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**THE PROBLEMS OF INTEGRATION OF AZERBAIJANI  
MINORITY INTO GEORGIAN SOCIETY**

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CSCE - Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe

ECHR- European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

ECMI- European Center for Minority Issues

ECRML- European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

ETA- Euzkadi Ta Atasuna

FCNM - European Framework Convention for the Protection of the Rights of National Minorities

GD- Georgian Dream

GOC- Georgian Orthodox Church

ICCPR- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICERD- International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination

ICESCR- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

SOCAR- State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic

UN- United Nations

UNE- Unified National Examination

UNM- United National Movement

## **ABSTRACT**

Since the independence of Georgia in 1991 minorities still seem non-integrated to the politico-social life of the country. Starting from Gamsakhurdia's nationalistic approach to a more decisive approach of Saakashvili's administration and comparatively moderate approach of the current government, Georgia's minorities are still experiencing serious problems in the process of integration. The study has a purpose to find out what are the core obstacles that left considerable number of minorities, particularly Azerbaijanis, unintegrated. Qualitative research method was applied methodology for this study where document analysis, reports and official statements were used as a mean of information. Research intended to find the reasons why Azerbaijanis are still poorly integrated to Georgian society and also to clear up the gaps in the policies of different presidents and their approaches to minority policy. The results revealed the fact that language knowledge is a core problem for minority integration in Georgia, however likewise still discriminative approach exist, even though it significantly decreased from time of Gamsakhurdia's presidency.

Keywords: Georgia, Minority, Azerbaijanis, Integration, Language

## INTRODUCTION

Georgia is a multiethnic country and at some point it created an unsafe situation in country. Relations between the minorities and Georgian Government after the collapse of USSR became more tense, and even got more aggressive on Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, however exclusive governance, “pretending to be deaf” and treating minorities as second-class citizens eventually affected on integration volume itself. Notwithstanding, Georgian Government’s interest in minorities grew in last years, and it still remains a very sensitive issue, since the implementation of policies did not give any significant results yet. Therefore this research aims to analyze main problems and obstacles of ethnic minority integration in Georgia. The study purpose is to define and identify the reason that keeps Georgia’s minorities (in our case Azerbaijani minority) unintegrated and set the priorities for the decision- makers that are driving the minority policies and propose, although not directly, recommendations for possible solutions. Furthermore, research might reveal a clear idea of set of drawbacks and assist to rethink and determine a long-term strategy for further and more successful integration pathway.

Semantically, in order to limit and clarify the scale and scope of this research, it will only focus on the case of Azerbaijani minority in Georgia. This research seeks answers to the following research questions: *What are the main problems of integration of Azerbaijani minority into Georgian society? How minorities have been historically regarded in Georgia? How inclusive were minority policies under Georgia’s governance during the different presidencies?*

Thus, in order to support the research question and likewise understand the whole picture of the Georgian minority policy/attitude, the first step is to look at the historical sources and clarify how majority and minorities coexisted so far. Georgia’s political system is semi-presidential republic and it has unicameral Parliament with 150 seats. The Georgian president elected directly for five-year

term (with the possibility for a second term) and the Parliament is elected for four- year term. Many of executive powers of the President were shifted to Prime Minister in 2013 after constitutional reform. President and Parliament both work together on setting policy and monitoring minority issue, therefore this research intends to address the last consequential sub-question which will be related to analyzing the Georgian Government's attitude towards minorities from the time of independence until nowadays and find out how the policies towards minorities worked and changed under the different presidents'.

Thesis mainly built up consisting two chapters: Minorities in Georgia which was intended to create an overview of minorities in Georgia and also discussing Azerbaijanis as a minority and their integration problems; and also "Georgian Minority Policy under different Presidencies" chapter which was aimed to deliver different administration's relations to minorities and policies that have been implemented during their office.

## **Methodology**

This study seeks to adopt qualitative document analysis, based on the primary and secondary literatures or sources-hence the observation based approach and also conducting an interview with Azerbaijani MP from Georgian Parliament. This method will help in the systematic analysis of the previous texts and data that are related to this study. For addressing the research questions and finding out the reasons of the problems in integration, research planned to be held on qualitative based method, however using mixed method is not also excluded since the additional information might be needed while working on research topic. The explanatory design of the qualitative method is used for secondary data collection and analysis (statistical data, legislative documents, international organizations' reports, academic texts, journals, national dailies, library materials, internet materials, census and official documents or records as well as online media reports) to support the findings of the research topic. Additionally, exploratory design of the quantitative method is used to analyze the interviews with the minority representatives. Content analysis of

different books, legislative documents, International organizations' reports and media reports are conducted to find about the policies of Gamsakhurdia's, Shevardnadze's, Saakashvili's and current Government's with the president Giorgi Margvelashvili administrations towards the national minorities of the country, the legal documents that they have ratified concerning the minority rights protection. The analysis of the research will also include significant works that has been done so far by European Center for Minority Issues (ECMI).

Although this research is carefully prepared at the moment on the base of qualitative research method, and I believe that it will be sufficient to end up with rational results, still I am aware of its limitations and shortcomings that might to some extent constrain my research. Sources of the data are mainly secondary. Furthermore, due to language barrier, this research does not use any official document in Georgian. These two shortcomings constrain the depth of this research.



# **1. THEORY**

## **1.1. General Minority Rights**

Minority rights issue is a relatively new sphere that concerns international community. Albeit the inclusive governance with the equal rights to all citizens is a trending way of development and part of the democratic way of evolving, still quite some countries behold the mindset that minorities are threat to national sovereignty, thus irredentist ideas of minorities may always create an unrest in country, therefore assimilation is mostly employed model in order to diminish the minorities vitality. However, in some cases it brings the feelings of alienation which may merely lead to secessionist movements. Hence minority issue is not only about which rights will be applied to the minorities in the paper, but also their practical inclusion of the whole society of a country. Certainly, role of nationalism, especially in 20<sup>th</sup> century has left a clear signs of intolerance even up to nowadays, but in a rapidly globalized world and again it's a very sensitive questions that needs extremely careful approach. The evolution of the minority rights have not been an easy made task. It showed several times that minorities are the ones who change the map of the world. Minority rights for the first time as a systematic conception was mentioned in Paris Peace Conference in 1919 where the Minority Treaties were signed with the aim to guarantee equal rights for minorities and efforts to preserve the cultural heritage of theirs. The minority rights shifted under the League of Nations responsibility, but raising nationalism since 30th, especially after Nazis came to power the minority rights evolution collapsed. Even countries started using the minority rights in their own benefits, i.e. Nazi Germany justified its invasion of Poland and Czechoslovakia on the grounds that these countries were violating the treaty rights of ethnic Germans on their soil. (Kymlicka)

The year of 1948 was a very important for the matter of minority rights as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights were adopted by the newly founded United Nations which were seen as a gendarme of a new world order after devastating World War II. The document that has been adopted was referring to minority rights: *“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”* (The UN 1949)

The minority rights evolution continued with several recognitions that have been made by the UN and worth to mention the fact of adoption of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1966 that was first treaty in history that condemned and prohibited all kind of discrimination based on race, ethnic origin or color, thus recognizing the rights of the minorities.

The minority rights has been more clearly identified in an adopted by the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1966. That is explained by the following manner from Article 27:

*“In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.”*  
(The UN 1966)

From the late 20th the minority rights discussions were intensively evolved and it has now divided actors which are playing a significant role on improvement of minorities in states by adopting or modifying the treaties related to minority rights. As such we have now more global player which is the UN and regional organizations such as the CSCE. CSCE in 1975 adopted Helsinki Act by which emphasized the essence of the minorities and advised the states to respect the rights of minorities, give them equal treatment and fundamental freedom. Likewise, the CSCE adopted Copenhagen document which attached and put accent on minority rights and notably on the freedom of expression, their own religion, language and culture. (CSCE 1990)

Now for Georgia’s minorities, their problems have long been unaddressed, but gradually minority rights improved after ratification of the FCNM in 2005 and adoption of a National Concept and Action Plan for Tolerance and Civil Integration in 2009 which accelerated integration process. Joining other international conventions would add up on prestige of the country therefore such

charter as ECRML is a necessary step for recognition and protection of the minority rights. (Minority Rights Group International 2009)

Nevertheless, minority rights now more widely known as a part of international human rights, it's still not uniquely structured, and also perceived not same by the states, since as mentioned, minorities may also jeopardize the state sovereignty and may create additional problems. Therefore attitudes towards minorities a bit skeptical in some countries including in Georgia, which is also to some extend understandable.

## **1.2. State policies and minority response to that**

Constantly changing the political map of the world did not let the minorities without consequences. Some ethnics that were prevailing in the territories found themselves drew out of borders of their nations and merged a new political map inside the country where they are now minority. Perhaps for some this was a rudiment for the future conflict and societal collision, but some could even pursue benefit out of it. Coherently, state's certain relation and policy with the respect to minorities determined by the ruling elite or parties were distinctive as such. Alan B. Anderson in his work for ECMI 'Ethnic minorities and minority rights in Europe: Theoretical typologies' discloses types of state policies from Genocide to Pluralistic attitude:

- 'Physical Genocide' is undoubtedly the most violent and aggressive state policy towards ethnics such as the Holocaust or Bangladeshi Genocide in 1971.
- 'Ethnic cleansing' which is purposely removal of specific group from a territory in order to create cultural and demographic dominance. This is in literal meaning is deportation which is followed by violence and even mass murder. Ex. Deportation of Azerbaijanis from Armenia in 1988-1989.<sup>1</sup>
- Assimilation likewise considered as one of the state policy towards minorities, and in this case minorities are endangered to lose their own identity and culture by incorporating to the majoritarian

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<sup>1</sup> <http://karabakh.org/conflict/refugees-idps/mass-human-rights-violation-during-the-deportation-of-azerbaijanis-from-armenia-as-well-as-from-azerbaijani-territories-occupied-by-armenian-military-forces/>

ethnic group. This policy also called as cultural genocide.

- Depending on the government's policy, minorities may also enjoy some rights such as minority language can be recognized, of course with some restrictions. Furthermore, weaker centrist states minorities may even reach up to the full autonomy where they have own national government, with limited access to international politics. Autonomous regions might also be deemed as country inside a country.

- Bilingualism or even trilingualism is also possible way of recognition of minority language at national or regional level. Ex. Belgium, where Dutch and French is official languages at the national level and German is recognized at the regional level. Luxembourg- tiny country with three official languages (French, German and Luxembourgish)

- Ultimately, in pluralistic state where the population is not having a dominant ethnic group consist of the principle of partnership and cooperation between the ethnic groups. (Anderson 2017) In case of Georgia, from Anderson's categorization, we may consider that during the first years of independence, Georgian Government was discoursing assimilation policies, however ignorant and "alien in our land" attitudes, particularly towards Azerbaijanis, were also in place that led to a conflictual response from the minorities. However assimilation turned more cooperation and inclusion of the minorities after the Saakashvili took office, which is considered as a best solution to a majority- minority relation.

The responses of the minorities may vary depending on how state policy will affect their identity and most certainly their rights. However here the competence of the unity and solidarity inside an ethnic group has so much to do with how the response to a specific state policy will look like. This goes without saying that the most truculent way of response is terrorism. i.e. ETA in the Basque country in Spain or the Provisional Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland.

We may also consider the policy of several European countries as a reason of terroristic attacks in last years committed by immigrants, but the point here that they are not representing minority group as such and the reason might be alienation of migrants. Perhaps assimilation policy would work just perfectly for economic migrants that are reaching Europe. Response of the minority can also be well- organized, by operating as united by all means (protests, using powers of political parties in order to achieve results and even standing for separatism). Minorities might also be obedient with the state's policies, not only because they are happy with it, but it could be the reason that political

unity is not strong enough to push back, even if there is ethnic solidarity. i.e Gypsies. (Anderson, 2017) In case of Azerbaijanis in Georgia, response in the form of terrorism and separatism are not represented, and it looks rather disoriented and disunited community that can only complain in words with the policies of the Government, but at the end will be obedient to its rules.

In the next chapters minorities in Georgia, particularly Azerbaijanis, will be discussed and then Minority policies under the different presidencies will be narrated.

## **2. MINORITIES IN GEORGIA**

### **2.1. Motivation**

My both parents` family line are Azerbaijanis from Georgia, therefore considering myself as a part of the Azerbaijani minority of Georgia, I decided to devote my master thesis to research minority issue in Georgia. It has been so implicit for me that why Azerbaijani population could not integrate into Georgian society after the Soviets collapsed, because 25 years passed since independence gained, and almost a new generation grew up; however results are not heartwarming in the sense of integration of minorities in Georgia, namely for Azerbaijanis. I give you an example from the region that I`m originally from, the city of Marneuli which is mostly populated by Azerbaijanis, and the signs of integration processes into the Georgian society is really lagging behind. Another question which is very interesting for me is why such a large minority does not form a strong community that would bind with Georgian society. Relevance of this study is also determined by ongoing dynamics of Georgian rapprochement with the Western countries and development of democratic institutions that requires respectful as well as inclusive and non-discriminative society. Hence, giving a high prominence, scientific motivation of this study is based on aspiration to shed some light in interpretation of policies towards minorities and unfold the framework of the core reasons of the failure or ignorance of the integration policy of Georgia towards minorities.

### **2.2. Minorities and Minority Rights in Georgia**

Georgia as previously mentioned is a very diverse country. The only fact about gradual decreasing number of minority population should cause us a concern: Why is it happening? According to the

National Statistics Office of Georgia, minorities now constitute of 13.2 percent in 2014, however formerly it was 16.22 percent in 2002. (National Statistics Office of Georgia 2014) Below Table 1 will show the minorities in Georgia and their distribution by ethnicity:

Table.1 Ethnic Composition of Georgia

Ethnic groups	Total (Thousand Persons)	Percentage Distribution
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>3 713,8</b>	<b>100,0</b>
Georgians	3 224,6	86,8
Azeris	233,0	6,3
Armenians	168,1	4,5
Russians	26,5	0,7
Ossetians	14,4	0,4
Yazidis	12,2	0,3
Ukrainian	6,0	0,2
Kists	5,7	0,2
Greeks	5,5	0,1
Assyrians	2,4	0,1
Other	14,3	0,4
Refusal	0,6	0,0
Nationality not specified	0,5	0,0

Source: GeoStat 2014

So the minorities in Georgia is finding themselves in a percentage of 13.2 from the whole population. Among them Azerbaijanis are the biggest minority group at the moment, which constitutes majority in the region of Marneuli, Bolnisi and Dmanisi. Accordingly, Armenians are holding the second biggest minority status in Georgia and in its Samtskhe-Javakheti (Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, collectively known as Javakheti) region, albeit this number was a way different that it's now. (BTKK 2008) Mostly minorities are settled in rural areas and are playing a very limited role in country's economic life, but leaving the minorities to their own destiny would mean just putting the towns on the verge of to become a ghost-town. If compare, statistics says that

minorities are migrating, perhaps to the countries where their ethnicities are in majority and the mother tongue can be utilized. Furthermore, from the time of independence of Georgia, more nationalistic approaches left minorities despair. Although since then, and especially since Rose Revolution, reforms were applied and even to minorities, still many areas are lacking the efficient slant.

The nationalistic views of the states in 20th century has also left an influence in the governing system of Georgia. Starting from Gamsakhurdia's "Georgia for Georgians" nationalistic approach left the minorities as a second-class citizens and did not provide any valuable rights to the minorities. Georgian authority slowly started move away from nationalistic approach during the office term of Shevarnadze, and especially after the Rose Revolution the changes regarding minority rights were in the air. This approach more or less was aiming to get closer to inclusive governance and since Saakashvili took office, several documents were adopted towards minority rights betterment. Georgia so far ratified major treaties and documents regarding human rights protection, which includes the ECHR, ICCPR, ICESCR and ICERD. As a conditions to accession to Council of Europe, Georgia has also ratified the FCNM. (ECMI, A Practical Guide 2011)

The right of minorities in Georgia is also stated in its Constitution and it illustrates general human rights, freedom and equality.

*"Everyone is free by birth and is equal before law regardless of race, color, language, sex, religion, political and other opinions, national, ethnic and social belonging, origin, property and title, place of residence"* (The Constitution of Georgia 2006)

Article 38 of the constitution is explain the rights for all citizens to develop freely their native culture and to use their mother tongue in private and in public, but it should not go against the sovereignty of Georgia. (The Constitution of Georgia 2006)

As the reforms started since Saakashvili took the office, minority protection and integration issues became the responsibility of the State Minister for Civic Integration Issues and afterwards it was shifted to the State Minister for Reintegration Issues in 2008. (Sordia 2009) Saakashvili's presidential period seems more efficient when it comes to minority related issues, and especially when Georgia adopted the "Concept on Tolerance and Civil Integration, where one of the main ideas was the balance between civil integration and the protection of the ethnic groups identities.



(Abbasov, Delihuseyinoglu, Pipia, Romyansev, & Sanamyan, 2016) Later in 2012 “National Security Concept” also emphasized the protection of the minority and the encouraging the imperative factor of the participation of minorities’ participation in the social and political life of the country. The policy towards integration of minorities has been continued by the “Georgian Dream” government since 2015 and was included to 2015-2020 development plan. (Abbasov, Delihuseyinoglu, Pipia, Romyansev, & Sanamyan, 2016)

All in all, Georgia, from the time of independence, started to pay more or less attention (certainly not as high priority) to the implementation of the minority policies. Perhaps the treaties are the ones that force it to be implemented or Georgia’s willingness to drive towards western world makes to change the attitude and go for inclusive democratization, or even simply in economic terms inclusion of the minorities as a resource would empower the economy. Thus, Georgia is fulfilled most of the international obligations with the exception of the ECRML (ECMI, A Practical Guide, 2011), because it may disrupt the process of integration and strengthening position of linguistic rights of the minorities. Additionally, the fact of that several groups that are considering themselves as ethnically Georgians might get status as dialects of Georgian is not making Georgian Government to be in rush with signing of this Charter. (Chylinski & Hofmannová , 2011)

### **2.3. Azerbaijanis as a minority in Georgia**

By population, more Azerbaijanis are living outside of the Republic of Azerbaijan as a minority, i.e. Azerbaijanis in Iran, Georgia, and Russia among others. Being the biggest minority in Georgia, the number of Azerbaijanis in Georgia is constituted by approximately 6.5 percent from the whole population at approximately at 284,861 person. Unofficially, estimate umber of Azerbaijanis living in Georgia varies between 350.000- 500.000. Azerbaijanis are settling more that 45 percent of Kvemo Kartli region and mostly are living in rural areas, which might be an epicenter of high unemployment, slow infrastructure development and also affect the social condition in the region. Thereby, likewise taking into account the language barrier, breadwinner population heading to

kinship country – Azerbaijan, or Turkey and Russia. (FAYOS, 2014) Semantically, Azerbaijanis are mostly living compactly in Kvemo- Kartli region, which is a bordering region with Azerbaijan that is usually referred as “Borchali” among the Azerbaijanis and they are in majority in districts such as Marneuli, Bolnisi, and Dmanisi, and 40 percent in the Gardabani district. (Storm, 2016) Population of Georgia is in decline if compare the statistical census and population of minorities are also declining. Compare to Georgians and Armenians, Azerbaijanis are figuring much lower decline with the number of approximately 22,800. Many of them left Georgia in the 90th after the collapse of Soviets and due to the language barrier, minorities choose the way to migrate to a country of kinship in order to find better conditions and where the language could be utilized. However, this is already changing and people are returning to Georgia due to economic improvements, political attitude to the minorities and also promising democratic changes in Georgia. (Storm, 2016)

Regarding the origin of the Azerbaijanis in Georgia- there are different versions. They might be descendants of the Seljuk Turks who conquered Georgia in the eleventh century, or perhaps they were settled here after Safavid’s Shah Abbas II invaded Georgia in the seventeenth century, or even there is a version that Georgian rulers invited Turks to Georgia, but the research will not go that in-depth to historical background, since it seeks to mostly discuss the contemporary integration problems of Azerbaijanis encountering in Georgia. The main point here is, as Katli Storm correctly states, “what is abundantly clear is that the roots of this population by far predate the 1936 division and delimitation of the South Caucasus into the three separate territorial units that are known today as independent Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.” (Storm, 2016)

Despite the fact that Azerbaijanis are the biggest minority in Georgia, their voice is somewhat unheard. Here we might presume several reasons for this matter. Perhaps, this is the outcome of the disunity inside the community, especially in terms of political organization of Azerbaijanis is so quiescent. Thus, this passiveness may create a different attitude towards them from the Government, since they are more traditional and self- reliant and prefer to keep connections with Azerbaijan. Or, simply the nationalistic approach of the Georgian presidents from the time of independence left the minority with unpaid attention, especially by the time of the former Presidents Gamsakhurdia and Sheverdnadze. This trend is not fully addressed even yet, as the disputes around Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been raised.

Language concern is the central problem for full participation of minorities in the politico- social and cultural life in Georgia, as well as for Georgian Azerbaijanis and the language policy on this matter is an extremely crucial point. (Mekhuzla & Roche, 2009) As Karli examines, Georgia's language policy efforts to promote Georgian language over the country's other languages (Azerbaijani and Armenian, for instance) have not led to marked increases in knowledge of Georgian among minority groups, especially among ethnic Azerbaijanis, and have contributed greatly to the social, economic and political estrangement of the members of these ethno-linguistic groups from larger Georgian society. As per language obstacle exists, the minorities are finding themselves in the exclusion from the daily life of the country, it confines the feasibility to reach information and it also affects the minority participation in the county's political life and determines the likelihood that minorities find and keep employment. (Storm, 2016) As noted, language is considered as a main source of slow integration of minorities, therefore it will be separately discussed in the next section together with Education system of Georgia.

Culturally, Azerbaijanis in Georgia are enjoying the freedom of all customs as in Azerbaijan and Georgia's not interventional attitude led to a cultural preservation of national identity. Usually both, Georgians and Azerbaijanis are identified by their religious background as a significant component of their uniqueness. But as there are many examples of co-existence of ethno- cultural and religious affiliations, there are also case in which indicate tension between ethnic groups. You may find villages consisting of Georgians, Greeks and Azerbaijanis co-living together and tolerating each other's accustoms, but the fact that the GOC is assumed privileged with even special rights makes the communities to suffer from the absence of legal protection hence religious communities registering as non-governmental organizations or non-profit law associations. (FAYOS, 2014)

Yet, the Constitution of Georgia have provisions on equality and non- discrimination towards minority groups, likewise the constitution is a guarantee for the rights to freedom of expression, thought, conscience, belief, and religion, there is powerful presence of the GOC in the politics. As stated, the GOC is privileged and a central element of unique Georgian nation that enjoys the rights that no any other religious groups are having. And where is dominance there we may find the sign of discrimination, including against the Azerbaijani. In 2013 Human Rights without Frontiers on the freedom of religious belief reported that there is an animosity between religious groups and located incidents in Kvemo Kartli region where Muslims were not allowed to enter mosques and were

menaced by the Orthodox Christians. Same year was recorded an incident between Christians and Muslims because of the forced removal of a minaret from mosque which ostensibly did not pay import taxes. This incident consequently led to arrests and involved Justice Minister, Tea Tsukujiani who alluded to the question that should even minarets be allowed in Georgia. (Storm, 2017)

## **2.4. Problems of Integration, Language and Reforms**

Minorities by and large successfully integrate to the society by the mean of the knowledge of the state language and efficient education plan so that they would not be isolated and disqualified from the entire system. In general, language issue is found as a central problem for the minorities and it is a fundamental issue for all the integration failures and thus ethnic minorities found less educated and semantically such situation may lead to discrimination and exclusion from the economic chances as they would have low-skilled occupations and consequently will have much lower income. The language barrier is deemed as the biggest factor that marginalizes minorities in Georgia as well, and the government should take over the issue and more responsibly address the problem in order to include the minorities into the Georgian-majority society. The situation has been improving throughout the years of programs and policies which will be discussed further in this section.

Georgian language is the state language of the Republic of Georgia as it's also mentioned in the Constitution. Abkhazian likewise considered as official language in the regional level. As in many post-Soviet countries, Russian was widely used in the society and even it was a common language for communication for minorities as such. Although old generation still use it as a mean of communication, but it became less popular so that now knowing Russian is not considered as an asset. So the focus is mostly on Georgian and its promotion is happening through different programmes, for instance "Georgian Language for Future Success" which was launched in 2011. Minorities are not well represented also in television channels and the primary channels of Georgian state television is dedicating only few minutes streams of daily news in minority languages. There

are programmes in radio and newspapers in Azerbaijani, Armenian and Russian which are supported by the Ministry of Culture. (FAYOS, 2014)

According to the law on General Education, Georgian is considered as a language of instruction in all education establishments, and at the same time Georgian legislation allows the minorities to receive their primary and secondary education in their mother tongue, however despite this fact Georgian language is required to be taught regularly. This is the point perhaps when problems are appearing. The lack of teaching staff, sufficient budgetary support and last, but not least, lack of thoroughly designed curriculum brings not to a heartwarming results. However, whether efficient or not, steps are taken especially after Rose Revolution. For instance, the National Concept on Tolerance and Civil Integration program which was adopted in 2009 brings several targets for the future development in the wave of education reforms. This conception also touched ethnic minorities and set the six objective for educational improvements directed to solve the language and all in all educational issue with minorities. Accordingly, it includes:

- access to pre-school education for ethnic minorities
- access to general education for ethnic minorities representatives
- access to higher education for ethnic minorities representatives
- improve command of the state language among persons of ethnic minorities
- protection of minority languages
- access to Vocational Education and Training programmes for ethnic minorities. (Mekhuzla & Roche , National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia, 2009)

Language and ability to communicate is a key factor in the every sphere of development and this drawback in the minorities either leaves marginalized or it creates the will to migrate. For the case of Azerbaijanis, they prefer to head to Azerbaijan, Russia or Turkey, but strict practical migration processes sometimes make people to choose illegal way to stay and work in respective countries. Now then this leaves the suffering Azerbaijanis in a very difficult situation, especially for the generations that did not catch with the reforms from the Georgian Government.

The educational problems of the minority dominated regions were mostly basic: teachers teaching quality and methodology and available textbooks designed for facilitation of language learning for the minorities. For this reason, the Ministry of Education and Science has started to organize a new

so-called “Georgian Language for Future Success” program which had target to improve the language instruction for the ethnic minorities. Apparently, giving a high force on renewal of textbooks of Georgian language and implementing new methodology were prioritized. Pupils from first to fourth grade were provided with a new textbooks with a special CD as an addition to it. All new materials were provided by the state to all minority schools for free of charge. Further, textbooks for fifth to eighth grades were refreshed and distributed to schools. (Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, 2012) Besides, program was aimed to support teachers in minority schools. Teachers and also volunteer teachers located in Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kakheti districts in order to support local teacher. These teachers taught Georgian language, literature and history, whilst simultaneously training the local teachers. New teaching methods were promoted through local teachers as many of them were still practicing Soviet ones. Accordingly, since 2011 more than 300 teachers were deployed in the minority regions and selected to this program teachers offered higher salary as 1000 GEL which is more than regular teacher can get. (Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, 2012) Trainer teachers at first were not welcomed warmly, rather they were seeing new teacher as a missionaries by the locals. The feeling that they are under Georgian teachers’ new methodological approach made them to be more skeptical and as Mekhuzla & Roche, 2009 indicates, local teachers were reluctant to get adapted to a new system. (Mekhuzla & Roche , National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia, 2009)

All in all, there are about 2084 public schools in Georgia and 292 of them considered as non-Georgian schools: 117 of them Armenian, 86 Azerbaijani schools and 11 Russian schools. Another problem that occurs in the piston of the educational system as textbooks that are in the list of curriculum are not provided in the minority languages which makes the minority schools such as Azerbaijani and Armenian to use materials from Azerbaijani and Armenian curriculum. This was another barrier for the minority representative for the last school examination in Georgia. As a fact, Azerbaijani minority claimed that they receive more support from Azerbaijan and Turkey rather than the Georgian Government, likewise Armenian minority claimed that they receive more educational and all in all socio-economical support from Armenia and Russia. (Wigglesworth-Baker, 2016)

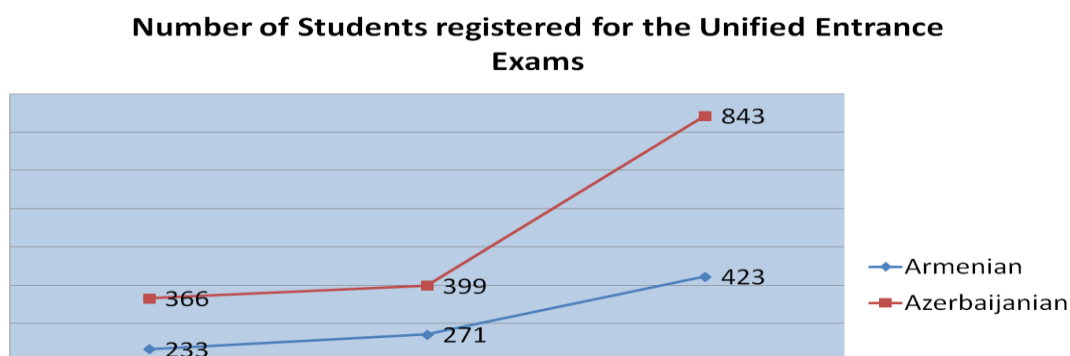
Until 2009, procedure for admission to a higher educational institution was offered in Georgian, and it's abecedarian to imagine the fortune of the ones who finished school before 2009. It most probably led to brain drain. However from 2009, in order to prevent further brain drain and marginalization among the minority community, the UNE started including Azerbaijani, Armenian, Abkhazian and Osetian languages as an available language for examination in the UNE. Specifically, new system was applied as the minority community now would have possibility to use quotas for minority communities. (FAYOS, 2014) This change caused it statistics of the minority students' participation and it is expanding from the year it's launched and table.2 and figure.1 below will illustrate it:

Table.2

2012 Unified University Entrance Exams						
Exam	Participated in the exam	Passed the exam	Accepted by HEI	Accepted by the special program of Georgian Language	Scholarship granted	Scholarship for the Georgian Language program
General Skills Russian	578	553	383	0	121	0
General Skills Armenian	262	207	200	198	98	98
General Skills Azeri	541	407	389	386	93	92

Source: (Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, 2012)

Figure.1



Source: (Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, 2012)

Sufficient knowledge of Georgian is crucial in order to incorporated Georgian society, but as Georgian teachers in minority dominated regions are not holding high level of Georgian limits the pupils further development and as such causes poor integration. Mekhuzla and Roche explain in their work for ECMI "*National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia*" that apart from the low standard of language teaching skills of teachers, pupils are in lack of so called "Georgian Environment". This absence ultimately disassociates ethnic minorities from the fellow Georgian citizens and could probably may find solution in more mobility- oriented policy that would unite the country's ethnics in one. By saying mobility, more constructive approach needs to be in practice. Exchange programmes, summer schools and camps, perhaps just like Soviet's Young Pioneer Camps should become an indivisible part of curriculum. Mekhuzla and Roche 2009, examines the case of Canada where cultural exchanges brought successful outcomes accelerated cultural understanding between the French speaking and English speaking Canadians. It opens an opportunity for people to get to know each other well and indeed considerably improve the integration process. Presently, the Ministry of Education and Science prioritize the organization of such kind of programs at the several levels of the education and namely exchange for schools, summer schools, twinning programs as well as programs for minorities in order to participate in higher education at universities.



## 2.5. Changes in the air

Exchange programmes was also encouraged by the president of Saakashvili and its importance was continued by his declaration on 22 December 2008, which calls authorities to accelerate the process and build the relevant concept for the future of the program. Now this policy gives its fruits and so-called Argonauts students' exchange programme is in the air and it was implemented by a local NGO's organization which was financed by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe High Commissioner on National Minorities and as other international contributors. The main aim was to promote Georgian language among the minority representatives, and also motivate them to learn Georgian (including parents and low skilled teachers as well). (Wigglesworth-Baker, 2016) Program created an opportunity for Azerbaijani and Armenian pupils to spend a semester of their final grade in different part of the country. This is certainly established Georgian environment for the minorities which is very crucial for the process of integration. Twenty students from Kvemo-Kartli participated in this program in 2012 and they were sent to Kakheti region. The project still ongoing and supported by the Ministry of Education and Science and program itself attained expected results because more and more people started to be involved in it and children from minorities started to incorporate with Georgians, learned their cultural background and certainly made friends. (Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, 2012)

Apart from exchange programme, positive step was implantation of so called 1+4 Programme, which allows students to be admitted to a higher educational institution and start education with intensive learning of Georgian during the first entire year. As there is no faculties which instructs program in minority language left, this innovation attract was so popular. This was efficient move initiated by the ministry of Education and Science in order to include the minorities to in higher education. 1+4 Programme now has quota for the minorities in the percentage of twelve from the total available places at universities. Subsequently, it's divided by each minority groups as follow: five percent to Azerbaijani student, five percent to Armenian students and one per each from Abkhazian and Ossetian ethnic minorities.

Azer Suleimanov, an MP from the UNM who is also member of committee that deals with regional policy considers unemployment as the main problem of the minorities to which basic reason is the illiteracy of state language and also emphasized the success of 1+4 Programme which brought a significant jump in numbers of participating Azerbaijani students in Georgian education institutions. Additionally, he notes that despite the fact that some Azerbaijanis know Georgian, they would have left unemployed if not Azerbaijani companies. (Mammad, 2016)

Students at first must pass the general skills examination in their mother tongue and afterwards they start intensive Georgian language course and once successful completion of it, they participate in the university entrance exams and once successful, student starts four years of high education program. This project considered successful as the number of engaged students increased from the period of 2010 to 2013. According to research, total number of students enrolled in this program in 2010 was 301 and in increased to 928 by the year 2013. Apparently the programme has been very effective for Azerbaijani minority since the number of students increased from 194 in 2010 to 737 in 2013 which leaves us a very promising hopes for the future. The high increase explained also by the fact that Azerbaijanis were supported by the SOCAR and enrolled students have a chance to get awarded scholarship which is offered to one hundred Azerbaijani students from Kvemo Kartli district. (Wigglesworth-Baker, 2016)

Disadvantage of current policies is determined by the fact that they are mostly directed to the new generation and it leaves in the side older generation, hence it still leaves them as a second class citizens of the state. In order to attain a significant result, state needs to focus simultaneously in several prospective: first and foremost allocate resources for Georgian language learning courses, inclusively for older generation and also motivate them in order to participate in it and also by showing a respectful attitude to the minorities ethnic and cultural background, erase the thoughts from the head of the minority representatives that these all done for the matter of assimilation of the ethnic minorities.

## **2.6. Political and Civic Participation of Azerbaijanis in Georgia.**

Generally, ethnic minorities are considered not well represented in the political and civil life of the country. Strangely, their participation in the elections usually constituted relatively high; however this participation seems very disoriented and complicated. The reason comes from the point that minorities are isolated and are not well aware about the political environment of the country. As also previously mentioned, political unity of Azerbaijanis in Georgia is pretty weak in organization, and they are poorly mobilize their voice in order to get things done for the sake of their own development. This all affect the matter of what minority members in Georgia do not hold senior positions in the governing, but just village or small town governing. Kvemo Kartli district, as a minority- populated region has never been governed by an Azerbaijani. (FAYOS, 2014) But this tendency now invalid, since October 2017 Mayor Election where Teimur Abazov, an Azerbaijani from the ruling party won the election and became Mayor of Marneuli.<sup>2</sup>

Semantically, senior posts mostly occupied by ethnic Georgians and there is still ethnic discrimination on appointment of a certain person. Consequently, appointing only Georgian speaking personnel in the high posts of the minority-populated regions were treated as an unfair attitude of the Georgian government towards minorities (Mirzoev, 2008) Azer Suleimanov notes that still family name plays a great role in the nominating of the administrative candidates, thus many of the positions occupied by the Georgians from Tbilisi. (Suleimanov, 2017)

Another very crucial point of civil participation of minorities is that they have a very limited voice in the political decision- making process. Yet, minorities are left unheard and underrepresented in the governmental or legislative bodies of Georgia. Worth to mention that according to Georgian Constitution, ethnic minorities are not allowed to form a political party giving it's regards to the ethnic background, but at the same time Constitution determines the basic rights for its citizens as all are equal before the law regardless of ethnic origin, but in fact, facing language barrier minority representatives are discriminated in many public administration positions. (Trier & Sambasile , 2005)

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<sup>2</sup> <https://news.day.az/azerinews/943580.html> (Last accessed - 15- Nov 2017)

In this way, several circumstances define the fact of ill participation of ethnic minorities in the social and political life of Georgia:

- Lack of competence in the state language
- Passive participation and poor mobilization
- Migration of potential budding individuals

Civic organizations were active in the beginning of the 1990th due to the growing ultra-nationalistic view of the government and exclusion of the minorities from the public life. Even demands for autonomy status came across so that could be escalated the ethnic issue more deeply. The fact of confrontation of Georgians and Azerbaijanis in Bolnisi and Marneuli were not promising a quicker resolution. Moreover, nationalistic groups from Kvemo Kartli were demanding autonomous status for “Borchali”, but these demands were unheard by the fact that armed conflict in Abkhazia and Ossetia occurred. Minorities also impotently participate in the political parties and most notably in opposition parties. (BTKK, 2008) Perhaps this might be a political culture of the Azerbaijanis that they are either supportive to those that are already in rule or merely light-hearted with respect to politics. Thus Azerbaijanis tend to show less attention to political system, rather to individuals. Thus roles of municipalities are downplayed and MPs considered more important persons in problem solving. Here we come to the language issue again, as this information gap might have been created by the fact that Azerbaijani community still refer to Baku for any information as such.

Positive signs are becoming visible when we observe that Azerbaijani minority took better part in the 2014 local elections and a bit late in 2016 Parliament elections 23 ethnic Azerbaijanis put their candidacy. Twelve of them were running in Kvemo Kartli region and mostly were from major parties. (Shiriyev, 2016) Azerbaijanis are getting more involved in Georgian political life as noted Chairman of the Congress of Azerbaijanis in Georgia Ali Babayev, but the process is evolving in a sluggish stream: “*Situation is changing; people are getting more interested in politics. Political parties have many ethnic Azerbaijani people as single mandate candidates or on their proportional lists.*” (Mammad, 2016) For now, there are three Azerbaijani MPs- two of them from ruling GD party and one of them from the UNM party. Becoming politically active means a lot for the future of the minorities, their integration and further development. In the last election, candidates were mostly young generation and they are the fruits of the state’s policy towards minority integration. Here we

might name “1+4” Programme which gave a very quick and positive results. Now there are more than 2000 Azerbaijani students in the Georgian Universities thanks to this programme. Besides, two Azerbaijani young candidates were also running for the last election, Ahmed Imamkuliyev and Samira Ismayilova; both from the opposition parties European Georgia and the UNM respectively. Although both lost, but the significant percentage of that they gained, especially from youth, is a positive change for the political participation of Azerbaijani minority. (Shiriyev, 2016)

Azer Suleimanov, MP from UNM, in his interview noted that number of Azerbaijanis that migrated from Georgia significantly decreased, especially during the period of Saakashvili when language related programs have been launched and implemented. Suleimanov also noted the main problem of the Azerbaijanis now is not only the language, since many Azerbaijanis already hold medium level of Georgian, but also unemployment. In the regions where Azerbaijanis are absolute majority, as city of Marneuli, Georgians constitutes about 80 percent of the governing positions, which is considered as an explicit discriminatory attitude. Although Georgia in words heads to Europe, but in reality minority issue needs an immense attention that minority communities need to push forward before Georgian Government. (Suleimanov, 2017)

First civil organization which is engaged in promotion of Azerbaijani minority issues in Georgia is so- called “Geyrat” organization, which means “Honor” from Azerbaijani. The aim of organization was to establish its branches in densely Azerbaijani- populated towns and villages and gather the whole ethnic as united in order to fight discrimination of Azerbaijanis and also promote participation of Azerbaijanis in political life of country. Another organization that is actively participates in civil life and especially gathering materials regarding legal violations towards Azerbaijanis and presenting them to the media, government and international organizations. “Vətənim Gürcüstan” (“Georgia- my homeland” from Azerbaijani) is also a well-known public organization which was launched in 2003. Organization works on development of relations between Georgian Azerbaijanis on the base of legacy and negotiations with the political parties. Likewise, in order to support the Azerbaijani minority in involving in political life of the country, different newspapers were published where States actions or laws were translated into Azerbaijani language as well; however they were not last long period. (Ибрагимли, 2006)

Summarizing, the civil and political participation of Azerbaijanis in Georgia are destined to fight the discrimination, educate the Azerbaijani population and unite Azerbaijanis in Georgia as one front and actively promote their participation in the elections.

## **2.7. Baku's relationship with Georgian Azerbaijanis**

Baku's relation to Georgian Azerbaijanis was changing from president to president, meaning Ayaz Mutalibov's period was a very sensitive period right after Soviet collapsed and newly appeared countries were less cared about minorities, thus Mutalibov was more focused on internal affairs and keeping safe space with Georgia. Same goes for the short period of Abulfaz Elchibey. The reason perhaps is that country was fresh member of international arena, Nagorno- Karabakh war with Armenia and besides, internal economic difficulties that were distracting from the additional problem of Georgian Azerbaijanis. Aliyev's office period coincides with the economic development (oil boom) and subsequently Baku's presence in Georgia emerged, although it's rather supportive and friendly. At the same time Baku's current relation is built on that so it would not damage the relations with Georgia. Ibrahimli 2006, presumes that Baku's indifferent attitude towards Georgian Azerbaijanis strengthened Georgia's discrimination of Azerbaijanis. As previously noted, Baku's position now more supportive and its presence also visible with the activities of its SOCAR. SOCAR's branch is one of the biggest companies operating in Georgia. Baku's position is aimed to increase the life standard of Azerbaijanis, especially in Kvemo Kartli district as well as protecting cultural background of Azerbaijani population. SOCAR and Heydar Aliyev Foundation are the main actors that are representing Baku's position in Georgia and both involved in many cognitive projects creating a new opportunities for the Azerbaijanis in Georgia:

- SOCAR scholarship for the Azerbaijani students
- New cultural centers, sport complexes that are financed by Heydar Aliyev Foundation and SOCAR
- SOCAR's existence itself is a job opportunity for Georgian Azerbaijanis
- Support of kindergartens and schools with reconstruction and textbooks

- Infrastructural projects

Baku's position does not bring the willing of political influence in Georgia, rather watchful and carefully supportive attitude in order to eschew any negative perception from the Georgian side, because ongoing positive strategic relationship with Georgia is a very important element in Azerbaijan's development. Baku- Supsa oil pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline are transporting Azerbaijani oil and gas to the world markets and all are crossing Georgia hence have a fundamental significance for the Azerbaijani economy.

Although Baku's officials expressed their brotherly relations to Georgia's Azerbaijanis, but in fact Baku's tries to motivate Azerbaijanis to stay in Georgia, rather than migrate to Azerbaijan. In this sense, apart from Visa- free agreement between Georgia and Azerbaijan, there is no specific treatment towards Azerbaijanis with Georgian citizenship in getting work permit or residence permission in Azerbaijan. Therefore officials are always encourage them to learn Georgian in order to be part of the Georgia's socio- economic and political life. Furthermore, SOCAR intends to increase the number of scholarships to the Azerbaijani students attending Georgian educational institutions. Likewise, SOCAR's Georgia branch created nearly 3000 jobs and half of them are Georgian Azerbaijanis. (Storm, 2017)

The focus of this chapter was overall minority situation in Georgia and mostly revealing the problems of integration of Azerbaijanis. It discussed the steps made by the Georgian Government in the sphere of education in order to include minority population in the educational institutions which eventually gave significant results, as number of Azerbaijanis in Georgian universities increased. Additionally, in this chapter we found out that Political and Civic participation of Azerbaijanis in the Georgian system is lacking organization and well-united approach.

### **3. GEORGIAN MINORITY POLICY UNDER DIFFERENT PRESIDENCIES**

#### **3.1. Gamsakhurdia's period**

Georgia announced its independence in April 9, 1991 and first democratically elected president of it became Zvia Gamsakhurdia who was distinctive with his ultra-nationalistic ideas. Before the independence, official state languages were Russian and Georgian and to a large extent Russian was the language of communication between the ethnics of Georgia. Now elected nationalistic government deprived Russian language as a state language and implied Georgian centric policy in all sphere of the country. This is certainly affected the minorities since the lack of knowledge of Georgian was so explicit. Georgian language was considered as a starting point of strengthening nationalism and also unification of Georgians, but this left minorities alienated thus it brought the wave of migration from the country, mainly to a country of kinship of the corresponding ethnics and at some point fueled the unrest in the country, including in Kvemo Kartli. (Makatsaria, 2013) Gamsakhurdia's slogan "Georgia for the Georgians" definitely determines his nationalistic policy, despite the fact that Georgians at the time of independence were constituting 70.13 percent (ECMI, Ethnic Groups of Georgia: Census, 1989) from the whole population. Gamsakhurdia's government was not indirect in expressing the will of absolute domination of Georgians in the society. Xenophobic attitude, accepting minorities as a guest in Georgia and government's nationalistic discourse was not a secret at all. Member of the Supreme Council of Georgia Guram Petriashvili argued that only books that are written by the Georgians should be published. This all created distrust to Georgians and resulted migration of minorities so that the number of Azerbaijani and



Armenian minorities considerably decreased. (Makatsaria, 2013) Minorities were also poorly represented in Supreme Council of Georgia. Out of 250 MPs only eight percent were representing national minorities and only two of them were Azerbaijanis. (National Minorities in Georgian Parliament, 2017) Azerbaijanis did not fit in the Gamsakhurdia's project as additionally they are Muslims. Apart from Georgian language, the GOC was also deemed as an element of Georgian-ness. Azerbaijanis were treated as a "settlers" or were treated as a second class citizens, thus leaving Muslim Georgians, especially Azerbaijanis, discriminated.

Another sad point for Georgians was that demographically statistics were not heartwarming as the birth rate among ethnic minorities such as Armenians and especially Azerbaijanis were high rather higher. There were also demands to confine the birth rate for non- Georgians, relocate Georgians to borderlands and even issue residence permission for minorities in order to keep them in their land and prevent their expansion. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016) At the same time, Gamsakhurdia's ideas to set a clear Georgian majority in the minority- populated territories caused the forced expelling the Azerbaijanis from their villages and placing there Georgians from West Georgia. Appeared Georgian language as the only recognized language in a multiethnic Georgia by the Gamsakhurdia's Georgia additionally created language barrier for minorities. There were no policies in order to integrate the minorities, rather minorities were treated as aliens and as a second class citizens and were discriminated in the educational institutions. (Makatsaria, 2013)

Period of Gamsakhurdia also remembered as changing of toponyms in the minority-populated areas in order to make it sound more Georgian. Example from my village, which was "Qaçğan" and was renamed to "Kachaghani" and many other villages in Kvemo Kartli and Bolnisi districts were renamed. In March 1991, before he was elected as a president he stated that Georgia is in danger to be divided by the minorities that were settled here by Russia; thus calling Azerbaijanis, Armenian and surprisingly Ossetians as a newcomers. He also proposed banning inter-ethnic marriages and limiting citizenship for the minorities. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016) In the rise of nationalism and alienation of minorities and treating them as a second class citizens led to creating of popular fronts. "Geyrat" was one of the organization where Georgian Azerbaijanis were fighting against discrimination. Although it did not raise to a separatist movement, however Geyrat had militias that were able to keep minority-populated areas safe from pillaging of Georgian paramilitaries and left Gamsakhurdia with less influence in Azerbaijani-populated territories. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016)

All in all, Gamsakhurdia's period 1991-1992 remembered as an ultra-nationalistic pages of Georgian history after independence, since the minorities were deprived their basic rights and refused to include in the Georgian-state building processes, therefore Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities are still having negative view on that period. (Makatsaria, 2013) Perhaps this might be explained by the fact that country was under Soviet rule for decades therefore sense of preserving nationalism from Russification increased and eventually it was prevailing in the first years of independence.

### **3.2. Shevardnadze's period**

Eduard Shevardnadze's presidency coincides to 1992-2003 years and considered as a time with less nationalistic discourse as it was during Gamsakhurdia's office which fostered ethnic tensions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but also mobilized Azerbaijanis in order to fight discrimination. At the same time, not much have been done for accelerating integration process of minorities.

First Constitution of the independent Georgia came to a life in 1995 and according to it, Georgian language was announced as a state language and also Abkhazian language for Abkhazia. However, no decent implementation in the regards of Georgian language promotion was done by the Shevardnadze's Government thus minorities had no improvements in integration records. Russian language was still in usage as a language of communication between ethnics. (Makatsaria, 2013)

Adoption of The Georgian Law on Education in 1997 is also coincides with the Shevardnadze's period which granted the minorities right to receive their education in their native language, however Georgian language became mandatory language as a subject to be taught in all minority schools, but in fact the implementation of it was so weakly- organized that almost no changes appeared by this law. The government's attention to it was negligent as Georgians teacher's salary was so low that it did not motivate teachers much to be involved in this field. In 1998 the Law on Public Office was adopted which required fluent knowledge of Georgian for hiring employees in public sector. However in reality this law didn't find itself in practice in minority-populated areas as

political elites had very limited knowledge of Georgian, but still stayed in their post as they were supporting Shevardnadze's Government. (Makatsaria, 2013)

Shevardnadze's political discourse was also reflected in his party name which sounded more inclusive in comparison to Gamsakhurdia – the Citizens' Union of Georgia. The constitution that was adopted in his period was also considered as a beginning of inclusion of minorities to state-building as it declared that all citizens of Georgia regardless their “regardless of race, color, language, sex, religion, political and other opinions, national, ethnic and social belonging, origin, property and title, place of residence” are equal before the law. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016)

Ethnic discrimination and any kind of hate attitude that could potentially create inter-ethnic conflict were perceived as a criminal offense. Additionally, ethnic minorities were able to organize their associations and organizations in order to defend their interests and also support cultural promotion, however forming a political party based on ethnicity was already banned back in Gamsakhurdia's period therefore minorities were not that densely involved in the political life. Shevardnadze signed and ratified several international treaties that could concern minority issue. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination was signed in 1999 in Tbilisi which also deemed as a backup for minorities. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016)

Another change that happened during the Shevardnadze's period is adoption of the reform on reorganization of the Georgian passports from where nationality identification was removed. The reformers argued this as noting ethnicity might give special privileges to a certain group. Although it was not so mere to accept it and even Shevardnadze's position on this was more nationalistic, however it was adopted by him in 1999. If we talk about the discussions that emerged regarding this reform in the parliament, then minorities were at some point excluded. Here the point brings us to language problem again as the representatives of the minorities in the parliament were not holding fluent knowledge of Georgian, thus they were absent at some point. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016)

During Shevardnadze's period minorities were not well-represented in the parliament of the country either. In the period of 1992-1995 term only 2.6 percent of parliament seats were representing minorities, but not a single Azerbaijani. In the period of 1995-1999 parliamentary term 7.7 percent of parliament seats were representing minorities and here five Azerbaijanis were represented in the parliament. In 1999- 2004 term, 7.2 percent of Parliament seats were representing national

minorities and six of them were Azerbaijanis. (National Minorities in Georgian Parliament, 2017) Most of these MPs were not even participating in parliament debates as they had poor knowledge of Georgian and their appearance in parliament were symbolic as to show multiculturalism of Georgia and how they include the minorities in the political life of Georgia, but in fact minorities left rather passive and unintegrated. Shevardnadze's period also remembered as division of Georgia into nine provinces in 1994 and Azerbaijani- populated territories were attached to Georgian majority territories and formed to today's Kvemo- Kartli which means Lower Georgia. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016)

Shevardnadze also used minority movements in his own interest in order to receive their support. Leaders of Geyrat and Javakhk movements were in cooperation with authorities thus used the organization for their own gains in return supporting ruling party of the Citizens Union of Georgia. Azerbaijanis were also poorly represented in local administrative term as not a single Azerbaijani was a governor of big cities, rather small town and village governing. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016) To sum up, Shevardnadze's period did not bring much changes for the life of minorities as they still left as outsiders of the state-building. Policies in teaching state language was so poor coordinated that Azerbaijanis were heading abroad for studies and working. All in all, policies of Shevardnadze towards minorities' integration can be described as "let sleeping dog lie".

### **3.3. Saakashvili's period**

Shevardnadze's administration may be deemed as careful approach in all sphere for the sake of keeping country stable, but in fact country was not giving prominent signs of development as this also applies to his relation to minorities. Now country was in need of reforms in order to impetus the development as outside 21<sup>st</sup> century was waving. We might say many improvements and alterations was followed since Mikhail Saakashvili became president in 2004 as a result of Rose Revolution. Saakashvili's liberal view brought reform on many sphere of the country; starting from tough fight

with corruption to building inclusive society where minorities also will also be involved. The will to make multiethnic diversity of Georgia from threat to its richness was also mentioned in his inauguration speech: “Georgia is home not only for all Georgians, but also for all ethnic minorities, residing in Georgia. Every citizen, who considers Georgia as its homeland, be they Russian, Abkhazian, Ossetian, Azerbaijani, Armenian, Jewish, Greek, Ukrainian, Kurd – is our greatest wealth and treasure”. Saakashvili also noted: “It is our responsibility to maintain the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Georgia, which has been left to us by our ancestors. The nation and the nationality are only one – Georgian, and it consists of Georgians, Azeri-Georgians, Abkhaz-Georgians, Ossetian-Georgians, Armenian-Georgians, and so on”. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016)

Saakashvili’s idea was unlike his predecessors where ethno- centric and nationalistic ideas were promoted, but rather his team was young reform oriented and liberal. He stayed away from the idea of encouraging Georgian nationalism and rather preferred to create inclusive civic society where all citizens of the country, regardless it’s ethnic origin, would be equal. He was also recalling Georgia’s Golden age by using the motto of “Forward to David the Builder”, the king who united all lands of Georgia. Saakashvili also changed the flag that left from 1918-1920 Democratic Republic of Georgia to the new five- cross flag with red and white colors, state anthem and state emblems. (Berglund & Blauvelt, *Redefining the Nation: From Ethnic Fragmentation to Civic Integration?*, 2016) Saakashvili’s intention on building inclusive state and the will to integrate minorities into the Georgian majority society was also followed by his ratifications of several Conventions that concerned minorities. During the first term, in 2005 The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) which have been long postponed by Shevardnadze was finally ratified by Saakashvili which accommodated additional protections for the minorities. Now even this convention appeared even in national discourse and new institutions working on integration of minorities were established. Saakashvili appointed Guram Absandze previously named as State Minister for National Accord Issues, but since 2004 as a State Minister for Civil Integration, who was involved in disarming Zviadist rebels in Samegrelo it. In 2005 new council was created which was dealing with National Minorities at the Ombudsman’s Tolerance Center and in 2006 Anna Zhvania was appointed as Presidential Advisor on Civil Integration. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016) During Saakashvili’s first presidency, only 4.7 percent of parliament seats were representing

minorities, meaning 11 MPs out of 235 and only three of them were Azerbaijanis. (National Minorities in Georgian Parliament, 2017)

On his second term, Saakashvili changed the State Ministry for Civil Integration to State Ministry for Reintegration which was directed to help to resolve the problems of the minorities. Importantly, in 2009 Saakashvili adopted National Concept and Action Plan for Tolerance and Civic Integration which defined six main directions of it that implemented by agencies supported by the government:

- Rule of law
- Education and State Language
- Media and access to information
- Civil and political participation
- Social and regional integration
- Culture and preservation of identity. (Berglund, 2016)

So the agencies were constantly demanded to report the fulfilment of certain tasks throughout the Action plan and reports were diverted to the Presidential Advisor via the Ministry of Reintegration. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016)

Language issue became so deep that in all sphere it was requirement for all, including for minority representatives, e.i. for studying or finding employment, thus language knowledge were evaluated by the professional test that would allow minorities to prove the language skills for applying to certain position. However without available resources that state lacked to offers to its minority representatives left minorities in disadvantage position due to the insufficient language instruction policy, but during Saakashvili's second term state language teaching programs expanded and many programs started to be implementing. For instance, Language Houses opened in minority- populated areas. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016)

In order to include the minorities to the state- building system, Georgian language was also considered as an important, but in compare to its predecessors, Saakashvili's attitude to the issue of language barrier was more decisive and played significant role in promoting state language in minority- populated areas by enforcing language laws which were ignored under Shevardnadze's rule, because otherwise integrating minorities speaking no Georgian would not have created an

opportunity for minorities to mobilize in Georgia. Hence, several programs were created in order to encourage minorities, especially youth, to learn Georgian language such as summer camps, exchange programs etc. (see p. 19-20) Additionally, it was very tough for minority representative to pass Unified National Examination which was in Georgian, but policy in 2009 changed and now certain percentage of students from minorities could be enrolled by their general ability test results and afterwards joining a year- long intensive state funded Georgian language course before they join university program which was taught exclusively in Georgian. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016); also see p. 23 of this thesis)

Furthermore, several corrections were made to the laws against discrimination in for instance Criminal Code; additionally the Law on General education from 2005 obtained new point regarding “neutrality and non-discrimination” (art.13). (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016) Saakashvili’s Georgia tried to keep minorities in attention by also trying to establish an environment where the population could exchange their complaints and by establishing the Public Defender’s Office in Marneuli and Akhalkalaki created an opportunity for the locals to express and address complaints. Likewise in order to create a better communication and interaction with the people of minority populated areas, the road networks conditions were improved by the support of Millenium Challenge Georgia fund which spent more than 203 million dollars in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe- Javakheti. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016) For Georgian Azerbaijanis very important point comes with the construction of Baku- Tbilisi- Kars railway transport line which will eventually pass through Azerbaijani populated area and may eventually create an economic rise for the region. During Saakashvili’s second period, 2008- 2012 only four percent of Parliament seats were representing national minorities which constituted only six seats and three of them were Azerbaijanis. (National Minorities in Georgian Parliament, 2017)

General picture of liberalization of the country and starting the mobilization of country’s citizens regardless their ethnic background and religion shook the hedges which positively affected the countries overall civil and political participation which is additionally can be considered as a fundamental potential of economic growth in the country. However, “Georgianness” as we previously discussed also defined by its religion and its adherence to the GOC. Even though state’s relation with religion, with GOC if to be precious, was carefully- oriented, but having privileges and support from the state, GOC became a way more popular. It also enjoyed exclusive treatment by the

state in terms of legal activities. By saying, it had status of a legal entity of public law and received tax breaks and also received funds from the state budget. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016) This was evaluated as a clear discrimination of the minorities and Saakashvili's entire liberalization conception was not covered in terms of religion. Berglund (2016) also explains that even Saakashvili's flag change to five crosses was not just a recall for Georgian Golden Age period, but also was sort of tribute to GOC. Eventually minorities were at some point accepting GOC as a state religion. (Berglund, 2016)

Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli were a little dubious about Saakashvili's policies regarding agricultural land which was basically main source from where Azerbaijanis could earn for living. However still Azerbaijanis were rather supportive to government and unlike Armenian minority in Javakheti were not protesting much on ethno-political level, but rather with socio-economic motives. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016)

Saakashvili on his speech on 21st of March 2004 in Marneuli noted the essence of knowing Georgian language: *"You are [among] the most hardworking citizens of our country....We have the best friendly relations...Your children should learn the state language so that they have equal possibilities and equal rights to be promoted in the hierarchy of state structures."* (ICG, 2006) Azerbaijanis were also the ones that benefitted the policies that directed on including Azerbaijani youth in educational institution by offering programs such as 1+4 Programme and quota for examination for UNE etc., because it was perceived as chance to break the chain of isolation. The number of student enrolled in universities significantly increased and this is an imperative ground for the future of integration of Azerbaijanis into the Georgian society. MP from the UNM party, Suleimanov, noted that minorities enjoyed anti-discrimination laws during the Saakashvili's period where penalty for any kind of discriminatory action was in place and one of the outstanding peculiarities of the Saakashvili's administration was that for the first time in the independent Georgian history, Azerbaijanis felt so united and belonging to Georgia, but this all declined again after GD coalition came to power. (Suleimanov, 2017)



### **3.4. Current administration – Presidency of Margvelashvili**

Saakashvili's UNM faced sizeable opposition which ultimately led his party's defeat by Bidzina Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream front in 2012 parliamentary elections. The will to drive Georgia towards more tolerant political environment in the period of coalition of GD and in the presidency of Giorgi Margvelashvili since 2013 made several changes in regards to minority issue. In 2014 the Ministry of Reintegration changed its name to the State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, but new government did no changes into the structural conception of it. Margvelashvili's period also coincided with the expiration of the National Concept and Action Plan for Tolerance and Civic Integration which was launched back in times of Saakashvili and new conception was started under the name of "Civic Equality and Integration Strategy 2015-2020". (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016)

Margvelashvili also appointed representative from Greek minority, a new woman advisor on the ethnic minority issues Sopho Shamanidi.<sup>3</sup>

During the period of GD, several anti-discriminatory laws adopted, an Equality Department created with the Office of the Public Defender. Also Official Language law from 2015 strengthened the state language and noted as a crucial element of Georgian statehood, thus no minority languages got any recognition status. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016)

The increase of hate speech against religious and ethnic minorities disrupted the belief of the national minorities in the government which was also reported in the Council of Europe's report and mentioned that occurred incidents left unconsidered. GOC's position in the society became more powerful in the period of the GD and it even promoted in the minority schools. Despite the fact that the knowledge level of state language among minorities and especially Azerbaijanis increased, alienation still remained and socio-political participation of the population also remained among the community. (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016)

Furthermore, GD's reluctance of direct meeting and miscommunication with the minority population also set as drawback of the current administration, as if we compare it Saakashvili's

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<sup>3</sup> <http://agenda.ge/news/7330/eng> (Last accessed 05- Nov, 2018)

visits to minority inhabited regions. Although those meetings were not changing much of the picture of the happenings, but still it could create a feeling that minorities are not forgotten. (Lorusso, 2016) During GD's first term, 2012- 2016 only 5.3 percent of Parliament seats were representing national minorities which constituted only eight seats and three of them were Azerbaijanis. For the term of 2016- 2020, 7.3 percent of Parliament seats were representing minorities. Meaning out of 150 MPs only 8 of them were minority representative and four of them were Azerbaijanis. (National Minorities in Georgian Parliament, 2017)

## 4. RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From time of independence Georgia experienced development from the nationalistic view of Gamsakhurdia to the more liberal approach of Saakashvili and yet to see how will it look like for the Georgian Dream's second term. Gamsakhurdia's nationalistic discourse after the Soviet collapsed, did not bring neither the integration of the minorities nor the political stability in the country. Instead, country encountered severe protests of minorities and consequently confronted and cause separating Abkhazia and South Ossetia from the center. Having these serious challenges and reacting to them with nationalistic discourse did not leave any space of tolerating or integration of the minorities. Despite the fact that Shevardnadze glued Abkhazia and South Ossetia back to Georgia, integration of the minorities still left unaddressed. To that, Shevardnadze's policy seemed more carefully-oriented because the internal stability was the main priority, thus having a business with minorities could just again destabilize the country, so "let the sleeping dog lie" policy was applied, therefore nothing about development of minority issue could efficient addressed. Shevardnadze was replace by Saakashvili and liberal team that aimed to unite the country regardless its multiethnic composition and sought to promote civic nation ideas. This was a real sign of the light in the end of tunnel for the minorities and indeed much have been done in order to include the minorities into the Georgian society, thus Saakashvili not only tolerated minorities, but also tried to apply policies in the vision to integrate them. Especially, reforms in education and state language-related policies during the period of Saakashvili shook the bricks in the system and encouraged minorities (especially very popular among Azerbaijanis) to learn state language which is the primary problem for integration. Seemingly not much changed since the Saakashvili's period and Georgian Dream looks little reluctant than Saakashvili all in all to make substantive changes. Its vision "Strength in Unity" should look like more credible in the practice as well and now it depends on

how they will proceed for further development and inclusion of the minorities into the nation-building process and likewise defending the rights of the minorities.

#### **4.1. Recommendations for the Georgian Government**

Since educational reform gave a significant jump on the number of minority representatives that joined Georgian universities, it's a potential ground to get Azerbaijani minority integrated thus the continuation of 1+4 Programme, likewise exchange mobility throughout the country, summer schools and camps, perhaps just like Soviet's Young Pioneer Camps should become an indivisible part of curriculum. Encourage older generation to learn Georgian and motivate them in order to participate in Georgian language houses, otherwise current policies are directed only to the new generation.

Participation of minority representatives in the administrative structures is also very important point since until this year not a single Azerbaijani was representing higher positions. Especially, in the places where the minorities corresponding majority, hiring mostly minority representatives and also declaring minority language as a second required language apart from Georgian would definitely boost Government- citizens relations.

Government should also promote political and civil participation of the minorities by encouraging them to join political parties and also educating them about the system as whole, because this way population will express their concerns which were overlooked by the time. Political parties should also stop looking down on minority participation in political life and including their activities in minority- populated areas would only benefit them.

Cautious attitude in terms of policy adoption that will concern minorities should be well- planned so that would not left minorities excluded from the discussion therefore cooperation with the Council on National Minorities is important. As discrimination still exist, Government should take tougher

stand in order to fight discrimination and strict anti- discrimination law can be in place, such as penalties. Representatives from the center should be more in touch with the minority population and organization of events, conferences and round tables with the participant from the center and minorities might build a trust of minority representatives on Government.

## CONCLUSION

Georgia is a multiethnic country with an approximate 13 percent of minority population. Minority right is a developing sphere in the international arena and it perceived differently from state to state. For some it's a strength that makes country economically and culturally strong, however for some it's a threat to the national sovereignty. The purpose of this thesis paper was to determine the reasons why minorities are still unintegrated in Georgia, focusing more on Azerbaijani minority, which is the biggest minority group for now. Motivation for choosing this topic was based on the fact that author originally comes from minority-populated area- village Kachagani, city Marneuli, region Kvemo- Kartli; and likewise the fact of unintegrated Azerbaijani population was a direct concern as the sense of belonging to Azerbaijani minority.

Thesis was written on the base of qualitative methodology by analyzing documents, reports from international organizations and local organizations and also, for making clear some nuances, thesis included an interview with a member of Georgian Parliament from the UNM party, Azerbaijani minority representative- Azer Suleimanov.

This thesis focused on finding out the problems of minority rights and particularly problems of Azerbaijani minority in Georgia, and thesis discussed issues related to language policy by revealing that this is the core problem and obstacle in the way of integration process of the minorities. Periods of Gamsakhurdia and Sheverdnadze were less directed to resolve the integration problems of Azerbaijanis in Georgia, but rather nationalistic and ignorant approach left Azerbaijanis excluded from the society. Hope of integration of the minorities and inclusion of minorities into the Georgian society was popped up in the wave of reforms in the period of Saakashvili, but now current

government needs to give more attention to it. Thesis also analyzed each presidential period from the time of independence and expressed the policies that have implemented in order to integrate and include minorities into the Georgian politico- social development.

Eventually, research brought us to a result that minority integration process in Georgia still ongoing, but takes place rather slowly. Georgian Government needs to pay more attention to minority integration and eliminate any form of discrimination which will ultimately bring minorities closer to the Georgian society.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A

Map of Georgia





# Appendix C

## Ethnic Map of Kvemo Kartli

