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# **The Armenian minority of post-Soviet Georgia and its identity**

**Supervisor**

Ch. Prof. Aldo Ferrari

**Assistant Supervisor**

Ch. Prof. Giuli Shabashvili

**Graduand**

Francesco Moratelli

870244

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## ABSTRACT

Il processo di integrazione delle minoranze etniche attualmente presenti sul territorio della Repubblica di Georgia rappresenta un problema di natura sociale, articolato su vari livelli, che comporta conseguenze sfavorevoli allo sviluppo complessivo di questa nazione e, per questo motivo, richiede particolari politiche volte a migliorare la coesistenza di queste popolazioni all'interno del Paese.

Questa tesi si occupa esclusivamente della minoranza armena di Georgia e, dopo una contestualizzazione storica delle origini e delle fasi della presenza armena, si prefigge come scopo quello di analizzare lo stato attuale dell'identità degli armeni di Georgia sotto molteplici aspetti e punti di vista, quali la barriera linguistica e altri ostacoli che si presentano a livello burocratico, scolastico, mediatico e di partecipazione politica. L'indagine si focalizza sull'attuale situazione armena e in particolare sugli ostacoli che devono ancora essere affrontati da questa minoranza e sulle politiche attuate dai governi georgiani nei suoi confronti, con le relative ripercussioni sull'identità degli armeni di Georgia. A questo proposito, un miglioramento della situazione è auspicabile, infatti, perché gioverebbe non solo agli armeni, ma anche all'intera Georgia in quanto nazione in via di transizione verso un Paese democratico alla ricerca di un'intensificazione dei rapporti di cooperazione con organizzazioni internazionali quali la NATO e l'UE.

Dal raggiungimento dell'indipendenza dall'Unione Sovietica nel 1991, la Georgia ha dovuto fronteggiare numerosi problemi di diversa natura, quali una guerra civile e la perdita di controllo effettivo su due regioni che costituivano il 20% della superficie del territorio nazionale: l'Abcasia e l'Ossezia del Sud. Fino ad ora, nonostante alcuni miglioramenti ottenuti, è mancato, da parte dei molteplici governi georgiani succedutisi, un forte segnale di volontà di risoluzione dei problemi con la minoranza armena ancora presente sul territorio nazionale, tramite politiche mirate alla sua integrazione, ma non assimilazione. La dimostrazione di una seria ed effettiva apertura al dialogo tra il governo centrale di Tbilisi e la comunità armena del Samtskhe-Javakheti e l'ottenimento di miglioramenti concreti per quanto riguarda la coesistenza di questi due gruppi etnici potrebbero essere un primo passo verso un riavvicinamento ed una distensione dei rapporti ancora problematici tra la Georgia e le Repubbliche di Abcasia e Ossezia del Sud.

La minoranza armena rappresenta attualmente il 4,5% della popolazione della Georgia costituendo il terzo gruppo etnico più numeroso dopo georgiani (86,8%) e azeri (6,3%). Benché Georgia e Armenia abbiano ripreso ad esistere come nazioni indipendenti da meno di tre decenni, entrambe, già in antichità, costituirono regni autonomi e potenti che esercitarono una notevole influenza nelle regioni del Caucaso e dell'Asia Minore. In quanto territori confinanti, georgiani e armeni ebbero sempre relazioni politiche e commerciali gli uni con gli altri e, a periodi alterni, determinate province furono sotto il controllo di entrambi i regni.

I primi insediamenti armeni in territorio georgiano risalgono ai primi secoli dopo Cristo, ma gli armeni furono una presenza costante specialmente a partire dal XVI secolo. Sebbene la minoranza armena abbia subito un drastico declino durante il XX secolo (nel 1939 gli armeni costituivano l'11,7% degli abitanti della Repubblica Socialista Sovietica di Georgia), nella regione georgiana del Samtskhe-Javakheti, gli armeni rappresentano ancora più della metà della popolazione (54,6%) con picchi del 94,33% e 95,78% nelle municipalità, rispettivamente, di Akhalkalaki e di Ninotsminda. Questa situazione di ormai consolidata e radicata maggioranza armena in queste province rappresenta il principale "ostacolo" che il governo georgiano deve affrontare e superare nell'attuazione di politiche integrative, in quanto gli interventi governativi devono essere misurati e regolati affinché non vengano percepiti, da parte della popolazione armena, come tentativi di assimilazione. Nella memoria collettiva degli armeni di Georgia è, infatti, ancora presente il ricordo delle politiche nazionalistiche e di assimilazione, improntate ad un etnocentrismo georgiano, operate dal primo presidente della Repubblica Georgiana Zviad Gamsakhurdia. La maggioranza della popolazione armena di Georgia risiede nel Samtskhe-Javakheti, ma esistono altre consistenti comunità armene anche in alcuni villaggi della regione di Kvemo-Kartli e nella capitale Tbilisi e, per questo motivo, non si può parlare di un'unica realtà, ma è opportuno distinguere e differenziare questi casi per via dei differenti percorsi e contesti storici nei quali si sono sviluppati. In particolare, la comunità armena di Tbilisi, negli ultimi secoli, si è integrata notevolmente nella società georgiana della capitale e, nonostante l'alto grado di resilienza dimostrato, rischia, al giorno d'oggi la completa assimilazione e perdita del suo retaggio storico e culturale, in maniera opposta alla comunità armena del Javakheti in cui il tasso di integrazione all'interno della nazione georgiana è pressoché nullo. La difficile situazione contemporanea del Samtskhe-Javakheti è imputabile al fatto che la regione, a dispetto della sua ubicazione sulla

trafficata via di collegamento tra le tre repubbliche caucasiche e la Turchia, è stata oggetto di scarso interesse da parte dei vari governi georgiani che non hanno attuato politiche per promuoverne né lo sviluppo socio-economico né l'integrazione civica durante il processo di costruzione di un ordinamento e di un'identità statuali in Georgia. Gli armeni della regione si sono, per questa ragione, spesso sentiti trascurati dall'amministrazione centrale di Tbilisi e vi è ancora un elevato scetticismo nei confronti dei provvedimenti presi dai legislatori a livello nazionale, che vengono spesso percepiti come ingerenze esterne alla loro realtà locale. La Rivoluzione delle Rose del 2003 e la salita al potere di Mikhail Saakashvili hanno significato un miglioramento della situazione non solo per la minoranza armena ma per l'intera nazione e, la ratificazione, nel 2005, della *Convenzione-quadro per la protezione delle minoranze nazionali* (FCNM) del Consiglio d'Europa ha rappresentato una decisa presa di posizione in senso positivo da parte del governo georgiano nei confronti dei diversi gruppi etnici presenti sul territorio nazionale. Negli anni successivi alla ratificazione sono state implementate alcune nuove leggi mirate a favorire l'integrazione della minoranza armena, ma questi sforzi si sono limitati, quasi esclusivamente, al campo dell'educazione, ignorando aspetti quali l'integrazione politica e la possibilità di riconoscere all'armeno lo status di lingua minoritaria nella regione. Nella dissertazione verranno portati in discussione i casi di Croazia e Romania, due stati che, presentando una situazione simile a quella georgiana per quanto riguarda le minoranze nazionali, potrebbero essere presi ad esempio dai politici georgiani. In Croazia e in Romania, infatti, in seguito all'adesione alla FCNM e al riconoscimento di uno status ufficiale a livello giuridico-burocratico alle lingue minoritarie, la condizione delle minoranze presenti in questi stati è notevolmente migliorata. Sulla base dei risultati ottenuti in queste nazioni viene valutata l'applicabilità di queste politiche alla realtà georgiana nonché gli sviluppi positivi e le semplificazioni che il riconoscimento di uno stato giuridico ufficiale della lingua armena a livello locale avrebbe sull'efficienza del sistema giudiziario specialmente, ma anche di quello burocratico-amministrativo.

Nel corso di questa ricerca vengono presi in considerazione ed esaminati anche recenti casi di discriminazioni subite dagli armeni e trattamenti che li penalizzano nonostante la Costituzione Georgiana riconosca e garantisca a tutti i cittadini l'uguaglianza senza alcuna distinzione di razza, lingua o religione. A livello legale tutti i cittadini sono equamente tutelati, ma alcune leggi ancora in vigore anziché favorire l'integrazione degli armeni hanno l'esito involontario di alienarli e di allontanarli dalla vita politica e

non solo del Paese. Gli esempi più eclatanti di trattamenti sfavorevoli e svantaggiosi nei confronti della minoranza armena si sono verificati in ambito religioso e culturale. Questi casi riguardano la restituzione, non ancora avvenuta, di alcune chiese reclamate dalla Diocesi della Chiesa Apostolica Armena di Georgia e, più in generale, il mancato riconoscimento del contributo culturale apportato dagli armeni alla formazione della nazione georgiana e l'assenza di tutela del patrimonio storico armeno in Georgia. Si tratta di dispute ancora aperte e generalmente ignorate dal governo georgiano che si dimostra poco propenso ad affrontarle e a risolverle. Le relazioni bilaterali tra Armenia e Georgia risentono negativamente di queste dispute irrisolte e, nella dissertazione si cerca di valutarne l'impatto esatto e di delineare eventuali prospettive di miglioramento di esse, anche alla luce del recente cambio di governo in Armenia e della volontà georgiana sempre più insistente e marcata di diventare uno stato membro dell'Unione Europea aderendo ai principi che essa rappresenta.

Le fonti principali utilizzate per raccogliere le informazioni e i dati necessari per questo lavoro sono stati studi e ricerche scientifiche a carattere monografico riguardanti la situazione della minoranza armena di Georgia, ma è stato esaminato anche il quadro normativo e giuridico della legislazione georgiana in rapporto alla "questione armena". Sono stati consultati, inoltre, anche numerosi articoli di attualità pubblicati da giornali e quotidiani in merito a particolari avvenimenti di diversa natura inerenti alle varie comunità armene. La mia esperienza di studio in Georgia della durata di un anno, inoltre, mi ha fornito innumerevoli opportunità di svolgere ricerche ed interviste sul campo non solo con esperti ed autorità legali competenti, ma anche con "semplici rappresentanti" delle comunità armena e georgiana sia di Tbilisi che di alcune località del Samtskhe-Javakheti. In queste occasioni ho potuto constatare di persona la situazione e i punti di vista sia degli armeni che dei georgiani e di rilevare come vi sia un modesto livello di conoscenza reciproca da parte di entrambi i gruppi etnici.

Le interazioni fra individui di etnia georgiana e armena sono ancora oggi poco frequenti e la maggior parte delle informazioni che gli uni hanno degli altri si basa prevalentemente su supposizioni e stereotipi. Nell'educazione e nella situazione mediatica sono stati identificati le sfere di interesse più rilevanti e problematiche che richiedono una particolare considerazione e un intervento urgente. Una volta affrontati questi campi, ulteriori attenzioni e analisi sono state rivolte al problema della partecipazione politica della minoranza armena in quanto questo aspetto gioca un ruolo chiave per stabilire il livello di integrazione raggiunto. Lo scarso coinvolgimento civico



attuale riflette, infatti, la mancanza di un senso di appartenenza alla nazione ed è una sintomatica dimostrazione di come le politiche georgiane fino ad ora non abbiano ottenuto successo nel favorire l'inclusione di tutti i suoi cittadini nella vita politica della nazione. Conseguentemente, diverse possibili raccomandazioni sono state vagliate e proposte come possibili espedienti per risolvere, o perlomeno migliorare, i problemi citati. In conclusione, l'identità degli armeni di Georgia risulta particolarmente difficile da determinare, sarebbe più corretto parlare di identità al plurale in quanto vi sono numerose differenze non solo da comunità a comunità a seconda della loro ubicazione geografica, ma, anche all'interno di una stessa comunità, la percezione cambia notevolmente da individuo a individuo. Il principale fattore accomunante è dato dal contesto storico-sociale per cui gli armeni di Georgia non si sono mai autogovernati, ma sono sempre stati e sono ancora "assoggettati" a "dominazioni straniere" o quantomeno "esterne", vale a dire, negli ultimi due secoli, zarista, sovietica e georgiana. La minoranza armena è coesistita con sfere di influenza culturale molto ampie e non le è stato facile preservare la propria identità dovendosi adattare continuamente a mutevoli contesti sociopolitici per non lasciarsi assimilare.

Per gli armeni di Georgia si sono alternati periodi di relative stabilità e tolleranza sotto l'Impero Zarista e l'Unione Sovietica a momenti di deciso nazionalismo georgiano durante la breve Repubblica Democratica di Georgia (1918-1921) e nel primo anno della Repubblica post-sovietica di Georgia (1991). Il principale elemento che è rimasto costante durante le varie dominazioni è la spiccata resilienza dimostrata, favorita sotto l'Impero Russo e l'USSR anche dalle esplicite tendenze filorusse che si riscontrano trasversalmente nella maggioranza degli armeni di Georgia. In seguito all'indipendenza della Georgia, tuttavia, i sentimenti filorussi della minoranza armena hanno assunto un ruolo opposto generando una considerevole diffidenza nei loro confronti da parte della maggioranza etnica georgiana di vedute opposte. L'emigrazione dalla Georgia di individui appartenenti alla minoranza armena è un fenomeno di grande portata che, anziché arrestarsi, negli ultimi anni è aumentato. La Rivoluzione delle Rose del 2003 e le nuove politiche di Saakashvili hanno sì forzato gli armeni del Samtskhe-Javakheti a uscire dalla situazione di isolamento in cui si erano chiusi sotto il governo di Shevardnadze e ad iniziare, seppur in maniera riluttante, a lasciarsi coinvolgere maggiormente nella vita del Paese, ma il livello di integrazione attuale non si può ancora definire soddisfacente. Anche per via della vicinanza alla Repubblica di Armenia, la situazione degli Armeni di Georgia rappresenta un caso unico all'interno

delle varie comunità della diaspora armena nel mondo e l'obiettivo principale resta, per armeni e georgiani quello di trovare il giusto equilibrio tra assimilazione e integrazione, e per la Georgia quello di favorire questo delicato processo in modo che il multiculturalismo presente sul territorio nazionale passi dall'essere un impedimento all'essere una ricchezza che può venire sfruttata per la crescita del Paese.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Association Agreement
AGBU	Armenian General Benevolent Union
ALA-LC	American Library Association - Library of Congress
ACCG	Armenian Cooperation Centre in Georgia
ARP	Armenian Revolutionary Party ( <i>Dashnakts 'ut'yun</i> )
CCIIR	Centre for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CEC	Central Election Commission
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CITC	Civil Integration and Tolerance Council
CNM	Council of National Minorities
COBERM	Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism
CoE	Council of Europe
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DAHR	Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
ECMI	European Centre for Minority Issues
ECRML	European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages
EU	European Union
FCNM	Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
GEDA	General Education Decentralization and Accreditation
GeoStat	National Statistics Office of Georgia
GPB	Georgian Public (National) Broadcaster
HCNM	High Commissioner on National Minorities
HEI(s)	Higher Education Institution(s)
ICG	International Crisis Group
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOS	International Organization for Standardization
JCF	Javakheti Citizens' Forum
JEMM	Javakheti Youth Sport Union ( <i>Javakhk'i Eritasardakan Marzamshakut'ayin Miut'yun</i> )

MDF	Media Development Foundation of Georgia
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
NAEC	National Assessment and Examination Centre
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCAP	National Concept and Action Plan for Tolerance and Civil Integration
NGO(s)	Non-Governmental Organisation(s)
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PDO	Public Defender's Office
PDSR	Party of Social Democracy in Romania
PIK	First Caucasus News ( <i>Pervyi Informatsionnyi Kavkazskii</i> )
PM	Prime Minister
PTN	Public Television Network
RT	Russia Today
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SMR	Office of the State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality (former Office of the State Minister for Reintegration)
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
TPDC	Teacher's Professional Development Centre
TSU	Tbilisi State University
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNAG	United Nations' Associations of Georgia
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNE	Unified National Examination
UNM	United National Movement
US(A)	United States (of America)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VET	Vocational Education and Training
ZZPA	'Zurab Zhvania' School of Public Administration

## INTRODUCTION – AIM OF THE STUDY

The integration process of the ethnic minorities currently present on the territory of the Republic of Georgia represents a social problem, articulated on various levels, which has adverse effects on the overall development of this nation and, for this reason, requires particular policies aimed at improving the coexistence of these populations within the country. According to various international reports, Georgia is one of the countries that is changing the fastest thanks to its growing economy<sup>1</sup> and, among the former Soviet Republics, it ranks high also as far as the protection of human rights is concerned<sup>2</sup>, nevertheless, the ethnic minorities of Georgia still face many unresolved issues. Georgia, as a country, is certainly troubled by many problems of different nature, but all the governments, so far, have failed to address the question of the ethnic minorities present on their territory in a satisfactory way.

This dissertation deals exclusively with the Armenian minority of Georgia and, after a historical contextualization of the origins and phases of the Armenian presence, aims to analyze the current state of the identity of the Armenians of Georgia under multiple aspects and points of view, such as the language barrier and other obstacles that arise in terms of bureaucracy, education, media and political participation. The study focuses on the current Armenian situation and in particular on the obstacles that still have to be faced by this minority and on the policies implemented by the Georgian governments towards it, with the related repercussions on the identity of the Armenians of Georgia. In this regard, an improvement in the situation is desirable, in fact, because it would benefit not only the Armenians, but also the whole of Georgia as a nation in transition towards a democratic country in search of an increase of co-operation relations with international organizations such as NATO and the European Union. Since the independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia has faced numerous different problems, such as a civil war and the loss of effective control over two regions which made up 20% of the national territory area: Abkhazia and South Ossetia<sup>3</sup>.

Until now, despite some improvements, there has been no strong signal from the different Georgian governments to solve the problems with the Armenian minority still

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<sup>1</sup> The general data about Georgia's economic progress over the last few years were taken from the survey of the World Bank, available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/georgia/overview>.

<sup>2</sup> The general data about Georgia's progress on human rights are taken from the 2019 monitoring survey of the Human Rights' Watch, available at <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/georgia>.

<sup>3</sup> Georg. *Tskhinvali*.

present on the national territory, through policies aimed at its integration, but not assimilation. Demonstrating serious and effective openness to dialogue between the central government of Tbilisi and the Armenian community of Samtskhe-Javakheti and obtaining concrete improvements regarding the coexistence of these two ethnic groups, could be a first step towards a reconciliation and an easing of the still problematic relations between Georgia and the Republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The Armenian minority currently represents 4.5% of Georgia's population making it the third largest ethnic group after Georgians (86.8%) and Azeris (6.3%). Although Georgia and Armenia have resumed their existence as independent nations for less than three decades, both, already in ancient times, constituted autonomous and powerful kingdoms that exerted significant influence in the regions of the Caucasus and Asia Minor. As neighbouring territories, Georgians and Armenians always had political and commercial relationships with each other and, at alternate periods, certain provinces were under the control of both kingdoms. The first Armenian settlements on Georgian territory date back to the first centuries after Christ, but the Armenians became a constant presence especially starting from the 16th century. Although the Armenian minority suffered a drastic decline during the 20th century (in 1939 Armenians made up 11.7% of the inhabitants of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia), in the Georgian region of Samtskhe-Javakheti, Armenians still represent more than half the population (54.6%) with peaks of 94.33% and 95.78% in the municipalities of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda respectively. This situation of a by now consolidated and rooted Armenian majority in these provinces represents the main "obstacle" that the Georgian government must face and overcome in the implementation of supplementary policies, as government interventions must be measured and regulated so that they are not perceived by the Armenian population, as attempts of assimilation. In the collective memory of the Armenians of Georgia, the remembrance of the nationalist and assimilation policies, marked by a Georgian ethnocentrism, operated by the first President of the Georgian Republic Zviad Gamsakhurdia, is still present. The majority of the Armenian population of Georgia resides in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, but other substantial Armenian communities also exist in some villages in the Kvemo-Kartli region and in the capital Tbilisi and, for this reason, one cannot speak of a single reality, but it is appropriate to distinguish and differentiate these cases because of the different historical paths and contexts in which they developed. In particular, the Armenian community of Tbilisi has integrated considerably in the Georgian society of

the capital in the last centuries and, despite the high degree of resilience shown, it risks, today, the complete assimilation and loss of its historical and cultural heritage, in a way that is opposite to the Armenian community of Javakheti, where the rate of integration within the Georgian nation is almost nonexistent. Part of the debate is based on the minority's readiness to integrate and criticizes the formation of “ethnic colonies”<sup>4</sup>, that retreat into their own ethnic group and show resistance to the cultural patterns of the host country, and for this reason I will consider the problems, obstacles and challenges that prevented integration from happening at a higher degree.

The difficult contemporary situation of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region is due to the fact that the area, despite its location on the busy major route between the three Caucasian republics and Turkey, has been subject of little interest by the various Georgian governments who have not implemented policies to promote its socio-economic development or civic integration during the process of building a social order and identity in Georgia. For this reason, the Armenians of the region have often felt neglected by the central administration of Tbilisi and there is still a high scepticism towards the measures taken by national legislators, which are often perceived as external interference to their local reality. The Revolution of Roses of 2003 and the ascent to power of Mikhail Saakashvili meant an improvement in the situation not only for the Armenian minority but for the whole nation and the ratification, in 2005, of the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (FCNM) of the Council of Europe<sup>5</sup> represented a decisive positive stance by the Georgian government towards the various ethnic groups present on the national territory. In the years following the ratification, some new laws, aimed at promoting the integration of the Armenian minority, were implemented, but these efforts were limited almost exclusively to the field of education, ignoring aspects such as political integration and the possibility of recognizing to the Armenian language the status of minority language in the region.

The dissertation will discuss the cases of Croatia and Romania, two countries that, presenting a situation similar to the Georgian one with regard to national minorities, could be taken as an example by Georgian politicians. In fact, in Croatia and Romania, following the ratification of the FCNM and the recognition of an official status for

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. definition “*ethnische Kolonie*” in Friedrich Heckmann, *Ethnische Kolonien: Schonraum für Integration oder Verstärker der Ausgrenzung?*, Bamberg, Universität Bamberg, 2015, pp. 35-36.

<sup>5</sup> Council of Europe (CoE), *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, 1 February 1995, ETS (European Treaty Series) #157.

minority languages at a legal-bureaucratic level, the condition of the minorities present in these countries has improved considerably. On the basis of the results obtained in these countries, the applicability of these policies to the Georgian reality is assessed as well as the positive developments and simplifications that the recognition of an official legal status of the Armenian language at the local level would have on the efficiency of the judicial system especially, but also of the bureaucratic-administrative one. In the course of this research, recent cases of discrimination suffered by Armenians and treatments that penalize them are also considered and examined, although the Georgian Constitution recognizes and guarantees equality to all citizens without any distinction of race, language or religion. On a legal level, all citizens are equally protected, but some laws still in force rather than favouring the integration of Armenians have the involuntary result of alienating them and removing them from political life of the country and not only. The most striking examples of unfavourable and disadvantageous treatment of the Armenian minority occurred in the religious and cultural spheres. These cases concern the restitution, not yet occurred, of some churches claimed by the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Georgia and, more generally, the failure to recognize the cultural contribution provided by the Armenians to the formation of the Georgian nation and the absence of the protection of the Armenian historic heritage in Georgia. These are disputes that are still open and are generally ignored by the Georgian government, which proves to be unwilling to face them and resolve them<sup>6</sup>.

Bilateral relations between Armenia and Georgia are adversely affected by these unresolved disputes and, in the dissertation, an attempt is being made to evaluate their exact impact and to outline any prospects for improving them, also in light of the recent change of government in Armenia and the increasingly insistent and marked Georgian will to become a member state of the European Union, adhering to the principles it represents. The main sources used to collect the information and data necessary for this work were monographic scientific studies and researches concerning the situation of the Armenian minority of Georgia, but the regulatory and legal framework of Georgian legislation was also examined in relation to the "Armenian question".

In addition, numerous topical articles published by newspapers and periodicals were consulted with regard to particular events of different nature pertinent to the various

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. A. Ghazinyan, "The 'Armenian problem': *Hayastansis* in Georgia face challenges over ethnicity", in *AGBU (Armenian General Benevolent Union) Online Magazine*, 1 November 2008, available at <https://agbu.org/news-item/the-armenian-problem-hayastansis-in-georgia-face-challenges-over-ethnicity/>



Armenian communities. Furthermore, my year-long study experience in Georgia has provided me with countless opportunities to carry out research and interviews in the field, not only with experts and competent legal authorities, but also with "simple representatives" of the Armenian and Georgian communities both from Tbilisi and from some places in Samtskhe-Javakheti. On these occasions I was able to see for myself the situation and the points of view of both Armenians and Georgians and to note that there is a modest level of mutual knowledge on the part of both ethnic groups. Interactions between individuals of the Georgian and Armenian ethnicities are still infrequent today and most of the information they have about each other is mainly based on assumptions and stereotypes. In education and in the media situation, the most relevant and problematic spheres of interest that require special consideration and urgent intervention have been identified.

Once these topics were discussed, further attention and analysis were addressed to the problem of the political participation of the Armenian minority as this aspect plays a key role in establishing the level of integration achieved. The current low civic involvement reflects, in fact, the lack of a sense of belonging to the nation and is a symptomatic demonstration of how the Georgian policies so far have not been successful in promoting the inclusion of all its citizens in the political life of the nation. Consequently, several possible recommendations have been examined and proposed as possible expedients to solve, or at least improve, the mentioned problems. In conclusion, the identity of the Armenians of Georgia is particularly difficult to determine, it would be more correct to speak of identities in the plural as there are numerous differences not only from community to community depending on their geographical location but, also within the same community, the perception changes considerably from individual to individual. The main common factor is given by the historical-social context for which the Armenians of Georgia have never self-governed, but have always been and are still "subjected" to "foreign" or at least "external dominations", that is, in the last two centuries, tsarist, soviet and Georgian dominations. The Armenian minority coexisted with very broad spheres of cultural influence and it was not easy for it to preserve its identity as it had to repeatedly adapt to the changing socio-political contexts in order not to be assimilated. For the Armenians of Georgia, periods of relative stability and tolerance under the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union alternated with moments of decisive Georgian nationalism during the brief Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921), and in the first year of the post-Soviet Republic of

Georgia (1991). The main element that remained constant during the various dominations is the marked resilience demonstrated, favoured under the Russian Empire and the USSR also by the explicit pro-Russian tendencies that are found across the majority of the Armenians of Georgia. After the Georgian independence, however, the pro-Russian sentiments of the Armenian minority took on an opposite role, generating considerable distrust towards them by the Georgian ethnic majority of opposing views. The emigration from Georgia of individuals belonging to the Armenian minority is a far-reaching phenomenon which, rather than stopping, has increased in recent years. The Revolution of Roses of 2003 and the new policies of Saakashvili forced the Armenians of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region to get out of the situation of isolation in which they had closed themselves under the government of Shevardnadze and to start, albeit reluctantly, to get more involved in the life of the country, but the current level of integration cannot yet be called satisfactory. Also due to its proximity to the Republic of Armenia, the situation of the Armenians of Georgia represents a unique case within the various communities of the Armenian diaspora in the world and the main objective remains, for Armenians and Georgians, to find the right balance between assimilation and integration, and for Georgia to encourage this delicate process so that the multiculturalism present on the national territory progresses from being an impediment to being an asset that can be exploited for the growth of the country.

## Note on the Romanisation from the Armenian, Georgian and Russian Scripts

For the transliteration of Armenian words it was used the “*ALA-LC Romanisation system*” (1997)<sup>7</sup>. While referring to terms, literature works, publications or personal names from Classical Armenian (Arm. *Grabar*), Western Armenian and Eastern Armenian language antecedent the Armenian Orthographic Reform of 1922-1924, I chose to follow the pre-reform traditional spelling of those words.

The transcription into Latin letters of Georgian terminology was done accordingly to the guidelines of the Georgian “*National System of Romanisation*”, jointly adopted in 2002 by the State Department of Geodesy and Cartography of Georgia, the Georgian Institute of Linguistics, and the Georgian Academy of Sciences. In 2011 this system was officialised by a decree of the President of Georgia<sup>8</sup>. The transliteration was approved for application to geographic names, but it has also been used for personal names and texts. Since in the Georgian (*mkhedruli*) script there is no upper case, I decided, also for the transliteration, to use exclusively the lower case.

The transliteration of Russian from Cyrillic to Latin script was done following the set of standards of the “*ALA-LC Romanisation table for Russian*” last adjourned by the American Library Association and the Library of Congress of the United States of America in 2012<sup>9</sup>. Publications and personal names antecedent to the 1917 Orthographic Reform were also transliterated accordingly to the modern Russian (Cyrillic) spelling.

Finally, in the instances of personal names of well-known public figures and common geographic toponyms that often occurred throughout the dissertation, for all three languages, I used the English, most commonly used, traditional spelling, without the use of any special diacritic.

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<sup>7</sup> See R. K. Berry (ed. by), *ALA-LC Romanization Tables: Transliteration Schemes for Non-Roman Scripts*, Washington D.C., Library of Congress, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Decree of the President of Georgia no. 109 “*geograp’iuli obiek’tebis sakhelts’odebat’a latinurenovani transliteratsiis ts’esis damtkitsebis shesakheb*” (= “On the Approval of Rules of Latin Transliteration of the Names of Geographical Features”), 24 February 2011, available at <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/1216954?publication=0>.

<sup>9</sup> See American Library Association & Library of Congress Romanization, *ALA-LC Romanization table for Russian*, last adjourned in 2012, available at <https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/roman.html>.

# CHAPTER I

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### I.1. Presence of Armenians in the territory of modern-day Georgia from antiquity to the XVII century

The presence of Armenians in the territory of the modern-day Republic of Georgia, as well as the relations and exchanges between the multiple Kingdoms of Armenia and Kingdoms of Iberia, are well attested since ancient times, thanks not only to archaeological and epigraphic evidences<sup>10</sup> but also to the *Chronicles* and *History of Armenians* (*Hayoc' Patmut' iwn*)<sup>11</sup> of Armenian historiographers such as *Movsēs Khorenac'i* (ca. 410-490 A.D.)<sup>12</sup>, *Eghishē* (410-475 A.D.)<sup>13</sup>, *P'awstos Buzand* (V century A.D.)<sup>14</sup>, *Ghazar P'arpec'i* (V-VI centuries A.D.)<sup>15</sup>, *Sebēos* (VII century A.D.)<sup>16</sup>. Especially in the territories of Javakh (Javakheti)<sup>17</sup> and Northern Tashir (Borchalu)<sup>18</sup>,

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<sup>10</sup> For more information on Armenian archaeological and epigraphic evidence see S. Karapetyan, *Javakh: Critical study of the Georgian-language lapidary inscription and scientific literature by Alexandre Kananian. Translation of the Armenian-language book of Javakhk' (2006), the 9th Volume of RAA Scientific Research Series*. Yerevan, Research on Armenian Architecture (RAA) Foundation, 2011, pp. 22-28.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. C. Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*. Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, 1963, pp. 278.

<sup>12</sup> See entry «Moses of Khoren» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Moses-of-Khoren>.

<sup>13</sup> See entry «Yeghishe», edited by G. Khrlopyan, in *Haykakan Sovetakan Hanragitaran* (= Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia), Armenian Academy of Sciences, Yerevan, 1977, vol. 3, pp. 506-507.

<sup>14</sup> See Buzand P'awstos, *Storia degli Armeni*, introduction by Gabriella Uluhogian, translation of Marco Bais and Loris Dina Nocetti, notes of Marco Bais, Milano, Mimesis, 1997, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> See entry «Lazar P'arpec'i» at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/lazar-parpeci>.

<sup>16</sup> See entry «Sebeos» at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sebeos>.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. A. Melkonyan, *Javakhk in the 19th century and the 1st quarter of the 20th century: a historical research*. Yerevan, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, Institute of History, 2007, p. 36. According to Hovhannes Karageozian [Cf. H. Karageozian, Hakobyan Alek'san (ed. by), Karapetyan Meruzhan (ed. by), *Sepagir Teghanunner. Ayraratum ew harakits' nahangnerum* (= Cuneiform toponyms. In Ayrarat and bordering provinces), Institute of Oriental Studies of the Armenian Academy of Sciences, vol. I, book 1, Yerevan, Magaghat', 1998, p. 204]: «This toponym underwent the following phonetic modification: Zabakha (this is the root of the toponym which ends in the plural desinence -a, typical of Indo-European languages) < Zabakh (this is the direct form of the toponym) > Zawakh (as a result of the interchange of the consonants b>v, which also occurs in other words). An Aramaic inscription found in Metskhet mentions the personal name of Zewakh, which probably derives from the toponym Zawakh>Jawakh (as a result of the interchange of the consonants z>j) > Jawakhk' (the former plural suffix a is replaced here by k', which indicates plurality in the Old Armenian language).» Vahe Sargsyan, author of many studies on the Javakh region, proposes a derivation of the toponym from *Chapagh-Javakhk'*, basing his theory on the geo-morphological elements such as its vast plains rich of water. [Cf. V. Sargsyan. *Javakhk'i himnaharts'i matenagitut'yun. I skzbane minch' 2012 t'. skizbē*. (= Bibliography of the Javakhk' question. From the origin to the beginning of 2012.), Yerevan, Mitk' Analytic Center, 2012, p. 3].

<sup>18</sup> Tashir (Arm. *Tashir*, Georg. *Tashiri*) is a historic region of Southern Caucasus, now divided into the Lori (Arm. *Lori*) province of Armenia (Southern Tashir) and the Kvemo-Kartli region of Georgia, more

Armeno-Georgian coexistence has been documented for millennia as these provinces belonged alternately both to the Greater Armenia<sup>19</sup> and the Georgian kingdoms<sup>20</sup>. Throughout the IV century A.D., both Armenia and Georgia became vassal states of the Sasanian Persian Empire<sup>21</sup>, and Western Armenia became part of the Byzantine Empire<sup>22</sup>. In the V century A.D., Arsacid Armenia<sup>23</sup> was entirely subjugated by the Sassanid Empire and became a Persian satrapy, while the monarchy of the Kingdom of Kartli (Iberia)<sup>24</sup> was also abolished by the Sasanids and the Principality of Kartli (Iberia) was established<sup>25</sup>, and the information about the earliest permanent Armenian settlements date back from the end of the VI and the beginning of the VII centuries<sup>26</sup>. In the following centuries, Armenia was recognized as an independent kingdom under the Bagratuni dynasty<sup>27</sup>, with Ani<sup>28</sup> as its capital city, only briefly in the IX century; Bagrat III (ca. 960-1014)<sup>29</sup> of the Georgian Bagratid dynasty<sup>30</sup> also unified the Duchy of Tao-Klarjeti<sup>31</sup>, the Principality of Kartli and the Kingdom of Abkhazia<sup>32</sup> into the ‘Kingdom of the Abkhazians and the Iberians’<sup>33</sup>. In the XI century, Seljuk Turks invaded Georgia on multiple occasions, and even the Byzantine-Georgian coalition was defeated in 1071 at the Battle of Manzikert<sup>34</sup>. Only after the battle of Didgori<sup>35</sup>, fought on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August 1121 between the Great Seljuk Empire and joint Armeno-

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specifically Borchalu (Rus. *Borchalinskiy uyezd*, Georg. *Borchalos mazra*), which was a uyezd (it corresponds approximately to the Eng. “county) of the Tiflis Governorate under the Russian Empire.

<sup>19</sup> Arm. *Mets Hayk’*.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. C. Toumanoff, “The Armeno-Georgian Marchlands”, in *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*, *op. cit.*, pp. 437–499, *supra*.

<sup>21</sup> See entry «Sasanian dynasty» at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sasanian-dynasty>.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. C. Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*, *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 84, *supra*.

<sup>23</sup> The Arsacid dynasty ruled Armenia from 54 to 428 A.D., see entry «Arsacid dynasty» at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Arsacid-dynasty>.

<sup>24</sup> Georg. *k’art’lis samep’o*, see G. R. Suny, *The making of the Georgian Nation*. 2nd Ed., *op. cit.*, p. 13, *supra*.

<sup>25</sup> Georg. *k’art’lis saerismt’avro*, see G. R. Suny, *The making of the Georgian Nation*., *op. cit.*, p. 25, *supra*.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. A. Abrahamyan, G. S. Melik’-Bakhshyan, *Hamarot urvagic hay gaght’avayreri patmut’yan* (= A brief outline of the history of Armenian immigrants), Yerevan, Haypethrat, 1964, pp. 93-94.

<sup>27</sup> Arm. *Bagratuni*, see entry «Bagratid dynasty» at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bagratid-dynasty-Armenian-dynasty>.

<sup>28</sup> See entry «Ani» at <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ani-historical-city-Armenia>.

<sup>29</sup> See entry «Bagrat III» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bagrat-III>.

<sup>30</sup> Georg. *bagrationi*, see C. Toumanoff, “Iberia on the Eve of Bagratid Rule: an Enquiry into the Political History of Eastern Georgia between the VI and IX century”, in *Le Muséon*, 1952, vol. 65, p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> Georg. *tao-klarjet’is saerist’avo*, see G. R. Suny, *The making of the Georgian Nation*., *op. cit.*, p. 25, *ibid*.

<sup>32</sup> Georg. *ap’khazet’a samep’o*, see G. R. Suny, *The making of the Georgian Nation*., *op. cit.*, p. 45, *ibid*.

<sup>33</sup> Georg. *ap’khazet’a da k’art’veit’a samep’o*, see G. R. Suny, *The making of the Georgian Nation*., *op. cit.*, p. 29, *supra*.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. entry «Battle of Manzikert» at <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Manzikert>.

<sup>35</sup> Georg. *didgoris brdzola*, cf. G. R. Suny, *The making of the Georgian Nation*., *op. cit.*, p. 36, *supra*.

Georgian forces lead by David IV the Builder (1073-1125)<sup>36</sup>, Tbilisi and other Georgian lands will go back to the Kingdom of Kartli. Following this event, a remarkable Armenian migratory wave, also encouraged by king David IV, headed itself to the Georgian capital Tiflis<sup>37</sup> and acquired important roles in the city's economy, administration and re-building process. Furthermore, the town of Gori<sup>38</sup> was (re-)founded by David IV the Builder with the specific purpose of settling there the Armenian immigrants who were arriving in the Kingdom of Kartli<sup>39</sup>. The Kingdom of Iberia collapsed in 1483 after its forces were defeated in the Battle of Aradeti<sup>40</sup> by *Q'varq'vare II Jaq'eli* (1416-1498)<sup>41</sup>, *Atabeg*<sup>42</sup> of the Principality of Samtskhe<sup>43</sup> and the dissolution of the Kingdom was ratified in 1490 by the Governor of Kartli. Under the Ottoman-Savafid rule of 1603-1618<sup>44</sup> Shah Abbas I of Persia (1571-1629)<sup>45</sup> relocated forcibly as many as 500,000 Armenians from the so-called Iranian Armenia region<sup>46</sup> to the city of Isfahan, in which the New Julfa neighbourhood was created appositely for these Armenians<sup>47</sup>. Due to this forced relocation, as well as to the general hardening of the policies of the Persian government toward the Armenian minority, a

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<sup>36</sup> Georg. *davit' D' aghmashenebeli* (= lit. David IV the Rebuilder), see entry «David IV» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/David-IV>.

<sup>37</sup> Tiflis (Rus. *Tiflis*; Arm. *T'iflis*; Georg. *Tip'lisi/TP'ilisi*) was the Russian name of Tbilisi. This toponym was used during the tsarist Empire and under USSR until August 17th 1936 when Soviet authorities changed the names of many cities to versions that resembled more the original name in the local language and *Tiflis* became *T'bilisi*. Cf. G. R. Suny, "Tiflis. Crucible of Ethnic Politics, 1860-1905", in *The City in Late Imperial Russia*, M. F. Hamm (ed. by), Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1986, pp. 249-281; The historical Armenian name for the city until 1936 was *TP'ghis*, nowadays the official Armenian name is *T'bilisi*, but most Armenians, in everyday life, still refer to it as *T'iflis*. Throughout the dissertation the version "Tiflis" of the toponym will be used when referred to the city during the tsarist period, while the version "Tbilisi" will be used when writing about all other historical periods.

<sup>38</sup> See entry «Gori» at <https://www.britannica.com/place/Gori>.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. §69 (=g153) of Robert Bedrosian's English translation of the *Chronicles* (Arm. *Taregirk'*) of *Smbat Sparapet*, available at <http://www.attalus.org/armenian/css10.htm>.

<sup>40</sup> See entry «*aradet'is brdzola*» (= Battle of Aradeti), edited by S. Khantadze, in *k'art'uli sabch'ot'a entsiklopedia* (= Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia), Tbilisi, Georgian Academy of Sciences, 1975, vol. I, p. 534.

<sup>41</sup> See entry «*q'varq'vare B' jaq'eli*», edited by S. Lomsadze in *k'art'uli sabch'ot'a entsiklopedia* (= Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia), Tbilisi, Georgian Academy of Sciences, 1986, vol. X, p. 638.

<sup>42</sup> *Atabeg* is a Seljuk-Turkic noble title that indicates the lord of a region subordinated to a king. It's a compound of the words *ata*, "ancestor, father" and *beg* "lord, leader, prince", see entry «*Atābak*» at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/atabak-turkish-atabeg-lit>.

<sup>43</sup> See entry «*samtskhe saat' abago*» (= Samtskhe Atabegate), edited by S. Lomsadze in *k'art'uli sabch'ot'a entsiklopedia* (= Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia), Tbilisi, Georgian Academy of Sciences, 1985, vol. IX, pp. 48-49.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. A. Mikaberidze (edited by), *Conflict and Conquest in the Islamic World: a Historical Encyclopedia*, Santa Barbara (CA), ABC-CLIO, 2011, vol. 1, p. 699.

<sup>45</sup> See entry «*Abbās I*» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Abbas-I-Safavid-shah-of-Persia>.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. R. H. Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 168.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. V. Gregorian, "Minorities of Isphahan: The Armenian Community of Isphahan, 1587-1722.", in *Iranian Studies* 7, issue no. 2, Abingdon-on-Thames, Routledge, 1974, pp. 652-81.

significant number of Persian-Armenians settled in the territories that belong to modern-day Georgia during the XV, XVI and XVII centuries, and it is in this period that the majority of the Armenian churches of Tbilisi were built<sup>48</sup>. Most of this migratory wave was directed to Tiflis and the Kvemo-Kartli region, which bordered with Iranian Armenia, probably with the hope to return soon to their homes in case of a shift of powers in the area. As a consequence of this mass-migration, toward the end of the XVIII century, in Tiflis there were 12,000 Armenians out of a total population of 20,000<sup>49</sup>.

## **I.2. History of the Armenian presence in Javakheti (VIII century B.C.-mid XX century A.D.)**

There are many epigraphic and archaeological sources as well as literary records about *Javakhk'/Javakhet'i*. The earliest mention of the toponym *Javakh*, as *Zabakha*, is found in the *Khorkhor* inscription<sup>50</sup> that dates to the kingdom of *Argishti I* of Urartu (786-764 B.C.)<sup>51</sup> and it is defined as a district of the Gugark' Thirteenth Province<sup>52</sup> of Greater Armenia (*Mets Hayk'*)<sup>53</sup>. The same classification as a district part of *Gugark'* is contained in the *Ashkharhats'uyts'*<sup>54</sup>. The exact borders of Upper Javakh and Lower Javakh are, however, matter of disagreement and discussion between Armenian and

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<sup>48</sup> See entry «*Vrastan*» (= Georgia), edited by H. Ayvazyan, in *op. cit.*, p. 543, *supra*.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. M. Polievtkov, G. Natadze, *Staryj Tiflis v izvestiyax sovremennikov* (= Old Tiflis in contemporary news), Tbilisi, Gosizdat Gruzii (= State Publishing House of Georgia), 1929, p. 30.

<sup>50</sup> This carved rock with the epigraphy of Argishti I is called *Khorkhor* after the name of the village in which it was found, located south-west of the city of Van, it was inhabited mostly by Armenians and Kurds until the deportations of 1915. S. Karapetyan, *Javakh: Critical study of the Georgian-language lapidary inscription and scientific literature by Alexandre Kananian. Translation of the Armenian-language book of Javakhk' (2006), the 9th Volume of RAA Scientific Research Series*, Yerevan, Research on Armenian Architecture (RAA) Foundation, 2011, pp. 12-13.

<sup>51</sup> Argishti I of Urartu (Arm. *Argishti A*), cf. C. Ghap'ants'ian, *Urartui patmut'yunē*, (= The History of Urartu), Yerevan, Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1940, pp. 143-152. For the toponym «*Javakhk'*» cf. *supra*, note n. 17, p. 20.

<sup>52</sup> Gugark' (Lat. *Gogarene*): according to Anania of Shirak (Arm. *Shirakats'i*) it was the 13th province of Greater Armenia, see entry «*Gugark'*», in *Haykakan sovetakan hanragitaran* (= Armenian Soviet Encyclopaedia), Yerevan, Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1977, vol. III, pp. 240-241.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *supra*, note 19, p. 21.

<sup>54</sup> Ancient Arm. *Ashkharhats'oyts'*, modern Arm. *Ashkharhats'uyts'* (lit. = "map"), usually translated as "Geography", is a Medieval Armenian manual on cosmology and geography with an atlas attached. It is attributed to Anania Shirakats'i (= Anania of Shirak), cf. S. Yeremyan, *Hayastanē ēst «Ashkharhats'uyts'»-i. P'ordz VII dari haykakan k'artezhi verakazmut'yan zhamanakakits' k'artezagrakan himk'i vra* (= Armenia according to the «*Ashkharhats'uyts'»*. Experience with modern cartographic reconstruction of VII century Armenian map), Insert A, Yerevan, Armenian SSR GA Publishing House, 1963, pp. 109-110.

Georgian scholars<sup>55</sup>. The first mention of the toponym *Javakhk'* within a literary work is in the *History of Armenians*<sup>56</sup> of *Movsēs Khorenats'i*<sup>57</sup>. In the IV century Javakh is mentioned as the summer residence of Georgian king *P'arnavaz* (reigned 299-234 B.C.)<sup>58</sup>, while in 185 B.C king Artaxias I (reigned 190-159 B.C.)<sup>59</sup> included Javakh in his Kingdom of Greater Armenia<sup>60</sup>. In 387 A.D., during the first partition of Armenia Major between the Eastern Roman Empire and Sassanid Persia, Javakh passed under the control of the Kingdom of Iberia until the IX century when Southern Javakh was united with the Bagratid Kingdom of Armenia<sup>61</sup>.

The region was briefly invaded by Seljuk Turks in 1065 but it remained under Georgian control until 1236 when it was conquered by Mongols and later became part of the Samtskhe Atabegate ruled by the *Jaqeli* family<sup>62</sup> until 1637 when it was conquered by Turks and during the XVII century many Apostolic Armenians were forced to convert to Islam<sup>63</sup>. In 1735 Javakh was invaded by the Nadir Shah of Persia<sup>64</sup> who deported about 6,000 people, mostly Armenians, to the *Khorasan* region of Iran, nevertheless, the population of Javakh remained almost entirely Armenian<sup>65</sup>.

Javakheti was included into the Russian Empire as a result of the 1828-1829 Russo-Turkish war<sup>66</sup>. Following the signature of the peace treaty, 7,300 Armenian families, circa 58,000 people, migrated from the Ottoman Empire to Russian-administered Javakheti, and many muslims resettled from Javakheti to Ottoman Turkey, therefore there was a further increase of the Armenian percentage of the population in the

<sup>55</sup> Cf. V. Bagrationi, *aghts'era samep'osa sak'art'velosa. sak'art'velos geograp'ia* (= Description of the Kingdom of Georgia. Geography of Georgia.), ed. by T'. Lomouri and N. Berdzenishvili, Tbilisi, Tbilisi State University "Stalin" Printing House, 1941, p. 131.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Movsēs Khorenats'i, History of Armenians*, translation and commentary on the literary sources by Robert W. Thomson, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 140.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *supra*, note n. 12, p. 20.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Toumanoff, Cyrill, *Chronology of the early Kings of Iberia*, Traditio vol. 25, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Arm. *Artashēs*, see entry «Artaxias I», available at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Artaxias>.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Hamaṗot patmut'yun Vrats' ěntsayeal Juanshēri patmēch'i* (= The complete history of the Georgian historian named *Juanshēr*), Venice, Saint Lazare Mekhitarist Typography, 1884, p. 24.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. S. Karapetyan, *Javakh: Critical study of the Georgian-language lapidary inscription and scientific literature by Alexandre Kananian. Translation of the Armenian-language book of Javakhk' (2006), the 9th Volume of RAA Scientific Research Series, op. cit.*, p. 13, *supra*.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *supra*, notes n. 41, 42, 43 p. 22.

<sup>63</sup> S. Karapetyan, *Javakh: Critical study of the Georgian-language lapidary inscription and scientific literature by Alexandre Kananian. Translation of the Armenian-language book of Javakhk' (2006), the 9th Volume of RAA Scientific Research Series, op. cit.*, *ibid.* p. 13, *supra*.

<sup>64</sup> See entry «*Nādir Shāh*», available at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nadir-Shah>.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. "The Chronicle of Abraham of Crete (*Patmut'iwn of Kat'oghikos Abraham Kretats'i*). Annotated translation from the Critical Text with Introduction and Commentary by G. A. Bournoutian", in *Armenian Studies Series I*, Costa Mesa (CA), Mazda Publisher, 1999, p. 45.

<sup>66</sup> See entry «Russo-Turkish wars» at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Russo-Turkish-wars>.



region<sup>67</sup>. In 1874, the Akhalkalaki administrative district<sup>68</sup> was created as a part of the Tiflis governorship. The data of the 1897 First General Census of the Population of the Russian Empire show that Armenians constituted 72.3% out of the total population of the district<sup>69</sup>. In 1899 the region was also suffered an earthquake that destroyed almost entirely 21 villages leaving 241 casualties<sup>70</sup>. The last Armenian migration toward this territory happened in 1915 and the following years, due to the events of the First World War and the massacres of ethnic Armenians in the Western Provinces of the Ottoman Empire, commonly referred to as Armenian Genocide. After the collapse of the Russian Empire, in 1918, Javakh was included in the Democratic Republic of Georgia and it remained a region of the Socialist Soviet Republic (SSR) of Georgia after its annexation to the USSR, despite protests from the local Armenian population and the Armenian SSR<sup>71</sup>.

### **I.3. Armenian Community of Tiflis<sup>72</sup> in the XIX century**

According to Abrahamyan, an ethnic Armenian community existed in Tbilisi since ancient times<sup>73</sup>, but the settlement of Armenians began especially after the collapse of the Bagratuni Kingdom of Armenia and the conquest of its capital Ani in 1045 by the Byzantines<sup>74</sup>. Armenians played a significant role in the political, economical and cultural life of the city from the beginning as well as in the creation of a Georgian

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. T. K. Blauvelt, C. Berglund, "Armenians in the making of Modern Georgia", K. Siekierski, S. Troebst (ed. by), in *Armenians in Post-Socialist Europe*, Köln, Böhlau, 2006, p. 71.

<sup>68</sup> Rus. *uyezd*, cf. *supra*, note n. 18, p. 20.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *Pervaya vseobshchaya perepis' naseleniya Rossiyskoy Imperii 1897 g. Raspredeleniye naseleniya po rodnomu yazyku, guberniyam i oblastyam* (= First general census of the population of the Russian Empire in 1897. Distribution of the population by mother tongue, provinces and regions), available at [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus\\_lan\\_97.php](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_lan_97.php).

<sup>70</sup> *Murch. K'aghak'akan, hasarakakan, grakan amsagir* (= Hammer: political, public, literature monthly magazine), Tiflis Printing House M. D. Rōtineants', 1900, pp. 103-105

<sup>71</sup> Cf. A. Melk'onyan, *Javakhk'ë XIX darum ew XX dari arajin k'arordin. Patmak'mnakan usumnasirut'yun.* (= Javakhk in the XIX century and in the first quarter of the XX century. Historico-analytical investigation), Yerevan, Zangak 97 Publishing House, 2003, pp. 285-289, 295-330.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *supra*, note n. 37, p. 22.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. A. Abrahamyan, *op. cit.*, p. 96, *supra*.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. G. A. Bournoutian, *A Concise History of the Armenian People: From Ancient Times to the Present*, Costa Mesa (CA), Mazda Publisher., 2006, p. 87; cf. A. Abrahamyan, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*, p. 96, *supra*; cf. P. Muradyan, *Armyanskaya ëpigrafika Gruzii: Tbilisi* (= Armenian epigraphics of Georgia: Tbilisi), Yerevan, Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences, 1988, p. 11.

statehood<sup>75</sup>. In the 1170s an Apostolic Armenian Diocese was established in Tbilisi because of the growing number of Armenians in the city<sup>76</sup>.

The migration process of Armenians toward Tbilisi continued in the XIV-XVIII centuries and the result was that, in the last decade of the XVIII century, of the 20,000 people living in Tbilisi, 12,000 were ethnic Armenians<sup>77</sup>. The demographic situation of Tiflis at the beginning of the XIX century, however, was aggravated by the rule of shah Agha Mohammad Khan (1742-1797)<sup>78</sup> who conquered and burnt to the ground the city in 1795. The city was completely burnt to the ground. Throughout the XIX century, epidemics occurred in 1802, 1811, 1830, 1847 causing a decrease in the population<sup>79</sup>.

In 1817, the Armenian population constituted 75,6% of the total population in Tiflis, but it decreased (only as a percentage of the total and not numerically) to 65% in the 1830s, to 54% in the 1850s<sup>80</sup> and to 47,7% in 1886<sup>81</sup>, and made up only 36,4% in 1899<sup>82</sup>, hence, in the second half of the XIX century, Armenians constituted only one of the ethnic minorities living in Tiflis and, although they were no longer the majority of the population<sup>83</sup>, in comparison with other ethnic groups they were still a significant presence in the city<sup>84</sup>. More in detail, the majority of ethnic Georgians were either nobles either peasants and farmers rarely interested in the city's economic activities, while ethnic Armenians, being active in trade and crafts, tended to live predominantly in the cities<sup>85</sup>, and in Tiflis they made up almost entirely the population of the *Avlabari* city district<sup>86</sup>. For this reason, Armenians, who had been living in Tbilisi longer than

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<sup>75</sup> See H. Ayvazyan, entry «*Vrastan*», in *Hay Sp'yruk' hanragitaran* (= Armenian Diaspora Encyclopedia), *op. cit.*, pp. 543-545, *supra*.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. A. Abrahamyan, *op. cit.*, p. 97, *supra*.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. M. Polievtkov, G. Natadze, *op. cit.*, p. 29, *supra*.

<sup>78</sup> See entry «*Āgā Moḥammad Khan Qājār*» at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/aga-mohammad-khan>.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. H. Sargsyan, “*T'iflisi nahangi hay bnakch'ut'yun XIX d. erkrord kesin*” (= Armenian population of the Tiflis region in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the XIX century), in *Hajots' patmut'yan harcer* (= Questions of Armenian History), Yerevan, Armenian Academy of Sciences, 2005, p. 99.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. M. Polievtkov, G. Natadze, *op. cit.*, p. 30, *supra*.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. A. S. Khakhanov (Khakhanashvili), “*Polozhenie armyan v gruzinskom tsarstve*” (= The situation of Armenians in the Georgian Tsardom), in *Bratskaya pomochsh' postradavshim v Turcii armyanam* (= Fraternal help for the Armenians suffering in Turkey), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. by Grigor Djanshiev (Djanshyan), Moscow, Tipolitogr. T-va I.N. Kushnerev, 1898, p. 553.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Y. Anchabadze, N. Volkova, *Gorod i gorozhane v XIX Veke* (= Old Tbilisi. City and citizens in the XIX Century), Moscow, NauKA (= Academy of Sciences), 1990, pp. 29-30.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Suny, R., *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, *op. cit.*, p. 116, *supra*.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. S. Mkrtchyan, “Contemporary Armenian Community in Tbilisi”, in *Iran and the Caucasus 13*, Leiden, Brill Academic Publishers, 2009, p. 300.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. A. S. Khakhanov, *op. cit.*, p. 553, *ibid*.

<sup>86</sup> *Avlabari* (Arm. *Havlabar*). Cf. J. Salukvadze, O. Golubchikov, “City as a geopolitics: Tbilisi, Georgia — A globalizing metropolis in a turbulent region”, in *Cities. The International Journal of Urban Policy*

other ethnic groups, held higher positions and were more actively involved in the economic, socio-political, and cultural aspects of Tiflis city life<sup>87</sup>. Although Armenians faced competition from recently-arrived Russian merchants, in the years 1844-1854, under the viceroyalty of prince Mikhail Vorontsov (1782-1856)<sup>88</sup>, the Armenian upper class was granted the hereditary title of ‘honoured citizens’ of the Russian Empire and, as a consequence of this, they started assimilating themselves into Russian cultural life<sup>89</sup>. In 1844, there were 21 Armenian churches with 65 priests in Tbilisi and at the end of the XIX and beginning of the XX centuries, up to 62% of Tiflis’ entrepreneurial and industrial enterprises were owned by ethnic Armenians<sup>90</sup>, including half of the biggest enterprises, and the largest one being completely Armenian<sup>91</sup>.

In the decades from 1840 to 1905, all of Tiflis city mayors were ethnic Armenian<sup>92</sup>, with the only exception of Dimitri Q’ip’iani (1814-1887) in the years 1875-1879<sup>93</sup>. In particular, Yeremya Artsruni (1804-1877)<sup>94</sup>, mayor from 1866 to 1868, after his death, donated his personal library (the first nucleus of the modern Public Library of Tbilisi) to the city of Tiflis<sup>95</sup>, and the Step’an Khatisyan (?-?)<sup>96</sup> donated his house to the city, located where the City Hall of Tbilisi will be built<sup>97</sup>. The highest honour for the Armenian community of Tiflis was reached, however, in 1880 when the Tiflis-Armenian Mikhail Tariyelovich, count Loris-Melikov (1824-1888), became Minister of Interior of the Russian Empire<sup>98</sup>. In these decades, Tiflis, besides being the official

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*and Planning*, vol. 52, Elsevier’s Science Direct (online), March 2016, p. 43, available at [http://City\\_as\\_a\\_geopolitics\\_Tbilisi\\_Georgia\\_A\\_globalizing\\_metropolis\\_in\\_a\\_turbulent\\_region](http://City_as_a_geopolitics_Tbilisi_Georgia_A_globalizing_metropolis_in_a_turbulent_region).

<sup>87</sup> Cf. «In the beginning of the XIX century, Armenians were mostly second and third generation descendants of immigrants and were classified as “locals”» in S. Mkrtchyan, *op. cit.*, p. 300, *supra*.

<sup>88</sup> Rus. *Mikhail Semyonovich Vorontsov*, see entry «Mikhail Semyonovich, Prince Vorontsov» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mikhail-Semyonovich-Prince-Vorontsov>.

<sup>89</sup> As *Aleksandr Amfiteatrov* (1862-1938) stated: «Caucasia was russified without russification, and at the forefront of this natural russianizing were, once again, the Armenians.», cited in R. G. Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 41; cf. T. K. Blauvelt, C. Berglund, “Armenians in the making of Modern Georgia”, *op. cit.*, p. 70; cf. R. G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>90</sup> See entry «*Vrastan*», ed. by H. Ayyvazyan, in *Hay Sp’yurk’ hanragitaran* (= Armenian Diaspora Encyclopedia), *op. cit.*, p. 545.

<sup>91</sup> R. G. Suny, “The Making of the Georgian Nation”, *op. cit.*, p. 118; cf. S. Chkhetiya, *Tbilisi v XIX stoletii 1865-1869* (= Tbilisi in the XIX century 1865-1869), Tbilisi, Printing House of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, 1942, pp. 208-209.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. *k’art’uli entsiklopedia* (= Georgian Encyclopedia), entry «Tbilisi», Tbilisi, 1992, p. 54.

<sup>93</sup> Georg. *Dimitri Q’ip’iani*, cf. R. G. Suny, “The Making of the Georgian Nation”, *op. cit.*, p. 100, *supra*.

<sup>94</sup> Arm. *Eremia Artsruni*, cf. S. Karapetyan, *T’iflisi k’ aghak’ aglukhnerē* (= The mayors of Tiflis), book E, Yerevan, Gitut’yun Publishing House, 2003, p. 18.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Mkrtchyan S., *op. cit.*, p. 301, *supra*.

<sup>96</sup> Arm. *Step’an Khatisyan*[ts’], cf. S. Karapetyan, *op. cit.*, 2003, p. 32, *supra*.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. H. Ayyvazyan, H., *op. cit.*, p. 546, *supra*; cf. S. Mkrtchyan, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*, p. 301, *supra*.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. entry «Mikhail Tariyelovich, Count Loris-Melikov» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mikhail-Tariyelovich-Graf-Loris-Melikov>.

juridical capital of the Caucasus Viceroyalty, can also be regarded as the main Armenian political capital (in 1890 it was founded in Tiflis the Armenian Revolutionary Federation<sup>99</sup>, and, later on, the National Board of Trustees cared for the people and orphans rescued from the 1915 massacres) as well as main cultural centre<sup>100</sup>. Tiflis, during the XIX century, can be considered the cultural capital of the region called, at the time, Transcaucasia<sup>101</sup> for many different ethnic groups, especially for Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis, but it was an important destination also for Russian writers, the most famous ones being, namely, Aleksandr Pushkin (1799-1837)<sup>102</sup>, Aleksandr Griboyedov (1795-1829)<sup>103</sup> and Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841)<sup>104</sup>. In the XIX century, the Armenians of Tiflis played a crucial role in keeping alive and prosper the Armenian culture within the Russian Empire, as well as in helping the economic and cultural development of the city as a whole<sup>105</sup>. In this general climate of change and multiculturalism, influenced also by the European travellers to the region and the nationalistic ideas that they brought with them to the Caucasus, some members of the Georgian *élite* and upper class began to reconsider their role and position in opposition to their Armenian counterpart<sup>106</sup>.

Many Armenians, who lived in Tiflis in the XIX century, contributed to the enrichment of many different fields of the arts and crafts. In 1824 Nersēs V (1770-1857)<sup>107</sup>, at the time archbishop of the Armenian Apostolic Church for the diocese of Georgia, established the Nersisyan School, an institution of higher education which worked as the most important centre for the safeguard and spread of Armenian culture until its

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<sup>99</sup> Armenian Revolutionary Federation, ARF (= Arm. *Hay Yeghapokhakan Dashnaks'ut' iwn, HYD*), usually referred to just as *Dashnaksutyun*, see entry «*Dashnaksutyun*» at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dashnaksutyun>.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. H. Ayvazyan, *op. cit.*, p. 544, *supra*..

<sup>101</sup> Rus. *Zakavkaz'e*, today it is more commonly referred to as South Caucasus, see entry «Transcaucasia» at <https://www.britannica.com/place/Transcaucasia>.

<sup>102</sup> Rus. *Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin*, see entry «Aleksandr Pushkin» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aleksandr-Sergeevich-Pushkin>.

<sup>103</sup> Rus. *Aleksandr Sergeevich Griboyedov*, see entry «Aleksandr Sergeevich Griboyedov» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aleksandr-Sergeevich-Griboyedov>.

<sup>104</sup> Rus. *Mikhayl Yurevich Lermontov*, see entry «Mikhail Lermontov» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mikhail-Yuryevich-Lermontov>.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. R. G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, *op. cit.*, p. 63, *supra*; cf. A. Ferrari, *Alla frontiera dell'impero. Gli Armeni nell'impero russo. 1801-1917*, Milano, Mimesis, 2011, pp. 114-118; cf. S. Chkhetiya, *Tbilisi v XIX stoletii (1865-1869)*, *op. cit.*, pp. 145, 208-209, *supra*.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. T. K. Blauvelt, C. Berglund, «Armenians in the making of Modern Georgia», *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72, *supra*.

<sup>107</sup> *Nersēs E' Ashtarakec'i*, cf. G. A. Bournoutian, *Russia and the Armenians of Transcaucasia 1797-1889*, Costa Mesa (CA), Mazda Publishers, 1998, pp. 531-532.

closure in 1924<sup>108</sup>. In Tiflis, in 1846, it was founded the newspaper “*Kavkaz*” (= “Caucasus”), the first Russian-language newspaper in the Caucasus, and its Armenian counterpart “*Kovkas*” (= “Caucasus”), issued only during the two-year period 1846-47, was the first Armenian-language newspaper of the Russian Empire<sup>109</sup>. During the following years, many other Armenian-language newspapers were founded, namely “*Meghu Hayastani*” (= “The bee of Armenia”, 1858-1866)<sup>110</sup>, “*Kṛunk Hayoc’ Ashkharhin*” (= “Crane of the Armenian world”, 1860-1863)<sup>111</sup>, “*Ararat*” (1868-1919)<sup>112</sup>, “*Mshak*” (= “The worker”, 1872-1892)<sup>113</sup> e “*Nor dar*” (= “New century”, 1884-1906)<sup>114</sup>. In the field of literature there three main writers are Khach’atur Abovean (1809-1848?)<sup>115</sup>, Raffi (1835-1888)<sup>116</sup> and Yovhannēs T’umanean (1869-1923)<sup>117</sup>, whose house, which today is a museum, was a meeting point for many writers of Armenian, Georgian, Azeri and Russian origin<sup>118</sup>. The most famous Armenian artists of XIX-century Tiflis were Yakob M. Hovnat’anean (1806-1881)<sup>119</sup>, Step’anos Nersisean (1815-1884)<sup>120</sup>, Geworg Bashinjaghean (1857-1925)<sup>121</sup> and Yartut’iwn Shamshinean (1856-1914)<sup>122</sup>, while for the music the most eminent personalities were Զոհար

<sup>108</sup> Arm. *Nersisean dproc’*, cf. A. J. Hacikyan, G. Basmajian, E. S. Franchuk, N. Ouzounian, *The Heritage of Armenian Literature: From the eighteenth century to modern times*. 3, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2005, pp. 67–68.

<sup>109</sup> Rus. *Kavkaz’* (pre-reform orthography), see entry «*Kovkas*», in *Haykakan sovetakan hanragitaran* (= Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia), vol. V, Armenian Academy of Sciences, Yerevan, 1979, p. 630 ; cf. <https://www.eastview.com/resources/gpa/kavkaz/>.

<sup>110</sup> See entry «*Meghu Hayastani*» in *Haykakan sovetakan hanragitaran* (= Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia), Yerevan, Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1981, vol. VII, p. 452.

<sup>111</sup> See entry «*Kṛunk Hayoc’ Ashkharhin*» in *Haykakan sovetakan hanragitaran* (= Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia), Yerevan, Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1979, vol. V, p. 668.

<sup>112</sup> See entry «*Ararat*», in *Hay gratput’yun yew grk’arvest hanragitaran* (= Armenian Encyclopedia of Typography and Book), Yerevan, Armenian Academy of Sciences, 2015, p. 139.

<sup>113</sup> See entry «*Mshak*» in *Haykakan harc’ hanragitaran* (= Armenian Question Encyclopedia), ed. by K. Khudaverdyan, Yerevan, Main Press of the Armenian Encyclopedia, 1969, pp. 337.

<sup>114</sup> See entry «*Nor dar*» in *Haykakan harc’ hanragitaran* (= Armenian Question Encyclopedia), *op. cit.*, pp. 357-358, *ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> See entry «*Khachatur Abovean*» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Khachatur-Abovean>.

<sup>116</sup> *Raffi*, pen name for *Yakob Melik’-Yakobean*, see entry «*Raffi*» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Raffi>.

<sup>117</sup> See entry «*Hovhannēs T’adevosi T’umanyan*» in *Haykakan sovetakan hanragitaran* (= Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia), Yerevan, Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1978, vol. IV, pp. 234-236.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. A. Ferrari, “Il multiculturalismo nella Transcaucasia dell’Ottocento: il caso di Tiflis”, *op. cit.*, p. 56, *ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> See entry «*Hakob M. Hovnat’anyan*» in *Haykakan sovetakan hanragitaran* (= Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia), Yerevan, Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1980, vol. VI, p. 576.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. M. M. Ghazaryan, “*Step’anos Nersisyan*”, in *Teghegagir hasarakakan gitut’yunneri* (= Journal of Social Sciences), № 1, Yerevan, Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1962, p. 35.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. V. Gayfejian, A. Sargsyan, *Gevorg Bashinjaghyan*. (in Armenian), Yerevan, Haypethrat, 1957, p. 37.

<sup>122</sup> See entry «*Harut’yun Shamshinyan*» in *Ov ov e. hayer: Kensagrakan hanragitaran* (= *Who’s who: armenians. Biographical encyclopedia*), Yerevan, Armenian Encyclopedia Publishing House, 2007, vol. II, p. 252.

Melik'ean (1883-1935)<sup>123</sup> and Azat Manukean (1878-1958)<sup>124</sup>. Although from the XVIII century, it is worth mentioning also Sayat'-Nova (1712-1795)<sup>125</sup>, a Tiflis-born ethnic-Armenian 'troubadour' who composed in Armenian, Georgian, Azerbaijani and Persian languages and who well embodies the multicultural spirit and atmosphere of Tiflis during those centuries. Following the assassination of tsar Alexander II (1818-1881) in 1881<sup>126</sup>, however, the liberalist imperial attitude toward the Caucasus changed into more reactionary and repressive policies, and many attempts were done to assimilate the local populations, including the Armenians, by russifying them and repressing their growing national sentiments<sup>127</sup>.

#### **I.4. Ethnic Armenians under the Democratic Republic of Georgia and Georgian SSR**

During the First World War (1914-1918), due to the massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, many Armenians fled to neighbouring Georgia and especially to Abkhazia to escape persecution<sup>128</sup>. Seizing the opportunity given by the instabilities of the Russian revolution, the Caucasus Viceroyalty<sup>129</sup> transitioned, in the years 1917-1918, through a Special Transcaucasian Committee<sup>130</sup>, a Transcaucasian Commissariat<sup>131</sup> and a Transcaucasian Federative Democratic Republic<sup>132</sup> before the

<sup>123</sup> See entry «*Romanos Melik'yan*» in *Haykakan sovetakan hanragitaran* (= Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia), *op. cit.*, p. 389, *ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> See entry «*Azat Manukyan*» in *Ov ov e. hayer: Kensagrakan hanragitaran* (= *Who's who: armenians. Biographical encyclopedia*), *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 41, *supra.*

<sup>125</sup> Arm. *Sayat'-Nova*, pen name for *Yarut'wn Sayadean*, see entry «*Sayat Nova*» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sayat-Nova>.

<sup>126</sup> Rus. *Aleksandr II Nikolayevich Romanov*, see entry «*Alexander II, emperor of Russia*» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alexander-II-emperor-of-Russia>.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. T. K. Blauvelt, C. Berglund, "Armenians in the making of Modern Georgia", in *op. cit.*, p. 72, *supra.*

<sup>128</sup> L. S. Landa, "Amshenskie armyanie Abkhazii: fragmenty istorii" (= Hamshen Armenians of Abkhazia, fragments of history), in *Materials of the VII Youth Scientific Conference on the problems of philosophy, religion, culture of the East. Series "Symposium"*, Issue n. 33, St. Petersburg, St. Petersburg Philosophical Society, 2004, pp. 106-108.

<sup>129</sup> Rus. *Kavkazskoe namestnichestvo*.

<sup>130</sup> Rus. *Osobyi Zakavkazskii Komitet*, cf. R. G. Hovannisian, *The Armenian People From Ancient To Modern Times, Volume II: Foreign Dominion to Statehood: The Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth Century*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 1997, p. 284.

<sup>131</sup> Rus. *Zakavkazskij Komissariat*, cf. R. G. Hovannisian, *The Armenian People From Ancient To Modern Times, Volume II: Foreign Dominion to Statehood: The Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth Century*, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Rus. *Zakavkazskaya Demokraticheskaya Federativnaya Respublika*, cf. R. G. Hovannisian, *The Armenian People From Ancient To Modern Times, Volume II: Foreign Dominion to Statehood: The Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth Century*, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*

establishment of the three independent democratic republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia<sup>133</sup> on May 28<sup>th</sup> 1918<sup>134</sup>.

On December 7<sup>th</sup> 1918, a conflict broke out between the newly-independent Democratic Republics of Armenia and Georgia for the modern-day Lori region of Armenia and Akhalkalaki rayon of Georgia. The so-called Georgian-Armenian war lasted until December 31<sup>st</sup> 1918 when a peace treaty was signed by the two nations under British supervision and the fought-over territories remained under a joint administration<sup>135</sup>. During the first parliamentary elections held on February 14<sup>th</sup> 1919 in the Democratic Republic of Georgia, the Armenian Revolutionary Party “*Dashnakts’ut’yun*” (ARP) submitted a nineteen-man electoral roll consisting mostly of Armenians living in Tbilisi and which included two women (Daria T’adeosean and Siranush Amirbegean)<sup>136</sup>. As a result, in the first elected Constituent Assembly of Georgia<sup>137</sup> there was a total of 8 Armenian and ethnic Armenian deputies, 4 from the Armenian Revolutionary Party and 4 from the Georgian Social-Democrat Labour Party, including one woman: Mkritch’ Vardoyants’ (1871-1955), Konstantine Paniev (1890-?), Ruben Aushtrov (1887-1937), Eleonora Ter-Farsegova-Makhviladze (1875-?), Tigran Avetisean (1891-1938), Davit’ Davit’khanian (1888-1957), Garegin Ter-Step’anean (1876-?), Zori Zoryants’ (1885-1943)<sup>138</sup>. In February 1921 Georgia was occupied by Soviet troops and after the expulsion of the government of the former Democratic Republic of Georgia, in March 1921 the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia<sup>139</sup> was established and in December 1922 it became part of the Soviet Union<sup>140</sup>.

Even though, at the same time, the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia<sup>141</sup> joined USSR, the majority of ethnic Armenians remained in the Georgian SSR and granted citizenship, but with special “markers” in their passports that reported their Armenian

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<sup>133</sup> Georg. *sak’art’velos demokratiuli respublika*.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. R. G. Suny, “The Making of the Georgian Nation” (Second ed.), in *op. cit.*, pp. 191-192, *supra*.

<sup>135</sup> See entry «Lori» edited by R. Matevossian, in *Haykakan sovetakan hanragitaran* (= Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia), *op. cit.*, vol. IV, pp. 663–64, *supra*.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. I. Iremadze, S. Ch’anturidze, *pirveli saqovelt’ao demokratiuli archevnebi damoukidebel sak’art’veloshi* (= The first general democratic elections in independent Georgia), Tbilisi, Tbilisi State University Press, 2017, p. 43.

<sup>137</sup> Georg. *sak’art’velos damp’udznebeli krebi*.

<sup>138</sup> For more information on the Armenian candidates and elected deputies at the first parliamentary election of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, see <http://firstrepublic.ge/en/theme/19?nationality=Armenian>.

<sup>139</sup> Georg. *sak’art’velos sabch’ota sotsialisturi respublika*.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. *The Europa World Year Book 2004, Volume I. Europa World Year Book (45th ed.)*. London, Europa Publications (Taylor & Francis Ltd.), 2004, p. 1806.

<sup>141</sup> Arm. *Haykakan Sovetakan Sots’ialistakan Hanrapetut’yun*.

ethnic heritage<sup>142</sup>. Although ethnic Armenians were considered equal under the law, ethnic Georgians were usually preferred and given priority for jobs in the public sector<sup>143</sup>. Moreover, under USSR, all religious faith and institutions were highly discouraged and persecuted, and most Armenian Apostolic churches were shut down as well as their affiliated institutions<sup>144</sup>. Differently from Abkhazia and South Ossetians, ethnic Armenians were not considered an autochthonous to Georgia, but rather “settlers”, and Samtskhe-Javakheti, as a region, was not granted any autonomy<sup>145</sup>. Moreover, although Stalin, as People’s Commissar for Nationalities, promoted local languages and alphabetisation<sup>146</sup> during the first years of the USSR, most Armenians, especially those of Javakheti and Abkhazia, did not learn Georgian: their main language remained Armenian and they used Russian as communication language, this became especially true starting from the mid-1930s when the previous language policy shifted toward russification<sup>147</sup>.

After the end of World War II, in 1945, significant numbers of Armenians from the Armenian-populated areas of the Georgian Soviet Union, including Javakheti, were deported to the Altai region and to Siberia as a part of the forced mass-deportations and purges of that period<sup>148</sup>. During Soviet times, Armenians constituted the second biggest ethnic group of the Georgian SSR, second only to ethnic Georgians. According to the censuses carried out during Soviet years, Armenians made up 11.5% of the population (307,018) in 1926<sup>149</sup>, 11.7% (415,013) in 1939<sup>150</sup>, 11.0% (442,916) in 1959<sup>151</sup>, 9.7% (452,309) in 1970<sup>152</sup>, 9.0% (448,000) in 1979<sup>153</sup>, and 8.1% (437,211) in 1989<sup>154</sup>.

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<sup>142</sup> Cf. T. K. Blauvelt, C. Berglund, “Armenians in the making of Modern Georgia”, in *op. cit.*, p. 78, *supra*.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. T. K. Blauvelt, C. Berglund, “Armenians in the making of Modern Georgia”, in *op. cit.*, p. 78, *supra*.

<sup>144</sup> D. V. Pospelovsky. *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory, and Practice, and the Believer, vol 2: Soviet Antireligious Campaigns and Persecutions*, New York, St Martin’s Press, 1988, p. 43.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. T. K. Blauvelt, C. Berglund, “Armenians in the making of Modern Georgia”, in *op. cit.*, p. 78, *supra*.

<sup>146</sup> This process is usually referred to as “korenization” or “*korenizatsiya*”, from the Russian word which literally means “putting down roots”, and it can be translated as “nativisation”, “indigenisation”. Cf. Y. Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, Or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism”, in *Slavic Review* 53, No. 2, ed. by H. Murav, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 414-452.

<sup>147</sup> Rus. *rusifikatsiya*, cf. L. A. Grenoble, *Language policy in the Soviet Union*, Dordrecht (Netherlands), Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003, pp. 117-118.

<sup>148</sup> See entry «*Javakhh'i hamarot patmut'yun*» (= A brief History of *Javakhh'*), available at [https://javakhhk.am/Main/Encyclopedia/History/History\\_prd\\_sov.html](https://javakhhk.am/Main/Encyclopedia/History/History_prd_sov.html).

<sup>149</sup> 1926 Census’ data available at [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_26.php?reg=2330](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_26.php?reg=2330).

<sup>150</sup> 1939 Census’ data available at [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_39.php](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_39.php).

<sup>151</sup> 1959 Census’ data available at [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_59.php](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_59.php).

<sup>152</sup> 1970 Census’ data available at [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_70.php](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_70.php).



More in detail, statistics from the same censuses show that in Tiflis, Armenians were 34.1% (100,148) of the population in 1926, 26.4% (137,331) in 1939, 21.5% (149,258) in 1959, 16.9% (150,205) in 1970, and 14.5% (152,767) in 1979<sup>155</sup>. There is a decrease in the percentage of Armenians out of the total, but the number of ethnic Armenian inhabitants of Tiflis actually increased from 100,148 of 1926 to 152,767 of 1989<sup>156</sup>.

Among the most notable ethnic Armenians active in Tiflis and Georgia during Soviet times are worth mentioning: the politicians Step'an Shahumyan (1878-1918), Simon "Kamo" Ter-Petrosyan (1882-1922) and Arkady Ter-T'adevosyan (1939), the chess masters Henrikh Kasparian (1910-1995) and Tigran Petrosyan (1929-1984), the artist Yervand "K'ochar" K'ocharyan (1899-1979), the film directors Sergey Parajanov (1924-1990) and Ruben Mamulyan (1897-1987), the musicians Aram Khach'atryan (1903-1978) and Aleksandr Melik-Pashayev (1905-1964), and the scientists Viktor Hambardzumyan (1908-1996) and Evgeny Abramyan (1930-2014).

### **I.5. The situation of Armenians in the post-1991 independent Republic of Georgia**

On 9 April 1991, in agreement with the results of a referendum held on 31 March 1991, Georgia was among the first Soviet Republics to declare its independence from the Soviet Union before its collapse<sup>157</sup>. The situation in the Soviet Union and in particular in the Caucasus region had been turbulent since the end of the 1980s. The most famous case is that of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and the war that followed between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan. Within Georgia as well, many uprisings took place in response to the Georgian nationalist movement, especially in the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast and in the region of Abkhazia.<sup>158</sup> Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1939-1993)<sup>159</sup>, as chairman of the Georgian Supreme Council<sup>160</sup> since October 1990's elections, had already expressed publicly his ethnocentric policies

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<sup>153</sup> 1979 Census' data available at [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_79.php](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_79.php).

<sup>154</sup> 1989 Census' data available at [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_89.php](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_89.php).

<sup>155</sup> Cf. H. Ayvazyan, entry «*Vrastan*», in *op. cit., supra*, p. 545

<sup>156</sup> Census' data available at <http://www.ethno-kavkaz.narod.ru/rngeorgia.html>; cf. Susan P. Pattie, "Armenians in Diaspora", in *The Armenians. Past and present in the making of national identity*. Ed. By Edmund Herzig and Marina Kurkichyan. RoutledgeCurzon imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, New York, NY, 2005, p. 138.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. *sak'art'velos mt'avroba* (= Government of Georgia); for the results of the referendum, see Government of Georgia, *History*, Government of Georgia Publications, 2014, available at [www.gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=ENG&sec\\_id=193](http://www.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=193).

<sup>158</sup> Cf. R. S. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Second ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 323–325.

<sup>159</sup> See entry «Zviad Gamsakhurdia» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Zviad-Gamsakhurdia>.

and a rhetoric that largely disenfranchised ethnic minorities<sup>161</sup>. Shortly after the declaration of independence, on 26 May 1991, Gamsakhurdia was elected as the first president of newly-independent Georgia and not only he held almost unlimited powers in his hands, but in February 1991 he created, with the support of the Georgian Supreme Council, a centralised system of politically powerful prefects and, after this move, opposition to the Gamsakhurdia presidency increased, leading to active, and often violent, demonstrations<sup>162</sup>. Furthermore, Gamsakhurdia promoted, to a chauvinistic degree, Georgian ethno-nationalism under the motto “Georgia for Georgians”<sup>163</sup>.

By trying to rebuild the Georgian nation under their language and the Georgian Orthodox faith, Gamsakhurdia alienated many of the other ethnic groups, mainly Azeris, Armenians and Ossetians, which he considered as threats to the Georgian identity, hence generating serious inter-ethnic conflicts as well as a civil war among Georgians<sup>164</sup>. The *oblast* of South Ossetia declared independence in September 1990, and ethnic clashes continued also in Abkhazia, where many Armenians, which, according to the Soviet census of 1989 made up 14.6% of the population (76,541) of the region<sup>165</sup>, sided with the separatists against the repression of the Georgian government<sup>166</sup>. Because of the leading role of Armenians in the Abkhazian War, Gamsakhurdia perceived that a further and major risk of secession could come also from the Armenian minority of Samtskhe-Javakheti as they could seek reunification with the recently formed Republic of Armenia<sup>167</sup>. At the same time, the ethnic minorities present in Georgia, including the Armenian one, felt excluded and alienated by the ethnocentric Georgian rhetoric of Gamsakhurdia’s government. In this uncertain situation of ethnic strife, the Armenian organisation *United Javakhk’ Democratic*

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<sup>160</sup> Georg. *sak’art’velos respublikis uzenaesi sabch’o*.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. G. Sordia, *Institutions of Georgia for Governance on National Minorities: an Overview*, ECMI Working Paper Series #43, September 2009, p. 6, cf. US Helsinki Watch Committee, “Conflict in Georgia: Human Rights Violations by the Government of Zviad Gamsakhurdia”, vol. III, issue n. 16, Tbilisi, Dec. 27 1991, p. 7.

<sup>162</sup> Cf. S. Wolff, entry «Georgia: Abkhazia and South Ossetia», in *Encyclopedia Princetoniensis*, Princeton, The Trustees of Princeton University, available at [www.pesd.princeton.edu/?q=node%2F274](http://www.pesd.princeton.edu/?q=node%2F274).

<sup>163</sup> Georg. *sak’art’velo k’art’velebist’vis*, cf. G. Khutsishvili, “Intervention in Transcaucasus”, in *Perspective of the Institute for the Study of Conflict, Ideology and Policy*, vol. IV, no. 3, Boston, Princeton University, 1994, available at <http://www.bu.edu/iscip/vol4/Khutsishvili.html>.

<sup>164</sup> S. Scott, “Nationalist Leader in Soviet Georgia Turns Georgians Against Minorities”, *The Baltimore Sun*, 1991, available at [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1991-03-07/news/1991066043\\_1\\_zviadgamsakhurdia-georgian-soviet-georgia](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1991-03-07/news/1991066043_1_zviadgamsakhurdia-georgian-soviet-georgia).

<sup>165</sup> 1989 Soviet Census’ data available at <http://www.ethno-kavkaz.narod.ru/rnabkhazia.html>.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. N. Asatiani, O. Janelidze, *History of Georgia*. Tbilisi, Publishing House Petite, 2009, p. 441.

<sup>167</sup> T. K. Blauvelt, C. Berglund, “Armenians in the making of Modern Georgia”, in *op. cit.*, p. 78.

*Alliance*<sup>168</sup> took de facto control of Javakheti thanks to its militia *Parvents*<sup>169</sup>. The *Javakhk'* movement started in 1988, following an incident that happened in Akhalkalaki when Georgian troops entered the town for military exercises without having forewarned the local population, which, consequently, felt threatened<sup>170</sup>. The *Javakh'* organisation pushed for self-determination of the Javakheti region within Georgia not only through pacific confrontation with the government, but also through direct challenges, such as the organisation of local elections that allowed the region to remain *de facto* semi-independent until November 1991, when the 'Provisional Council of Representatives' created by the *Javakh* organisation, finally agreed on the officials nominated by the central government<sup>171</sup>. The anti-government uprisings continued throughout the whole year 1991 until December 22<sup>nd</sup> when a military *coup d'état* removed Gamsakhurdia from power and he and his government eventually fled the country on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1992<sup>172</sup>. In 1992, in Tbilisi, an associations named *Kanch'* (= "Call") was founded with the purpose of helping preserve their Armenian identity<sup>173</sup>. Shortly afterwards, the "Union of Georgian Armenians"<sup>174</sup> helped keeping the Armenian community together during the Georgian Civil War, at the same time trying to address also the "Armenian issue" that was developed in that period by the Georgian government<sup>175</sup>. In the same years, the Georgian government lost control over the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which successfully seceded<sup>176</sup>.

After the fall of Gamsakhurdia, Eduard Shevardnadze (1928-2014) became the new leader of the country, first as Chairman of the Parliament (1992-1995) and later as

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<sup>168</sup> Cf. *Miats'yal Javakhk' zhoghovrdavarakan dashink'*, cf. S. E. Cornell, "Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Case in Georgia", in *Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Report No. 61*. Uppsala, Uppsala Universitet, 2002, p. 143; cf. J. Wheatley Jonathan, "Managing Ethnic Diversity in Georgia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back" in *Central Asian Survey* 28(2), Abingdon-on-Thames, Routledge, June 2009, p. 123.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. H. Lohm, *Dukhobors in Georgia: A Study of the Issue of Land Ownership and Inter-Ethnic Relations in Ninotsminda rayon (Samtskhe-Javakheti)*, ECMI Working Paper #35, 2006 p.11; cf. T. K. Blauvelt, C. Berglund, "Armenians in the making of Modern Georgia", in *op. cit.*, p. 10, *supra*.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. S. E. Cornell, *Autonomy and conflict: ethno-territoriality and separatism in the South Caucasus : cases in Georgia*, *op. cit.* p. 167, *supra*.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. S. E. Cornell, *op. cit.*, p. 164: «The area remained effectively outside the control of Tbilisi for virtually the entire tenure of Gamsakhurdia».

<sup>172</sup> Cf. N. Asatiani, O. Janelidze, *History of Georgia*, *op. cit.*, p. 432, *supra*.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. S. Mkrtchyan, in *op. cit.*, p. 302, *supra*.

<sup>174</sup> Arm. *Vrastani hayeri miut'yun*.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. S. Mkrtchyan, in *op. cit.*, *ibid.*, p. 302, *supra*.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. S. M. Chervonnaia, *Conflict in the Caucasus: Georgia, Abkhazia and the Russian Shado*, Glastonbury, Gothic Image Publications, 1994, p. 50; D. Sammut, N. Cvetkovski, "The Georgian – South Ossetian Conflict", in *Confidence Building Matters*, no. 6, London, VERTIC, March 1996, p. 8, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20090430213436/http://www.caucasus.dk/chapter4.htm>.

elected President of Georgia (1995-2003)<sup>177</sup>. The country was in a continuous situation of tension and instability until 1995 when some order was re-established, but some major unresolved problems and weaknesses still affected the nation. The government's authority was mostly limited to Tbilisi and its official institutions did not hold a strong centralised power. For this reason, Shevardnadze did not continue his predecessor's ethno-nationalist policies, in order not to undermine the precarious situation with the country's minorities, and he followed what Laurence Broers defined "politics of omission"<sup>178</sup>, showing little interest in integrating ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, Shevardnadze granted citizenship to all residents independently of their ethnicity and tried to mitigate the effects of the previous government's ethnocentric propaganda by promoting civic nationalism, but at the same time he neglected the active role that minorities could have in the nation's political life<sup>179</sup>. If it is true that Armenians of Javakheti, due to the language barrier, did not participate in the political life at a national level, conversely, almost all the top administrative positions of the region were held by ethnic Armenians<sup>180</sup>.

Differently, Armenians of Tbilisi felt insecure for being members of an ethnic minority in the city in which the major Georgian nationalist propaganda was happening and, at the same time, they feared retaliation due to the fact that the numerous Armenians of Abkhazia had supported the separatist army during the war<sup>181</sup>. Furthermore, many Armenians of the capital changed their surnames in order to make them sound "more Georgian"<sup>182</sup>. Under Shevardnadze's government, the region of Javakheti and its development were overlooked, and the economic stagnation, together with the memory of Gamsakhurdia's anti-minority policies, led many Javakheti Armenians to emigrate abroad, especially to neighbouring Russia and Armenia, but also to Europe and America<sup>183</sup>.

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<sup>177</sup> See entry «Eduard Shevardnadze» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Eduard-Shevardnadze>.

<sup>178</sup> L. Broers, *Containing the Nation, Building the State: Coping with Nationalism, Minorities and Conflict in Post-Soviet Georgia* (PhD Dissertation), London, University of London (SOAS), 2004, p. 211

<sup>179</sup> Cf. T. K. Blauvelt, C. Berglund, "Armenians in the making of Modern Georgia", in *op. cit.*, p. 78, *supra*.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. J. Wheatley, "Managing Ethnic Diversity in Georgia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back" in *op. cit.*, p. 126, *supra*.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> J. Hin, *Ethnic and Civic Identity: Incompatible Loyalties? The Case of Armenians in Post-Soviet Georgia* (PhD Dissertation), Amsterdam, Nederlandse Geografische Studies (= Netherlands Geographical Studies), 2003, p. 56.

## I.6. Ethnic Armenians following the Rose Revolution (2003)

In November 2003, mostly due to the worsening of the economic situation (rising unemployment, poverty, salaries not being paid), people started to openly show their dissatisfaction about the high levels of corruption in the government by protesting in the streets demanding for Shevardnadze's resignations<sup>184</sup>. Eventually Shevardnadze stepped down and at the early elections of January 2004, Mikheil Saakashvili, leader of the United National Movement (UNM)<sup>185</sup> was elected president<sup>186</sup>. Saakashvili had promised to reform the Georgian government in order to improve not only the economic and political situation, but also to promote social integration through policies aimed at better integrating the ethnic minorities of Georgia<sup>187</sup>.

The strategy of Saakashvili to foster ethnic integration consisted of both emblematic acts, such as phrasing a new national motto 'Strength is in Unity'<sup>188</sup>, along with new policies and legislations. In 2005, Georgia ratified to the Council of Europe's FCNM, which was implemented domestically through a "National Concept and Action Plan for Tolerance and Civic Integration" that was to be enforced by the newly created State Ministry for Reintegration Issues, Civil Integration and Tolerance Council, and Council for National Minorities<sup>189</sup>. The government passed stricter laws to prevent and punish discrimination<sup>190</sup>. In 2005, the Law on General Education endorsed the right of minorities to be taught in their native languages and further efforts were made to translate textbooks, equalise the curricula and improve the teaching of Georgian as a second-language<sup>191</sup>. Simultaneously, Saakashvili used the mass-media to address directly the ethnic minorities living in the country and sponsored cultural organisations and NGOs dealing with the ethnic minorities, as well as making some concessions to

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<sup>184</sup> Cf. J. Wheatley, *Georgia From National Awakening to Rose Revolution*. Burlington (VT), Ashgate, 2005, p. 85.

<sup>185</sup> Often referred to by its Georgian acronym ENM (*ert'iani natsionaluri modzraoba*).

<sup>186</sup> Cf. J. Wheatley, *Georgia From National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 155, *ibid*.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. H. Lohm, *Javakheti after the Rose Revolution: Progress and Regress in the pursuit of National Unity in Georgia*, ECMI Working Paper Series #38, April 2007, p. 19.

<sup>188</sup> *Georg. dzala ert'obashia*.

<sup>189</sup> C. Berglund, "Forward to David the Builder!" Georgia's (re)turn to language-centered nationalism, in *Nationalities Papers*, 44(4), New York, Columbia University, 2006, p. 530.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. H. Lohm, *Javakheti after the Rose Revolution: Progress and Regress in the pursuit of National Unity in Georgia*, *op. cit.*, p. 31, *ibid*.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. S. Mekhuzla, A. Roche, "National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia", ECMI Working Paper #46, September 2009, p. 11.

the Armenian Apostolic Church<sup>192</sup>, a fact that caused great dissatisfaction among many clergymen and laypersons of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Many Armenians as well, however, were not completely satisfied by the new government's effort, especially due to the missed restitution of many churches, including five located in Tbilisi, to the Armenian Apostolic Church<sup>193</sup>.

In Samtskhe-Javakheti, Saakashvili's government, also thanks to American fundings, further developed the region's poor road system, started the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, which passes through Akhalkalaki, modernised border crossing points with Armenia, and improved the supply of gas and electricity to the most populous towns of the region<sup>194</sup>. If all these improvements unquestionably reduced the isolation of the region, at the same time, other policies displeased the local Armenians. Consequently to the closure, in 2007, of the base of the Russian army's 62<sup>nd</sup> Division at Akhalkalaki, together with the enforcement of laws requiring local officials to speak Georgian, not implemented during the previous administrations, many Javakheti Armenians perceived a threat of assimilation and protests took place in Akhalkalaki, culminated with the arrest, in July 2008, of Vahagn Chakhalyan, the leader of United Javakh Democratic Alliance<sup>195</sup>. Despite lower popular support at the 2008 elections, Mikheil Saakashvili was re-elected President of Georgia<sup>196</sup> and during his second term, he continued to implement the policies of his first mandate.

In 2013, Saakashvili was barred from running again for the presidency, and his party's candidate lost the elections to Giorgi Margvelashvili of the Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia (Georg. *k'art'uli otsneba – demokratiuli sak'art'velo*) Party<sup>197</sup>. During Margvelashvili's presidency there were virtually no steps forward were made in regards to the Armenian minority, on the contrary some of the policies of Saakashvili's

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<sup>192</sup> Cf. G. Nijaradze, "Religion und Politik in Georgien: Eine Umfrage unter der Stadtbevölkerung", in *Politischer Dialog Südkaukasus*, Tbilisi, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2008, p. 4.

<sup>193</sup> Cf. N. Hauer, B. Jardine, *Georgian Orthodox Church takes aim at Armenian churches "There is interest in erasing any evidence of Armenians in Tbilisi."*, EurasiaNet, 5 November 2018, available at <https://eurasianet.org/georgian-orthodox-church-takes-aim-at-armenian-churches>.

<sup>194</sup> J. Wheatley, *Obstacles impeding the Regional Integration of the Javakheti Region of Georgia*, ECMI Working Paper Series #22, September 2004, p. 7.

<sup>195</sup> "Chakhalyan's case: Jailed Armenian-Georgian activist in Georgia faces new charges", ArmeniaNow, 6 December 2005, available at [https://www.armenianow.com/social/human\\_rights/21606/armenianactivistchakhalyanfacesnewaccusations](https://www.armenianow.com/social/human_rights/21606/armenianactivistchakhalyanfacesnewaccusations).

<sup>196</sup> J. Kilner, "Saakashvili wins Georgian presidential election", Reuters 6 January 2008, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-election/saakashvili-wins-georgian-presidential-election-idUSL0539702720080106>

<sup>197</sup> "Margvelashvili Set for Outright Victory", OldCivil.ge, 28 October 2013, available at <https://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26626>.

time were abandoned, and the integration process slowed down, especially as far as the educational system is concerned.

As a consequence to the 2007 amendments to the Constitution<sup>198</sup> Georgia transitioned from presidential to parliamentary republic, and at the 2018 presidential elections the Georgian Dream's candidate Salomé Zourabichvili<sup>199</sup> was elected president<sup>200</sup>. Since then, President Zourabichvili, during her visit to Armenia, discussed with the Armenian Prime Minister about the bilateral issues such as the Armenian minority of Javakheti, but no specific policies addressing the problem have been announced<sup>201</sup>. Nevertheless, the President has made some controversial statements that were criticised by many Armenian NGOs present in Georgia. During her visit to Akhalkalaki, she urged local Armenians to learn Georgian and, while expressing her believe that a basic knowledge of the national language should be a requirement for Georgian citizenship, she also promised to take action to make the learning of the Georgian language more accessible and to improve integration<sup>202</sup>. On another occasion, Zourabichvili expressed her disagreement for the fact that official delegations from the Mountainous Republic of *Artsakh* (Nagorno-Karabakh) visited the two occupied regions of Georgia, namely South Ossetia and Abkhazia<sup>203</sup>. Similarly, during her meeting with the Armenian Patriarch (Arm. *kat'oghikos*) Karekin II, the President of Georgia told that the decision of the Armenian Apostolic Church to change the subordination of the Armenian churches of Abkhazia from the Georgian Eparchy to the Southern Russian Eparchy is a violation of Georgia's territorial integrity<sup>204</sup>. The Armenian Patriarch stated that it is only a temporary measure and that he recognizes the Armenian churches of Abkhazia as belonging to the Georgian Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church<sup>205</sup>.

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<sup>198</sup> “Key Points of Newly Adopted Constitution”, OldCivil.ge, 27 September 2017, available at <https://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30474>.

<sup>199</sup> Salomé Zourabichvili is the French transliteration of her name and, since she is a French national, it is the most commonly used version. The traditional English spelling is Salome Zurabishvili.

<sup>200</sup> “Georgia's First Woman President Sworn In Amid Opposition Protests”, 16 December 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-s-first-woman-president-sworn-into-office/29659171.html?lflags=mailer>.

<sup>201</sup> “Georgian President Zurabishvili discusses development of cooperation with Armenian Prime Minister”, 13 March 2019, available at <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2019/700>, “Georgian, Armenian Leaders Discuss Regional Cooperation”, Agenda.ge, 13 March 2019, available at <http://asbarez.com/178337/georgian-armenian-leaders-discuss-regional-cooperation/>

<sup>202</sup> “Salome Zourabichvili urged Armenians of Javakheti to learn Georgian”, ArmInfo.info, 15 April 2019, available at [https://arminfo.info/full\\_news.php?id=41239&lang=3](https://arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=41239&lang=3).

<sup>203</sup> “Georgian President in Armenia: “it is very sad that delegations from Nagorno-Karabakh visit the occupied regions of Georgia”, Agenda.ge, 14 March 2019, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2019/711>

<sup>204</sup> “Georgian president to Armenian patriarch: Armenian churches in Georgia's occupied Abkhazia region must not be subordinate to Russia”, Agenda.ge, 15 March 2019, available at <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2019/716>.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

Moreover President Zourabichvili advocated for the creation of a joint Armenian-Georgian team of archaeologists to identify the origin of the churches of Georgia claimed by both the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Georgian Orthodox Church<sup>206</sup>.

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<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*



## CHAPTER II

### ARMENIAN COMMUNITY OF CONTEMPORARY TBILISI

#### II.1. A brief overview of the current situation

In the years that followed the declaration of independence from the Soviet Union, mainly 1991-1995, the overall population of Georgia decreased, due to emigration abroad, and, especially in Tbilisi, the ethno-demography changed because many people, mostly ethnic-Georgians, settled from the countryside to the capital. According to official data, the population of Georgia decreased, mainly as a result of emigration. The number of ethnic-minority individuals was almost halved there was a 3% decrease among ethnic Georgians<sup>207</sup>. According to the data of the last census of 2014, in Georgia there are 168,100 Armenians (4.5% of the total population), and, in Tbilisi, 53,409, which is equal to 4.8% of the population of the capital<sup>208</sup>.

Although as many as 30 Nongovernmental Organisations focused on different aspects of Armenian identity were established in the Republic of Georgia and they have been active in organising various kinds of events and manifestations to promote the Armenian culture, they have not been particularly functional in carrying out their work<sup>209</sup>. One justification for the not-completely-developed effectiveness of the NGOs is certainly due to the lack of resources, in fact, they rely mostly on private donations and volunteering, and, only to a lesser extent, some of them are financed by the Armenian Diocese. Furthermore, according to Vardanyan, «Armenian NGOs often do not address correctly many of the existing issues and lack the required organisational capacities to access the public funds that are available for non-governmental organisations»<sup>210</sup>.

In modern days, Armenians of Tbilisi show lower levels of interest and engagement as part of the Armenian community of Tbilisi, which is therefore no longer organised and

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<sup>207</sup> Cf. S. Minasyan, *Vrastani ēt'nikakan pok'ramasnut'yunnerē. Hamarkman neruzhē hay bnakch'ut'yan ōrinakov* (= The ethnic minorities of Georgia. The number potential through the example of the Armenian population), Yerevan, CMI, 2006, pp. 11, 14.

<sup>208</sup> See data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat), p. 8, available at [http://geostat.ge/cms/site\\_images/\\_files/english/population/Census\\_release\\_ENG\\_2016.pdf](http://geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/english/population/Census_release_ENG_2016.pdf).

<sup>209</sup> Cf. T. Vardanyan, “*T'iflisii hay hamaynk'ē. nor martahraverner, hin khndirner*” (= The Armenian community of Tiflis: new challenges, old problems), in *21rd Dar teghekatvakan-verlucakan handes* (= 21st Century Information and Analytical Magazine), No 4, Yerevan, Noravank' Publishing House, 2006, p. 100.

<sup>210</sup> Cf. T. Vardanyan, *op. cit.*, p. 102, *supra*.

structured as it used to be in the past, not even by institutions such as the Armenian Apostolic Church, NGOs, or cultural organisations<sup>211</sup>. Many cultural and educational Armenian associations are still present in the city, but there is no major institution to which the community can refer and, for this reason, there is no internal cohesion among the members<sup>212</sup>. Besides schools, the main centres of aggregation for the members of the Armenian community remain the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the ‘Petros Adamian’ Tbilisi State Armenian Drama Theatre<sup>213</sup>, but, according to Mkrtychyan, «about 0.5% of the Armenians living in Tbilisi regularly take part in communal structures»<sup>214</sup>.

## II.2. The role of the Armenian Apostolic Church

Throughout the centuries, the Armenian Apostolic Church played a significant and very specific role in preserving the Armenian identity and working as a unifying element for the diaspora Armenians<sup>215</sup>, and this is true also for the Armenian Diocese of Tbilisi, which was existed, without interruption, since its creation in the 1170s<sup>216</sup>. During Soviet times, 9 of the 26 Armenian churches of Tbilisi were destroyed, in 1994 also the church of *Surb Gevorg Dzorabash* (= Saint George on the Peak of the Gorge) was demolished<sup>217</sup>, and, at this moment, only two of the remaining 16 Armenian churches are still functioning as Armenian Apostolic: *Surb Gevorg* (Saint George) and *Surb Ējmiatsin* (Saint Descent of the only-begotten)<sup>218</sup>. Both these churches are important places where Tbilisi-Armenians can gather and interact not only for the religious service, but also for cultural events during which they can interact in their native language discuss on “Armenian matters” and keep alive the Armenian culture. Beyond the daily liturgies, the Armenian diocese, thanks to donations coming mostly

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<sup>211</sup> Cf. S. Mkrtychyan, *op. cit.*, p. 302, *supra*.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. T. Vardanyan, *op. cit.*, p. 98, *supra*.

<sup>213</sup> Arm. *Petros Adamyani anvan haykakan petakan t’atron*, Georg. *petros adamianis sakhelobis t’bilisis sakhemts’ip’o somkhuri dramatuli t’eatri*, former official website available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20160202110548/http://www.tbilarmtheatre.ge/>.

<sup>214</sup> Cf. S. Mkrtychyan, *op. cit.*, p. 302, *supra*.

<sup>215</sup> Arm. *Sp’yurk’ahayer* are individuals of ethnic Armenian origin who live outside of the Republic of Armenia, cf. E. Herzig, “The Armenians: Past And Present In The Making Of National Identity”, in *op. cit.*, 2004, p. 126, *supra*.

<sup>216</sup> Cf. *supra* note 76, p. 26.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. S. Karapetyan, *The State Policy of Georgia and the Monuments of Armenian Culture (1988-1998)*, Yerevan, Foundation for the Study of Armenian Architecture, 1998, available at [http://raa.am/BOOK\\_2/book\\_2\\_E\\_FrSet.htm](http://raa.am/BOOK_2/book_2_E_FrSet.htm).

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

from Russian-Armenians, in the last years, started offering also cultural-educational meetings that bring the dying Armenian community of Tbilisi further together. From 2006 to 2009, the Diocese also printed a monthly newsletter named “*Norashen*” (= Newly built), which allowed them to reach out to more people as well as to raise awareness on the issues of Tbilisi’s Armenian heritage to the international public<sup>219</sup>.

### II.3. The Petros Adamyan Tbilisi State Armenian Drama Theatre

The Petros Adamyan Tbilisi State Armenian Drama Theatre, that Tbilisi-Armenians often still refer to by its previous name “Stepan Shahumyan Armenian State Theater”<sup>220</sup>, was established in 1856<sup>221</sup>, and is currently the oldest and only state-funded professional Armenian theatre still existing outside of the Republic of Armenia<sup>222</sup>. The state fundings, although not constant, come from both the Armenian Government as well as, since Saakashvili’s first presidential mandate, from the Georgian Ministry of Culture<sup>223</sup>. One article, published in *Norashen*, well describes what the theatre represents for the Armenian community: «For *Virahayer* (= Georgian Armenians) the Petros Adamyan Tbilisi State Armenian Drama theatre is like a piece of Armenia with its performances and other events intended to preserve Armenianness»<sup>224</sup>. In September 2013 opened its doors also the “Gari Davtyan Puppet Cultural Theatre and House-Museum” (Arm. “*Gari Davt’yan tıknıkayın mshakuyt’i tun-t’angaran*”), another institution that organises different types of shows and performances in Armenian language<sup>225</sup>.

### II.4. The importance of the Armenian Schools of Tbilisi

In the multiethnic Georgian capital, Armenian-language schools have played, along with their educational purposes, an important role in preserving and passing on the

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<sup>219</sup> Organisation for the support of the Armenian Diocese in Georgia “*Kanter*”.

<sup>220</sup> Arm. *Step’an Shahumyanı anvan haykakan petakan t’atron*, see <http://dlnm.info/ru/segodnyashniyden-tbilisskogo-armyanskogo-dramteatra-v-ozhidanii-dnya-zavtrashnego/>.

<sup>221</sup> Cf. M. Gogolashvili, entry «*petros adamianis t’eatri*», in *k’art’uli sabch’ot’a entsiklopedia* (= Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia), Tbilisi, Georgian Academy of Sciences, 1979, v. IV, pp. 614-615.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. <http://sakartvelotour.com/teatr>.

<sup>223</sup> Cf. S. Mkrtchyan, *op. cit.*, p. 303 *supra*.

<sup>224</sup> Cf. A. Manukyan, “*150-amyā hobelyari p’aravor tarinerē*” (= The glorious years of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary), in *Norashen*, No 2, Yerevan, 2006, p. 26.

<sup>225</sup> Cf. *Septemeri 3-in krkin «Bats’ dṛneri ḡr ēr» Gari Davt’yan tıknıkayın tanē* (= On September 3<sup>rd</sup> was again "Open Doors Day" again at the Gary Davtyan Puppet House), available at <https://www.nt.am/am/news/185971/>.

Armenian culture and identity to the younger generations of Tbilisi Armenians<sup>226</sup>. In fact, subjects such as Armenian history and literature are usually taught in Armenian schools, although they are not a part of the official national school curriculum. The schools try also to organise extracurricular events for children, their families and staff members to get together. Compared to the 40 Armenian schools operating in the 1950s<sup>227</sup>, nowadays, there are 8 Armenian and Armenian-Russian mixed public schools functioning in Tbilisi, but the overall level of attendance is not very elevated: N.5 and N.104 Armenian schools have, respectively, 100 and 160 students, while the remaining schools are attended by fewer pupils<sup>228</sup>. According to the Ambassador of Armenia to Georgia in 2006, Hrach Silvanyan: «*Only one ethnic Armenian out of every 40 attends an Armenian school in Tbilisi*<sup>229</sup>». Starting from the 1990s, in order to improve the Armenian literacy rates among young *T'iflisahayer* (= Tbilisi Armenians), the Armenian-Diocese started to run some part-time schools, such as the<sup>230</sup> also the 'Surb Grigor Narekats'i Shabat'orya Dprots' (= Saint Gregory of Narek Saturday School)', the 'Hayartun (*Hay arvesti tun* = House of the Armenian art) Educational and Cultural Center' (personally supported also by President Saakashvili), 'Mesrop Mashtots' Kirakornya Dprots' (= Mesrop Mashtots Sunday School)', 'Surb Grigor Lusavorich' Nakhakrt'arani (= Saint Gregory the Illuminator Preschool)', 'Surb Movses Khorenats'i Nakhakrt'arani (= Saint Moses of Khoren Preschool)' and especially the 'Surb Eghya Margarem Kirakornya Dprots' (= Saint Elijah Sunday school)', which in 2005 was attended by 80 students<sup>231</sup>. Furthermore, since 2006, the Armenian Cooperation Centre in Georgia (ACCG), an Armenian NGO of Tbilisi, also started offering Armenian language courses<sup>232</sup>.

<sup>226</sup> Cf. S. Mkrtychyan, in *op. cit.*, pp. 303-304, *supra*.

<sup>227</sup> Cf. A. Ayvazyan, *Hayots' ekeghets'in XVIII dari hay azatagrakan sharzhman k'arughinerum* (= The Armenian Church at the Crossroads of the Armenian Liberation Movement in the 18th century), Yerevan, Lusakn, 2003, p. 546.

<sup>228</sup> Cf. Mkrtychyan S., in *op. cit.*, p. 304, *supra*.

<sup>229</sup> Cf. A. Harutyunyan, "Hrach Silvanyan: *Vrastanum divanagitut'yann avelanum ē baridrats'yut'yan ew harazatut'yan gortsonē*" (= Hrach Silvanyan: the diplomacy in Georgia is, as well, a matter of harmonisation and fraternisation), in *Azg Ōrat'ert'* (= People's Journal) n. 104, 2006, available at <https://www.azg.am/imagesshow.php?lang=AM&type=&id=2006060707&n=0>.

<sup>230</sup> Cf. <https://armenianchurch.ge/hy/tem/krtutyam>

<sup>231</sup> Cf. S. Mkrtychyan, in *op. cit.*, p. 304, *supra*.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

## II.5. Media situation among Tbilisi Armenians

Although the majority of Tbilisi Armenians has a good knowledge of the Georgian language, their main sources of information and news remain the Armenian-language local weekly newspapers *Vrastan* (= Georgia), *Arevik* (= Little Sun), *Vank'* (= Monastery), and *Nor Serund* (= New generation), in addition to the main newspapers issued in the Republic of Armenia, and other Russian-language newspapers such as *Svobodnaya Gruzija* (= Free Georgia)<sup>233</sup>. As far as television is concerned, the members of the Armenian-speaking community of Tbilisi who can afford satellite TV usually watch Republic of Armenia's channels such as "*Shant*" (= Thunderbolt) or Russian state television channels such as "*Pervyi Kanal*" (= First Channel) or "*Rossiya-1*" (= Russia-1). Moreover, daily at 21.00, the main news program "*Moambe*" of the main Georgian television channel "*Pirveli Arkhi*" (= First Channel), thanks to the cooperation with the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) and the US Embassy, is broadcasted in Georgian with simultaneous Armenian and Azerbaijani language translations<sup>234</sup>. The programme concern world and national news and does not specifically address news related to Armenia<sup>235</sup>. On the radio station 102.5 FM it is also available a five-minute news bulletin in Armenian language<sup>236</sup>, however, most people still read the news in the internet, thanks to website such as "[www.armenian-community.ge](http://www.armenian-community.ge)"<sup>237</sup> or online newspapers like "*Aliq Media*"<sup>238</sup> (= Channel Media), and "*J-News*" (= Javakheti News)<sup>239</sup>, both available also in Georgian and Russian, and international "*JAMnews*"<sup>240</sup>, available in English, Russian, Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian languages.

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<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> See T. Kuch'ukhidze, "*moambe 21.0 saat'ze azerbaijanul da somkhur enebze sink'ronulad it'argmaneba*" (=At 21.00 "*moambe*" will be synchronously translated in Azerbaijani and Armenian), 1TV.ge, 28 September 2018, available at <https://1tv.ge/news/moambe-2100-saatze-azerbaijanul-da-somkhur-enebze-sinqronulad-itargmneba/>.

<sup>235</sup> Cf. T. Vardanyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-116, *supra*; D. Ter-Baghdasaryan, "*Hayin haykakanin motets 'nelu arak'elut'yamb*" (= With the mission of bringing Armenians closer to Armenianness), in *Norashen*, n. 1, 2007, p. 13.

<sup>236</sup> Cf. S. Mkrtchyan, in *op. cit.*, p. 304, *supra*.

<sup>237</sup> Official website available at <http://armenian-community.ge/>.

<sup>238</sup> Arm. *Alik' Media*, official website available at <https://www.aliq.ge/>.

<sup>239</sup> Official website available at <http://jnews.ge/am/>.

<sup>240</sup> Official website available at <https://jam-news.net/>.

## II.6. Current Issues and Challenges of Tbilisi Armenians

The main problem, faced by the ethnic Armenians of Tbilisi, is the disunity of the organisations present in the city, which do not communicate with each other at a sufficient degree in order to create a cohesive communal life and a feeling of inclusiveness for all the members of the community. On the contrary, the community is divided, within itself, into smaller groups that often do not have a dialogue with each other. Differently from other Diaspora communities, many Armenians of Tbilisi do not hold the Armenian motherland in high consideration, and their ties to Armenia are limited, almost exclusively, to the private sphere (i.e. relationships with family members who still live there), rather than a willingness to participate more actively in the Armenian Diaspora network. This attitude is due, probably, to the geographical proximity of Armenians of Tbilisi to Armenia, which makes them underestimate the importance of keeping alive the relation between *T'iflisahayer* and *Hayastants'iner* (= Armenians of Armenia). Nevertheless, although the high degree of integration, achieved by the Armenians of Tbilisi, into their Georgian homeland and Georgian culture is certainly a very positive aspect that has to be praised and encouraged, it is also sad and shameful the lack of active consideration that many members of the community show toward the Armenian heritage of Tbilisi and its preservation. After the majority of the Armenian *intelligentsia* of Tbilisi left the city in the post-Soviet period, those who remained did not match the sense of nostalgia they feel for the important role played by Armenians in XIX-century Tiflis with an active effort in preserving the traces of that time. For instance, the sale of a portion of Hovhannēs T'umanean's house to private owners was widely discussed but no measures were taken to prevent it from happening<sup>241</sup>. In Tbilisi, as an increasing number of ethnic Armenians become more and more “georgianised”, the survival of Armenian schools in the city becomes uncertain as the funding they receive depends on the numbers of student who attend and their number is decreasing due to the difficulties that having attended an Armenian-language school creates to access Georgian universities<sup>242</sup>. Another issue, concerning the Armenian Diocese, is represented by the request they sent to the Georgian government asking for the restitution of 5 Armenian churches located in Tbilisi, some of which are

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<sup>241</sup> Cf. D. Harutyunyan, “*T'umanyani tunē vacharvel ē 1997-in*” (= T'umanyan's house was sold in 1997), in *Azg orat'ert'* n. 24., p. 14; cf. <https://www.aliq.ge/ge/ovanes-thumanianis-sakhli/>.

<sup>242</sup> Cf. S. Mkrtychyan, in *op. cit.*, p. 306, *supra*.

in decaying due to time and neglect<sup>243</sup>. Some Armenian NGOs based in Tbilisi also protested the presence of “anti-Armenian statements” and armenophobic attitude in some mass-media<sup>244</sup>. All these problems have been ongoing for decades but a solution has yet to be found and, certainly, the approach of many Tbilisi Armenians of waiting and advocating for the Republic of Armenia to intervene in this matters is not enough to overcome this *impasse*.

## II.7. Armenia in the perception of Tbilisi-Armenians

The perceptions and feelings of *T'iflisahayer* about their identity are very peculiar and must be distinguished from those of Javakheti Armenians. Armenians of Tbilisi have undergone a very unique and complex integration process that often left contradicting and conflictual ideas in them. There is no standard opinion regarding Armenia and Georgia, on the contrary, it is common to meet both Tbilisi Armenians who regard Armenia as their “real homeland” and Georgia simply a “second homeland” or simply the “home country” in which they happen to be born and live, as well as people who consider Georgia their homeland while Armenia represents, for them, more of a “historical homeland”<sup>245</sup>. The spectrum of the identity feelings about Armenia and Georgia is rather wide and intricate to analyse in depth. An important distinction that can be made about it is that the interpretations of the concept of “Armenia” often depends on the individuals, some of them use it to designate specifically the Republic of Armenia, while others intend it more broadly and abstractly as the embodiment of what can be considered “Armenian-ness”. Furthermore, many ethnic Armenians of Tbilisi, including younger generations, have grown up being more exposed to Russian culture and education rather than the to the Armenian or Georgian ones. In many households of ethnic Armenians, the most commonly spoken language is Russian and at Armenian gatherings it is incredibly common to hear Tbilisi Armenians speaking to each other in Russian, rather than in Armenian or in Georgia. For these reasons, many young people feel a sense of alienation and do not label themselves either as Armenian, either Georgian or Russian. Many of these young ethnic Armenians tend and prefer to

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<sup>243</sup> <https://eurasianet.org/georgian-orthodox-church-takes-aim-at-armenian-churches>.

<sup>244</sup> Cf. A. Bostanjyan, “*Koch' oghjakhohut'yan*” (= Call for common sense), in *Norashen, Virahayoc' t'emi hogevor, mshakut'ayin, Irtvakan handes*, No 5, 2006, p. 1.

<sup>245</sup> Cf. S. Mkrtchyan, in *op. cit.*, pp. 306-307, *supra*; J. Hakobyan, “The Armenian Question: keeping a home in Georgia and a heart in Armenia.”, in *AGBU Online Magazine*, 4 November 2004, available at <https://agbu.org/news-item/the-armenian-question-keeping-a-home-in-georgia-and-a-heart-in-armenia/>.

consider their place of origin the city of Tbilisi and are very proud to be “*T’iflisets’i*”/“*T’biliseli*” (= Tbilisian) without the need for a broader social identity. In general, a tendency that seems to be shared by many is a decreasing sense of pride deriving from the sole fact of being Armenians, due to both the absence of education about Armenian culture as well as the growing exposure of Georgia’s youth, independently from their ethnicity, to globalisation and, more in particular, to the European and American models and lifestyles.

## **II.8. “Armenian-ness” in the everyday life of Tbilisi Armenians**

If the preservation of a clear Armenian identity in city as multiethnic as Tbilisi has never been easy, modern times and the faster rhythm at which the traditional patterns of identity are changing made it more complicated to find common elements of “Armenian-ness”, around which the community can gather. The main occasion, for which Armenians, joined by a growing number of ethnic Georgians, get together is April 24, which marks the Memorial Day of the Armenian Genocide. Although Georgia, as a country, has not yet officially recognized the massacres of ethnic Armenians in Ottoman Turkey in 1915 as a genocide, every year many manifestations, usually in the form of marches, are held in Tbilisi near the Turkish embassy, but also in Kutaisi, Batumi and major Georgian cities, as well as in Javakheti<sup>246</sup>, to mark this day. In April 2015, the Armenian Diocese and other Armenian NGOs of Tbilisi presented an official petition to the Georgian parliament asking to formally discuss the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and to observe a minute of silence in memory of the victims<sup>247</sup>. The Genocide Memorial Day, however, is not a holiday peculiar only to Tbilisi, but rather a remembrance day shared by all the communities of the Armenian diaspora around the world. The second most important Armenian event, celebrated only in Tbilisi, is the the “Sayat-Nova Day” (Arm. *Vardaton* = “Holiday of Roses”) which does not have a fixed date but it is usually hold on the last Sunday of May<sup>248</sup>. On this occasion many ethnic Armenians gather at the church of *Surb Gevorg*, where the burial site of Sayat Nova is located and the cultural event involves a public reading

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<sup>246</sup> “Armenians of Javakhk March: Demand Genocide Recognition from Turkey”, Hetq.am, 23 April 2015, available at <https://hetq.am/en/article/59837>.

<sup>247</sup> See “Georgia Armenians demand country’s parliament to discuss Genocide issue”, News.am, 17 April 2015, available at <https://news.am/eng/news/262446.html>.

<sup>248</sup> Cf. G. L. Yepiskoposov, *Armeniya v myslyakh i serdtsakh*, (=Armenia in the thoughts and hearts), Publishing house of Moscow State University, 1993, p. 87.



of some of Sayat Nova's poems as well as traditional dances and music<sup>249</sup>. During the last two centuries, because of Sayat-Nova's multiculturalism, this event used to be an "unofficial holiday" for the whole city of Tiflis and it was attended by many different ethnic groups, on a larger scale, in the *Meidan Square*<sup>250</sup>. In the same square, however, in 2009, a monument, in the shape of a scroll with a Sayat Nova's poem carved in it, was erected and dedicated to the "friendship of Armenian and Georgian peoples"<sup>251</sup>. The most famous Armenian place in Tbilisi is, however, the *Avlabari* district, called *Havlabar* in Armenian<sup>252</sup>. Despite the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood no longer being predominantly Armenian and despite the urban changes of the Soviet times, the *Surb Ējmiatsin Church* and the *Khojivank'* Armenian Pantheon still stand there and, to this day, the name of the district is usually associated with the Armenian presence in Tbilisi in the memories of both ethnic Armenians and ethnic Georgians<sup>253</sup>.

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<sup>249</sup> "V Tbilisi v 100-ĭ raz proshel prazdnik Vardaton posvyashchennyĭ Sayat-Nove" (= For the 100th time, the Vardaton holiday dedicated to Sayat Nova was held in Tbilisi), PanArmenian.net, 26 May 2014, available at <http://www.panarmenian.net/rus/news/179261/>.

<sup>250</sup> Cf. G. L. Yepiskoposov, in *op. cit.*, *ibid.*

<sup>251</sup> *t'bilisshi saiat'novas memoriali gaikhsna* (= A Sayat-Nova Memorial has been inaugurated in Tbilisi), 1TV, 6 July 2009, <http://old.1tv.ge/ge/news/view/4995.html>

<sup>252</sup> Cf. entry «Avlabari» edited by O. Tqeshelashvili, in *k'art'uli sabch'ota entsiklopedia*, vol. I, Tbilisi, Georgian Academy of Sciences, 1975, pp. 128-129.

<sup>253</sup> Cf. A. Harutyunyan, *Contesting national identities in an ethnically homogeneous state*, Kalamazoo, Western Michigan University, 2009, p. 184.

## CHAPTER III

### ARMENIAN COMMUNITY OF CONTEMPORARY JAVAKHETI

#### III.1. Brief geographic and demographic overview

Samtskhe-Javakheti covers approximately 10.7% of the Georgian territory. The most problematic borders of this region (Georg. *mkhare*) are: the eastern one with the region of Kvemo-Kartli (= Lower Kartli), which is inhabited mostly by ethnic Azerbaijanis, but with some villages that are predominantly Armenian<sup>254</sup>; the southern Georgian national border with the Republics of Armenia and Turkey, and its western border with the Autonomous Republic of Adjara. The region's territory is made up mostly of highlands (often referred to as "Samtskhe-Javakheti Plateau") and it is delimited on most sides by mountainous ranges that cause the climate to be rigid with low temperatures during the long winters, and not particularly hot summers, with a rainy weather all year long: for this reason, the region is sometimes called "Georgia's Siberia"<sup>255</sup>. Natural resources abound in the region, especially basalt, perlite and marble, moreover, also it is located in Samtskhe-Javakheti also the resort-town of Borjomi, renowned for the production of naturally carbonated mineral water, which provides important sources of income for the region, thanks to the bottling of water and the thermal tourism. The region's abundance of natural resources has, however, not been fully exploited yet to develop any specific kind of industry and the main occupation of the local population is still agriculture, especially the cultivation of cereals and potatoes and livestock, in particular cattle and sheep. According to the 2014 census, the region has a total population of 160,504 but it is decreasing and surveys show that in 2018 the population amounts to 155,900. The region is made up by three historical provinces: Samtskhe, Javakheti and Tori, and, of its 6 municipalities (*rayons*): Adigeni, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe, Borjomi and Ninotsminda. The main towns are Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Borjomi, Vale, and Ninotsminda, 7 more are considered townlets, plus 254 villages, for a total of 353 settlements. The administrative centre is located in Akhaltsikhe, which is the most populated town in the region with 17,903 inhabitants, 34% of which are ethnic

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<sup>254</sup> Cf. J. Wheatley, *Obstacles impeding the Regional Integration of the Kvemo-Kartli Region of Georgia*, ECMI Working Paper Series #23, February 2005, p. 6.

<sup>255</sup> J. A. George, "The Dangers of Reform: State Building and National Minorities in Georgia", in *Central Asian Survey* 28 (2), Abingdon-on-Thames, Routledge, 2009, p. 143.

Armenian<sup>256</sup>. Armenians constitute the main ethnic group (54.6%)<sup>257</sup>, while other ethnicities comprise Georgians (43.35%), Greeks (0.36%) and others (1.7%), mostly Russians and Ossetians. Ethnic Armenians make up more than 90% of the population in the municipalities of Akhalkalaki (92,9%) and Ninotsminda (95%), which constitute the historical region of Javakheti. In the Akhalkalaki district 51 out of the 61 villages are ethnic Armenian, 7 are Georgian, 2 are mixed Armenian-Georgian and 1 is mixed Armenian, Georgian and Greek<sup>258</sup>. In Ninotsminda municipality 29 of the 31 villages are ethnic Armenian, 1 is mainly ethnic Georgian and 1 is mixed Armenian and Russian *Dukhobor* (Gorelovka)<sup>259</sup>. Also in the district of Tsalka, although it belongs to the Kvemo-Kartli administrative region, Armenians make up the majority of the population (54.98%)<sup>260</sup>. Although inhabited mainly by ethnic Armenians, only four villages' names are clearly derived from the Armenian language: Varevani and Vachiani in the Akhalkalaki district and Ormasheni in the Dmanisi district, and Burnasheti in the Tsalka district<sup>261</sup> and differently from Turkic toponyms in the region, no Armenian village was renamed with more Georgian-sounding designation<sup>262</sup>. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Armenians still refer to the town of Ninotsminda (Georgian for "saint Nino") by its former Soviet Russian name of Bogdanovka.

### III.2 Government policies towards Javakheti

Under Shevardnadze, there was no particular intervention of the Georgian government in regards to the people of Samtskhe-Javakheti. The teaching of the Georgian language was not promoted and this caused Russian to be the *lingua franca* within the region. The isolation and neglect of this region was due also to the lack of connecting roads and infrastructure and it was often the 62<sup>nd</sup> Divisional Russian Base, rather than the Georgian government, that provided goods and services to the local population. Consequently, the Russian ruble was the most widely used currency in the region. Nowadays both Georgian lari and Armenian drams circulate as currencies in Samtskhe-

<sup>256</sup> GeoStat, 2014 General Population Census, p. 5.

<sup>257</sup> Census data from Demoskop Weekly, 539-540, January-February 2013, available at: [http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_89.php?reg=6](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_89.php?reg=6).

<sup>258</sup> M. Diego Gordón, *Nomen est omen? Naming and Renaming of Places in Minority Inhabited Areas in Georgia*, ECMI Working Paper Series #10, December 2017, p. 8.

<sup>259</sup> GeoStat, 2014 General Population Census, p. 6.

<sup>260</sup> GeoStat, 2014 General Population Census, p. 7.

<sup>261</sup> M. Diego Gordón, 2017, *op. cit.*, p. 27, *supra*.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

Javakheti<sup>263</sup>. Although at the regional level the high-rank officials were ethnic Georgians appointed by Tbilisi, at the municipality level, especially in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, the key posts of district administrators (Georg. *gamgebeli*) were held by ethnic Armenians. Following the Rose Revolution of November 2003, the teaching of Georgian in schools improved thanks to new translated textbooks and better formation of the teachers. In 2005, the government of Saakashvili also started to implement the language-requirement laws for public posts that were never enforced during Shevardnadze's presidency<sup>264</sup>. Due to the enforcement of the language requirements and the general qualification testing, some ethnic Armenians who failed to prove enough mastery of Georgian were replaced by ethnic Georgians<sup>265</sup>. Subsequently, many Armenians of Javakheti developed additional sentiments of distrust and fear toward the new government interventions that destabilised their *status quo*<sup>266</sup>. More infrastructures and roads were also built, especially in remote villages inhabited predominantly by ethnic minorities. The 'Zurab Zhvania' School of Public Administration was founded with the purpose of preparing members of ethnic minorities to be hired in the public sector. Saakashvili also promoted the construction of Armenian public libraries and cultural activities such as youth camps, called "patriot camps" that were meant to bring closer children who came from different ethnic backgrounds<sup>267</sup>.

### III.3. Local actors

In areas inhabited predominantly by Armenians, so-called local actors have played a very important role since Gamsakhurdia's presidency. They consisted mostly of local families who had reached an influential and wealthy social status under the Soviet rule or seizing entrepreneurial opportunities from the dissolution of USSR and the opening to market economy<sup>268</sup>. Local actors were successfully able to acquire the major businesses of Javakheti, especially basalt cave-mining, and management of oil and gas

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<sup>263</sup> J. Wheatley, *The Integration of National Minorities in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli Provinces of Georgia. Five years into the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili*, ECMI Working Paper Series #44, September 2009, p. 11.

<sup>264</sup> J. Wheatley, *Implementing the framework convention for the protection of national minorities in Georgia: a feasibility study*. (ECMI Working Paper, 28), European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), 2006, p. 26, available at <https://nbnresolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-63072>.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> J. Wheatley, *The Integration of National Minorities in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli Provinces of Georgia. Five years into the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili*, *op. cit.*, p. 12, *supra*.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22

supplies<sup>269</sup>. These powerful families, often referred to as “clans”, not only owned the most lucrative economic activities, but they also occupied many leading public offices and often resorted to corruption to exercise their influence. Even during Saakashvili’s presidency, prominent figures such as Samvel Petrosyan, Enzel Mkoyan, Mels Bdoyan and Vahagn Chakhalyan made sure, as high-rank local officials, and thanks to the disinterest of Tbilisi central government to secure the allegiance of the Armenians of the region, the majority belonged to poor lower classes<sup>270</sup>. Due to the lack of knowledge of the Georgian language, ethnic Armenians paid little attention to national parliamentary elections and it was easy for regional political parties, namely *Virk’* (= Iberia, an old name to indicate Georgia), JEMM (Javakheti Youth Sport Union), United Javakh, founded by the most influential persons of Javakheti, to act as lobbies and to substitute the central government and use propaganda to install in the local population distrust for the Georgian government and this fact severely affected the efforts of Saakashvili for the implementation of his new inclusive policies<sup>271</sup>. There are, however, more than 100 NGOs in Javakheti, 20 of which are highly active in fostering integration projects<sup>272</sup>. The most famous one is probably Javakheti Citizens’ Forum (JCF) with often works along with the Ministry of Education and Science to solve education issues and endorse the teaching of the Georgian language.<sup>273</sup>

### III.4. Migration and Seasonal Labour

After the independence from USSR and under Gamsakhurdia’s presidency, many ethnic Armenians fled the region, for instance in the Akhaltsikhe municipality, the proportion of Armenians fell from 42.8% in 1989 to 36.6% in 2002<sup>274</sup>. A widespread phenomenon that occurs in Javakheti is seasonal migration for work. This tendency is very common among Armenians, and it regards in particular working-age males who emigrate, usually to Russia or Eastern European post-Soviet countries, during the spring and summer seasons to work as manual labourers, predominantly in the construction sector<sup>275</sup>. They are able to do so because they often hold dual citizenship Georgian and Armenian

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<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>273</sup> J. Wheatley, *The Integration of National Minorities in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli Provinces of Georgia. Five years into the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili*, *op. cit.*, p. 31, p. 12, *supra*.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

or Russian<sup>276</sup>. It is estimated that before the closure of the Russian base in Akhalkalaki, as many as many as 3,000 Javakheti Armenians may hold a Russian passport, and 1,500 ethnic Armenians from Javakheti received Armenian citizenship only in the first months of 2009<sup>277</sup>. Although emigration is common also among Georgians, their percentages are not as high as those of the Armenians, for this reason, an intervention of the Georgian government in providing more job opportunities in the region, would have drastically reduced this practice.

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<sup>276</sup> The Georgian Law does not allow dual citizenship, nevertheless, the majority of ethnic Armenians from Javakheti has, besides their Georgian citizenship, either Armenian either Russian second citizenship, cf. *ibid.* p. 40.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

## CHAPTER IV

### ARMENIAN AS A MINORITY LANGUAGE?

Language has been a very sensitive issue for Georgians since the awake of nationalist movements in the second half of the XIX century. Similarly, and unfortunately, language has been a key issue and a distinctive element also for Armenians. If this pride and attachment that both Armenians and Georgians share for their own language, throughout the past centuries, have helped these two peoples to preserve their ethnic identities from different foreign dominations, after Georgia's independence, the rising nationalist propaganda caused Armenians to feel threatened by the risk of assimilation. Even after Gamsakhurdia's government was exiled and this ethnocentric rhetoric diminished, mutual suspicion between ethnic Armenians and Georgians did not fade away. Although Georgia is, indeed an ancient nation with a long history, at the present time, the Republic of Georgia can be considered as a young nation that is still in the process of re-creating and affirming its national identity, balancing between the difficult legacy of its Soviet past and the new challenges of contemporaneity with the clear desire to join NATO and the EU but also the problems caused by the de facto loss of the two regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Georgian Parliament signed the FCNM of the CoE in 2005, but it has neither signed nor ratified ECRML yet. The missed ratification is likely due to the government's fear of a disapproval from public opinion amongst the majority Georgian-speaking population, a view also shared by many parliamentarians and government officials. Language is a highly politicised issue and Georgian is the only official language recognised by the Constitution<sup>278</sup>, with the only exception of Abkhazian language in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. Article 4 recognises the right for ethnic minorities to receive education in their native languages, but no legal status is given to them, hence including to Armenian, at any other administrative level. Because of the fragile situation concerning ethnic minorities and the negative experiences of the nation with the two separatist republics, the majority of Georgians does not appear very open to recognise that minority languages can be a resource of cultural richness the country. Currently, even in Javakheti, openly discussing the Armenian language status is stigmatised, since it is often seen from

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<sup>278</sup> Art. 4, Constitution of Georgia, as of 8 April 2005, available at <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/29248?publication=68>.

Tbilisi as a manifestation of separatism<sup>279</sup>. Although granting legal status to Armenian and other minority languages would not automatically solve the problem of civil integration, it would certainly be a helpful first step in promoting bilingualism rather than isolationism, and, at the administrative local level, it would greatly simplify, accelerate and improve bureaucratic processes, as well as it would decrease unemployment. The usage of Armenian in public offices is already a reality in the municipalities in which ethnic Armenians constitute the majority of the population, and its formal recognition would only legalise an already existing practice. From a “human point of view”, however, this operation is more difficult because many Georgian-Armenians perceive the new language policies as favouring the Georgian language and discriminating toward them<sup>280</sup>, but with the due carefulness on this matter, no major extra resources would be needed in order to implement linguistic policies for the official use of Armenian language locally. Both Armenian and Georgian sides should be ready to make some concessions for this process to be accomplished, but one actor should be willing to be the one to make the first step in this direction.

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<sup>279</sup> JAMnews, Armenian language in Georgia: ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ of the official language status, 23 February 2017, available at

<https://jam-news.net/armenian-language-in-georgia-pros-and-cons-of-the-official-language-status/>.

<sup>280</sup> “Georgia's Armenian and Azeri Minorities”, in *Crisis Group Europe Report N°178*, 22 November 2006, p. 22.



## CHAPTER V

### EDUCATION

#### V.1. Brief Overview

In Soviet times, due to the status of Russian as vehicular language in the whole USSR, most Armenians of Georgia, with the exception of those living in Tbilisi, usually did not learn Georgian, but rather Russian. Armenian remained the language spoken at home and its teaching was promoted, along that of other minority languages also in primary and secondary schools<sup>281</sup>. This situation is particularly true for the Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti, and this fact became an issue after Georgia's independence, since Georgian substituted Russian as the new language of communication for all the minorities living within the borders of the newly-formed Republic of Georgia. The low level of literacy, in addition to the underdeveloped infrastructures in the region, constituted a barrier to the civic integration of Armenians. Even though both infrastructure and Georgian-language education programmes have improved since independence, the situation is, to this day, still problematic. The 2005 Law of Georgia on General Education, indeed equalised public schools to independent legal bodies of public law, and the General Education Decentralization and Accreditation project (GEDA), financially subsidized by USAID, was created to inspect both the school buildings promotion as well as to control the educational activities<sup>282</sup>. There were no major changes in the Georgian education system after the collapse of USSR, and, nowadays, minority-language schools constitute still the majority in Samtskhe-Javakheti with the addition of Georgian language as part of the school curriculum being the main improvement. In 2005 the Law on General Education was ratified, establishing a standardized education system at the same time with decentralised school administrations<sup>283</sup>. Moreover, this reform also intended to improve the qualification of teachers, thanks to more trainings and testings. In 2010, a bilingual pilot programme was launched for minority-language schools, to this day, this programme is still ongoing

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<sup>281</sup> S. Mekhuzla and A. Roche, *'National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia'*, *op. cit.*, p. 5, *supra*.

<sup>282</sup> See Article 31.1 of the Law of Georgia on General Education (Georg. *sak'art'velos kanoni zogadi ganat'lebis shesakheb*), issued on 8 April 2005, published 4 May 2005, available at <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/29248?publication=68>.

<sup>283</sup> H. Lohm, *Javakheti after the Rose Revolution: Progress and Regress in the pursuit of National Unity in Georgia*, ECMI Working Paper Series #38, April 2007, p. 27.

and it undergoes improvements every year<sup>284</sup>. This reform made Georgian the official language of instruction in Georgian Language and Literature, History and Geography of Georgia and other social sciences also in minority monolingual schools<sup>285</sup>. Simultaneously, the MoES collaborated with the OSCE to translate Georgian textbooks into minority languages and thanks to UNDP's fundings new resources for the teaching of Georgian as a second language were translated.

## V.2. Preschool education

The article 27.2 of the Constitution of Georgia states that «pre-school education shall be guaranteed in accordance with the procedures established by law<sup>286</sup>». However, only elementary and basic education are mandatory and financed by the State, for this reason, in Samtskhe-Javakheti a major issue is the scarcity of infrastructure and the inadequacy and poor conditions of the buildings, especially in regard to the sanitary situation of the toilet and this does not encourage young pupils to attend the schools. The nursery schools are funded through the municipality's budget, and the majority of the funds are usually spent for different projects rather than for education<sup>287</sup>. According to 2014 data, in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region there is a total of 54 pre-schools, out of which 17 are minority-language schools<sup>288</sup>, and they are located mainly in urban areas<sup>289</sup>. The lack of day-care centres for pre-schooling in villages prevent children living in rural areas from attending and it often does not allow family members, especially mothers, to work in order for them to stay home and take care of their children<sup>290</sup>. These considerations worsen the already-existing tendency, among ethnic Armenians, not to send children to preschool education. Local surveys show, in fact that only 1,116 out of 4,322 ethnic-minority children in pre-school age are engaged in pre-

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<sup>284</sup> T. Wigglesworth-Baker, "A research Study into Multilingual Education in Georgia", HCNM OSCE, 2015, p. 4.

<sup>285</sup> B. Tsipuria, 'From State Language Education to Civic Integration', *Language Policies and Education in Multilingual Societies*, CIMERA Publications, Tbilisi, 2006, p. 19.

<sup>286</sup> See Article 27.2, Constitution of Georgia, as of 8 April 2005, available at <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/30346?publication=35>.

<sup>287</sup> European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), "Needs Assessment of Ethnic Minority Women in Georgia", commissioned report for UN Women, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 47

<sup>288</sup> SMR, "Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014", June 2014, p. 40

<sup>289</sup> ECMI, "Needs Assessment of Ethnic Minority Women in Georgia", *op.cit.*, p. 47, *ibid.*

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

school education<sup>291</sup>. In Georgia, overall, only 69.5% of children attend early-school education compared to 95% in the European Union<sup>292</sup>. This lack of attendance of pre-school education is an unresolved issue that can cause greater issues because of the disparity it creates for ethnic-minority children when they begin attending primary school<sup>293</sup>. After decades of disinterest about early education from the Georgian government, in 2014, some Georgian-Dream-Party lawmakers cooperated with UNICEF to write an “Early and Pre-school Education and Training Act” that should bring Georgian schools closer to European standards<sup>294</sup>. This bill aims at improving the quality of education and at including all minors thanks to better programmes that address mostly psychological and physical violence on kids by holding in higher consideration their personal backgrounds, including linguistic, religious and ethnic aspects<sup>295</sup>. The bill was approved by the Georgian parliament in October 2017 and it instituted an Preschool Interagency Coordination Council<sup>296</sup> as well as specific national standards for pre-school education (to prepare children to enter primary education) by improving accessibility and quality, and setting technical regulations for teachers’ qualifications, nutrition and hygiene<sup>297</sup>. UNICEF assured its intention of continuing working closely with Georgia on a local level to guarantee that schools will enact the new national guidelines<sup>298</sup>. The program, however, did not go into effect in language-minority school yet, because of the time needed to translate the new law and its relative methodological guide-books into Armenian<sup>299</sup>.

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<sup>291</sup> SMR, “Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014”, op. cit., pp. 39-40.

<sup>292</sup> UNICEF Georgia, *skolamdeli ganatleba* (= School Education), available at <https://www.unicef.org/georgia/ka/skolamdeli-ganatleba>.

<sup>293</sup> Cf. S. Veloy Mateu, *The Armenian minority in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia: civic integration and its barriers*, Policy Paper, 2016, p. 14

<sup>294</sup> UNESCO, “Education for All 2015 National Review: Georgia”, 2015, p. 1.

<sup>295</sup> Agenda.ge, “Early and pre-school education will see major changes”, 5 January 2016, available at <http://agenda.ge/news/49822/eng>.

<sup>296</sup> Georg. *skolamdeli ganat'leba uts'qebat'ashoris sakoordinatsio sabch'o*.

<sup>297</sup> See S. Veloy Mateu, *The Armenian minority in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia: civic integration and its barriers*, op. cit., p. 37; cf. UNICEF, *adreuli skolamde aghzrdis da ganat'lebis standartebi* (= Early schooling and education standards), available at <https://www.unicef.org/georgia/ka/angarisheba/adreuli-skolamde-aghzrdis-da-ganatlebis-standartebi>.

<sup>298</sup> See <https://www.unicef.org/georgia/ka/skolamdeli-ganatleba>, cit., supra.

<sup>299</sup> SMR, “Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014”, op. cit., p. 42.

### V.3. General education

The Law of Georgia on General Education clearly states that the language of communication in all educational institutions of Georgia is Georgian<sup>300</sup>. Nevertheless, The same Law, grants to ethnic minorities the right to receive general primary and secondary education in their mother tongue<sup>301</sup>. According to data from 2008, non-Georgian language public schools are attended by 8.79% of the total number of students in Georgia<sup>302</sup>. Although in decline the non-Georgian language schools mixed Armenian-Georgian schools are still numerous: in 2006, there were 121 monolingual Armenian schools and 140 mixed Armenian-Georgian and Armenian-Russian schools, while according to the latest data of the Ministry of Education and Science District Resource Centres the number of Armenian-language schools decreased to 100 in 2013 and only 96 in 2015<sup>303</sup>. It must be noted, though, that also the number of Georgian-language schools decreased, since all schools with fewer pupils than those required by the Resolution 596 of the MoES were unified into one<sup>304</sup>. Since minority language schools are often located in rural areas difficult to be reached, the school buildings are often in inadequate conditions and the school supplies scarce. Consequently, in 2009, the Georgian Ministry of Education and Science, provided computers and new technological devices to 140 Armenian schools, most of which located in Samtskhe-Javakheti, however, since many teachers do not possess sufficient knowledge of technology, computers are seldom used<sup>305</sup>. Furthermore, in the 2006-2008 period, 15 Armenian-language schools were renovated, and, especially, equipped with proper heating facilities<sup>306</sup>. More in detail, in Akhaltsikhe municipality there are 14 Armenian schools out of 39; in the Ninotsminda municipality 31 out of 38 schools, and 55 out of 65 schools in the

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<sup>300</sup> Articles 4.1 and 5 of the Law of Georgia on General Education, as of 8 April 2005, *cit., supra*.

<sup>301</sup> Articles 4.3, 7 and 9 of the Law of Georgia on General Education, *cit., ibid.*

<sup>302</sup> Cf. S. Tabatadze, N. Natsvlishvili, *Intercultural Education, Teachers Professional Development Centre*, Tbilisi, Ivane Javakhisvili Tbilisi State University Publishing House, 2008, p. 13.

<sup>303</sup> Civic Integration and Tolerance Council, "National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration (2nd ed.)", 1 November 2008, p. 9.

<sup>304</sup> See "sak'art'velos ganat'lebisa da metsnierebis ministris brdzaneba №596 ssip zogadsaganmanat'leblo dats'esebulebebis optimizatsiis sakit'khebze komisiis shekmnis t'aobaze" (= Resolution 596 of the Minister of the Education and Science of Georgia on the Creation of the Commission on the Issues of Optimization of General Education Institutions Legal Entities of Public Law), 2 November 2005, cf. S. Mekhuzla, A. Roche, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12, *supra*.

<sup>305</sup> See S. Mekhuzla and A. Roche, "National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia", *op. cit.*, p. 10, *supra*.

<sup>306</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

Akhalkalaki municipality<sup>307</sup>. Thousands of students study in these schools in their native Armenian language, which is often the only language they speak. However, the Georgian educational system does not grant any status to Armenian language and literature as a comprehensive school subject and the students do not have any exam in this discipline<sup>308</sup>. This situation implies that there is no training for Armenian language teachers and, contrary to Georgian teachers, they do not have to pass any test nor hold any specific certification<sup>309</sup>. According to an interview conducted by JAMnews with Anahit Zhamkochyan, the Chairperson of the Civil Education Centre for Samtskhe-Javakheti, less than 30% of the teachers in the Akhalkalaki municipality hold a higher education degree and even fewer are specialised in the teaching of their subject<sup>310</sup>. The same problem happens with the teaching of the Georgian language due to the lack of teachers who speak it fluently or hold a higher degree in Georgian language and literature<sup>311</sup>. The first governmental programs to booster the teaching of the state language to ethnic minorities were launched fifteen years ago. These programmes started, rather soon, to achieve discrete results in the teaching of Georgian as a foreign language. Some problems arose, however, when legislators implemented the next step of the policy by introducing a bilingual system in all non-Georgian schools. The project was to conduct 30% of a lesson in Georgian language and the rest 70% in the native language of national minorities. Such a separation during the lessons was not easy to guarantee because of the low number of teachers available both Georgian-Armenian bilingual and mother-tongue Georgian, for this reason the Georgian percentage of the teaching was often ignored<sup>312</sup>.

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<sup>307</sup> See “*somkhuri skolebi mshobliuri enis ts’ignebts t’vis bolos miigheben*” (= Armenian schools will receive native language books at the end of the month), 25 November 2013, available at <http://sknews.ge/index.php?newsid=2845>.

<sup>308</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>309</sup> Cf. “Four main problems of Armenian-language education in Georgia”, JAMnews, 17 November 2015, <https://jam-news.net/four-main-problems-of-armenian-language-education-in-georgia/>.

<sup>310</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>311</sup> Cf. I. Popovaite, “Armenians in Akhalkalaki struggle to learn Georgian”, Democracy and Freedom Watch, 26 December 2014, available at <https://dfwatch.net/armenians-in-akhalkalaki-struggle-to-learn-georgian-18393-32827>.

<sup>312</sup> See S. Veloy Mateu, *The Armenian minority in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia: civic integration and its barriers*, op. cit., p. 14, *supra*.

#### V.4. Textbooks and national curricula

Another major issue in the Georgian educational system was the availability of minority language textbooks. The textbooks in minority languages were provided exclusively by kin states, that is, in the case of Armenian language schools, by the neighbouring Republic of Armenia<sup>313</sup>. The textbooks supplied, however, were never satisfactory for the Georgian government, because subjects such as history of Georgia was not included and the overall curricula were not adapted to the national Georgian one<sup>314</sup>. Armenians as well often complained that the textbooks, and books in general, provided by the Republic of Azerbaijan to ethnic-Azeris in Georgia, often contained false, denigratory, and even racist, representations of Armenians<sup>315</sup>. From 2005 to 2009, a textbook of Georgian as a Second Language, *T'avt'avi* (= ear, the part of the stem of cereal plants that contains the grains), was gradually introduced into different grades of the education system<sup>316</sup>. This book, however was at the centre of many criticisms due to its monolingual methodology, rather than a preferred multilingual approach<sup>317</sup>. In 2007, the MoES decided to start translating Georgian textbooks into minority languages, rather than having them supplied by kin states, in order to align them to the national curriculum; a praiseworthy effort to increase the inclusion of minorities within society<sup>318</sup>. Due to miscommunication and lack of organisation, many Armenian schools complained that curricula and textbooks for the 2006-2016 period were not delivered in time and 2008 was the first year in which Armenia did not deliver any school material to the students of Samtskhe-Javakheti (compared to the 9,815 books provided in 2007)<sup>319</sup>. Two major unresolved issues are that pupils face an additional economic burden as their families have to buy textbooks that were previously donated from Armenia. As a consequence, during the academic year 2007-2008, as much as 30% of

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<sup>313</sup> International Crisis Group, "Georgia's Armenian and Azeri Minorities", in *Policy Report*, November 2006, p. 2.

<sup>314</sup> See S. Mekhuzla, A. Roche, *National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia*, *op. cit.*, p. 12, *supra*.

<sup>315</sup> Cf. "Armenian image in history textbooks of Azerbaijan", in *Journal of Conflict Transformation*, Caucasus Edition, 1 April 2012, available at <https://caucasusedition.net/armenian-image-in-history-textbooks-of-azerbaijan/>.

<sup>316</sup> UNESCO, "Report of Georgia on the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace", 2008, available at <http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/26049/12041269863GEORGIE.pdf/GEORGIE.pdf>.

<sup>317</sup> Transparency International Georgia, "Education's Impact upon the Integration of National Minorities", *Georgia Today*, 1 February 2008, at [http://www.georgiatoday.ge/article\\_details.php?id=4344](http://www.georgiatoday.ge/article_details.php?id=4344).

<sup>318</sup> Cf. S. Mekhuzla, A. Roche, *National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>319</sup> SMR, "Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014", June 2014, p. 51.

the students of Samtskhe-Javakheti did not have textbooks of any kind, either translated or donated<sup>320</sup>. According to the MoES, a new curriculum for the next decade is currently being prepared<sup>321</sup>, therefore, minority-language schools operate with a curriculum that is already outdated and no longer conform to the new Georgian one, which means a “substandard” education for ethnic-minority pupils. It must be noted, nevertheless, that in the last curriculum, a bilingual approach was adopted in regards to the translation of minority languages. This change requires not only for Georgian language and literature, but also for other social sciences, namely history and geography, to be taught in Georgian<sup>322</sup>. The structure used for the new textbooks was that 30% of them would be in Georgian, and 70% in Armenian, in order to match the respective percentages of in-class teaching. A so-divided typology of bilingual education does not have any scientific and methodological ground and does not correspond to any learning principle on the combined study of subjects<sup>323</sup>. The failure and ineffectiveness of this approach was reported also in the assessment made by the SMR<sup>324</sup>. Furthermore, other problems concerning textbooks are the inclusion of stereotypes about national minorities and the lack of any reflection of the multiculturalism of Georgia, that causes both minority students to feel neglected and ethnic Georgian pupils not to learn about the ethnic diversity of their country but rather to mistrust those who belong to other ethnicities<sup>325</sup>. The presence of rhetoric of this type in the books undermines and damages the purpose of anti-discrimination and integration of the 2005 Law on Education when it states that:

*«schools shall facilitate tolerance and mutual respect among pupils, parents and teachers irrespective of their social, ethnic, religious, linguistic and world-view affiliations [...] and shall protect individual and collective rights of minorities to freely use their native language, preserve and manifest their cultural affiliation on the basis of equality<sup>326</sup>».*

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<sup>320</sup> Advisory Council for the FCNM of the Council of Europe delegation at the JCF Resource Centre in Akhalkalaki, 10 December 2008, see S. Mekhuzla, A. Roche, *National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia*, *op. cit.*, p. 22, *supra*.

<sup>321</sup> SMR, “Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014”, *op. cit.*, p. 52, *ibid*.

<sup>322</sup> See Article 5.4 of the Law on General Education, *cit.*, *supra*.

<sup>323</sup> Cf. S. Tabatadze, *op. cit.*, p. 9, *supra*.

<sup>324</sup> Cf. SMR, “Assessment Document on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action Plan 2009-2014”, *op. cit.*, p. 52, *supra*.

<sup>325</sup> Cf. S. Tabatadze, *op. cit.*, p. 8, *supra*.

<sup>326</sup> See Article 13, paragraphs 5, 6, 7 of the Law on General Education, *cit.*, *supra*.

It is essential for both ethnic Georgian and minority students to learn about multiculturalism and intercultural sensitivity, which are the most needed conditions and prerequisites to achieve the civil integration process.

## V.5. Teaching Minority-Specific Subjects

Teaching history and similar subjects in multiethnic countries like Georgia has always been a very delicate issue. This problem exacerbated when Georgia became independent in 1991, since, already in the last decade of USSR, politicised ethnocentric views of history and historiography started to emerge in the Georgian education system<sup>327</sup>. The history of national minorities, not only in minority-language schools, but also in the Georgian ones, is extremely relevant to increment integration, as national minorities are often ignored or misrepresented in Georgian textbooks. Minority-specific subjects are not a part of the national curricula and they are available only as optional courses in the minority-language schools that have enough resources from their budgets to afford the extra costs, mainly the teachers' salaries, for these subjects to be taught. ECMI, the Council of National Minorities, The Javakheti Citizens' Forum and the Tsalka Citizens' Forum have repeatedly complained about this problem with the Ministry of Education of Science in Georgia until in 2006 it finally legislated on this matter and from the academic year 2007-2008 the amendments to the national curricula granted more freedom in the organisation of facultative subjects<sup>328</sup>, abolished the pre-existing time restrictions on elective courses and provided extra funding to schools in rural mountainous areas that allowed to cover for teachers' salaries<sup>329</sup>. Furthermore, from 2007 the Georgian Ministry of Education and Science started a new programme to fund the teaching of Armenian and Azeri history, and other minority-specific subjects, in minority schools. However, the increased teaching of the Georgian language and the additional requirements of new Georgian curriculum, there are no many curricular hours

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<sup>327</sup> CIMERA "History Teaching in Georgia", p. 65, available at [http://www.cimera.org/pdf/History\\_Teaching\\_in\\_Georgia.pdf](http://www.cimera.org/pdf/History_Teaching_in_Georgia.pdf).

<sup>328</sup> See *sak'art'velos ganat'lebisa da metsnierebis ministris brdzaneba №841 erovnul sasts'avlo gegmebze*, (= Decree 841 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia on National Curricula), as of 27 September 2006, available at [http://gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=GEO&sec\\_id=96&info\\_id=26011](http://gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=96&info_id=26011).

<sup>329</sup> See *sak'art'velos mt'avrobis №182 dadgenilebashi shesuli №246 tsvlilebis shedegad* (= Amendment #246 to the Decree of the Government of Georgia #182), as of 13 November 2007, available at [http://gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=GEO&sec\\_id=95&info\\_id=2534](http://gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=95&info_id=2534).



available for these courses<sup>330</sup>. Moreover it is recommended for the Georgian textbooks to be amended, both in their original versions for Georgian-language schools and in their translated versions for minority-schools, by adding some paragraphs about the historical presence in the country of other non-Georgian ethnic minorities and their cultures<sup>331</sup>.

## V.6. Training of Georgian-language teachers

In the period of time between 2004 to 2006, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, within the framework of the “Civic Integration”, “School Partnership” and “Future Starts Today” programmes, sent a total of 40 Georgian-language teachers (27 to Kvemo-Kartli and 13 to Samtskhe-Javakheti) in order to facilitate integration of linguistic minorities<sup>332</sup>. These teachers had the task not only of teaching Georgian language, literature and history, but also of training the local teachers about the new methods of teaching, in conformity to the new General Law on Education as well as to the national curriculum. This was a needed measure since it was estimated that approximately 90% of teachers in the minority regions had not been trained since the collapse of USSR<sup>333</sup>. This intensive training programme was divided into four distinct phases for a total of approximately 168 hours. Although according to the teachers the training was very helpful to improve their language skills, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities’ (HCNM) assessments of the training programme in Kvemo-Kartli showed that a minimum of 60-70 of the 420 teachers involved, mostly ethnic Armenian and Azeri, had essentially no knowledge of Georgian at the beginning of the programme and some of them were not able to participate and that overall the mastery of Georgian among teachers did not significantly improve<sup>334</sup>. The authorities in charge had not taken into consideration the teachers’ low level of fluency in Georgian

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<sup>330</sup> Cf. S. Mekhuzla, A. Roche, *National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>331</sup> Cf. L. P. Gigineishvili, “Post-reform History Textbook in Georgia: Changing Patterns and the Issue of Minorities in Georgian History”, in *History Teaching in Georgia: Representation of Minorities in Georgian History Textbooks*, edited by L. P. Gigineishvili and I. Gundare, 7-22, Geneva, CIMERA Publications, 2007, p. 9.

<sup>332</sup> See International Monetary Fund, *Georgia : Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Progress Report*, IMF Publications, Washington D.C., 9 October 2006, p. 28.

<sup>333</sup> Interview with N. Bolkvadze, the Tbilisi office of the OSCE Representative of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, 12 December 2008, in S. Mekhuzla, A. Roche, *National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia*, *op. cit.*, p. 13, *supra*.

<sup>334</sup> OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, “Supporting Teaching of GSL in Minority Schools in Kvemo Kartli: Final Narrative Report”—an assessment of the 2004-2006 teacher training programme in Kvemo Kartli, 2007, p. 57.

and the scepticism, reluctance and hostility of many of them toward this initiative<sup>335</sup>. Due to the inconsistency and short duration of these training programmes, a survey of the Teacher's Professional Development Centre (TPDC) showed that 30% of teachers of Georgian language interviewed in Kakheti, Kvemo-Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, especially those coming from rural monoethnic homogenous areas, was not able to hold a conversation in Georgian<sup>336</sup>. Since the majority of the people who took part in the programme agreed that they would benefit from further trainings, similar projects are being carried out since 2009 as part of the 'Qualified Georgian Language Specialists in Schools of Regions Populated by Ethnic Minorities' programme, financed by the Ministry of Education and Science in cooperation with the TPDC<sup>337</sup>. Due to the 2008 War in South Ossetia, however, the initially allocated budget was reduced and many teachers had to rely on training from local NGOs and initiatives offered by the OSCE HCNM<sup>338</sup>. As endorsed by international specialists in the field of education, starting from the academic year 2009-2010 the Teacher's Professional Development Center, within the framework of the projects "Teach for Georgia" (Georg. "asts'avle sak'art'elost'vis")<sup>339</sup> and "Non-Georgian School Teachers' Professional Development Program" (Georg. *arak'art'ulenovani skolebis masts'avleblebis prop'esiuli ganvit'arebis programa*)<sup>340</sup> started sending, after appropriate testing, university graduates as teachers in remote villages, including in regions predominantly populated by minority groups, for a two-year period in order to increase the number of Georgian speaking teachers in these areas, following a model that has been successfully implemented in various countries; both programmes have been renewed and improved multiple times and, to this day, are still ongoing and slowly improving the teaching of Georgian in rural areas<sup>341</sup>. Nevertheless, greater financial contributions are necessary for non-Georgian language schools in order for teachers to effectively keep adjourned about

<sup>335</sup> Cf. S. Mekhuzla, A. Roche, *National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>336</sup> Information provided by the TPDC, July 2009, in S. Mekhuzla, A. Roche, *National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>337</sup> Georg. *k'valip'itsiuri k'art'uli enis. spetsialistebi et'nikuri umtsiresobebit' dasakhlebuli regione bis skolebshi*, see "*masts'avlebelt'a dasak'mebis sakhelmtsip'o programebi grdzeldeba*" (= State teacher-employment programmes extended), 4 May 2010, available at <https://www.mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=823&lang=geo>.

<sup>338</sup> Cf. S. Mekhuzla, A. Roche, *National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>339</sup> For more information about the program see at [https://www.tsu.ge/data/file\\_db/news/universities.pdf](https://www.tsu.ge/data/file_db/news/universities.pdf).

<sup>340</sup> For more information about the program see the official website available at [http://old.tpd.c.ge/index.php?action=page&p\\_id=1160&lang=eng](http://old.tpd.c.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=1160&lang=eng).

<sup>341</sup> Cf. *programaze "asts'avle sak'art'velost'vis" registracia dait's'qo* (= The registration for the program "Teach for Georgia" have started), 15 May 2014, available at <https://edu.aris.ge/news/programaze-aswavl-saqartvelostvis-registracia-daiwyo.html>

the requirements for the national curriculum, the unified national examinations (UNEs) and the future teaching qualification examinations. It would be beneficial for teacher training in Georgian language skills to be carried out on a more long-term basis in order to avoid violations of the right of national minorities to access secondary and higher education, and not undermine the process of civil integration of these ethnicities. Following the encouraging results of bilingual education programmes supported by the Swiss organisation CIMERA in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, with the financial contribution of the OSCE HCNM, CIMERA sponsored a similar project on Multilingual Education in Georgia from April 2006 to April 2008<sup>342</sup>, training with a bilingual methodology 97 teachers and 560 students from non-Georgian schools (8 locates in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 4 in Kvemo-Kartli)<sup>343</sup>. Once the initial scepticism of parents, students and teachers was overcome, the evaluation report proved that the CIMERA project was extremely successful increasing the linguistic of the students involved skills faster and more effectively than those who studied in a monolingual environment<sup>344</sup>. Thanks to the encouraging results of the projects of CIMERA and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities about bilingual methodology for minority education, the MoES has launched a Multilingual Education implementation strategy that, to this day, is being successful<sup>345</sup>. The introduction of multilingual education into the Georgian education system has been a very important and symbolic step for the role it plays in stimulating intercultural dialogue and acceptance of different cultures and the Centre for Civil Integration and Inter-ethnic Relations (CCIIR)<sup>346</sup> monitors this process with attention<sup>347</sup>. The Georgian education system, however, has not transitioned yet to multilingual or bilingual education and it is counterproductive that national legislation still compels every school in the country to teach history, geography and the social sciences in the Georgian language<sup>348</sup>.

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<sup>342</sup> For more information on the projects of CIMERA see the official website, available at [http://www.cimera.org/en/projects/ind\\_projects.htm](http://www.cimera.org/en/projects/ind_projects.htm).

<sup>343</sup> C. Bachmann (ed. by), *Language Policies and Education in Multilingual Societies*, Geneva, CIMERA Publications, 2006, p. 8.

<sup>344</sup> L. Grigule and A. Perrin, “*Multilingual Education in Georgia: Executive Summary of the Evaluation Report*”, CIMERA 2008, p. 5, available at <http://www.cimera.org>.

<sup>345</sup> Decree 185 of Ministry of Education and Science in Georgia, “Multilingual Instruction Support Programme”, 2009, p. 31.

<sup>346</sup> Georg. *samok'alak' o integratsiisa da erovnebat 'shorisi urt' iert' obebis tsentri*.

<sup>347</sup> For more information see the last report of the CCIIR, available at <https://www.cciir.ge/ka/news-and-events/2020-02-06-17-39-03>.

<sup>348</sup> Article 5.4 of the Law of Georgia on General Education, of 8 April 2005, *cit*.

## V.7. Higher education

Students who graduate from non-Georgian language schools have notably lower levels of enrolment at higher education institutions than their Georgian counterparts, and this situation is also an obstacle to future civic integration. The Law on Higher Education in 2004 compelled all pupils to pass the Unified National Examinations (UNEs)<sup>349</sup>. This decision, although introduced as a measure to reduce corruption in university entrance procedures, had the side-effect of penalising and discriminating minority students because of their poor mastery of the Georgian language, and, moreover, it highlighted the unequal opportunities given to students who had previously attended monolingual schools. When the first reformed UNE took place in 2005, of the three main mandatory subjects (Georgian Language and Literature, General Abilities Test and Foreign Language skills), minority students were allowed to take an easier Georgian language and literature exam than the one taken by their ethnic Georgian counterparts, but this simplified version of the test was not accepted by universities lacking a Russian language sector<sup>350</sup> such as the branch of the ‘*Ivane Javakhsivili*’ Tbilisi State University (TSU) located in Akhalkalaki. In Javakheti, only two students from Akhalkalaki district and one from Ninotsminda, out of 80 students who took the exam, were able to pass it and enrol in university<sup>351</sup>. Following the low results of minority students, the MoES modified the UNE’s curriculum for 2006 by allowing, the students who wished it, to take the General Abilities Test, the foreign language part and other optional courses in Russian, and the Georgian language and literature component was also simplified for all pupils<sup>352</sup>. In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Science, with financial aid from the OSCE HCNM, provided 100 school graduates of different ethnic background with free preparatory courses for the UNEs at accredited higher-education institutions in Tbilisi<sup>353</sup>. Out of the total number of students, 20 ethnic-Armenian school

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<sup>349</sup> Georg. *ert’iani erovnuli gamotsdebi (eeg)*, see Article 89, available at [http://www.mes.gov.ge/upload/text/geo/1196078343\\_legislation.pdf](http://www.mes.gov.ge/upload/text/geo/1196078343_legislation.pdf).

<sup>350</sup> ICG, “Georgia’s Armenian and Azeri Minorities”, 28 November 2016, p. 28, available at <https://humanrightshouse.org/articles/icg-georgias-armenian-and-azeri-minorities/>.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>352</sup> See Article 5.2 of *sak’art’velos ganat’lebisa da metsnierebis ministris ‘ert’iani erovnuli gamotsdebi chatarebis debulebis damtkitsebis shesakheb’ №127 brdzanebis* (= Decree 127 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia ‘On Establishing the Rules of Conducting General National Exams’), 28 March 2005,

<sup>353</sup> See *sak’art’velos ganat’lebisa da metsnierebis ministris brdzaneba №1251* (= Decree 1251 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia), 10 December 2007, available at [http://www.mes.gov.ge/upload/multi/geo/1199879670\\_brzaneba%201251.PDF](http://www.mes.gov.ge/upload/multi/geo/1199879670_brzaneba%201251.PDF).

graduates took part in the preparatory courses at TSU, and 18 attended similar courses at Tbilisi Medical University. Thanks to the simplified exams and the preparatory courses, in 2006, 31 ethnic-Armenian students from Javakheti were able to successfully pass the UNEs and just three students from the region failed because of the Georgian language part of the examination. Although no changes were made to the UNEs in 2007, overall, fewer students applied, and only 3 out of 36 ethnic Armenian students passed the exams. This decrease in applications is probably attributable to the closure of the Akhalkalaki branch of the TSU university and the fact that the Javakheti region is distant approximately 300 kilometres from the capital<sup>354</sup>. Moreover, in 2008, both Georgian schools were reformed with the addition of one more year of secondary education (a transition scheduled to enter into force also in minority schools with one year of delay)<sup>355</sup>, and UNEs were also modified with the introduction of the possibility to take the General Abilities' component of the examination in Armenian and Azeri languages<sup>356</sup>. For these reasons, many more minority students than in the previous years took the national examination, but only 26 ethnic Armenian students from Samtskhe-Javakheti successfully passed it<sup>357</sup>. According to the Ministry of Education and Science and the National Assessment and Examination Centre (NAEC) the disappointingly low results from ethnic Armenian and Azeri students are due to a lower level of overall preparation and lack of fluency in the Georgian language, rather than disadvantageous and discriminatory standards of the Unified National Examinations. Conversely, the number of ethnic Armenian and Azeri students who, in the last years, decided to go to study, respectively, in Armenia and Azerbaijan, increased rather than declined and the majority of them are expected not repatriate to Georgia to pursue a career after graduating from university. In 2009, the Ministry of Education and Sciences also launched a quota system to help minority students pursuing a post-secondary education in Georgian universities by assigning to all non-Georgian students a specific percentage of all academic placements, 5% in the case of Armenians. This new system, usually referred to as "1+4 program", allows ethnic-minority students to enrol in Georgian university upon successfully passing the General Skills examination in their native

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<sup>354</sup> Cf. S. Mekhuzla, A. Roche, *National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia*, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>355</sup> See Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia, "*ratom gakhda sach'iro kidev ert'i ts'lis damateba zogadsaganmanat'leblo skolebshi? ratom aris autsilebeli me-12 klasi?*" (= Why was another year for secondary schools necessary? Why is 12th grade necessary?), available at <http://mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=176&lang=geo?id=176&lang=eng>.

<sup>356</sup> See <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/59740?publication=0>.

<sup>357</sup> Cf. S. Mekhuzla, A. Roche, *National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

language, but with the prerequisite to study the Georgian language for one year before being able to attend the four years of bachelor courses in the field of studies in which they want to pursue a degree<sup>358</sup>. Although from 2009 to 2013, the number of students involved in this program increased from 301 to 928, these figures are far from covering the totality of the places available for minorities which went from 11% in 2010 to 24% in 2013. The majority of ethnic-minority students attend the Tbilisi State University, followed by Ilia State University and Georgian Technical University<sup>359</sup>. Moreover, although in 2010, the first year in which this programme went into force, the number of ethnic Armenians and ethnic Azeris did not differ greatly was more popular, in 2013 the number of Armenians enrolled had only slightly increased while the number of Azeris had tripled from the beginning and also when compared to the number of ethnic Armenians<sup>360</sup>. Furthermore, the average scores in the General Skill exams of minorities, although taken in their native languages, are approximately lower than those of their Georgian counterparts by a 10% gap<sup>361</sup> with approximately 30% of ethnic Armenians and Azeris failing the test, hence denoting a problem in the quality of education in non-Georgian schools<sup>362</sup>. A flaw in the quota system, however, allows minority students to enroll in universities also with lower scores, moreover, thanks to the quota system, these students are entitled to a state-funded place, and many students with a non-Georgian ethnic background take advantage of this bias even though they are fluent in Georgian. The percentage of quota minority-students who successfully complete a Bachelor programme is also significantly lower than their Georgian peers<sup>363</sup>. Nevertheless, the students who benefited from the “4+1 Programme” declared themselves overall satisfied about the improvement of their Georgian skills, but still felt discriminated by many of their Georgian classmates, and, in some cases, even by

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<sup>358</sup> See G. Ayalova, G. Babghiasvili, I. Karazian, *Quota system in Georgian universities helps ethnic minorities, but is easy to abuse*, Democracy & Freedom Watch, 30 January 2015, available at <https://dfwatch.net/quota-system-in-georgian-universities-helps-ethnic-minorities-but-is-easy-to-abuse-45154-33194>.

<sup>359</sup> Cf. S. Tabatadze, N. Gorgadze, *Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Quota System in Georgia*, Tbilisi, Center for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations (CCIIR) Publications, 2013, pp. 28-31, available at, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED555611.pdf>.

<sup>360</sup> Cf. S. Tabatadze, N. Gorgadze, *Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Quota System in Georgia*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, «The average scores in the General Skills Examinations are 39.28% in Russian, 37.52% in Georgian, but only 26.79% in Armenian and 25.61% in Azeri, with a total national average of 37.29%.»

<sup>362</sup> UNAG (United Nations Association of Georgia) *Research Report: The effectiveness of one year Georgian language program for ethnic minorities at HEIs* (= Higher Education Institutions), 9 November 2016, available at <http://www.una.ge/news/685/eng>.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*

some of their professor<sup>364</sup>. Last year, in September 2019, 110 ethnic Armenians were enrolled in the preparation course of ‘*Ivane Javakhishvili*’ Tbilisi State University<sup>365</sup>. The “1+4 Programme”, as it is now, will conclude with the students entering university during the current academic year 2019-2020 and the Ministry of Education and Sciences has not announced yet whether it will extend it for the upcoming years.

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<sup>364</sup> S. Gorgodze, “*ramdenad ep‘ek‘turia 1+4 programa et‘nikuri umtsiresobebistvis?*” (= How effective is the “1 + 4” programme for ethnic minorities?), 7 April 2015, available at <http://liberali.ge/articles/view/3975/ramdenad-efeqturia-14->.

<sup>365</sup> L. T‘orosyan, “*1+4 tsragir, vortegh azgut‘yuně karevor ch‘ē*” (= 1+4 Program, where ethnicity is not important), Aliq Media, 18 September 2019, available at <https://www.aliq.ge/14-tcragir-ortegh-azguthyneh-karevor-che/>.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ARMENIAN MINORITY AND THE MEDIA SITUATION

#### VI.1. Brief historical overview

The media situation plays a pivotal role in achieving the integration of ethnic minorities with the national majority and their participation into the public and political life of the country. Until now the Georgian Government has taken little effort and paid not enough attention to this issue which is crucial to shape better relations among the ethnic groups living in Georgia. Under the Communist rule in Georgia, the most widespread newspaper in Armenian language was *Sovetakan Vrastan* (= Soviet Georgia) at 33,000 copies a day<sup>366</sup>. In 1991, after the independence, many new newspapers and channels were created as a state-run media was initially lacking, this situation, however, did not guarantee the spread of free and unbiased information<sup>367</sup>. On the contrary, many of the media supported Gamsakhurdia's nationalistic propaganda and defamation of opposition members<sup>368</sup>. The President made sure to give the most important positions at the state television to his loyal supporters and dismissed many opposition publications<sup>369</sup>. The U.S. based Helsinki Watch NGO<sup>370</sup>, already on 27 December 1991, issued a report on human rights violations, including that of freedom of speech, made by the government of Gamsakhurdia who feared that the pro-secession protests in South Ossetia and Abkhazia could spread to the Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities<sup>371</sup>. Gamsakhurdia was ousted a few months later and, under Eduard Shevardnadze<sup>372</sup>'s rule, independent newspapers and channels started to revive, but it was not until 1994 that restrictions on party-affiliated publications were partially eased<sup>373</sup>. In two occasions, in

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<sup>366</sup> Cf. G. Bokeria, G. Targamadze, L. Ramishvili, "*Georgian Media in the 90s: A Step to Liberty*", 1997, p. 5.

<sup>367</sup> Cf. T. Akerlund, *National Minorities and the Media Situation in Georgia*, ECMI Working Paper Series #52, January 2012, p. 4.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>369</sup> Cf. G. Bokeria *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 6, *ibid.*

<sup>370</sup> "Helsinki Watch (1978), a division of the U.S.-based non-governmental organization Human Rights Watch, was founded to monitor and promote the human rights provisions of the 1975 Helsinki Accords.", see entry «Helsinki Watch» at <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/helsinki-watch>.

<sup>371</sup> Cf. Helsinki Watch via Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights Violations by the Government of Zviad Gamsakhurdia*, December 27, 1991.

<sup>372</sup> See entry «Eduard Amvrosiyevich Shevardnadze» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Eduard-Shevardnadze>.

<sup>373</sup> Cf. T. Akerlund, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*, p. 57.



July 1995 and July 1996 the Ministry of Communication of Shevardnadze's government shut down shortly the TV station *Rustavi-2* because of journalistic inquiries about the situation of chaos in the country and illegalities committed at the official level.<sup>374</sup> It must be noted also the role of media reports concerning electoral irregularities in setting off the mass demonstrations that led to the end of the Shevardnadze government<sup>375</sup>. Following the Rose Revolution of 2003, Mikheil Saakashvili<sup>376</sup> was elected President of Georgia and, although the new government showed a generalised tendency towards liberalisation of Georgia in many fields, freedom of media remained the object of political disagreement and polemics between the ruling party and the opposition. The outbreak of the war with Russia over South Ossetia, in August 2008, and the following nationalistic propaganda furtherly reduced the freedom of expression in the media<sup>377</sup>.

## VI.2. Current Legislation

In 2016, the overall media situation in Georgia was still rated by the American organization 'Freedom House' as only "partially free", because of governmental influence over some nation-wide TV stations and the unclear status of TV station ownership<sup>378</sup>. In regard to the media situation for the ethnic minorities, Georgia has signed the majority of the international human rights treaties guaranteeing freedom of opinion, expression and thought<sup>379</sup> as well as it is a party, since 2005, to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) of the Council of Europe, which contains provisions concerning media<sup>380</sup>. The 2004 Law on Broadcasting of the Georgian Public Television Broadcaster (GPTB) states clearly, in chapter III, article 16, paragraph 1, that: «*The Public broadcaster shall broadcast a number of programmes in*

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<sup>374</sup> Cf. G. Bokeria *et al.*, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>375</sup> Cf. M. Mikashavidze, "*Media Landscape: Georgia*", Tbilisi, European Journalist Centre, 2018, p. 22.

<sup>376</sup> See entry «Mikheil Saakashvili» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mikheil-Saakashvili>.

<sup>377</sup> Cf. M. Akhvlediani, "The fatal flaw: the media and Russian invasion of Georgia", in *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, (Online), Taylor & Francis, June 2009, p. 38.

<sup>378</sup> See Freedom House, "Freedom of Press Report 2016", available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/georgia>; cf. D. Aprasidze, "Freedom House Report on Georgia", 2010, p. 222, available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/images/File/nit/2010/NIT-2010-Georgia-proof-II.pdf>.

<sup>379</sup> Cf. G. Lomsadze, "*IREX Media Sustainability Index 2010, Georgia*", p. 147, available at <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2010-georgia.pdf.pdf>.

<sup>380</sup> See official website of the Council of Europe, "State parties to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities", available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/etats-partie>.

certain proportions prepared in the languages of minorities, about minority groups and programmes prepared by minorities»<sup>381</sup>. Furthermore, Article 6 of the FCNM rephrases the Georgian Broadcasting Law adding that:

*«The Parties shall encourage a spirit of tolerance and intercultural dialogue and take effective measures to promote mutual respect and understanding and co-operation among all persons living on their territory, irrespective of those persons' ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity, in particular in the fields of education, culture and the media»<sup>382</sup>.*

It is Article 9 of FCNM that specifically addresses the media situation stating that:

*« 1. The Parties undertake to recognise that the right to freedom of expression of every person belonging to a national minority includes freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas in the minority language, without interference by public authorities and regardless of frontiers. The Parties shall ensure within the framework of their legal systems that persons belonging to a national minority are not discriminated against in their access to the media.*

*2. Paragraph 1 shall not prevent Parties from requiring the licensing, without discrimination and based on objective criteria, of sound radio and television broadcasting, or cinema enterprises.*

*3. The Parties shall not hinder the creation and the use of printed media by persons belonging to national minorities. In the legal framework of sound radio and television broadcasting, they shall ensure, as far as possible, and taking into account the provisions of paragraph 1, that persons belonging to national minorities are granted the possibility of creating and using their own media. 4. In the framework of their legal systems, the Parties shall adopt adequate measures in order to facilitate access to the media for persons belonging to national minorities and in*

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<sup>381</sup> Cf. *The Law of Georgia on Broadcasting* (Law of Georgia No. 3088 of 19 February 2015), Chapter III, Article 16, paragraph 1, available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/download/32866/39/en/pdf>.

<sup>382</sup> See the English Text of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities available at <https://rm.coe.int/16800c10cf>.

*order to promote tolerance and permit cultural pluralism.” Deeply interconnected with the not-yet achieved integration of the Armenian ethnic minority into the Georgian community and especially its not fulfilled participation into the politic life of the country»<sup>383</sup>.*

Georgia has hence fulfilled its obligations toward the Advisory Committee of FCNM by establishing the needed legal framework to promote access to the media for the minorities, nevertheless, many obstacles remain to be overcome in order to guarantee the availability of quality information and the differentiation of sources of news in languages that everyone can fully understand<sup>384</sup>.

### **VI.3. Availability of Armenian-language media in Georgia**

Indeed, to this day, Georgia has neither ratified nor signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) although it was one of the country's commitments upon joining the CoE<sup>385</sup>. Nevertheless, the Georgian Ministry of Culture continues to financially support several newspapers in minority languages, including the Armenian-language *Vrastan*<sup>386</sup>, these are distributed to most main cities where the respective national minorities make up the majority of the population. Consequently, some minority NGOs have complained that these newspapers are under-financed, and that they are used by the party in power as a mean to forward their political agenda and propaganda<sup>387</sup>. The Georgian Public Television Broadcast and the Public Television Network also implement the law by broadcasting a news report in non-Georgian languages. *pirveli arkhi* (= First Channel) broadcasts a news program, *moambe*, every week day at 16.00 for 30 minutes in a different minority language (Abkhazian, Ossetian, Armenian, Azeri and Russian), on Wednesdays it is in Armenian, and every day at 16.30 there are 20 minutes of news in Russian<sup>388</sup>. Due to the unfortunate viewing

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<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>384</sup> See Advisory Committee on the FCNM, “Opinion on Georgia”, 19 March 2009, available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/-/georgia>.

<sup>385</sup> Cf. T. Akerlund, *op. cit.*, p. 7, *supra*.

<sup>386</sup> Cf. J. Wheatley, *The Status of Minority Languages in Georgia and the Relevance of Models from other European States*, ECMI Working Paper Series #26, March 2006, p. 14.

<sup>387</sup> Cf. J. Wheatley, *Implementing the framework convention for the protection of national minorities in Georgia: a feasibility study*, ECMI Working Paper #28, 2006, p. 38, available at <https://nbnresolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-63072>.

<sup>388</sup> See official website at <https://1tv.ge/show/moambe/?tab=team>.

time during mid-afternoon and the length, which is half of the Georgian newscast, these programmes do not cover very much information<sup>389</sup>, local people do not consider it very effective lamenting that mostly world-news are covered and they are not informed about the domestic and local situation<sup>390</sup>. The Georgian Public Broadcasting (GPB) also broadcast Armenian news at 20.30 each day<sup>391</sup>. Many ethnic-Armenians, therefore, turn to the daily Russian-language newscast “*Nastoyashcheye Vremya*” (= Current Time) provided by *meore arkhi* (= Second Channel) of the GPB in order to be better informed about the events in Georgia and around the world<sup>392</sup>. Although the situation for the Armenian minority of Javakheti is still slightly better than that of the Azeri minority in Kvemo-Kartli<sup>393</sup>, the two major local private televisions (*ATV-12*<sup>394</sup> in Akhalkalaki and the *P'arvana TV*<sup>395</sup> in Ninotsminda) which broadcasted in Armenian language, and also rebroadcasted the evening news from Georgian private channels *Rustavi 2* and *Imedi* (= Hope) simultaneously translated into Armenian thanks to funding from the “News Rebroadcasting in the Minority Language Project” of OSCE HCNM, were shut down in 2015 due to financial problems<sup>396</sup>. A major problem remains, however, the limited coverage and reception area of these two television networks and the fact that they do not possess their own license, but are sub-licensed under the television stations *speqtri.ge* and *metskhre arkhi “imperia”* (= Channel 9 “Imperium”), which means that their broadcasting could be suspended or censored whenever *ATV-12* and *P'arvana* dissent from their contractors’ opinions<sup>397</sup>. “*A-Info*”, a news agency based in Akhalkalaki, covers the news in Armenian for Samtskhe-Javakheti and has a web site in Armenian, English and Russian, it was briefly shut down in 2011 due to lack of funds and staff, but, later it was successfully reopened<sup>398</sup>. Among the Armenian-language newspapers circulating in Javakheti there are: monthly *Arshaluys* (= Sunrise), printed in

<sup>389</sup> Cf. J. Wheatley, *The Status of Minority Languages in Georgia and the Relevance of Models from other European States*, *op. cit.*, p. 14, *ibid.*

<sup>390</sup> ICG, Georgia’s Armenian and Azeri Minorities, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>391</sup> See official website at [http://gpb.ge/moambe\\_3.php?lang=geo&tm\\_id=0&sub\\_id=3](http://gpb.ge/moambe_3.php?lang=geo&tm_id=0&sub_id=3).

<sup>392</sup> SMR, “Report on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and 2014 Action Plan”, *op.cit.*, pp. 12-13

<sup>393</sup> ICG, Georgia’s Armenian and Azeri Minorities, *op. cit.*, *supra*.

<sup>394</sup> See *telekompania “ATV12”* (= Telecompany “ATV12”) at <http://www.media.ge/ge/database/media/300910/>.

<sup>395</sup> See *telekompania “p'arvana”* (= Telecompany “*P'arvana*”) at <http://www.media.ge/ge/database/media/300909/>.

<sup>396</sup> Cf. J. Wheatley, *The Status of Minority Languages in Georgia and the Relevance of Models from other European States*, *op. cit.*, p. 14, *supra*.

<sup>397</sup> Cf. T. Akerlund, *op. cit.*, p. 18, *supra*.

<sup>398</sup> Cf. *Inch'u en p'akvum lratvamijots'nerē Javakhk'um*: (= Why are the media being shut down in Javakhk'?), 2 April 2011, available at <https://hetq.am/hy/article/51243>. See official website at <http://www.a-info.org/hy/>.

Ninotsminda and spread all over Javakheti, weekly Armenian-Georgian *Yaravayin Darapas* (= South Gate)<sup>399</sup>, weekly *K'ajatun* (= Brave House), more recent online newspapers “Jnews.ge”<sup>400</sup>, and *Aliq Media* (*Alik'* = Channel)<sup>401</sup>, both available in Armenian, Russian and Georgian. Unfortunately, due to scarce financial resources, many newspapers are no longer being printed, such as the newspaper *Lernashkharh'* (= Mountainous World), which was closed after 8 issues, and the biweekly newspaper *Akunk'* (= [Water] Spring), which was shut down in 2010 after almost ten years of activity and the plan to reprint it under the name *Nor Akunk'* (= New [Water] Spring) was never realised<sup>402</sup>. Thanks to NGOs and private donations, the minority access to media is gradually increasing: one independent community radio station (“Making Waves: a Community Radio Project for Georgia”) was established, in Ninotsminda, to broadcast mostly in Armenian, and, starting from 2006, with support from the BBC World Service Trust and Georgian Association “*studio re*”, a group of 120 local journalists and media and production managers was trained to guarantee the sustainability of this radio station<sup>403</sup>. Since the majority of the television coverage accessible to Armenians of Javakheti is still provided by the Armenian and Russian national broadcasts, this situation has a negative effect on their integration within the Georgian nation, and, conversely, it drives the local population to identify rather with Armenia than with Georgia and to develop philo-Russian tendencies that are not shared by the overwhelmingly majority of the ethnic Georgian population. Moreover, due to the minorities' low level of knowledge of the national language, it is essential for the government to adequately finance programmes in minority languages, in order to promote their sense of belonging to Georgia and their participation in the political life of the country.

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<sup>399</sup> “South Gate” was first published in 2005, in an online version from 2010, but it was shut down for financial reasons in 2014, see *P'akhvel ē Javakhk'um “Yaravayin Darapas” t'ert'i ew kaiky haykakan ējē* (= In *Javakhk'* the Armenian newspaper “Southern Gate” and its website have been closed), *Tert.am*, 4 February 2014, available at <https://www.tert.am/am/news/2014/02/04/javaxq-iratvamijoc/993467>.

<sup>400</sup> See official website at <http://jnews.ge/>.

<sup>401</sup> See official website at <https://www.aliq.ge/>.

<sup>402</sup> Cf. *Inch'u en p'akvum iratvamijots'nerē Javakhk'um*: (= Why are the media being shut down in Javakhk'?), *Hetq.am*, 2 April 2011, available at <https://hetq.am/hy/article/51243>.

<sup>403</sup> «The funds came from the European Commission's “European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights. Further support was received from the UK Embassy to Georgia and the UK's Global Conflict Prevention Pool. IREX Europe implements the project as part of a consortium led by the BBC World Service Trust.» See “Georgia's new community radio”, BBC World Service, 8 September 2006.

#### VI.4. Minority-related programs

The Executive Board of the Georgian Public Broadcaster, for the period 2015-2016, set in primary consideration the issue of minorities<sup>404</sup>. Moreover, also the National Concept and Action Plan for Tolerance and Civil Integration (NCAP) highlighted, in its Plan of Action for 2015-2020, the access of minorities to media as one of the main spheres that need improvement, and it scheduled projects of cooperation with some minority NGOs and the Georgian Public Broadcaster in order to make progress regarding this issue by creating new programmes in minority languages<sup>405</sup>. Consequently, some improvements have been made such as the translation of certain programmes of political analysis into minority languages, more inclusion of the ethnic minorities in documentaries about the history of Georgia, and in general displaying more often on TV the positive aspects and the issues of the nation's multiculturalism<sup>406</sup>. Furthermore, the GBP designated an entire department with the task of providing programmes specific for the national minorities<sup>407</sup>. News is also offered at Radio One once a week in minority languages, but radio programmes are not very popular and followed, especially by Armenians from Samtskhe-Javakheti<sup>408</sup>. Until 2015, four times a week, there was a talk-show named *chveni ezo* (= Our Yard), during which guests of different ethnicities spoke about their cultures, a programme that took inspiration from the so-called "Italian yards" (*Georg. italiuri ezoebi*) of XIX-century Tiflis, the courtyards shared by many buildings in which people from different ethnicities used to interact<sup>409</sup>. Although TV coverage in Georgia has improved due to digital TV, the situation in mountainous and rural areas of Samtskhe-Javakheti is still precarious. The Advisory Committee for the FCNM reports a «*concerning mediocre quality of cultural programmes in minority languages and a considerable need for more professionalism and training among journalists working in*

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<sup>404</sup> Georgian Public Broadcaster, "Programme Priorities for 2015-2016, approved by the Board", pp. 5-8, available at

[http://gpb.ge/uploads/documents/65402a712b26442cbd42064764b5d7b1gadackvetileba\\_14.pdf](http://gpb.ge/uploads/documents/65402a712b26442cbd42064764b5d7b1gadackvetileba_14.pdf).

<sup>405</sup> SMR, "State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and 2015-2020 Action Plan", *op.cit.*, p. 3, *supra*.

<sup>406</sup> See Articles 1.2, 2.1, 2.6, SMR, "State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and 2015-2020 Action Plan", *op.cit.*, p. 3, *supra*.

<sup>407</sup> FCNM, 2nd Report Submitted by Georgia Pursuant to Article 25, paragraph 2 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ACFC/SR/II(2012)001), *op.cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>409</sup> See the official channel of the GPB available at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLue6znsWBAf4w4YuHpF9Tr7fsuvtlmcEk>

*minority languages to reach out minority communities*<sup>410</sup>». Despite the improvements achieved in recent years by the government, such programmes do not equip ethnic Armenians with enough information about the civil and political life of Georgia. Moreover, many ethnic Armenians lament that their minority and the news and problems concerning their region are underrepresented on Georgian televisions<sup>411</sup>. This the lack of representation and information makes many Armenians feel excluded, and, in response, they turn to non-Georgian media<sup>412</sup>. This information is proved by a qualitative survey supervised by the NGO “Friendship of People of Samtskhe-Javakheti” in 2012, during which 65% of the respondents among those of Armenian, Azeri and Greek ethnic background stated that they do not follow Georgian channels, but turn to media from their kin states instead<sup>413</sup>. As stated above, this situation does not favour neither civic integration, nor politic participation; on the contrary, it has a negative effects on the Armenian minority as the information, in particular about geopolitics, they obtain from the Armenian, and especially Russian, news tend to be in contrast with the dominant point of view of Georgian media and this often results in a polarisation of attitudes concerning the same issue<sup>414</sup>. The Russian channels that are the most viewed by ethnic Armenians are<sup>415</sup> *Pervyi Kanal* (lit. = First Channel, usually referred to as “Channel One”, previously known as ORT)<sup>416</sup>, followed by Russia Today (RT)<sup>417</sup>, *Rossiia-1* (= Russia-1)<sup>418</sup>, *Rossiia-24* (= Russia-24)<sup>419</sup>, and NTV<sup>420</sup>. In 2010, a Russian- language television channel named *Pervyi Informatsionnyi Kavkazskii* – PIK (= First Caucasus News), with its headquarters in Georgia and focused on news from the Caucasus, was opened<sup>421</sup>, and it which was rather popular among ethnic

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<sup>410</sup> Cf. S. Veloy Mateu, *The Armenian minority in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia: civic integration and its barriers*, *op. cit.*, p. 22, *supra*.

<sup>411</sup> N. Verulashvili, “How Russian propaganda sways Georgian ethnic minorities”, JAMnews, 19 March 2019, <https://jam-news.net/how-russian-propaganda-sways-georgias-ethnic-minorities/>

<sup>412</sup> SMR, “Report on the Implementation of the National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and 2014 Action Plan”, *op.cit.*, p. 11, *supra*.

<sup>413</sup> S. Melkumyan, “*Mnogoobrazie kak vozmozhnost*” (= “Diversity as an opportunity”), NGO Friendship of People of Samtskhe-Javakheti, 2012, pp. 13-14.

<sup>414</sup> S. Veloy Mateu, *The Armenian minority in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia: civic integration and its barriers*, *op. cit.*, p. 22, *supra*.

<sup>415</sup> N. Verulashvili, “How Russian propaganda sways Georgian ethnic minorities”, *cit.*, *supra*.

<sup>416</sup> Official website available at <https://www.1tv.ru/>.

<sup>417</sup> Official website available at <https://www.rt.com/>.

<sup>418</sup> Official website available at <https://russia.tv/>.

<sup>419</sup> Official website available at <https://www.vesti.ru/>.

<sup>420</sup> Official website available at <https://www.ntv.ru/>.

<sup>421</sup> RFE/RL, “Georgia Offers Russian-Language Alternative To Kremlin TV”, 25 January 2011, available at [http://www.rferl.org/content/georgian\\_russian\\_tv/2286802.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/georgian_russian_tv/2286802.html).

Armenians<sup>422</sup>, but due to disagreements<sup>423</sup>, the GPB broke the contract with PIK and suspended its licence permanently, after two years of operation, in October 2012<sup>424</sup>. According to the Russian news agency “*Interfax*”, experts did not rule out that the suspension of PIK’s broadcasting was connected with the change of power in Georgia and the new ruling party’s lack of interest in pursuing an anti-Russian propaganda<sup>425</sup>. Among the channels of the Republic of Armenia that are most viewed by ethnic Armenians of Javakheti there are public Armenia-1<sup>426</sup>, and private *Shant’ TV* (= Lightning Bolt TV)<sup>427</sup>, *Yerkir Media* (= World Media)<sup>428</sup>, and Civil Net TV<sup>429</sup>.

## VI.5. Regional and local media

Nowadays, in Akhalkalaki, only the Armenian-language TV-station *Javakh* is still working, since the aforementioned *ATV-12* and *P’arvana* channels were shut down for economical problems in 2015, but it broadcasts mostly commercial announcements, and does not cover daily news<sup>430</sup>. In Akhaltsikhe, the administrative centre of the Samtskhe-Javakheti *mkhare*, according to the 2014 census, Armenians are the second biggest ethnic group of the town after Georgians, but making up only 26.7% of the total population<sup>431</sup>, no local Armenian broadcasting station exist, but private *metskhre arkhi* (= Channel 9), whose motto is “quality information for a multiethnic community” (Georg. “*khariskhiani inpormatsia multiet’nikuri sazogadoebisat’vis*”), broadcasts many of its Georgian-language news reports with Armenian subtitles available and their

<sup>422</sup> Salome Samadashvili, *Muzzling the Bear. Strategic Defence for Russia’s undeclared Information War on Europe.*, Brussels, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2015, p. 26.

<sup>423</sup> “Relaunch of Georgia’s Russian Language Channel”, 24 January 2011, available at <https://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=23076>.

<sup>424</sup> See “Georgia’s PIK TV channel closed down”, *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 20th October 2012, available at <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/news/politics/32812.html>.

<sup>425</sup> “*Gruzinskomu telekanalu PIK otkazali v efire*” (= The Georgian television channel PIK was denied airing), *Interfax*, 20 October 2012, available at <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/271862>; “*Gruzinskiĭ russkoyazychnyi telekanal PIK prekratil svoe veshchanie*” (= Georgian russian-language television canne PIK stopped its broadcasting), *Ria Novosti*, 20 October 2012, available at <https://ria.ru/20121020/904887915.html#13549006415592&message=resize&relto=register&action=addClass&value=registration>

<sup>426</sup> See official website available at <https://www.1tv.am/en/>.

<sup>427</sup> See official website available at <https://www.shanttv.com/>.

<sup>428</sup> See official website available at <https://yerkirmedia.am/hy/>.

<sup>429</sup> See official website available at <https://www.civilnet.am/>.

<sup>430</sup> S. Veloy Mateu, *The Armenian minority in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia: civic integration and its barriers*, *op. cit.*, p. 23, *supra*.

<sup>431</sup> Data from the 2014 Census of the Georgian population available at [http://census.ge/files/results/english/1\\_Number%20of%20population%20by%20administrative-territorial%20units%20and%20sex.xls](http://census.ge/files/results/english/1_Number%20of%20population%20by%20administrative-territorial%20units%20and%20sex.xls).



website provides all articles about local events both in Georgian and in Armenian<sup>432</sup>. In the region, also other private channels operate, although with limited broadcasting areas, but the majority of them exist more for reasons of political and party propaganda, rather than in order to equip minorities with updates about daily news or leisure-time programmes<sup>433</sup>. The transition to digital TV in 2015<sup>434</sup> and the wider availability of internet has brought to the ethnic Armenian minority new possibilities of improvement. Among ethnic ethnic Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti, radio stations and programmes are not as popular as television channels, the main exception being “*chveni sak'art'velo*” (= Our Georgia), aired by “*sakartvelos radio - fm 102.3*” (= Radio of Georgia – 102.3) until 2012, when it was stopped due to financial problems<sup>435</sup>. The Ninotsminda-based independent Radio NOR (fm 100.1) also airs daily news reports in Armenian and Russian, and it has all information available in both languages on its website<sup>436</sup>. Nevertheless, the primary sources of information for ethnic Armenians remain private and independent news through their websites, and YouTube and SoundCloud channels: mainly *Jnews*<sup>437</sup>, based in Akhalkalaki (in Armenian and Russian), Tbilisi-based *Aliq Media*, which partners also with local TV and radio stations<sup>438</sup>, Open Caucasus (OC) Media (in Russian and English)<sup>439</sup>, JAMnews (in English, Russian, Georgian, Armenian and Azeri) founded and operating with assistance from the UK Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, and, in minor part, from COBERM (Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism), a joint EU-UNDP programme<sup>440</sup>. Furthermore, also *Samkhret'is Karibch'e* (= South Gate) newspaper<sup>441</sup> used to publish an Armenian-language counterpart (Arm. *Yaravayin Darapas* = South Gate) until 2014<sup>442</sup>, and although its website remains only in Georgian, from 2016, it

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<sup>432</sup> Official website available at <https://tv9news.ge/>.

<sup>433</sup> S. Veloy Mateu, *The Armenian minority in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia: civic integration and its barriers*, op. cit., p. 24, supra.

<sup>434</sup> For more information on the shift to digital TV of 2015 see <https://digitaltv.ge/ka/ციფრული-მსაჯულებლობა/>.

<sup>435</sup> Cf. Media Development Foundation, “Hate Speech and Xenophobia: Media Monitoring Report 2014-2015”, Tbilisi, 2015, p. 65.

<sup>436</sup> See official website at <http://nor.ge/am/>.

<sup>437</sup> See official website at <http://jnews.ge/>.

<sup>438</sup> See official website at <http://jnews.ge/>.

<sup>439</sup> See official website at <https://oc-media.org/>.

<sup>440</sup> Information available on the official website at <https://jam-news.net/about-us/>.

<sup>441</sup> See official website at <http://sknews.ge/>.

<sup>442</sup> Cf. supra note, p. 77, n. 399.

started airing 24-hour long bilingual radio programmes in Georgian and Armenian on FM 97.5, based in Akhaltsikhe<sup>443</sup>.

## VI.6. Current issues

Despite the many improvements of recent years, especially following the New Georgian Law on Broadcasting of 2004, and the ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) of the Council of Europe in 2005, many obstacles still remain. A survey carried out in November and December 2019 among the Georgian population about their trust in national media registered that despite high degrees of distrust overall, the percentages among minorities such as the Armenian one are considerably higher (as much as 88%) than those of ethnic Georgians<sup>444</sup>. This lack of trust may be caused by the fact that minorities do not feel portrayed to a satisfying degree on national channels, and this underrepresentation does not motivate their interest. As stated above, the news broadcasted in Armenian by some Georgian channels do not last long enough to cover all the information and are shown at unfavourable times. Such adversities force most ethnic Armenians to look elsewhere for information, and the main sources are Russian and Armenian media. Normally, consulting both domestic and foreign media would be a good criterion to check the objectivity of the information, but ethnic Armenians receive news exclusively through foreign media, namely Russian and Armenian. These sources of risk to influence and polarise even further ethnic Armenians, whose ideas are already often conflicting with those of the ethnic Georgian majority. These different opinions concern especially the role of Russia in South Ossetia and Abkhazia as well as in modern Georgian politics, but also the point of view on the integration of Georgia into the European Union. These contrasting sentiments regarding Russia, the EU and Georgia lead ethnic Armenians to further isolate themselves from ethnic Georgians and has a negative effect on integration. Online media platforms can be a good alternative solution to this problem,

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<sup>443</sup> “*samkhret’is karibch’e*” *radiomauts’q’eblobist’vis emzadeba* (= “South Gate” is preparing for radio broadcasting), 9 February 2016, available at <http://sknews.ge/index.php?newsid=7591>.

<sup>444</sup> Shot’a Tq’eshelashvili, “*romel arkhs endobit?*” *imedi 30%, mt’avari 18%, rust’avi2 12%, tv pirveli 5%*” (= Which channel do you trust? Imedi 30%, Mtavari 18%, Rustavi2 12%, TV Pirveli 5%), 16 January 2020, <https://bm.ge/ka/article/romel-arxs-endobit---imedi-30-mtavari--18-rustavi-2-12-tv-pirveli-5/47081>.

but governmental aid is essential in keeping such media open and to improve the access to the internet in mountainous areas of Samtskhe-Javakheti<sup>445</sup>.

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<sup>445</sup> S. Veloy Mateu, *The Armenian minority in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia: civic integration and its barriers*, *op. cit.*, p. 24, *supra*.

## CHAPTER VII

### PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE

#### VII.1. Overview of the situation

According to the data of the 2014 census, the last one held in Georgia to this day, Armenians represent 4.5% of the total population of Georgia, ranking as the third largest ethnic group in the country behind Georgians (86.8%) and Azerbaijanis (6,3%)<sup>446</sup>. The proportion of ethnic minorities in Georgia is 13.2% out of the total population<sup>447</sup>. Although the presence of an ethnic-Armenian minority in Georgia is a delicate issue, at the same time, it is also a powerful instrument that has not been exploited yet by the Georgian government to improve its relations with the Republic of Armenia, nor it has been used by Georgian political parties to expand their electoral basis and the reach of democracy in Georgia; nevertheless, the potential given by these two prospects, so far, has not been exploited yet. The two main important aspects that need to be underlined when talking about the participation of ethnic Armenians in Georgian public and political life are the language barrier that still exists, and the lack of legal incentives for the parties to reach out to ethnic minorities for their votes. Party politics of Georgia follow the *Organic Law of Georgia on Political Associations of Citizens*<sup>448</sup>, which guarantees participation into the public life of the country to every citizen with «no discrimination on the basis of race, colour, language, sex, religion, national, ethnic and social affiliation, production, property rights and rank, place of residence<sup>449</sup>». This Law, however, does not contain any specific clause that could motivate the parties in engaging more with the minorities. There are only two clauses that specifically address minorities: one banning parties from provoking ethnic rivalry and clashes<sup>450</sup>; and another one that prevents parties from restricting membership based on territorial criteria<sup>451</sup>. Whether these two clauses are determining factors or not in explaining the low participation of minorities in Georgia, certainly they do not affect the

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<sup>446</sup> See data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat), available at [http://geostat.ge/cms/site\\_images/\\_files/english/population/Census\\_release\\_ENG\\_2016.pdf](http://geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/english/population/Census_release_ENG_2016.pdf).

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>448</sup> Georg. *sak'art'velos organuli kanoni mok'alak'et'a politikuri gaert'ianebebis shesakheb.*

<sup>449</sup> See Article 11, “Organic Law of Georgia on Political Associations of Citizens”, Legislative Herald of Georgia, 1997, available at <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/28324>.

<sup>450</sup> See Article 2, “Organic Law of Georgia on Political Associations of Citizens”, *cit., ibid.*

<sup>451</sup> See Article 6, “Organic Law of Georgia on Political Associations of Citizens”, *cit., ibid.*

situation in a positive way. The Article 7 of the *Law on Political Associations of Citizens*, aimed at increasing female representation in politics, offers 30% higher funding to political parties that present election lists in which at least three candidates out of every ten are female<sup>452</sup>. It cannot be determined if a similar law could encourage individuals belonging to an ethnic minority into affiliating themselves to a national political party, but, so far, no attempt has been made in this direction, and the Georgian electoral system does not include any other mechanism aimed at increasing the representation of national minorities<sup>453</sup>. Many governmental agencies, such as the Central Election Commission, the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civil Equality, and the Public Defender have been established to foster equality and integration, in order to fulfil this requirement undertaken by Georgia upon signing the Association Agreement (AA) with the European Union in 2014<sup>454</sup>. Besides the legal framework, it must be taken into consideration, while discussing about the representation of ethnic minorities, also the readiness and willingness of political actors to move forward in this direction. For this reason, the next paragraphs evaluate the political representation of minorities in the current situation with an emphasis on the causes of the political underestimation of minorities' role during elections, the restrict access of minorities to parties' memberships and the benefits that a wider participation of ethnic minorities into politics could have for the Georgian democracy. From the Rose Revolution of 2003 until the 2017 local elections, there have been many significant improvements in the share of ethnic minorities in proportional party lists<sup>455</sup>. Among the party nominees of the 2017 local elections, only less than 6% (21 individuals) of all mayoral candidates belonged to ethnic minorities and among the mayor candidates in the 64 municipalities only 9 had a non-Georgian-sounding last name<sup>456</sup>. Similarly, of the 4,796 majoritarian candidates only 399 (8.3%) came from minority communities<sup>457</sup>. Moreover it is worth mentioning that, in multiethnic Tbilisi, no candidate of the ruling Georgian Dream party<sup>458</sup> belonged to an ethnic minority, and, overall, only 3.2% of the candidates in the

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<sup>452</sup> See Article 7, "Organic Law of Georgia on Political Associations of Citizens", *cit.*, *ibid.*

<sup>453</sup> K. Margvelashvili, A. Tsiklauri, "Electoral Systems and National Minorities" in *Integration of National Minorities. Policy papers.*, The Hague, Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, 2017, p. 12.

<sup>454</sup> Association Agreement 2013. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. Article 3, 349, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2014:261:FULL&from=EN>.

<sup>455</sup> Cf. L. Kakhishvili, *Competing for Votes of Ethnic Minorities in Georgia: The 2017 Local Elections*, Tbilisi, Centre for the Studies of Ethnicity and Multiculturalism, 2018, p. 5

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>458</sup> Georg. *k'art'uli otsneba*, see official website of the Georgian Dream Party at <http://41.ge/>.

capital could be considered of an ethnic minority. It can therefore be stated that ethnic minorities are still underrepresented among the candidates running for public offices.

In 2012, a Working Group on Ethnic Minority Issues was established by the Central Election Commission<sup>459</sup>, and, although the GPB and other local TV channels broadcasted information also in Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russian about the parliamentary elections of the same year, only one political party presented its programme in minority languages<sup>460</sup>. According to Levan Kakhishvili:

*«This can be explained with a widespread belief held by political parties that minorities vote overwhelmingly for the ruling party, which means that there is no point in investing resources, energy and time in reaching out to minorities especially in their compact settlements<sup>461</sup>.»*

Although this assumption was proved true at the 2012 parliamentary elections, during which, the ruling UNM obtained as high as 80% of the preferences among the Armenians of Javakheti compared to a nationwide average of 40.3%, in the following elections, this Soviet-time legacy of voting for the major party or the party in power has changed. Despite the overall low turnout (46.1%) of the presidential elections of 2013, this figure, in Javakheti was even lower amounting at 40.92%<sup>462</sup>. According to the answers to a survey conducted in 2015 by the ECMI, many ethnic Armenians did not vote during the last elections because either “they did not care about politics in Georgia”, either “they did not believe their participation to be relevant”<sup>463</sup>. Eventually, the official statistics of the 2017 elections show, indeed, a decreasing support for the main party. In Samtskhe-Javakheti, a region in which 51.72% of the population does not belong to the Georgian ethnic group and, more specifically, 50.52% is represented by Armenians<sup>464</sup>, 35.7% of the majoritarian candidates belonged to ethnic minorities. Of all

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<sup>459</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), “Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 9 of the Convention” (CERD/C/GEO/6-8), 2014, paragraph 24, p. 6.

<sup>460</sup> ECMI, “Minorities in 2012 Parliamentary Elections Observatory”, available at: <http://ecmcaucasus.org/upload/elections/Minority-Languages-in-elections.pdf>.

<sup>461</sup> Cf. L. Kakhishvili, *op. cit.*, p. 5, *supra*.

<sup>462</sup> Georgia Election Data, “Presidential Elections 2013”, available at [http://data.electionportal.ge/en/event/1/event/38/indicator\\_type/2/view\\_type/summary/change\\_shape/true/parent\\_clickable/false/shape/69898/shape\\_type/1?data\\_set\\_id=111&data\\_type=official](http://data.electionportal.ge/en/event/1/event/38/indicator_type/2/view_type/summary/change_shape/true/parent_clickable/false/shape/69898/shape_type/1?data_set_id=111&data_type=official).

<sup>463</sup> ECMI, “A Study of Electoral Behaviour of Ethnic Armenians in Georgia”, Tbilisi, November 2015, p. 28.

<sup>464</sup> See data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GEOSTAT), available at [http://geostat.ge/cms/site\\_images/\\_files/english/population/Census\\_release\\_ENG\\_2016.pdf](http://geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/english/population/Census_release_ENG_2016.pdf).

the regions of Georgia, only in Kvemo-Kartli, in which the population is constituted for 48,75% by ethnic minorities and, more specifically 41.75% is ethnic Azerbaijani and 5.07% by ethnic Armenians, it was registered a higher number of candidates belonging to an ethnic minority (38.4%)<sup>465</sup>. The engagement of Armenian minority in political life is a crucial step in the democratization process of Georgia, and the actual low level of their political participation is a symptom of the not yet achieved integration<sup>466</sup>.

## VII.2. Political Participation

As mentioned above, the Article 6 of the “Organic Law of Georgia on Political Associations of Citizens prevents the formation of political parties on territorial or ethnic basis and this provision, despite its goal of non-discrimination, greatly limits the Armenian minority from being able to participate as a group in the national political scene<sup>467</sup>. Ethnic Armenians, otherwise, are very involved at the local level of civil and political life and they held the majority of the posts in the city councils (Georg. *sakrebulo*) and district administration (Georg. *gamgeoba*) of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda<sup>468</sup>. The representation of ethnic Armenians, however, is not so elevated at the regional government of Samtskhe-Javakheti, where the regional chief (Georg. *gubernatori*) and the administration team are all ethnic Georgians<sup>469</sup>. The lack of knowledge of the Georgian language appears to be another important obstacle that prevents ethnic Armenians from accessing positions at the regional and national level. Seating in the current national parliament, there are two deputies who come from the ethnic Armenian minority, both members of the ruling Georgian Dream Party: Samvel Manukyan and Enzel Mkoyan<sup>470</sup>. The main issue regarding them is that they are both members of so-called “clans” that exist in Javakheti and that exercise pressure to get elected in order to pursue their personal political interests<sup>471</sup>. Nevertheless, it is of great relevance the fact that ethnic Armenians usually have rather high turnouts at the

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<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>466</sup> K. Margvelashvili, A. Tsiklauri, "Electoral Systems and National Minorities" in *op. cit.*, p. 11, *supra*.

<sup>467</sup> S. Veloy Mateu, *The Armenian minority in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia: civic integration and its barriers*, *op. cit.*, p. 33, *supra*.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>470</sup> See list of deputies of the current legislature at <http://parliament.ge/en/parlamentarebi/deputatebis-sia>.

<sup>471</sup> See *supra* note, p. 53, n. 270, cf. J. Wheatley, *The Integration of National Minorities in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli Provinces of Georgia. Five years into the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili*, ECMI Working Paper Series #44, September 2009, p. 24.

elections, especially when compared to other minorities and the Georgian majority. For instance, at the local elections of 2010 there was an average national turnout of 49%, while, in Samtskhe-Javakheti, the turnout was of 73.5%<sup>472</sup>. These data show that there is a willingness of political participation coming from the ethnic-Armenian minority, therefore, the question arises of what obstacles are still impeding political engagement from being achieved also at the national level. Despite these encouraging results, many politicians did not campaign in the municipalities of Samtskhe-Javakheti that are populated mostly by ethnic Armenians<sup>473</sup>. The Georgian Dream Party used to have a campaign office in Akhalkalki, but for minorities is not easy to find updated information on the political programmes, candidates and electoral procedures<sup>474</sup>. As a result of these behaviours, at the 2014 municipal elections of Samtskhe-Javakheti, the turnout decreased to 49.8% (still higher than the nationwide turnout of 43.3%)<sup>475</sup>. Consequently, over the last few years, the Central Electoral Commission and other governmental agencies have been trying to increase minority participation in the national electoral processes by promoting campaigns in minority languages to inform about the candidates, the agendas and the electoral procedures<sup>476</sup>. Despite these attempts, during the last presidential elections of 2018, not all candidates held campaign meetings in Samtskhe-Javakheti, and not enough emphasis was given to the minority issues<sup>477</sup>.

### VII.3. Attitude of ethnic Armenians toward Georgia's foreign policies

The attitude of the overwhelming majority of the ethnic Armenians of Georgia,

<sup>472</sup> International Crisis Group, "Georgia: The Javakheti Region's Integration Challenges", in *Policy Briefing, Europe Briefing No. 63*, Tbilisi/Yerevan/Brussels, ICG Publications, 23 May 2011, p.11.

<sup>473</sup> J. Wheatley, "The Integration of National Minorities in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli Provinces of Georgia", European Centre for Minority Issues Working Paper #44, September 2009, p. 25.

<sup>474</sup> S. Veloy Mateu, *The Armenian minority in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia: civic integration and its barriers, op. cit.*, p. 34, *supra*.

<sup>475</sup> ECMI, "A Study of Electoral Behaviour of Ethnic Armenians in Georgia", Tbilisi, November 2015, p. 16.

<sup>476</sup> Central Electoral Commission, "The Central Election Commission Introduced to Media Information on Ethnic Minorities", 11th June 2014. Available at: <http://www.cesko.ge/en/mediisatvis-4-ge/pres-relizebi-13-ge/the-central-election-commissionintroduced-to-media-information-on-ethnic-minorities.page>.

<sup>477</sup> See M. Ivelashvili, *raze esaubrnen ert'manet's prezident'obis kandidatibi da amomrchevlebi samtskhe javakhet'shi* (= What do candidates and voters speak to each other about in Samtskhe-Javakheti), Radio Liberty, 27 September 2018, available at <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/რაზე-ესაუბრნენ-ერთმანეთს-პრეზიდენტობის-კანდიდატები-და-ამომრჩევლები-სამცხე-ჯავახეთში/29513352.html>.



especially those from Samtskhe-Javakheti, is in line with the philo-Russian stances of their kin state, the Republic of Armenia. These pro-Russia tendencies date back to the Tsarist and Soviet times, and, nowadays, it is not easy to eradicate them since ethnic Armenians get their information mostly from Russian media. The current nature of the relations of Georgia with the European Union, due to lack of information from the government, is not very clear also among ethnic Georgians, and the situation among the ethnic Armenians of Javakheti is even worse. There is, nevertheless, some degree of awareness that the EU's integration policies and rule of law could help protecting the rights of Armenians as a minority, but, at the same time, many ethnic Armenians do not feel welcoming of the EU is this means a worsening of their relations with Russia, which is still seen as a major ally<sup>478</sup>. Some Civil Society Organisations, such as the ECMI, have been organising meetings in Samtskhe-Javakheti to promote European integration, and to spread information about the EU-Georgia Association Agreement<sup>479</sup>. Similar campaigns to raise awareness have been carried out by CSOs in Javakheti about the implications of a NATO membership for Georgia<sup>480</sup>. Armenians of Javakheti are more sceptical toward the possibility of joining NATO that they are toward the EU, because they fear that Turkey, which is a member of NATO, would seize the admission of Georgia into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation as an opportunity to deploy its military forces in the region<sup>481</sup>. The closure of the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki was not welcomed by the local Armenians who saw its presence as a deterrent to Turkey. Ethnic Armenians, differently from Georgians, value highly the preservation of good relations with Russia as it is a country they often travel to for occasional work and because they consider it their major ally in the region against Turkey and Azerbaijan<sup>482</sup>.

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<sup>478</sup> Caucasian House, "Problems of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti and Foreign Policy Preferences of the Local Populations", Research report, 2014, p. 32.

<sup>479</sup> ECMI, News of Activities. Available at: [http://www.ecmicaucasus.org/menu/news\\_archive.html](http://www.ecmicaucasus.org/menu/news_archive.html).

<sup>480</sup> Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, "Enhancing State Language Knowledge and Raising Awareness on NATO and EU of Ethnic Armenian Minorities in Javakheti", available at: T. Kintsurashvili, S. Gelava, A. Chitaladze, *Informing ethnic minorities on Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration*, Tbilisi, Media Development Foundation, 21 March 2019, available at <http://gfsis.org/index.php/activities/projects/view/125>; [http://www.mdfgeorgia.ge/eng/view\\_research/159](http://www.mdfgeorgia.ge/eng/view_research/159).

<sup>481</sup> Caucasian House, "Problems of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti and Foreign Policy Preferences of the Local Populations", Research report, 2014, p.32.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

#### VIII.1. Current situation and structure of the Legal System in Javakheti

According to Article 14 of the *General Administrative Code of Georgia*, the official language of administrative proceedings in Georgia is Georgian, with the only exception of Abkhazian in Abkhazia<sup>483</sup>. This exclusivity of the legal status of Georgian and Abkhazian is restated in Article 73 of the same Law concerning the parties to administrative proceedings<sup>484</sup>. Nevertheless, in the administrative organs of Javakheti, and, in particular, in the municipalities of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda in which the majority of the population is ethnic Armenian, Armenian and Russian are used more often than Georgian, in contrast with the provisions of the Administrative Code<sup>485</sup>. This widespread use of Armenian as oral language of communication at the local level in district (Georg. *gamgeoba*) administration is due to the reality of the situation, in which the majority of the employees is ethnic Armenian. The Russian language is used mainly for written documents as a *lingua franca* to communicate with personnel of non-Armenian heritage, although local Georgians usually speak also Armenian and/or Russian<sup>486</sup>. Notwithstanding the legal provisions requiring all documents to be redacted in Georgian, it is not uncommon, even for official certificates, to be sent in Russian language to the governmental offices and Ministries in the capital<sup>487</sup>. More rarely, some documents are translated into Georgian by Georgian employees of the municipality offices<sup>488</sup>. Currently, in Javakheti, there are two district courts (Georg. *raionuli sasamart'lo*), respectively in Ninotsminda and in Akhalkalaki, and one District Prosecutor's Office (Georg. *raionuli prokuraturis op'isi*) in Akhalkalaki with authority also over the Ninotsminda district, and one regional court (Georg. *saolk'o sasamart'lo*)

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<sup>483</sup> See Article 14 of the “General Administrative Code of Georgia” (Georg. *sak'art'velos zogadi administratsiuli kodek'si*), available at <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/16270?publication=33>.

<sup>484</sup> See Article 73 of the “General Administrative Code of Georgia”, *cit., supra*.

<sup>485</sup> J. Wheatley, “The Status of Minority Languages in Georgia and the Relevance of Models from other European States”, European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) Working Paper Series #26, March 2006, p. 11.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

and Regional Prosecutor's Office (Georg. *saolk'o prokuratura*) based in Akhaltsikhe and serving the whole Samtskhe-Javakheti region<sup>489</sup>.

## VIII.2. Issues in the administration of justice

The language barrier constitutes the major impediment in the administration of justice, both at the written level for official documents, and orally during the trials in courts. Two years after the Rose Revolution, in 2005, the government of Mikhail Saakashvili simultaneously introduced improved methods of teaching Georgian to minorities and started to implement the language-requirement laws for public posts that were never enforced during Shevardnadze's presidency<sup>490</sup>. Due to the enforcement of the language requirements and the general qualification testing, some ethnic Armenians who failed to prove enough mastery of Georgian were replaced by ethnic Georgians<sup>491</sup>. Subsequently, many Armenians of Javakheti developed additional sentiments of distrust and fear toward the new government interventions that destabilised their *status quo*<sup>492</sup>. Nevertheless, at the local level of courts, the most widespread language is Russian, not only for written documents, but also for the pre-trial protocol such as witness statements and the results of preliminary investigations<sup>493</sup>. This practice is carried out on an informal basis as it goes against the provisions of the Administrative Code, and it is due to the poor mastery of the Georgian language at the local level of the juridical system<sup>494</sup>. Consequently, in the tribunals of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, trials are usually conducted orally in Armenian, and the written memoranda are subsequently translated into Russian. Most of the personnel of district courts, including judges and lawyers, does not have a fluent knowledge of Georgian, and also the majority of the plaintiffs, for this reason, the sentences are, in most of the cases, recorded in Russian, despite the provisions of the *Administrative Code* requiring all legal procedures to be held in

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<sup>489</sup> See "*sak'art'velos saolk'o prokuraturebis struktura*" (= Structure of district prosecutor's offices) available at <http://pog.gov.ge/district-structure>; "*akhaltsikhis raionuli sasamartlo. chvens shesakheb*" (= District Tribunal of Akhaltsikhe. About us), available at [http://www.court.ge/courts/axalcixis\\_raionuli\\_sasamartlo/?page=24](http://www.court.ge/courts/axalcixis_raionuli_sasamartlo/?page=24).

<sup>490</sup> J. Wheatley, "Implementing the framework convention for the protection of national minorities in Georgia: a feasibility study" ECMI Working Paper #28, European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), 2006, p. 26, available at <https://nbnresolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-63072>.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>493</sup> J. Wheatley, "The Status of Minority Languages in Georgia and the Relevance of Models from other European States", *op. cit.*, p. 11, *ibid.*

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*

Georgian<sup>495</sup>. The absence of qualification exams and controls of the language requirements for the staff are also in break of the *Law of Georgia on Public Service*<sup>496</sup>. In Akhaltsikhe, where the Regional Prosecutor's Office for Samtskhe-Javakheti is located, Armenians make up the 26.7% of the population<sup>497</sup>. Subsequently, Russian-written documents sent by the Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda district courts to the central Prosecutor's Office in Akhaltsikhe are usually rejected, and this practice causes long delays in the administration of justice at the local level<sup>498</sup>. Delays can become especially problematic when the rejected documents regard misdemeanours because they force the defendants into pre-trial detention for three months for offences that would commonly require them to be remanded into custody<sup>499</sup>. In order to circumvent such delays and the risk of detention, which is a violation of the individual right to a fair trial, ethnic Armenians sometimes recur to bribery and corruption of local authorities to have the charges dismissed<sup>500</sup>. Moreover, the practice of not accepting documents written in language other than Georgian could undermine the arbitrariness in the selection of the applications, hence prompting possible abuses of power from the authorities in charge<sup>501</sup>. To prevent the recurrence of similar situations and guarantee the effectiveness of the legal system, it would be sufficient, for the national government, to legally compel the regional bureaucratic institutions to accept documents drafted in Armenian. The legal system of Samtskhe-Javakheti, for the aforementioned reasons, operates in an faulty, and sometimes discriminating, way toward the Armenian minority. The language barrier is an issue that needs a considerable amount of time to be overcome, both for the younger generations to learn Georgian and for the difficulty in finding qualified interpreters. Given these premises, granting a provisional official status to the Armenian language at the local level of the juridical system in Samtskhe-Javakheti, would greatly improve the efficiency of the execution of justice in the region,

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<sup>495</sup> See Articles 14 and 73 of the "General Administrative Code of Georgia" (Georg. *sak'art'velos zogadi administratsiuli kodek'si*), available at <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/16270?publication=33>.

<sup>496</sup> See Law of Georgia on Public Service (Georg. *sak'art'velos kanoni sajaro samsakhuris shesakheb*), Chapter V (Appointment of Officers), Article 27 (Basic Requirements for Officers), Paragraph 1a, 27 October 2015, available at <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/3031098?publication=26>.

<sup>497</sup> Data are taken from the 2014 General Census of the Georgian Population (Georg. *mosakhleobis saq'ovelt'ao aghts'era*), GeoStat, November 2014, available at [http://census.ge/files/results/Census%20Release\\_GEO.pdf](http://census.ge/files/results/Census%20Release_GEO.pdf).

<sup>498</sup> J. Wheatley, "The Status of Minority Languages in Georgia and the Relevance of Models from other European States", *op. cit.*, p. 11, *ibid*.

<sup>499</sup> J. Wheatley, "The Status of Minority Languages in Georgia and the Relevance of Models from other European States", *op. cit.*, p. 11, *supra*.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid*.

simply by legalising an informal practice that already exists. The examples of Croatia and Romania that will be presented in the next chapters show how, under similar circumstances, the regulated recognition of a legal status to minority languages does not undermine the authority and the prestige of the national language, contrarily, it can be a useful instrument to promote integration<sup>502</sup>.

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<sup>502</sup> Cf. J. Wheatley, “The Status of Minority Languages in Georgia and the Relevance of Models from other European States”, ECMI Working Paper Series #26, March 2006, p. 22

## CHAPTER IX

### ARMENOPHOBIA?

#### IX.1. Historic development of anti-Armenian sentiments

Armenophobia is a neologism created in the XX century following the example of many similar terms. It is a compound words of *Armeno-* and *-phobia* (Greek *-φοβία*) which means “fear”, together it indicates a vast range of negative sentiments and attitudes, such as hatred, fear, aversion, prejudice and disapproval towards Armenian people, Armenian culture and everything that may be related to Armenia. Similarly to anti-Semitism, the existence of anti-Armenian sentiments dates back to ancient times, probably because ethnic Armenians started very early in history, even before the lost of their first homeland, to migrate to different countries and to interact with different societies. Armenian communities abroad have always been characterised by a high degree of both integration with the new culture that surrounded them and at the same time of preservation of their own distinctive cultural aspects, in particular language, religion and traditions. Armenians have often been involved as merchants in trading and money-lending as well as in handcraft and artisanal activities and they often rose to wealthy, privileged and influential high social statuses; this tendency, linked with the conservation of their customs and practices probably lead to feelings of distrust and suspicion towards them from the local members of the societies in which they were living, however, they were usually not regarded as second-class citizens. In the Savafid Persian Empire, under shah Abbas I Armenians were forced to relocate and live in areas reserved to them<sup>503</sup>, but it was not until 1895 in the Ottoman Empire that a well-organised propaganda of anti-Armenian sentiment was openly promoted by a national government and resulted into systematic violence and massacres<sup>504</sup>. Although well-integrated into the Ottoman societies, Armenians were considered dangerous because of their different faith and reluctance to convert to Islam. It was this lack of assimilation, aggravated by the circumstances of World War I and the re-awoken

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<sup>503</sup> Cf. *supra*, note n. 45, p. 22.

<sup>504</sup> Hamidian Massacres (1894-1896) ordered by Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1842-1918), see entries «Abdülhamid II» at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Abdulhamid-II> and «Hamidian Massacres» at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hamidian-massacres>. For more information on this topic see A. Sarafian (edited by), *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Falloden by Viscount Bryce, James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee, Uncensored Edition*. Princeton ( NJ), Gomidas Institute, 2000.

Armenian nationalism, that led the Ottoman Empire to perpetrate a systematic massacre of approximately 1 to 1.5 million of Armenians from 1914 to 1923<sup>505</sup>.

## IX.2. Anti-Armenian sentiments in Georgia

Armenians living under the Kingdom of Kartli and the following foreign dominations of Georgia, besides being sometimes seen with suspicion by ethnic Georgians, did not experience, differently from other ethnicities, any legalised discrimination towards them. In the XIX century, many ethnic Armenians belonged to the upper class, and held high and influential positions in tsarist Georgia, and at the end of this century and the beginning of the following one, due to the rise of Georgian nationalism, Armenians started being perceived as a possible obstacle to independence and negative attitudes towards them were widespread among the Georgian nobility and *intelligentsia*. Even important Georgian personalities of that time, such as Ilia Ch'avch'avadze, Akaki Ts'ereteli and Niko Nikoladze openly made anti-Armenian statements in journals expressing their concern about the Armenians of Tiflis as an impediment on the path of Georgia's independence<sup>506</sup>. During the three years of existence of the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921), although 8 elected deputies were of Armenian descent, the people in charge of the government looked with scepticism at the Armenian minority of Georgia, since they were not certain of their loyalty, especially after the events of the Georgian Armenian War<sup>507</sup>. Under the Soviet Union, the different ethnicities were encouraged to keep their language and culture, and it was not until Zviad Gamsakhurdia's presidency that the Armenian minority was the target of alienating nationalist policies<sup>508</sup>. According to the 1989 census, Armenians constituted 14.6% of the population of Abkhazia<sup>509</sup>. Ethnic Armenians of Abkhazia have been supporting the secession of the region since the Georgian-Abkhazian War of 1992-1993, and this attitude has further increased the distrust of ethnic Georgians towards

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<sup>505</sup> This mass extermination is usually referred to as Armenian Genocide, cf. entry «Armenian Genocide» at <https://www.britannica.com/event/Armenian-Genocide>.

<sup>506</sup> Gulaber Klariji (alias of Alek'sandre Abdaladze), “*somkhebis shemosevebi sak'art'veloshi*” (= Armenian invasions of Georgia), in *Georgian Times*, 25 July 2003, pp. 6-7, available at [http://www.amsi.ge/istoria/somx/somxebis\\_shem.pdf](http://www.amsi.ge/istoria/somx/somxebis_shem.pdf).

<sup>507</sup> Cf. A. Andersen, G. Partskhaladze, *Armeno-Georgian War of 1918 and Armeno-Georgian Territorial Issue in the 20th Century*, 2015, p. 28, available at [https://www.academia.edu/10176756/Armeno-Georgian\\_War\\_of\\_1918\\_and\\_Armeno-Georgian\\_Territorial\\_Issue\\_in\\_the\\_20th\\_Century](https://www.academia.edu/10176756/Armeno-Georgian_War_of_1918_and_Armeno-Georgian_Territorial_Issue_in_the_20th_Century).

<sup>508</sup> Cf. *supra*, note n. 164, p. 34.

<sup>509</sup> Data from the 1989 Soviet Census are available at <http://www.ethno-kavkaz.narod.ru/rnabkhazia.html>.

Armenians. Differently from Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze's and Saakashvili's governments have not openly spread anti-Armenian propaganda, nevertheless concern among political actors and the general public about the delicate situation of Samtskhe-Javakheti remains, due to the fact that the region is perceived at possible risk of secession<sup>510</sup>. Furthermore, the support of the local Armenian population for the Russian intervention in Abkhazia is still highlighted, sometimes by the media<sup>511</sup>, and this practice endorses hatred towards ethnic Armenians living in the rest of Georgia as well. Nowadays, although armenophobic acts are not very frequent, an attitude of suspicion in their regards persist among the majority of ethnic Georgians. This stance of Georgian towards the Armenian minority living in their country is attributable to many stereotypes and misconceptions that perpetuated during the last centuries, and, in particular, throughout the past decades, especially following the independence of Georgia in 1991. Some of these beliefs still existing today date back to the XIX century, when Armenians used to make up the majority of the trading and entrepreneurial class of Tbilisi, for example the colloquial and slang usage of the word *somekhi* (= Armenian) as a synonym to indicate a stingy person. The majority of these negative attitudes developed, probably, in response to certain misappropriating claims made by some Armenians, which, even though they were sporadic occurrences, became established stereotypes among Georgians<sup>512</sup>. The most controversial claims are, for instance: the Armenian origin of traditional Georgian dishes such as *khach'apuri* and *khinkali*, the Armenian heritage of famous Georgian figures like XII-century writer Shot'a Rust'aveli and Josef Stalin, the allegation that Tbilisi is an "Armenian city", the ascription of the first version of the Georgian alphabet (*asomt'avruli*) to Armenian Mesrop Mashtots<sup>513</sup>. A rarely considered aspect is, however, the few interactions that occur between ethnic Armenians and Georgians and the little familiarity that both peoples have of each

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<sup>510</sup> L. Coffey, "Russia's next acquisition: if Russia wanted to exploit the situation in Georgia's Samtskhe-Javakheti province, there's no better time than now", Aljazeera, 17 January 2015, available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/01/russia-caucasus-georgia-armeni-2015114111654383153.html>.

<sup>511</sup> Cf. "Armyanskiĭ vopros" v Abkhazii glazami gruzinskikh SMI (= The "Armenian Question" in Abkhazia through the eyes of the Georgian media), Regnum Information Agency ( Rus. *Informatsionnoe Agentstvo*), 25 January 2007, available at <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/772350.html>; "Focus on Faction: Georgian media stirs Abkhazian-Armenian 'conflict'", ArmeniaNow.com, 6 April 2015, available at <http://armenianow.com/?action=viewArticle&AID=1977&CID=2055&IID=&lng=eng>.

<sup>512</sup> T. Kintsurashvili, *Hate Speech and Xenophobia. Media Monitoring Report 2014-2015*, Tbilisi, Media Development Foundation, 2015, p. 65.

<sup>513</sup> L. A. Grenoble, *Language policy in the Soviet Union*, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publications, 2003, p. 116.



other<sup>514</sup>. This lack of general knowledge is particularly true in the case of Georgians' assumptions about Armenians, since very few have been to Armenia, whereas the majority of Armenians has travelled to Georgia. Since 2015, the Media Development Foundation of Georgia (MDF), funded by USAID and UNAG, has carried out monitoring surveys about the presence of hate speech and xenophobia in the Georgian media issuing annual reports<sup>515</sup>. During the first years of activities of the MDF, reports have shown a fluctuating trend in the number of armenophobic comments present in the media, passing from the 36 instances of 2014-2015<sup>516</sup> to the 26 of 2016<sup>517</sup> to the 58 of 2017<sup>518</sup> to the 39 of 2018<sup>519</sup>. Armenophobic statements come mostly from representatives of public offices, religious servants, and members of political parties, and they consist, for the major part, of a negative portrayal of the Armenian identity, followed by attacks to political actors (usually references to Armenian origin without any justification and in a discriminatory context), statements about disputed religious buildings, accusations of trying to destabilise and seize Georgia<sup>520</sup>.

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<sup>514</sup> M. Shalvashvili, “*dominanturi mzera - somekhi t’emi*” (= Dominant gaze - the Armenian community), Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC), 5 February 2020, available at <https://emc.org.ge/ka/products/dominanturi-mzera-somekhi-temi>.

<sup>515</sup> See official website available at <http://www.mdfgeorgia.ge/eng/home>.

<sup>516</sup> T. Kintsurashvili, *Hate Speech and Xenophobia. Media Monitoring Report 2014-2015*, Tbilisi, Media Development Foundation, 2015, p. 26.

<sup>517</sup> T. Kintsurashvili, *Hate Speech. 2016 Report*, Tbilisi, Media Development Foundation, 2016, p. 8.

<sup>518</sup> T. Kintsurashvili, *Hate Speech. 2017*, Tbilisi, Media Development Foundation, 2017, p. 13.

<sup>519</sup> T. Kintsurashvili, *Hate Speech. 2018*, Tbilisi, Media Development Foundation, 2018, p. 11.

<sup>520</sup> T. Kintsurashvili, *Hate Speech and Xenophobia. Media Monitoring Report 2014-2015*, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28, *ibid.*

## CHAPTER X

### CASES OF DISCRIMINATION AND UNFAIR TREATMENT

#### **X.1. Unfair Treatment of ethnic Armenian Workers of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway**

The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway is an international project agreed on, in January 2005, by the governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey.<sup>521</sup> Due to lack of fundings<sup>522</sup> the project was delayed and it was not until November 2017 that the presidents of the three countries involved launched the construction<sup>523</sup>. After many further delays, due, among other things, to the 2008 war in South Ossetia<sup>524</sup>, the railway was officially inaugurated on 30 October 2017<sup>525</sup>. The project was an alternative to the initially planned Kars-Gyumri-Tbilisi railway closed in July 1993 following the Nagorno-Karabakh War and the stalemate situation that occurred between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as between Armenia and Turkey<sup>526</sup>. Ethnic Armenians, who constitute the majority of the population in the Javakheti, a region of Georgia<sup>527</sup> through which a significant part of the railway was projected to pass, were initially against the project because it completely excluded Armenia and it “had to go through fertile of local lands, sown fields and pastures”<sup>528</sup>. Following the closure of the Russian military base present in Akhalkalaki<sup>529</sup>, the Georgian government promised, thanks to the railway project, many

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<sup>521</sup> Cf. *Pointers*. *Railway Gazette International*. March 2007. Retrieved 2 September 2007

<sup>522</sup> Cf. G. Hakobyan, “Armenia Responds to Kars-Akhalkalaki Railroad Proposal”, in *Central Asia Caucasus Analyst (CACI): Fields*, Washington D.C., Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, 7 September 2005, available at <http://cacianalyst.org/publications/field-reports/item/10268-field-reports-caci-analyst-2005-9-7-art-10268.html>.

<sup>523</sup> At the time the presidents were Ilham Aliyev for Azerbaijan, Mikheil Saakashvili for Georgia, and Abdullah Gül for Turkey, cf. *Presidents Inaugurated Construction Of "Baku-Tbilisi-Kars" Railway*. Prime-News. 21 November 2007. Archived from the original on 30 May 2007. Retrieved 30 December 2007.

<sup>524</sup> Cf. *Railway to link Kars, Tbilisi, Baku in 2015*, Baku - Anadolu Agency.

<sup>525</sup> Cf. *Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey launch 'Silk Road' rail link*. Reuters, 30 October 2017.

<sup>526</sup> Cf. Lussac, Samuel. 2008. "The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railroad and its Geopolitical Implications for the South Caucasus." *Caucasus Review of International Affairs*, p. 12; cf. “*Caucasian Review of International Affairs (CRIA)*”. Archived from the original on 4 March 2016. Retrieved 18 January 2011.

<sup>527</sup> Javakheti is part of the Georgian administrative region, Georg. ‘*mkhare*’, of Samtskhe-Javakheti.

<sup>528</sup> Cf. A. Ayvazyan, “*We won't leave until we're paid*” – workers on Georgian section of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad on strike available at: <https://jam-news.net/we-dont-leave-until-were-paid-workers-on-georgian-section-of-baku-tbilisi-kars-railroad-on-strike/>.

<sup>529</sup> Cf. I. Øverland, *The Closure of the Russian Military Base at Akhalkalaki: Challenges for the Local Energy Elite, the Informal Economy and Stability* in *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies*, Issue 10, 2009, available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/pipss/3717>.

new jobs to the residents of the region, which is inhabited mostly by ethnic Armenians<sup>530</sup>. However, as reported by Agunik Ayvazyan in her article for JamNews:

*“The local population says they have been largely deceived, claiming that Azerbaijani and Turkish companies hire ‘their own’ people in the region. «No local Armenians are hired. They bring their own Azerbaijani workers from Baku and Marneuli [...]», locals says.”*<sup>531</sup>

According to Ayvazyan’s article, no more than twenty people amongst the residents of the village of Kulalis in the Ninotsminda District were hired as workers for the railway<sup>532</sup>. These complaints are yet to be answered by officials at the local and state level, but, as of June 2019, workers of all ethnicities on the Georgian section of the railway started a strike to protest the delay of the payments of their salaries from the Azerbaijani company Demyrol<sup>533</sup>.

## **X.2. Appropriation of Armenian Apostolic Churches of Georgia**

In the 1170s an Apostolic Armenian Diocese was established in Tbilisi because of the growing number of Armenians in the city<sup>534</sup>. Many churches and places of worship were built, thanks to donations from wealthy Armenians of Tbilisi in order to accommodate the growing number of Armenians in the XIV-XVIII centuries<sup>535</sup>. The most controversial facts regarding the Armenian community and their heritage have happened in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, and in particular towards churches and religious buildings belonging mostly to the Armenian Apostolic Church, and, in a minor part, to the Armenian Catholic Church. Revendications of religious buildings from the Armenian Apostolic Church have happened, however, also in Javakheti and other areas of Georgia, namely Kakheti, Gori, and Kutaisi<sup>536</sup>. The Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Georgia has been very active in condemning the appropriation and destruction by abandonment of many historical monuments to the point of sponsoring,

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<sup>530</sup> U. Yapıcı, “Samtskhe-Javakheti Region: A Neglected Keypoint for European Security of Energy Supply?”, in *Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 2016, vol. 14, pp. 6-7.

<sup>531</sup> Cf. A. Ayvazyan, *cit.*, *ibid.*

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>534</sup> Cf. *supra*, note n. 76, p. 26.

<sup>535</sup> Cf. *supra*, note n. 77 p. 26.

<sup>536</sup> Cf. S. Karapetyan, *The Georgian state policy and Armenian cultural monuments between 1988 and 1998*, Yerevan, RAA Publications, 1998, p. , available at <http://www.ancestralstones.com/03Reading.htm>.

amongst many press releases, also the publication, through its “Kanter” organisation, of the dossier ‘*Cultural Genocide of Armenian Heritage in Georgia*’<sup>537</sup> and the realisation of the documentary film ‘*Ancestral Stones*’ (Arm. *Nakhineri k’arerê*) by film-director Yeghishe Gevorkyan<sup>538</sup>. In 2011, within the framework of a program sponsored by the Council of Europe, a team of Armenian and Georgian specialists were to study certain monuments of the two countries, but Samvel Karapetyan, who had already published research about the Armenian heritage of Georgia, on that occasion was denied entry into Georgia at the border<sup>539</sup>. Until today, few scientific publications and research papers have been written about the churches of Georgia whose affiliation is controversial, and the majority of these studies was carried out almost exclusively by Armenian experts, hence the objectivity of these articles is sometimes questionable.

Armenian and Georgian churches share many similarities in architecture and iconography and it is not always easy to determine the original ownership, especially due to the fact that many churches were alternately Georgian and Armenian depending on the time examined. In the first decades of Soviet rule, all religions and places of worship were the indiscriminate targets of persecutions and many churches and properties were either destroyed or confiscated in all the republics that formed the USSR, including in Georgia<sup>540</sup>. According to French historian Jean-Michel Thierry, 10 of the 24 Armenian churches existing in Tbilisi were destroyed in the 1930s<sup>541</sup>, including the Church of *Surb Astvatsatsin* (= Holy Mother of God) and a great part of its annexed cemetery<sup>542</sup>. Stones, marbles and materials of the destroyed churches, *khachk’ars* (= cross-stones) and graves were employed in the construction of other buildings<sup>543</sup>. The remaining churches, with the exception of the two still functioning

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<sup>537</sup> Cf. *Cultural Genocide of Armenian Heritage in Georgia*, published by the Organisation for the support of the Armenian Diocese in Georgia “Kanter”, 2005, available at: [http://www.ancestralstones.com/cultural\\_genocide\\_en.pdf](http://www.ancestralstones.com/cultural_genocide_en.pdf)

<sup>538</sup> The documentary film “*Ancestral Stones*” was directed by Yeghishe Gevorkyan in 2004-2005 in Georgia and participated in the 3rd Annual Golden Apricot Festival in Yerevan (10-15 July 2006) in the competition “Armenian Panorama - documentary”, for more information see <http://www.ancestralstones.com/01About.htm>.

<sup>539</sup> L. Sukiasyan, “«*Örenk’ ch’em khakhtel*». Samvel Karapetyanin gortsuneut’yan patcharov argelel en mtnel Vrastan” (= «I have not broken the law.» Samvel Karapetyan banned from entering Georgia due to his activities), Aravot.am, 16 December 2015, available at <https://www.aravot.am/2015/12/16/639951/>.

<sup>540</sup> Cf. D. V. Pospelovsky, “A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory, and Practice, and the Believer”, vol I: *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Anti-Religious Policies*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1987, p. 34.

<sup>541</sup> J.-M. Thierry, *Armenian Art*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1989, p. 586.

<sup>542</sup> S. Karapetyan, *The State Policy of Georgia and the Monuments of Armenian Culture*, Yerevan, RAA Publications, 1998, p. 45.

<sup>543</sup> Cf. S. Karapetyan, “*Hayots’ masunk’neri teghum vrats’ ekeghets’i*” (= A Georgian Church in the place of Armenian relics?), in «*Banber*» n. 64, 1995, p. 3.

today, were either turned into storehouses, deposits and other typologies of buildings, either left to decay<sup>544</sup>. The most controversial example of appropriation and demolition of Armenian heritage in Tbilisi and in all Georgia is the case of the Armenian Pantheon of *Khojivank'* and the construction of the Holy Trinity Cathedral (Georg. *ts'minda samebis sakat'edro tadzari*) of the Georgian Orthodox Church. The plan to build a new cathedral was announced by the Georgian Patriarchate in 1989, but due to the turmoils caused by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Georgian Civil War, the construction did not begin until 23 November 1995, mostly supported by the Georgian Orthodox Church and private donations<sup>545</sup>. The site chosen for the construction of the cathedral was Mount Elia (Georg. *elias mt'a*) in Tbilisi, located in the district of *Avlabari* (Arm. 'Havlabar'), a neighbourhood of Tbilisi that, historically, was populated mostly by ethnic Armenians. Moreover, on the location of part of the church used to stand, since the XVII century, the Armenian Church of *Surb Astvatsatsin* (Holy Mother of God), called *Khojivank'* (= Monastery of Khoja), with an annexed cemetery, usually referred to as Pantheon because many important Armenian figure of Tbilisi, including Raffi and T'umanean, had been buried throughout more than two centuries. The destruction of the church and part of the Armenian cemetery was authorised in the 1934 by Lavrenti Beria, an ethnic Georgian very close to Stalin, and it lasted until 1938<sup>546</sup>. As it happened for other religious buildings of Tbilisi, the construction materials of *Khojivank'*, including epigrams and gravestones of famous Armenians, were either destroyed or re-used to build new edifices<sup>547</sup>. In part of that area an elementary school was built, but the former site of the Armenian graveyard remained completely closed until the 1960s when some sporadic visits to the remains of the Pantheon were granted. In 1994 the construction of the Holy Trinity Cathedral began, and, according to the original plan, the new church was not supposed to occupy the still existing portion of *Khojivank'*, nevertheless, according to Armenian media, more gravestones, foundations of buildings and even human remains were dug up and

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<sup>544</sup> Cf. M. Hasratian ( Head of the Architecture Department of the National Academy of Sciences), in S. Karapetyan, *The State Policy of Georgia and the Monuments of Armenian Culture*, Yerevan, RAA Editions, 1998, p. 5.

<sup>545</sup> Cf. [http://gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=-&sec\\_id=380&info\\_id=45753](http://gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=-&sec_id=380&info_id=45753).

<sup>546</sup> Cf. S. Karapetyan, *The State Policy of Georgia and the Monuments of Armenian Culture*, Yerevan, RAA Editions, 1998, p. 45.

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid.*

bulldozed in the construction process<sup>548</sup>. The Armenian minority of Tbilisi openly protested against these actions, but, despite the delays they causes, in 1997 the construction resumed and the Holy Trinity Cathedral of Tbilisi was officially consecrated in 2004.

A more recent incident regards the *Norashen* Holy Mother of God Armenian Church, often referred to as *Tandoyants'*, which is situated in the Old Tbilisi (Georg. *dzveli t'bilisi*) city district in a cross street to the very central Kote Apkhazi (Leselidze) Street. The church was historically Armenian, as its construction in 1507 was financed by a wealthy Armenian named Satat<sup>549</sup> and for the following centuries all the renovations were done by prominent Armenian families of Tbilisi<sup>550</sup>. The Church was also mentioned as being Apostolic Armenian by the French traveller Jean Chardin during his visit to Georgia in 1673 and by the Georgian literate Egnate Ioseliani in 1867<sup>551</sup>. According to Samvel Karapetyan, some architectural changes were made to the church in 1983 in order to hide its Armenian origin, but these claims are not proved. The church has been shut down in early Soviet times and, due to disuse, many of the frescoes and architectural structures have suffered great damages. Since the fall of Soviet Union the Armenian Diocese of Georgia has been claiming possession of the church, but no official action was taken by the Georgian government until November 2007 when construction works started in the areas surroundings the church. On demand of Armenian NGOs to the National Agency of State Property, it was announced to the public that ownership of the *Tandoyants'* Church had been granted to the Georgian Orthodox Patriarchate the previous July<sup>552</sup>. Since then a legal battle has started between

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<sup>548</sup> Cf. J. Hakobyan, "Havlabar: Armenian community in Tbilisi pays the price of urbanization", ArmeniaNow, 28 September 2007, available at, [https://www.armenianow.com/hy/features/7697/havlabar\\_armenian\\_community\\_in\\_tbi](https://www.armenianow.com/hy/features/7697/havlabar_armenian_community_in_tbi).

<sup>549</sup> Arm. Սատաթ. Cfr. "Թբիլիսիի Նորաշեն Սուրբ Աստվածածին Եկեղեցի [Norashen Holy Mother of God Church of Tbilisi]". armenianchurch.ge (in Armenian). "An Historical Overview of the Norashen Sourb Astvatzatzin Church". *Hetq.* 8 December 2008. Archived from the original on 29 April 2019.; Armenian version by Kristine Aghalaryan.

<sup>550</sup> Cfr. Hasratyan, Murad (2009). "Թբիլիսիի հայկական եկեղեցիների ճարտարապետությունը [Architecture of the Armenian Churches in Tbilisi]". *Etchmiadzin* (in Armenian). **65** (6): 74 Cfr. Mouradian, Parouyr (2008). "Թբիլիսիի հայոց Նորաշեն եկեղեցու իրական պատմությունը [The real story of Norashen Armenian Church of Tbilisi]". *Etchmiadzin* (in Armenian). **64** (5): 92–97 Cfr. Shakaryan, Rev. Fr. Sahak (2010). "Փաստաթղթեր Թբիլիսիի Նորաշենի Ս. Աստվածածին Եկեղեցու մասին [Documents on St. Astvatsatseen Church of Norashen in Tbilisi]". *Etchmiadzin* (in Armenian). **66** (7): 70–84.

<sup>551</sup> Jean Baptiste Chardin (16 November 1643 – 5 January 1713), Egnate Ioseliani, pseudonym Tskaltubeli (1847-1919). Cfr. "Թբիլիսիի Նորաշեն Սուրբ Աստվածածին Եկեղեցի [Norashen Holy Mother of God Church of Tbilisi] cit.

<sup>552</sup> N. Hauer, B. Jardine, "Georgian Orthodox Church takes aim at Armenian churches. There is interest in erasing any evidence of Armenians in Tbilisi.", 5 November 2018, available at <https://eurasianet.org/georgian-orthodox-church-takes-aim-at-armenian-churches>.

the Armenian Apostolic Diocese of Georgia, supported by local Armenian NGOs and the Georgian Orthodox Patriarchate for the possession of the church. The Georgian Patriarchate, despite recognizing the existing church as Armenian, claims that in the XVII century, on the same area, used to stand a Georgian church. Pro-Armenian Tbilisi organisations responded that any modification to the existing church is in violation of the Law of Georgia on Cultural Heritage (Article 37), which protects historical building from destructions or renovations that are not conform to their history<sup>553</sup>. The dispute is still ongoing and the constructions stopped until a verdict will be reached by a Georgian court, but a final decision is likely to take many years<sup>554</sup>.

### **X.3. Monument to Mikhayel Avagyan in the village of Bughashen**

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2019 in Bughashen<sup>555</sup>, a predominantly ethnic-Armenian-inhabited<sup>556</sup> village situated near Akhalkalaki in the Samtskhe-Javkheti region of Georgia, a statue dedicated to Mikhayel Avagyan<sup>557</sup> was unveiled at the presence of the Armenian Ambassador to Georgia Ruben Sadoyan and other important authorities of ethnic Armenian heritage such as the mayor of Akhalkalaki, Yurik Hunanyan, the chairman of the local city council (Georg. *sakrebulo*), Nairi Iritsyan as well as Enzel Mkoyan and Samvel Manukyan, two members of the Georgian parliament for the ruling Georgian Dream party<sup>558</sup>. Mikhayel Avagyan was an ethnic Armenian native of the village of Bughashen, who died while fighting in the Nagorno-Karabakh War and who is regarded by many Armenians as a hero<sup>559</sup>. The erection of the statue was financed by Gagik Avagyan, a relative of Mikhayel Avagyan<sup>560</sup>. A monument dedicated to Avagyan, erected in 1997, was located in the court yard of an old school and due to damages sustained because of time, it was decided to replace it with the new statue.

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<sup>553</sup> Cf. N. Hauer, B. Jardine, “Georgian Orthodox Church takes aim at Armenian churches. There is interest in erasing any evidence of Armenians in Tbilisi.”, 5 November 2018, available at <https://eurasianet.org/georgian-orthodox-church-takes-aim-at-armenian-churches>.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>555</sup> Georg. *bughasheni*.

<sup>556</sup> Data about the ethnic composition of the village were taken from GeoStat, *General Census of the Georgian Population*, 2014, available at [http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p\\_id=2152&lang=geo](http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=2152&lang=geo).

<sup>557</sup> See entry «Avagyan, Mikayel Vladimiri», nicknamed *Kobra* (1957 – 1994), in *Gharabaghyan Azatagrakan Paterasm 1988-1994 Hanragitaran* (= Karabakh Liberation War 1988-1994 Encyclopedia), ed. by H. Ayvagian *et al.*, Yerevan, “Armenian Encyclopedia” Publishing House, 2004, p. 80.

<sup>558</sup> Cf. A. Ayvazyan, “Unveiling of statue of Armenian Karabakh combattant in Georgia causes outrage”, JAMnews, 24 January 2019, available at <https://jam-news.net/unveiling-of-karabakh-war-monument-in-georgia-causes-outrage/>.

<sup>559</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*

The unveiling of this monument sparked outrage among the ethnic Azeris of Georgia as well as in Azerbaijan, but statements of disapproval of the event were issued also by some Georgian authorities. The event was reported by some Azerbaijani media as the unveiling of a monument to a participant of the Khojaly massacre<sup>561</sup>, although there is no evidence of his involvement in this episode of the Karabakh War. Some Azerbaijani media pointed out also the involvement of Mikhayel Avagyan in the Georgian-Abkhazian war, but this fact was denied by Manushak Avagyan, the wife of the deceased, by showing the stamps on her husband's passport to ArmenPress as a proof of his being in Armenia at the time of the events<sup>562</sup>. Azeri PM Rasim Musabayov<sup>563</sup> stated his disagreement through a post on his Facebook profile:

*«The connivance of the provocative action in Akhalkalaki will not add warmth to the relationship between Azerbaijan and Georgia, and may encourage the Armenians of Akhalkalaki to take other provocative actions in order to damage the strategic partnership of Tbilisi and Baku ... I believe that Baku should issue a request to the Georgian government to clarify its position on this apparent Armenian provocation»<sup>564</sup>.*

On 8 February 2019, a group of ethnic Azeri citizens of Georgian origin held a protest outside the Georgian Parliament in Tbilisi demanding the dismantlement of the bust of Michael Avagyan. According to some Armenian medias, a number of Armenian NGOs operating in Georgia have criticized the organization of these protests<sup>565</sup>. Many posts expressing concern over the monument were also shared by private users on social

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<sup>561</sup> Cf. “*Xocalı cəlladına Gürcüstanda abidə qoyuldu*” (= Monument to Khojaly executioner erected in Georgia), Day.az, 26 January 2019, available at <https://news.day.az/azerinews/1085040.html>; “*Xocalı qatili erməniyə Gürcüstanda abidə qoyuldu*” (= A monument to an Armenian murderer of Khojaly was erected in Georgia), Teref.az, 23 January 2019, available at <http://teref.az/siyaset/108613-xocali-qatili-ermeniye-gurcustanda-abide-qoyuldu.html>; “*Gürcüstan öz başına hansı problemi açıb?*” (= What problem is facing Georgia?), Səs İnformasiya Agentliyi, 31 January 2019, available at <https://sia.az/az/news/politics/723005.html>.

<sup>562</sup> Cf. “*Azatomartik Mik'ayel Avagyanə ch'i masnaks'el vrats'-abkhazakan bakhumnerin. merkats'vel ē adrbejanakan hert'akan sutē*” (= The liberator-soldier Michael Avagyan was not involved in the Georgian-Abkhazian clashes: another Azerbaijani lie exposed), Tert.am, 11 February 2019, available at <https://www.tert.am/am/news/2019/02/11/Michael-avagyan/2918894>.

<sup>563</sup> Az. Rasim Musabəyov, sometimes referred to as Rasim Musabekov (1951).

<sup>564</sup> Cf. A. Ayvazyan, “Unveiling of statue of Armenian Karabakh combattant in Georgia causes outrage”, *cit., supra*.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*



medias<sup>566</sup>. The Armenian youth of Bughashen, members of the “Zori Zoryan”<sup>567</sup> Youth Association also held a counter-protest rally to show both the Georgian authorities and the Azerbaijani community that they stand by the statue and will not allow its demolition<sup>568</sup>. Speaking to *Tert.am*, Eduard Ayvazyan, the director of Samtskhe-Javakheti Media Analytical Center, said that there is no need for ingerence about the Mikhayel Avagyan's monument. Eduard Ayvazyan noted that they also thank the Georgian authorities for the same approach. He noted that until the time of his interview all the statements of the Georgian authorities on this topic were very balanced<sup>569</sup>. As a matter of fact Tbilisi distanced itself from the erection of this monument by stating how it was a decision taken by local residents<sup>570</sup>. Ayvazyan continued by saying:

*«It seems that also the Georgian authorities realise that this is a provocation coming from the Azerbaijani side. There is an Azeri deputy, Azer Suleimanov, who is a member of the opposition United National Movement (Saakashvili's Party), calling on the parliament to dismantle the statue of Michael Avagyan. In other words, it is mainly opposition groups that have deeper ties with the Azerbaijani community»<sup>571</sup>.*

Eduard Ayvazyan insists that the Armenian community is united on this issue:

*«Everyone in Javakhk says that we are all Michael Avagyan, even posting photos of Michael Avagyan's bust on their social networks, with Georgian letters saying that I am Michael Avagyan and saying that this is a matter of our dignity, and there is no compromise or compromise here, no question of discussion»<sup>572</sup>.*

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<sup>566</sup> Cf. “Azatamartik Mik'ayel Avagyanē ch'i masnaks'el vrats'-abkhazakan bakhumnerin. merkats'vel ē adrbejanakan hert'akan sutē”, cit., *ibid*.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>569</sup> Cf. *ibid*.

<sup>570</sup> Cf. G. Lomsadze, “South Caucasus troubles set in stone”, Eurasia.net, 29 January 2019, available at <https://eurasianet.org/south-caucasus-troubles-set-in-stone>.

<sup>571</sup> Cf. E. Ayvazyan, “Vrastani ishkanut'yunnerē gitakts'um en, or Mik'ayel Avagyan hushardzani apamontazhman pahanjē adrbejanakan sadrank' ē” (= Georgian authorities realize that demanding the demolition of Michael Avagyan's monument is an Azerbaijani provocation), *Tert.am*, 9 February 2019, available at <https://www.tert.am/am/news/2019/02/09/eduard-ayvazyan/2917260>.

<sup>572</sup> Cf. *ibid*.

The former State Minister for Conciliation and Civil Equality Paata Zak'areishvili, in an interview with JAMnews, said that the participation of the authorities in the ceremony violates the principle of neutrality that Georgia adheres to in the conflict around Karabakh:

*«Georgia has so far managed to maintain neutrality in this situation and remain a certain factor of stability in the South Caucasus. Against this background, any decision by local authorities, whether in the Javakheti or Kvemo Kartli region, is very sensitive, and local authorities should understand this. I believe that the local authorities should have tried to convince the local residents as much as possible that erecting such a monument does not correspond to Georgia's attitude to the situation in the South Caucasus. The situation shouldn't have been allowed to develop this far – it was necessary to explain to the people that both sides of the conflict need Georgia and should not try to lean towards any side. I think local authorities should show more prudence and stay in contact with the central authorities that shape the country's policy in the South Caucasus»<sup>573</sup>.*

Georgian journalist Giorgi Lomsadze wrote, in his article of 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019 for *Eurasia.net*, that *«To Armenians, Mikhail Avagyan is a war hero; to Azerbaijanis, he is a war criminal. To Georgians, he is now a headache»<sup>574</sup>* because since the unveiling of the statue, Baku has demanded clarification from Georgia's ambassador to Azerbaijan, while Azerbaijan's ambassador to Georgia wrote a formal protest note to Tbilisi<sup>575</sup>. In response to these statements the Council of Armenian non-governmental organisations of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli condemned these manifestations of interference in the internal affairs of Georgia as the attempts of some to destabilize the country and the region for political purposes and expressed support for

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<sup>573</sup> Cf. A. Ayvazyan, "Unveiling of statue of Armenian Karabakh combattant in Georgia causes outrage", JAMnews, *cit.*, *supra*.

<sup>574</sup> Cf. G. Lomsadze, "South Caucasus troubles set in stone", *cit.*, *supra*.

<sup>575</sup> Cf. F. Mamedov, "A esli v Azerbaïdzhane postavit' pamyatnik abkhaztsu, kotoryï prolil krov' gruzin?" (= And what if in Azerbaijan we erected a monument to the Abkhazian who killed Georgians?), Haqqin.az, 26 January 2019, available at <https://haqqin.az/news/143883>.

the Georgian authorities in these difficult days<sup>576</sup>. Moreover the Council of Armenian Public Organisations of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli qualified what happened as anti-Armenian provocation initiated by the joint efforts of the opposition circles of Georgia and Azerbaijan in an attempt to eradicate the Armenian factor in the region<sup>577</sup>. Subsequently, the responses of the Georgian authorities, aimed at solving the problem in a civilized way by neutralising internal and external provocations, were well received by the Armenian public<sup>578</sup>.

#### **X.4. Perceived discrimination and fear, the reverse case of Gorelovka**

Gorelovka is a village of approximately 1165 inhabitants<sup>579</sup>, located in the Samtskhe-Javakheti Region of Georgia only 10 km away from the Armenian border. The village was founded in the 1840s by the Dukhobors<sup>580</sup> who resettled in the Javakheti and Dmanisi *rayons* after they were exiled from Russia by Tsar Nicholas I<sup>581</sup>. During the XX century, under Soviet rule, many Dukhobors migrated abroad, mainly to Canada, or, following persecutions, were deported to Siberia and other ethnic groups<sup>582</sup>. In Soviet times there were still 72 Dukhobor families that made up the majority of the population in 8 villages of the Bogdanovka (now Ninotsminda) rayon; some Armenian families also lived there but no distinction was made at the time. After the independence of Georgia, in 1991, the trend of migrations of Dukhobors continued and great numbers of Armenians moved in the village and the Georgian government lead by Zviad Gamsakhurdia promoted Georgianisation of the region by encouraging both Georgians, from the village of Adigeni and Khulo damaged by landslides<sup>583</sup>, and Muslims to settle in the village, in order to prevent Armenians in the region from gaining too much

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<sup>576</sup> Cf. A. Ayvazyan, “*Reaktsiya Soveta na azhiotazh po povodu byusta Avagyana*” (= Reaction of the City Council to the media exposure over Avagyan’s bust), Jnews.ge, 11 February 2019, available at <http://jnews.ge/?p=28997>.

<sup>577</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>579</sup> Cf. *sak'art'velos statistikis erovnuli samsakhuri, noemberi 2014* (= National statistic Office of Georgia, November 2014), available at <https://www.geostat.ge/index.php/ka>

<sup>580</sup> Rus. *Dukhobory* (lit. “spirit wrestlers”) sometimes spelled ‘Doukhobors’ (French transliteration), cf. J. Elkinton, *The Doukhobors: their history in Russia; their migration to Canada*, Philadelphia, Ferris & Leach Publishers, 1930, p. 4.

<sup>581</sup> Cf. N. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers Forging the Russian Empire in the South Caucasus*, London, Cornell University Press, 2005, p. 118; Nicholas I (Rus. *Nikolay Pavlovich Romanov*) (1796-1855), Russian emperor from 1825 to 1855, see entry «Nicholas I Tsar of Russia», available at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nicholas-I-tsar-of-Russia>.

<sup>582</sup> Cf. J. Elkinton, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-165, *ibid.*

<sup>583</sup> Cf. N. Mikuradze, “Armenians and Doukhobors in Gorelovka, Georgia”, Democracy and Freedom Warch, 26 March 2014, available at <https://dfwatch.net/armenians-and-doukhobors-in-gorelovka-georgia-93868-27492>.

influence and seek reunification with the Republic of Armenia<sup>584</sup>. The number of Dukhobors decreased from more than 2000 in the 1980s to only 40 families in the 2000s<sup>585</sup>. Due to the demographic changes in the village, the coexistence of the different ethnic groups in the village has become problematic. Local Armenians often feel discriminated by policies of the Georgian government that tend to assign agricultural lands rather to ethnic Georgians or Dukhobors than to Armenians, despite the fact that many Armenians live in houses that they illegally occupied after Dukhobors left the village<sup>586</sup>. Gorelovka, like many other villages of the region, lacks adequate infrastructures and shortages of electricity, water supply and heating happen often<sup>587</sup>. In these circumstances, ethnic Armenians tend to accuse the government of discrimination in their regards, and violent clashes with police and public authorities often occur, the last time being in January 2020, when local people closed the road of access from the village to Armenia as an act of protest for a water shortage<sup>588</sup>. Such an attitude of “perceived discrimination” is not an isolated case, and many ethnic Armenians of Javakheti tend to blame and accuse the Georgian government of discriminating them, rather than attributing the causes of their poor conditions to an overall lack of funds at the national level<sup>589</sup>. Despite the long presence of Adjarans and Dukhobors in many villages of Javakheti, ethnic Armenians fear the demographic change represented by the more recent settlements of ethnic Georgians and ethnic Azeris in the region, and this concern is probably a legacy of the Georgianisation policies implemented by Gamsakhurdia<sup>590</sup>. The sometimes paranoid sentiments of Armenians are often equally matched by the responses of many ethnic Georgians, who perceive the complaints of Armenians as a concealed wish for secession of Javakheti and reunification with Armenia. The reasons behind these beliefs are due to the lack of information that the two communities have of each other.

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<sup>584</sup> Cf. N. Taradji, “Living in Gorelovka”, Nima Taradji Editorial and Documentary Photography, 2016, available at <https://www.nimataradji.com/gorelovka-doukhobors-muslims-christians>.

<sup>585</sup> Cf. M. Bokuchava, “Gorelovka – Sorrow of the Last of Doukhobors”, 20 November 2012, available at <http://www.humanrights.ge/index.php?a=main&pid=15919&lang=eng>.

<sup>586</sup> Cf. H. Lohm, “Javakheti after the Rose Revolution: Progress and Regress in the pursuit of National Unity in Georgia”, Flensburg, European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) Working Paper Series #38, April 2007, p. 38.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>588</sup> Cf. “Gorelovka village residents close road leading to Georgia's border with Armenia”, News.am, 20 January 2020, available at <https://news.am/eng/news/555563.html>; cf. M. Mkrtchyan, “Residents of the Georgian Gorelovka village blocked the road leading to Armenia”, ArmInfo, 20 January 2020, available at [https://arminfo.info/full\\_news.php?id=48671&lang=3](https://arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=48671&lang=3).

<sup>589</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

## CHAPTER XI

### ARMENIA – GEORGIA RELATIONS AFTER INDEPENDENCE

#### XI.1. Overview

Georgia shares with Armenia more similarities than with any of its other neighbouring countries because of their often overlapping history and the common Christian faith that make them stand out in a region which is predominantly muslim<sup>591</sup>. Russia shares with Georgia the Christian Orthodox faith, but because of the role played by the Russian government in the secession of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia, their bilateral relations have deteriorated over the last three decades. The Armenian Apostolic Church is autocephalous and does not belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church like the Georgian Church, nevertheless they share many similarities. The most evident difference between these Armenia and Georgia is represented by their ethnic composition, which is extremely various in Georgia and almost monoethnic in Armenia<sup>592</sup>. Georgia declared its independence<sup>593</sup> from the Soviet Union on April 9<sup>th</sup> 1991, following the result of a referendum held on March 31<sup>st</sup> of the same year<sup>593</sup>. A few months later, on August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1991 Armenia declares its independence and, following a referendum, independence was declared on September 21<sup>st</sup> 1991. Since then, both countries went through different stages of development that are only in part comparable. Georgia witnessed a civil war and the loss of two regions (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) while the Republic Armenia intervened in support of the Armenian minority during the Nagorno-Karabakh War against the Republic of Azerbaijan. Their relations can overall be defined as friendly, but with an underlying tension in their domestic interactions, mostly because of the significant Armenian minority living in Georgia. In particular the relation of Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti with Armenia is still seen with suspicion because of its similarities with the South Ossetians' desire for reunification with their Northern Ossetia<sup>594</sup>. Conversely, Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti perceive a threat to their ethnic identity mostly because of some of Georgia's

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<sup>591</sup> Cf. R. Nalbandov "Uncertain old friends: Georgian-Armenian relations", pp. 177-178.

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>593</sup> For more information see the official website of the Government of Georgia, "About Georgia", gov.ge. 9 August 2016, available at [http://gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=ENG&sec\\_id=193](http://gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=193).

<sup>594</sup> Cf. R. Nalbandov, *op. cit.*, p. 81, *supra*.

language policies<sup>595</sup>. Because of Turkey's and Azerbaijan's ongoing blockade toward Armenia, and the embargo situation imposed by many world countries to Iran, Georgia is the most important corridor in order for Armenia to export its products and import goods and energy, mostly electricity, from abroad<sup>596</sup>. The main destabilising factor in the Armenian-Georgian bilateral relations is the almost opposite role that Russia plays for these two countries. Since 2015, Armenia has become a member of the Russian-sponsored Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)<sup>597</sup>, while Georgia has been trying for almost two decades to be admitted into NATO<sup>598</sup>.

## **XI.2. Impact on the Armenian minority of Georgia**

A major factor that aggravated Armenian-Georgian relations, was the decision of the Georgian government to dismantle the 62<sup>nd</sup> Russian military base in Akhaltsikhe, which employed almost 10,000 ethnic Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti. The Georgian government sees Russia as a potential external influence that could support the secession of Javakheti and its reunification with Armenia<sup>599</sup>, while many ethnic Armenians perceived the presence of a Russian military base in Akhaltsikhe as a guarantee that prevented any stricter Georgia's interference in the region<sup>600</sup>. While Russia represents a major economic partner for both Armenia and Georgia, from a political, diplomatic and military point of view, the situation is very different. Russia and Georgia have both officially and unofficially been at war over Abkhazia and South Ossetia since Georgia's independence, with the last armed conflict between the two countries being in 2008<sup>601</sup> with further escalations happening in July 2019 with the ban

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<sup>595</sup> Z. Anjaparidze, "Javakheti Region Complicated Georgian Relations with Armenia", in *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, v. 2, issue 101, 2005, available at <https://jamestown.org/program/javakheti-region-complicates-georgian-relations-with-armenia/>.

<sup>596</sup> For the economic data, see ArmStat, *The Statistical Yearbooks of Armenia*, available at <https://www.armstat.am/en/>.

<sup>597</sup> Data available at the official website of the Eurasian Economic Union, available at <http://www.eaeunion.org/?lang=en#about-countries>.

<sup>598</sup> "Information on NATO-Georgia Relations". Ministry Of Foreign Affairs Of Georgia. 2007, available at: [http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?sec\\_id=89&lang\\_id=ENG](http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?sec_id=89&lang_id=ENG), cf. Stephen Jones, "The Role of Cultural Paradigms in Georgian Foreign Policy", in *Ideology and National Identity in Post-Communist Foreign Policies*, ed. by Rick Fawn, Frank Cass Publishers, London, 2004, pp. 102-103.

<sup>599</sup> Cf. "Stepanyan: Russian is Behind the Statements on Separation of Javakheti From Georgia", *Kavkazskii Uzel*, March 26, 2012, available at <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/203717/>; cf. "Expert: Georgia and Azerbaijan Should Not Allow For Separation of Javakheti", *Georgian Times*, April 22, 2011, available at <http://www.georgiatimes.info/news/55503.html>.

<sup>600</sup> Cf. I. Øverland, "The Closure of the Russian Military Base at Akhalkalaki: Challenges for the Local Energy Elite, the Informal Economy and Stability", in *op. cit.*, p. 10, *supra*.

<sup>601</sup> "Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia", *Azerbaijan Business Center, ABC.az*, 2008, available at [http://abc.az/eng/news\\_26\\_08\\_2008\\_27081.html](http://abc.az/eng/news_26_08_2008_27081.html).

of direct flight from Russia to Georgia<sup>602</sup>. In Armenia, on the contrary, there is a significant Russian military presence and Russia represents Armenia's main trade partner and source of foreign direct investment<sup>603</sup>. All the governments of Armenia until now have been fully aware of how the maintenance of good diplomatic relations with Georgia is of extreme importance for their country and, for this reason, the newly-elected Armenian presidents and prime ministers usually travel to Georgia for their first state-visit<sup>604</sup>, likewise, their Georgian counterparts usually go to Armenia as one of their first foreign visits<sup>605</sup>. Although often weak, there are many more signals of a wish to improve their bilateral relations coming from both Armenia and Georgia. For instance, the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Georgia guarantees a visa-free regime for Armenian nationals, and this policy greatly facilitates Armenians intending to travel abroad both for tourism or for seasonal work<sup>606</sup>. Similarly, a gesture of "good intentions" from the Armenian side was in June 2019, when the Armenian representative at the United Nations (UN) abstained from voting the *A/RES/73/298* (a Georgian-proposed resolution concerning the status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, and South Ossetia<sup>607</sup>) instead of backing Russia by voting against the measure as they did all the previous times that, since 2008, Georgia has proposed similar resolutions had been proposed to the plenary session of the UN<sup>608</sup>. Given the similar, but at the same time opposite situation of Nagorno-Karabakh (Arm. *Artsakh*), which is internationally recognised as a *de jure* territory of Azerbaijan under Armenian occupation, voting in favour of the resolution would have been against Armenian interests, and the Armenia's abstention already represents an informal first step of improvement on this sensible issue between the two countries, according to the analyst of Armenia-Georgia relations Johnny Melikian<sup>609</sup>. This vote, moreover, happened only three months after the visit of the President of Georgia, Salomé

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<sup>602</sup> Ruta Burbaite, "Russia bans passenger flights to and from Georgia starting July 8", AeroTime Hub, 24 June 2019, available at <https://www.aerotime.aero/ruta.burbaite/22771-russia-bans-passenger-flights-to-and-from-georgia-starting-july-8>.

<sup>603</sup> For the data on Armenian investments see ArmStat, *Statistical Yearbook of Armenia*, 2019, available at <https://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=586&year=2019>.

<sup>604</sup> For more information on the Foreign Visits of the Presidents of Armenia, see the official website of the President of Armenia, available at <https://www.president.am/en/foreign-visits/>.

<sup>605</sup> <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/14831/President-Zurabishvili-Pays-Official-Visit-to-Armenia>.

<sup>606</sup> See "Georgia Restores One-Year Visa-Free Rules", CivilNet.ge, 10 June 2015, available at <https://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28337>.

<sup>607</sup> For the full text of the UN Resolution *A/RES/73/298*, see <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/73/298>.

<sup>608</sup> A. Meljumyan, "In nod to Georgia, Armenia changes UN vote", EurasiaNet, 5 June 2019, available at <https://eurasianet.org/in-nod-to-georgia-armenia-changes-un-vote>.

<sup>609</sup> <https://eurasianet.org/in-nod-to-georgia-armenia-changes-un-vote>.

Zourabichvili, to Yerevan, an event defined by both the Armenian prime minister Nikol Pashinyan and the Georgian President as “a historic opportunity to upgrade the relations between our countries”<sup>610</sup>. Both Armenia and Georgia, in their bilateral relations, are very affected by Russia, and must always try to keep a balance in their foreign policies. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, for instance, has expressed his wish to restore railway connections between Armenia and Russia through Georgia and Abkhazia, but the Georgian government is not likely to give its consent to such a project<sup>611</sup>. Richard Giragosian, director of the Yerevan think tank Regional Studies Center, said Armenia’s UN vote suggests a more “careful” diplomatic approach by the new government, which took power last spring. For Armenia, “despite expectations and perhaps pressure from Russia, the abstention may have been a compromise, aimed at no longer angering its important neighbor Georgia, while seeking more flexibility from the Moscow line in UN votes,” Giragosian told Eurasianet. Russia voted against the resolution, and most of the others who joined it were aligned with Russia. Arsen Kharatayan, a Tbilisi-based former foreign policy advisor to Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, wrote on his Facebook page that the vote was a crucial step in restoring faith between the two countries: “Armenian-Georgian relations should be beyond the influence of any third party,” he said, expressing hope that Georgia will take a similar approach in the future when Armenia-related votes come up<sup>612</sup>.

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<sup>610</sup> <https://jam-news.net/nikol-pashinyan-there-are-no-unsolvable-issues-between-georgia-and-armenia/>

<sup>611</sup> A. Meljumyan, “In nod to Georgia, Armenia changes UN vote”, EurasiaNet, 5 June 2019, available at <https://eurasianet.org/in-nod-to-georgia-armenia-changes-un-vote>

<sup>612</sup> <https://ge.boell.org/en/2017/12/15/armenia-georgia-resilient-relationship>.



## CHAPTER XII

### EUROPEAN MODELS OF APPLICABILITY

#### XII.1. Premise

Georgia ratified the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 2005 and was expected sign the European Charter for Regional or Minority languages (FCNM) in 2006, but, until now it has neither signed it nor ratified it<sup>613</sup>. Since then, the situation in Samtskhe-Javakheti, in regard to the ethnic-Armenian minority living there, has not shown significant signs of improvement, therefore, it is important to look for possible models of other states, well applicable to the Georgian reality, that can motivate the Georgian government to take steps in order to change the persisting *status quo* in the field of minority-language legislations. According to Jonathan Wheatley, Georgia and Romania are the European nations that share the most similarities with Georgia, namely, «a) one or more territorially concentrated national minority, most members of which are unable to speak or understand the state language; b) experience of an authoritarian communist form of government; c) recent political instability and ethnopolitical conflict; d) non-integrated geographically concentrated minorities; e) emergency of strong nationalist movements and xenophobia in which language is seen as central to national consciousness; f) proximity of the minority-speaking region to its kin-state and consequent presence of reunification sentiments»<sup>614</sup>. Moreover, both countries have signed and ratified the FCNM and introduced minority-language legislations<sup>615</sup>.

#### XII.2. The case of Romania

The main ethnic group of Romania consists of Romanians, while Hungarian and Rom, the two other main minorities, make up, according to the 2011 census, respectively 6.1% and 3.0% of the total population of the country<sup>616</sup>. Similarly to the case of the

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<sup>613</sup><https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages/signatures-and-ratifications>.

<sup>614</sup>Cf. J. Wheatley, "The Status of Minority Languages in Georgia and the Relevance of Models from other European States", ECMI Working Paper Series #26, March 2006, p. 22.

<sup>615</sup> Croatia has signed in 1997 and ratified in 1998, Romania has signed in 1995 and ratified in 2008, cf. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/148/signatures>

<sup>616</sup> Cf. Institutul Național de Statistică (INS), *Rezultate definitive ale Recensământului Populației și al Locuințelor – 2011 (caracteristici demografice ale populației)*, 2013, p. 5, available at

Armenian minority in Javakheti, Hungarians of Romania are concentrated in the region of Transylvania, where they make up 19.6% of the region's population with peaks of 73.8% in the Covasna county and 84.6% in the Harghita county<sup>617</sup>. As in Georgia, also in Romania there was, throughout the communist and post-communist periods, an aggressive nationalist discourse which combined a preference for Romanian people and the Romanian language with anti-Magyar and anti-Rom sentiments, which resulted in deadly ethnic clashes between the two ethnic groups in March 1990 in Transylvania<sup>618</sup>. Following the 1996 parliamentary elections won by the opposition party "Romanian Democratic Convention"<sup>619</sup>, also the "Democratic Alliance of Hungarians from Romania (DAHR)"<sup>620</sup> joined the ruling coalition. One year later, in 1997, a new Department for the Protection of National Minorities was created and an ethnic-Hungarian minister for national minorities was sworn in to co-ordinate it. A new anti-discrimination law was approved, and amendments were made to existing laws on education and public administration in order to foster greater linguistic rights to non-Romanians<sup>621</sup>. Nevertheless, the most important legislations in regard to language use were approved by the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR), after their victory in the 2000 elections. In the following years, the PSDR and the DAHR, worked together and passed the "Law on Public Administration no.215/2001", later amended to the Constitution, which legalised the usage of minority languages in written and oral communication between the local authorities and the citizens, in the administrative counties in which more than 20% of the population is made up by an ethnic national minority<sup>622</sup>. Furthermore, this law guaranteed the right for minorities a) to be informed in their mother tongue about the agenda of the local councils' sessions and decisions; b) the usage of the minority language, alongside official Romanian translation, in public ceremonies (e.g. weddings) and proceedings in which at least 1/3 of the council members belongs to an ethnic minority as well as in public services; c) the addition of

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[http://www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/REZULTATE-DEFINITIVE-RPL\\_2011.pdf](http://www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/REZULTATE-DEFINITIVE-RPL_2011.pdf).

<sup>617</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>618</sup> S. Constantin, "Linguistic Policy and National Minorities in Romania", 2004, available at <http://www6.gencat.net/llengcat/noves/hm04tardor/docs/constantin.pdf>.

<sup>619</sup> Rom. *Convenția Democrată Română* (CDR).

<sup>620</sup> Hung. *Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség* (RMDSZ); Rom. *Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România* (UDMR).

<sup>621</sup> Cf. J. Wheatley, "The Status of Minority Languages in Georgia and the Relevance of Models from other European States", in *op. cit.*, p. 24, *supra*.

<sup>622</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

the names of localities and institutions in the minority language<sup>623</sup>. Later amendments to the Constitution, with the purpose of speeding up juridical proceedings, also ensured that trials could be executed in Hungarian in circumstances in which neither one of the parties asked for an interpreter<sup>624</sup>. According to the reports of submitted by Romania to the Council of Europe, these new measures were successfully implemented in Hungarian-populated areas, and it also provided jobs as interpreters and translators for bilingual speakers of the minority language and Romanian<sup>625</sup>. In conformity with the FCNM, Romania was able to make these concessions to the ethnic minorities, who live concentrated in specific areas, without changing the legal status of the official Romanian language but just by recognising the local languages as *de facto* official administrative languages of certain counties, hence considerably improving the rapidity and the effectiveness of the administration at the local level.

### **XII.3. Applicability of the Romanian model to the Georgian reality**

The demographic and administrative-territorial structure of Transylvania in Romania and Javakheti in Georgia can be easily confronted because of many common traits they share. Correspondingly, it would be sufficient to implement the Romanian experiment solely at the district (Georg. *raioni*) and community (Georg. *t'emi*) level, and, at this moment, ethnic-Armenians make up more than 20% of the total population only in Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda, Akhaltsikhe and Tsalka districts<sup>626</sup>. Without changing the privileged role granted to Georgian language by the Georgian Constitution<sup>627</sup>, not only would the administration and the judicial system of Samtskhe-Javakheti greatly benefit from the recognition of Armenian as an official local language, but it would also provide additional jobs in a region with high level of unemployment and, consequently,

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<sup>623</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>624</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>625</sup> Second Report Submitted by Romania Pursuant to Article 25, Paragraph 1 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (received on 6 June 2005) at [http://www.coe.int/t/e/human\\_rights/minorities/2.\\_framework\\_convention\\_%28monitoring%29/2.\\_monitoring\\_mechanism/3.\\_state\\_reports\\_and\\_unmik\\_kosovo\\_report/2.\\_Second\\_cycle/2nd\\_SR\\_Romania.asp#TopOfPage](http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/minorities/2._framework_convention_%28monitoring%29/2._monitoring_mechanism/3._state_reports_and_unmik_kosovo_report/2._Second_cycle/2nd_SR_Romania.asp#TopOfPage).

<sup>626</sup> Cf. National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat), 2018 Demographic Situation in Georgia, Statistical Publication, Tbilisi, 2019, p. 127, available at <https://geostat.ge/media/27215/demograpia-2018.pdf>.

<sup>627</sup> Cf. Parliament of the Republic of Georgia, *Constitution of Georgia*, 1995, Article 2.3: «*The official language of Georgia shall be Georgian, [...]. The official language is protected by the organic law*»; Article 62.4: «*Legal proceedings shall be conducted in the official language. An individual who does not have a command of the official language shall be provided with an interpreter*», available at <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/30346?publication=35>.

encourage the learning of Georgian and civic integration reassuring, at the same time, ethnic Armenians that they would not risk linguistic assimilation. . The model also has other very significant advantages. Furthermore, in many villages of Javakheti, Armenian is already the vehicular language used among the majority of public employees while carrying out their duties, hence giving it *de facto* legal status would be a mere codification of an informal practice already in use<sup>628</sup>.

#### **XII.4. The case of Croatia**

Similarly to Georgia, Croatia was a Socialist Republic member of a multiethnic communist authoritarian federation, until it declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991<sup>629</sup>, and in the following years, 1991-1995, it suffered a violent transition period marked by an inter-ethnic civil war with Bosnia-Herzegovina during which Croato-centric nationalist ideology and propaganda were widely used also in order to perpetrate an ethnic-cleansing of the Bosniak-Muslim population<sup>630</sup>. Croatia ratified the FCNM and the European Charter for Regional or Minority languages in 1997<sup>631</sup>, and joined the European Union (EU) on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2013<sup>632</sup>. Until 2001 the Council of Europe's Advisory Committee on the FCNM stated in the reports that it submitted about the situation in Croatia that no measure had been taken to implement it, and widespread feelings of Croatian nationalism persisted<sup>633</sup>. The language is a very central and sensitive issue in Croatia and after independence, there have been attempt to "re-croatize" the language in order to differentiate it from Serbian. The Constitution of Croatia<sup>634</sup> and the Law on

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<sup>628</sup> Cf. J. Wheatley, *The Status of Minority Languages in Georgia and the Relevance of Models from other European States*, in *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 29, *supra*.

<sup>629</sup> C. Sudetic, "2 Yugoslav States vote independence to press demands", in *New York Times*, 26 June 1991, p. 1, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/06/26/world/2-yugoslav-states-vote-independence-to-press-demands.html>.

<sup>630</sup> C. Sudetic, "Yugoslav factions agree to U.N. plan to halt civil war", in *New York Times*, 3 January 1992, p. 1.

<sup>631</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages/signatures-and-ratifications>.

<sup>632</sup> Treaty of Croatia's Accession to the European Union – Ratification Process <http://www.delhrv.ec.europa.eu/?lang=en&content=3935>.

<sup>633</sup> Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention on National Minorities, 'Opinion on Croatia' (adopted on 6 April 2001), at [https://www.coe.int/t/e/human\\_rights/minorities/2.\\_framework\\_convention\\_\(monitoring\)/2.\\_monitoring\\_mechanism/4.\\_Opinions\\_of\\_the\\_Advisory\\_Committee/1.\\_Country\\_specific\\_opinions/1.\\_First\\_cycle/1st\\_OP\\_Croatia.asp#Top%20OfPage](https://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/minorities/2._framework_convention_(monitoring)/2._monitoring_mechanism/4._Opinions_of_the_Advisory_Committee/1._Country_specific_opinions/1._First_cycle/1st_OP_Croatia.asp#Top%20OfPage).

<sup>634</sup> See "Constitution of the Republic of Croatia", as of 15 January 2014, in *Official Gazette Nos 56/90, 135/97, 113/00, 28/01, 76/10 and 5/14*, edited and translated by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia, Art. 7, 8, 12.1, 12.2, available at

Criminal Procedure<sup>635</sup> guarantee the ethnic minorities' right to officially use their languages together with the Croatian language at the local administrative level and in courts in circumstances in which at least one third of the local population belongs to an ethnic minority, but it was never actively enforced. According to the CoE's Expert Committee's monitoring reports about the implementation of the FCNM, in certain municipalities, Czech, Serbian, Hungarian and Italian languages had been used during administrative procedures, but not Ukrainian, Ruthenian or Slovak<sup>636</sup>. The minority case that shares the most similarities with the situation of Armenians in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia is that of the Italian minority living in the peninsula of Istria, an area that used to belong to the Kingdom of Italy between the two World Wars and where many instances of violence from both sides have been registered<sup>637</sup>. Moreover, Italians make up 6.9% of the total population of the county of Istria, and, although the region does not share a direct border with Italy, they are separated only by 46.6 km of Slovenian coastline and many Croats still fear Italy's possible territorial revindication on the peninsula<sup>638</sup>. Differently from Javakheti Armenians, however, Italo-Croatian bilingualism is rather common in the region and, accordingly to the 2001 "Constitutional Law on Human Rights and Freedoms and on Rights of Ethnic and National Communities or Minorities" of Croatia, in 2003, Italian was recognised as the second official language of Istria and its usage at the regional administrative level and its teaching in schools were equalised to that Croatian<sup>639</sup>.

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[https://www.usud.hr/sites/default/files/dokumenti/The\\_consolidated\\_text\\_of\\_the\\_Constitution\\_of\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Croatia\\_as\\_of\\_15\\_January\\_2014.pdf](https://www.usud.hr/sites/default/files/dokumenti/The_consolidated_text_of_the_Constitution_of_the_Republic_of_Croatia_as_of_15_January_2014.pdf).

<sup>635</sup> Criminal Procedure Code NN 152/08 NN 76/09, last checked 3 July 2009, Art. 7.1, 7.4, available at [https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/7895/file/Croatia\\_Criminal\\_proc\\_code\\_am2009\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/7895/file/Croatia_Criminal_proc_code_am2009_en.pdf).

<sup>636</sup> Council of Europe, "Application of the Charter in Croatia", ECRML (2005) 3 (Strasbourg, 7 September 2005), p. 33, available at [https://www.coe.int/t/e/legal\\_affairs/local\\_and\\_regional\\_democracy/regional\\_or\\_minority\\_languages/2\\_Monitoring/2.3\\_20Committee\\_of\\_Experts'\\_Reports/Croatia\\_2nd\\_report.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/local_and_regional_democracy/regional_or_minority_languages/2_Monitoring/2.3_20Committee_of_Experts'_Reports/Croatia_2nd_report.pdf)

<sup>637</sup> Cf. M. Klemenčič, "The Effects of the Dissolution of Yugoslavia on Minority Rights: the Italian Minority in Post-Yugoslav Slovenia and Croatia", in *Citizenship in historical perspective*, edited by S. G. Ellis, Guðmundur Hálfdanarson and Ann Katherine Isaacs, Pisa University Press, 2006, pp. 343-344, available at <http://www.clio-hres.net/books/7/26.pdf>.

<sup>638</sup> See data from the 2001 *Census of Croatian Population*, available at <http://www.dzs.hr/Eng/Census/census2001.htm>.

<sup>639</sup> See Istrian Regional Assembly's 2003 Statute, Art. 6, 28, available at <http://www.istria-istria.hr/index.php?id=587>

## **XII.5. Applicability of the Croatian model to the Georgian reality**

Besides the comparability of the Italian minority situation of Croatia with the Armenian minority situation of Georgia, the two countries share also a rather similar administrative-territorial structure. The organisation of Georgian districts (*raionebi*) and municipal communities (*t'emebi*) is very similar, respectively, to that of Croatian *općine* and *grādovi*<sup>640</sup>. If a law similar to article 12.1 of the Croatian “Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities” were to be implemented in Georgia, there would be four districts, namely, Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda, Akhaltsikhe and Tsalka where the use of the Armenian language could be equalised to that of Georgian in the local administration. Correspondingly to what happened in Romania, granting an official status to the minority language, Italian in this case, did not jeopardise the relevance of the national language, i.e. Croatian.

## **XII.6. Available possibilities for Georgia**

Since becoming a party of the FCNM in 2005, Georgia has failed to enforce many of the provisions of the convention regarding minority-languages. Since the usage of Armenian language at the local level is often an already existing *de facto* reality, it would be sufficient for Georgia to normalise this situation by legislating for the official recognition of minority languages for regional administration with no need for a major extra deployment of means and resources for this cause<sup>641</sup>. Notwithstanding the shortcomings still existing in Romania and Croatia, the examples provided by these two countries prove how their commitments to protect and stimulate bilingualism in both the national and minority languages, not only did not undermine the status of the official national languages, but they were also able to decrease the level of discrimination and at the same time increase the incentives for minorities to integrate in the public and civic life of the countries. Furthermore, a long-term commitment of Georgia in this direction, could also send a positive message to the ethnic minorities of the break-away regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

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<sup>640</sup> Cf. J. Wheatley, *The Status of Minority Languages in Georgia and the Relevance of Models from other European States*, in *op. cit.*, p. 34, *supra*.

<sup>641</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

## CONCLUSION

Armenians have been steadily settled in certain territories of the contemporary Republic of Georgia for centuries, and for most of this time they have been under external domination, namely Persian, Seljuk-Turkish, Tsarist, Soviet, and Georgian. They lived side-by-side with Georgians and other populations of different ethnicities and religion in a situation of continuous struggle in order to resist assimilation and maintain their cultural identity<sup>642</sup>. Simultaneously, ethnic Armenians had to adapt themselves to the changing realities that surrounded them, and especially to the Russian culture. Armenians in Georgia were able to flourish culturally and economically, and, during other historical periods they were neglected and discriminated, but always, to some degree isolated within their communities<sup>643</sup>. After Georgia regained independence, the emerging nationalism in the 1990s made Armenians fear for the preservation of their identity, and, in order not to be assimilated, they further isolated themselves within the Javakheti region. The reforms implemented in the aftermath of the Rose Revolutions, somehow, forced ethnic Armenian to come out from this isolation and to actively try to integrate<sup>644</sup>. The new laws of the Saakashvili decade can be considered as the first serious attempts, coming from the Georgian side, to solve the issues with ethnic Armenians and to finally achieve a fruitful coexistence. Some of these projects are still going on, and in the field of education we started to witness the first results. Georgia and its people are still experiencing many domestic and external problems, and the risk is that the “Armenian Problem” will keep being relegated in second position, however, it is an issue that need to be solved, in order to prevent it from escalating. The problems between Armenians and Georgians are not comparable to the warlike situations existing between Georgia and Russia or Armenia and Azerbaijan, but a prompt intervention is needed to avoid the situation from worsening. It must be taken into consideration that the modern Republic of Georgia has been existing as a sovereign nation for less than three decades, and the process of nation-building is still ongoing. Moreover, Georgians, despite being the main ethnicity in their homeland, also experienced foreign dominations throughout the last centuries, and modern Georgians are still trying to reconnect to their past and their history in order to recover their identity. The loss of

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<sup>642</sup> Cf. T. K. Blauvelt, C. Berglund, “Armenians in the making of Modern Georgia”, in K. Siekierski, S. Troebst (Ed.), *Armenians in Post-Socialist Europe*, Köln, Böhlau, 2006, p. 85.

<sup>643</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>644</sup> *Ibid.*

Abkhazia and South Ossetia is still an open wound, and it has understandably made Georgians more suspicious of the other minorities living in their country, despite their historical tradition of being a multiethnic nation. The Caucasus has always been a corridor situated between Europe and Asia. The geographical location of Georgia has made it a transition zone for merchants of the Silk Way, and it is also thanks to the richness brought by trade and multiculturalism if Tbilisi flourished as a city. At the same time, many powerful empires have often fought over Georgia and it was difficult for ethnic Georgians to retain their independence. It is more difficult to define the identity of the ethnic Armenians of Georgia as it would be more appropriate to speak about many different identities. Armenians of Javakheti and other regions of Georgia have been more isolated and they strongly preserved the language and traditions that they share with their kin state, while the majority of Tbilisi Armenians has lived in a multicultural city for centuries, in which they were able to create a profession for themselves out of their ability to relate with different ethnicities at the same time. Armenians of Tbilisi have, in many instances, assimilated into the prevalent Georgian culture often losing their language and culture in the process. The main element that kept them together was the Armenian Apostolic Church, and it is for this reason that, still today, there is a great attachment to certain religious buildings that used to belong to them. The communities of the Armenian diaspora around the world has always integrated successfully into cultures and environments that were very different from their original one; the closeness to Armenia and the many similarities they share with the Georgian culture have paradoxically complicated the integration process of the Armenians of Javakheti. The perceptions that Armenians of Georgia have of Armenia depend often on the individual, and it is not always possible to generalise about Armenians of Tbilisi or Armenians of Javakheti. There are many different degrees of attachment to Armenia: some consider it a historic homeland, some a second homeland, some identify it as their real homeland despite living in the Georgia, but there are also those who have lost almost every relation with it. It is therefore difficult for Armenians to find a balance between their “Armenianness” and “Georgianness”, since the lack of cultural exchanges and the stereotypes have put these two identities into a conflictual relation. Being Armenian and being Georgian do not need to be mutually exclusive identities. Georgian people are very proud of their hospitality and they like to say to



foreigners who happen to be in their country that, in their culture, “a guests is from God”<sup>645</sup>. In some periods of history, Armenians have been considered almost as “guests” in Georgia, meaning settlers, despite having been present in some regions of Georgia for many centuries. It is understandable and licit of Georgians to ask Armenians the effort to integrate in their country and learn the language, but, at the same time, the Georgian institutions have to equip Armenians of the villages with the adequate tools in order for this to happen. Despite the external factors that influence the Georgian politics, it is important for the people in power to keep promoting and financing the integration of the Armenian minority and it would be beneficial for the EU to take a more active role in this process. There have been European examples of similar situations that have improved greatly over the past decades, and Georgia itself used to be a melting-pot in the XIX century. The premises have not changed since then, but in order to achieve integration it is important for both Armenians and Georgians to learn from history and focus on their similarities and what they have to gain from each other rather than on the negligible differences that exist between them.

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<sup>645</sup> Georg. “*stumari ghvt'isaa*”

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