endogamy, or marrying inside one's ethnic and religious group, has been a norm in Georgia. The 1994–2007 marriage data also confirm a tendency towards endogamy in the country, especially among Georgians, Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Greeks, and Kurds/Yezidis. A number of ethno-

graphic studies reveal that marriage rules even among Georgians conform to strict traditional norms. In this regard, Georgian intra-group marriages between cousins six or seven times removed are generally not allowed, while endogamous marriages between partners with common ancestors and the same last name are usually avoided.

According to the Georgian National Department of Statistics, due to the removal of the "ethnicity" line from the Georgian ID cards, collecting quantitative data on ethnically mixed marriages has become impossible after 2007. Since ethnicity is no longer mentioned in official marriage records, it has become difficult to formally document the ethnic background of mixed couples. From 2009 to 2013, the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) conducted a series of surveys throughout Georgia regarding people's attitudes about ethnically mixed marriages. As the Figure 3 shows, the overwhelming majority of people in the country approve of women of their ethnicity marrying ethnic Georgians (90–91 percent range). Marrying Russians is more acceptable than marrying representatives of other ethnic groups mentioned in the chart. In turn, marrying Jews, Azerbaijanis, and Kurds/Yezidis, all often affiliated with various religious denominations, won less support. Within the given time period, the approval rates remain the same with minor fluctuations.

Discussion

In general, some of the factors affecting mixed marriage dynamics include religiosity, strong ethnic consciousness, group size, migrations, settlement type, language use, media coverage, and stereotypes. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, ethnicity and religion have played an important role in Georgia. The Soviet political system was instrumental in constructing and solidifying ethnic identities by institutionalizing ethnicity, partly through Soviet passports. In the late 1980s through the early 1990s, ethnicity became extremely politicized, igniting nationalistic rhetoric that resulted in ethnic conflicts across the former Soviet bloc, including Georgia. To this day, ethnic affiliation and last names, in particular, remain important attributes of an individual's identity in Georgia.

In the late 1990s–early 2000s, the Georgian leadership decided to remove the "ethnicity" line from Georgian passports and ID cards as a way to promote civic integration. However, this move has been strongly opposed by both the ethnic majority and ethnic minority groups. For some, the recording of their ethnicity in the ID cards meant preserving their ethnic heritage. Yet, others maintained that ethnic heritage cannot be lost and exists regardless of its legal status. This debate continues to this day, reflecting citizens' concerns about preserving their ethnic identity and fears of assimilation.

Unbalanced and negative portrayals of ethnic minorities in the Georgian media and one-sided Georgian history teaching in schools and universities, especially in the 1990s and 2000s, also fed into inter-ethnic tensions in the country. In this regard, derogatory terms that have been used in the media to refer to ethnic and religious minority representatives include "traitors," "separatists," "aggressors," "potential criminals," etc. This situation, in turn, further contributes to social alienation and promotes stereotypical thinking. Also, the Georgian history textbooks published between the early 1990s and late 2000s, applied an ethnocentric rather than citizen-based approach. These textbooks were characterized as one-sided, emphasized the Georgian ethnicity, and excluded non-Georgian ethnic minorities from the curriculum (CIMERA 2007). A number of recent reports have documented cases of religious and ethnic discrimination in schools to this day (EMC 2014).

Religion as a salient identity marker has also re-emerged with new meaning after the demise of the USSR; the Georgian Orthodox Church has become a cornerstone for the "genuine" Georgian identity (Khaindrava 2004:55). In the last ten years, religiosity has also increased throughout the country, especially among the younger generation. Based on the 2008 World Values Survey (WVS), 78 percent of people in Georgia noted that churches in the country provided answers to the problems of family life. According to the 2013 Caucasus Barometer conducted by CRRC, 95 percent of people in Georgia said that religion was important in their daily lives. Also, religious denominations in the country tend to discourage inter-faith marriages, unless the other partner converts.

The declining intermarriage dynamics in Georgia are also partly due to the fact that ethnic Georgians constitute the majority of the population, while non-Georgian ethnic groups comprise about 16 percent of society (2002 Census). Furthermore, based on the 1989 and 2002 census data, about 25 percent of the Georgian citizens left the country permanently, as a result of ethnic and civil wars as well as due to difficult socioeconomic conditions. A significant number of these emigrants were Russians, Jews, Armenians, Greeks, Kurds/Yezidis, and others. Nevertheless, mixed marriages have been more common in urban centers, including Tbilisi, than in rural areas. In this regard, despite its rich ethnic and religious mosaic, Georgia's Kvemo Kartli region has been also characterized by relatively low intermarriage rates and clear group boundaries. Melikishvili (2011) documents cases of disowning or ostracizing family mem-

bers for marrying outside of their ethnic and religious groups in this region.

Conclusion

In sum, between 1994 and 2007, the number of mixed marriages in Georgia declined almost twofold. Among the major "traditional" ethnic groups in Georgia, the Georgian–Russian and the Georgian–Armenian mixed marriages were the most common. In contrast, the Georgian–Georgian homogenous marriages increased by 2007. The 2009–2013 CRRC annual surveys also reveal a continued tendency toward endogamy. Some of the major factors affecting the marriage dynamics in Georgia include higher religiosity, strong ethnic consciousness, religious restrictions, unbalanced media coverage and ethnic tensions, as well as a significant outflow of the country's minority population. All of these factors in one way or another have affected the mixed marriage trends in Georgia. The decline in intermarriage may also indicate that boundaries separating ethnic groups in Georgia may have become more rigid since the demise of the Soviet Union. Such developments may negatively impact the social and civic integration of the country's minority population.

About the Author:
Milena Oganesyan is a Ph.D. Candidate in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Montana-Missoula, MT, USA. Milena is currently conducting fieldwork in Georgia. Her research focuses on ethnically and religiously mixed couples in Georgia.

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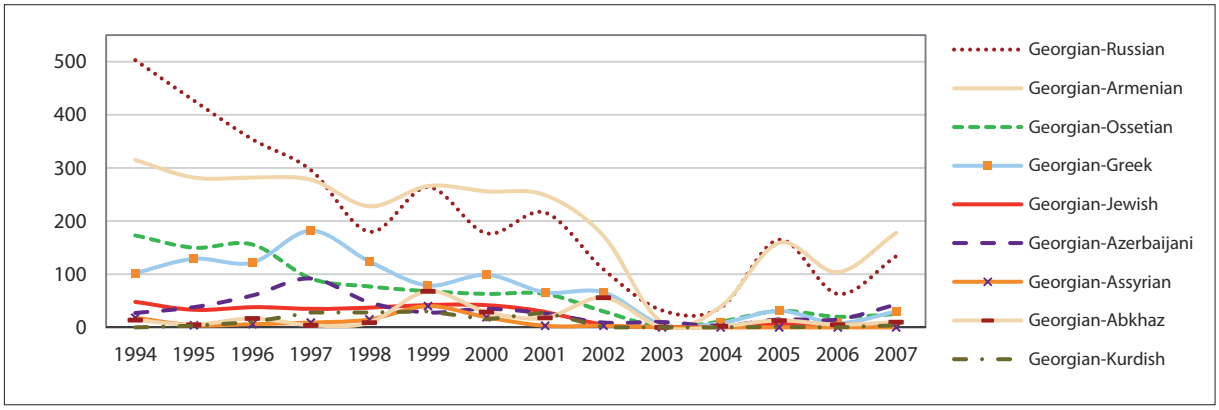
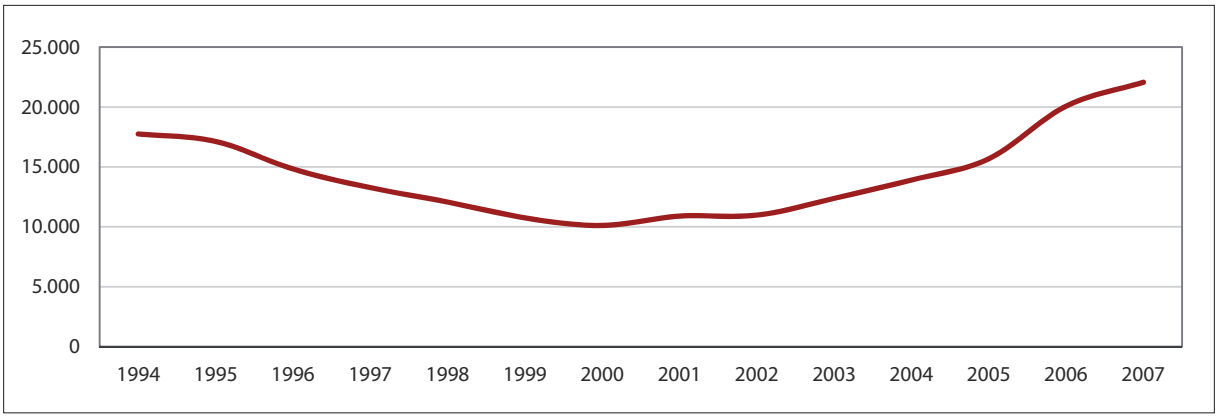
Figure 1: Mixed Marriage Among Georgians by Year (Count)



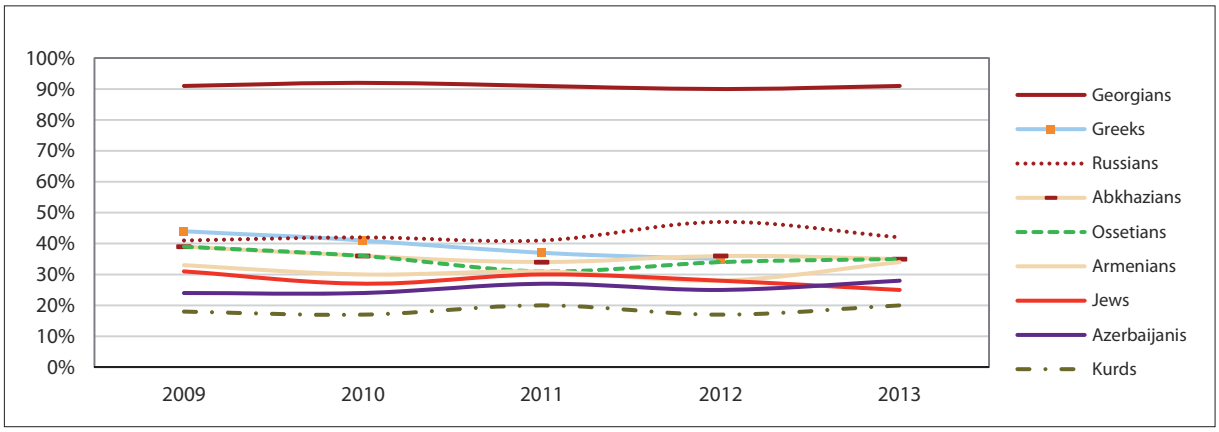
Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia

Figure 2: Georgian–Georgian Homogeneous Marriages by Year (Count)



Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia

Figure 3: Approval of Georgian Women Marrying … by Year (%)



Source: 2009–2013 Caucasus Barometer, CRRC

CHRONICLE

21 June–7 July 2014

21 June 2014	Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visits Azerbaijan and holds talks with his Azerbaijani counterpart Elmar Mammadyarov on further deepening of cooperation between the two countries and the situation in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh as well as the ongoing Ukraine crisis
23 June 2014	Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov holds talks with his Armenian counterpart Edvard Nalbandian on issues related to Armenia's integration into the Eurasian Economic Union (EES)
23 June 2014	The Russian Foreign Ministry says that a phone conversation was held between Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin and Georgian Prime Minister's special envoy for relations with Russia, Zurab Abashidze, on technical consultations between Georgian and Russian experts on the potential effects on Georgian–Russian bilateral trade of deep and comprehensive free trade agreements (DCFTA) signed with the EU
24 June 2014	Activists protest Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's speech at a session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in Strasbourg
25 June 2014	NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen says the upcoming NATO summit in Wales in September will not address the question of granting Georgia a Membership Action Plan (MAP)
26 June 2014	The Russian Foreign Ministry announces that citizens of the Commonwealth Independent States (CIS), excluding member states of the Customs Union and Eurasian Economic Union (EES), will no longer be able to use their national identification documents to enter Russian territory as of 1 January 2015
27 June 2014	Georgia and the EU sign an association agreement, including a deep and comprehensive free trade area (DCFTA), with Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili saying at the signing ceremony that Georgia is "taking a big step towards free Europe"
27 June 2014	Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili welcomes Russia's "constructive policy" and says that it has kept its promise not to interfere with the signing of an association agreement between Georgia and the EU
29 June 2014	US Congressman and Helsinki Commission Co-Chairman Chris Smith calls for a special envoy to be named to mediate between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh during a visit to Azerbaijan
30 June 2014	Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt holds talks with the Georgian authorities in Tbilisi and representatives of the opposition United National Movement party and underlines the importance of implementing the association agreement with the EU to accelerate Georgia's modernization
30 June 2014	An Azerbaijani citizen suspected of the stabbing death of a Russian man in Moscow that had sparked riots in October 2013 pleads not guilty at Moscow City Court
1 July 2014	Former chief of Georgia's military police Grigori Dgebuadze is arrested in the Netherlands after Tbilisi issues an international arrest warrant against him on charges of illegal confinement and organizing torture
3 July 2014	Former mayor of Tbilisi Gigi Ugulava is detained at Tbilisi airport as he was travelling to Chisinau and Kiev after being accused of misuse and embezzlement of public funds
3 July 2014	Ukrainian Justice Minister Pavlo Petrenko and Minister of Infrastructure Maxim Burbak visit Georgia after the Georgian Prime Minister's office says that Georgian Justice Minister Tea Tsulukiani has been tasked to visit Ukraine to share Georgia's reform experience with Ukrainian counterparts
4 July 2014	The EU says it is closely following the arrest of former Tbilisi mayor and United National Movement party leader Gigi Ugulava and calls on the Georgian authorities to ensure that the judicial process is fully independent, transparent and free of political influence in a statement released by the spokesperson of the EU's foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton
6 July 2014	Georgian Parliament speaker Davit Usupashvili visits Azerbaijan and meets with his Azerbaijani counterpart Oktay Sabir Asadov as well as Prime Minister Artur Rasizade and Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov
7 July 2014	Former Georgian President and Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union Eduard Shevardnadze dies at the age of 86

Compiled by Lili Di Puppo

For the full chronicle since 2009 see <www.laender-analysen.de/cad>

ABOUT THE CAUCASUS ANALYTICAL DIGEST

Editors: Denis Dafflon, Lili Di Puppo, Iris Kempe, Natia Mestvirishvili, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines

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