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Mentors: Vladimer Papava
Aleksandre Kvakhadze

Editor: Rusudan Margishvili

Technical Editor: Artem Melik-Nubarov

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Policy Paper Series include policy briefs developed within the framework of the *National Minorities in Political Processes – Engagement for a Better Future* project. The papers were elaborated by the ethnic minority youth from Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli for whom it was their first attempt to work on an analytical document. The papers address the challenges and solutions for the engagement of ethnic minorities in the political, economic or social life of Georgia.

The project was implemented by the Rondeli Foundation with the support and active participation of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (OSCE HCNM). The project aims to increase the political and social inclusion of ethnic minorities and facilitate a healthy policy debate on the issues of national minorities among the political parties, thus overall contributing to good governance practices. Within the framework of the multi-component project, members of Tbilisi-based political party youth organizations, young people living in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli and active representatives of the local community attended various thematic seminars. The project also included thematic meetings of representatives of political parties and government agencies with the representatives of national minorities, the preparation of TV programs and organizing internships in political parties for young people representing ethnic minorities.



The views and opinions expressed in these policy briefs are those of the authors and do not reflect the views of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (OSCE HCNM) and the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (Rondeli Foundation).

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PARTICIPATION OF THE CANDIDATES REPRESENTING THE AZERBAIJANI COMMUNITY IN THE ELECTIONS

Fagan Abbasov

SUMMARY

The degree of involvement of ethnic minorities, including the Azerbaijani community in Georgia, in the country's public political life since the 1990s has been rather low. One of the most important ways to engage in the political processes is to participate in elections as a candidate or voter. It should be noted that there is no legal incentive for the political parties to increase the number of ethnic minorities in their ranks. The elections in recent years have shown positive trends in this regard, although significant challenges remain. The purpose of this paper is to review the dynamics of ethnic Azerbaijanis participation in the electoral process.

INTRODUCTION

The involvement of ethnic minorities in the elections and political processes in Georgia is of great importance for the democratic development of the country. The purpose of this paper is to study the issue of participation in the elections of candidates representing the Azerbaijani community in Georgia. Georgian Azerbaijanis are the largest ethnic group residing in the country. According to 2014 statistics, the share of the Azerbaijani community in the population of the state is 6.3%, however, their participation in the political life of the country, as well as in the electoral process is noticeably low. [1 - p.9]

Since gaining independence and the later Rose Revolution, the engagement of other groups, including the Azerbaijani community, in the electoral process, and the participation of their candidates in the elections, has been both weak and merely symbolic. The language barrier, the information vacuum, the lack of interest from the political authorities, and many other local or central problems made it difficult for the Azerbaijani community to participate in the electoral process.

One of the most significant reasons for the low involvement of ethnic minorities in the electoral process is the lack of interest on the part of political parties. In many cases, parties in ethnic minority populated areas do not give preference to their representatives. Consequently, the involvement of candidates representing the Azerbaijani community in the electoral process, where they constitute the majority or a significant part of the population, is quite low.

For decades, since the boundaries between the ruling party and the state, especially in minority-populated regions, was erased, the ruling party has always won with a big advantage. However, the situation has somewhat changed in recent years. In addition to the ruling party, opposition forces also have the opportunity to garner a significant share of votes.

One of the clearest examples of the involvement of ethnic minorities, including the Azerbaijani community, in the electoral process is the number of community representatives running as candidates. This paper will discuss the issue of engagement of the Azerbaijani community in the parliamentary and local elections.

In the parliamentary election, representatives of the Azerbaijani community and ethnic minorities are rarely incorporated in the proportional lists of political parties. They occupy places in the

proportional lists that in most cases do not give them a real chance of being elected. Further, in the case of majoritarian constituencies, the candidates of political parties from the local Azerbaijani communities are given preference only in one or two majoritarian constituencies. There are majoritarian constituencies where the Azerbaijani community makes up the majority or a large part of the population, although political parties still do not consider the ethnic factor.

In the local elections, a representative of the Azerbaijani community is nominated as a candidate for Mayor in Marneuli. In other municipalities, the highest position for a representative of the Azerbaijani community so far has been the position of Deputy Chairman of the City Assembly.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the involvement of candidates from the Georgian Azerbaijani community in the election process, and investigate the existing problems.

The following tasks were set to achieve the objectives of the study:

- Analysis of secondary data, which includes the study of state policy documents, data from the National Statistics Office, and the research conducted by non-governmental organizations;
- Identifying key problems in the electoral process in ethnic minority regions.

In Georgia, the Azerbaijani community is the largest group among the non-dominant ethnic groups in the country (6.3%). Nevertheless, the level of engagement of the Azerbaijani community in political life, including in the elections, is quite low. This is especially noticeable during the participation of members of the Azerbaijani community in the elected bodies.

Representation of the Azerbaijani community in Parliament and local self-governance

The first Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia in 1990-1991 had seven representatives of ethnic minorities, including one ethnic Azerbaijani. In the third Parliament of 1992-1995, only four out of 234 members were representatives of ethnic minorities. None of these were ethnic Azerbaijanis. The fourth parliament in 1995-1999 had sixteen representatives of ethnic minorities, including six from the Azerbaijani community. The number of ethnic minorities in the 5th parliament of 1999-2004 was also sixteen, seven of which were ethnic Azerbaijanis. Since 2004, the number of MPs has been reduced to 150. Three members of the new parliament were ethnic Azerbaijanis. As the Sixth Parliament, in the seventh Parliament in 2008-2012, there were three. Prior to that, all ethnic Azerbaijani MPs were members of the ruling party. Three members of the eighth Parliament in 2012 were ethnic Azerbaijanis. One of these was elected as a majoritarian from the UNM party, and two through the proportional list from Georgian Dream. As a result of the 2016 parliamentary elections, four ethnic Azerbaijanis became members of the ninth Parliament, including one majoritarian and two proportionals from Georgian Dream, and also one proportionally from UNM. Based on this data, one can argue that the representation of the Azerbaijani community in the legislature is quite low compared to their share in the population of the country. [2]

The engagement of the Azerbaijani community in local elections is also quite low. Following the Rose Revolution, their limited representation was most evident in the 2006, 2010, and 2014 local elections. For example, in those municipalities where for decades the Azerbaijani community had been in the majority, the position of Advisor to the District Head and Member of the City Assembly were the highest positions occupied by an Azerbaijani.

The 2006 Local Elections

Local elections were held in Georgia in October 2006, for the first time since the adoption of the 2005 Organic Law, which in terms of integration into political life was particularly important for

ethnic minorities, including the Azerbaijani community. During this period, the participation of representatives of the Azerbaijani community in government institutions was very low.

In the 2006 local elections, the total number of candidates representing the Azerbaijani community was 58 in the majoritarian constituencies and 41 in the proportional lists. The elections were held without competition in the Kvemo-Kartli areas densely populated by Azerbaijanis. During this period, the grassroots movement Geirati was popular in the Azerbaijani community. But its leader claimed that many activists and members of the movement were not allowed to participate in the elections. According to the data, in Kvemo-Kartli municipalities, the demands of a large number of candidates were not met. [3 - p.164]. Ethnic Azerbaijanis were selected from 43 polling stations across the country, among them, 21 on ballot only from the ruling party. [4] Every member of the Azerbaijani community was elected from the ruling party. As a result of the elections, ethnic Azerbaijanis gained the following number of places: 16 out of 28 in Marneuli, nine out of 29 in Dmanisi, ten out of 24 in Bolnisi, nine out of 33 in Gardabani, four out of 21 in Sagarejo, two out of 30 in Tsalka, one out of 18 in Telavi, and one out of 15 in Lagodekhi. [3 - p.166]

Parliamentary elections of 2008

In the 2008 parliamentary elections, only 23 of the 1,767 candidates on the party list were ethnic Azerbaijanis. Two ethnic Azerbaijani candidates were elected from the United National Movement in the proportional list. No minority candidate was elected from any of the other parties. As for the majoritarian constituencies, only nine (2.07%) of the 434 majoritarian candidates running in the elections were ethnic Azerbaijanis. Among them, all candidates ran in Kvemo-Kartli: Marneuli (five out of seven), Gardabani (two out of four), Bolnisi (one out of seven), and Dmanisi (one out of four). [5 - p.394]

As a result of this election, only three ethnic Azerbaijanis entered the fifth Parliament. All three candidates were elected from the ruling party. Among them, one from the Marneuli majoritarian district (Azer Suleimanov) and two from the proportional list (Ramin Bairamov and Isvakhan Shamilov). [2]

Local elections of 2010

In the 2010 local elections, as in the previous election (2006), the interest of political parties in the candidacies of the members of Azerbaijani community was very low. No ethnic Azerbaijani was elected as a head of administration in any of the densely Azerbaijani-populated districts of Kvemo Kartli. As for the elections of majoritarian candidates of the local assemblies, according to the districts, the results were distributed in the following manner with regard to Azerbaijanis taking the position: 11 out of 18 in Marneuli, eight out of 19 in Gardabani, seven out of 14 in Bolnisi, three out of 30 in Tsalka, four out of 21 in Sagarejo, one out of 18 in Telavi, and one out of 15 in Lagodekhi. In municipalities where the Azerbaijani community is strong, such as in Kaspi, Mtskheta, Tetrtskaro, and Rustavi, the number of ethnic Azerbaijani candidates was very low. Representatives of the Azerbaijani community were elected solely from the ruling party. [6]

Parliamentary elections of 2012:

Of a total 2,155 candidates on the proportional list of 16 political parties running in the 2012 parliamentary elections, 29 (1.34%) were from the Azerbaijani community. The five political parties did not include an ethnic Azerbaijani candidate in their proportional list at all. Two ethnic Azerbaijanis (2nd and 8th) were nominated among the first score of the Movement for Just Georgia party list. In the National Democratic Party, the representative of the Azerbaijani community was in 8th place,

in the Christian Democratic Union 14th, in the proportional list of Kakha Kukava's Free Georgia 15th, and in the New Rights party 16th place. No member of the Azerbaijani community was in the first score of other parties participating in the elections, including the Georgian Dream and the UNM parties. The Georgian Dream and UNM each had seven representatives of the Azerbaijani community in their proportional lists. While two ethnic Azerbaijanis from the Georgian Dream party list, Ali Mammadov (36th) and Damakhir Darziev (56th) became Members of Parliament, none of the seven Azerbaijanis included in the UNM party list (Samira Ismailova, 39th, occupied the best position among them) managed to enter the eighth Parliament. [7]

As for the majoritarian constituencies, in the 2012 elections, political parties allowed a representative of the Azerbaijani community as a majoritarian candidate in Marneuli alone. Six of the seven majoritarians in the 22nd district (Marneuli) were ethnically Azerbaijani. In the 23rd (Bolnisi) and 24th (Dmanisi) districts, where ethnic Azerbaijanis make up two-thirds of the population, or in the 21st district (Gardabani), where they make up about half of the population, no ethnic Azerbaijani was on the ballots. As a result of the elections, in the Marneuli district, as in 2008, the candidate of the United National Movement, Azer Suleimanov, won with 78.91%. Georgian Dream majoritarian Makhir Darziev received 16.48% of the vote, while 3.72% of the votes were distributed among the other five candidates. [8]

As a result of the 2012 parliamentary elections, three representatives of the Azerbaijani community became Members of Parliament. One of them was a majoritarian candidate from UNM and two were candidates from the Georgian Dream by a proportional list.

Local elections of 2014

In the 2014 local elections, as in the previous elections, the interest of political parties towards the Azerbaijani community candidacies was low. A total of four Azerbaijani mayoral candidates ran in the elections. Among them there were three from Marneuli and one from Gardabani. The ruling Georgian Dream party did not nominate a representative of the Azerbaijani community as a mayoral candidate in any of the districts. In the municipalities of Bolnisi and Dmanisi, where ethnically Azerbaijani candidates did not vote, the ruling party won with a fairly high percentage (71.86% in Dmanisi, 71.06% in Bolnisi), in the case of Marneuli, three out of six political parties: UNM Nino Burjanadze - United Opposition and Non-Parliamentary Opposition (Free Georgia, New Rights Party) gave preference to an ethnic Azerbaijani candidate. [9]

Primarily, Merab Topchishvili from Georgian Dream and Akdamed Imamkuliev from United National Movement fought for victory. Unlike other municipalities in the region, the pre-election process in Marneuli was quite tense. The chairman of the Marneuli District Election Commission, in accordance with Article 167, Paragraph 10 of the Election Code, revoked Imamkuliev's registration on June 5. This decision was related to the fact that out of the two full years required by law, the candidate was not present in Georgia for several months.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) rejected the UNM's lawsuit and upheld the decision of the Head of Marneuli District Election Commission on the removal of Akamed Imamkuliev's candidacy. [10] The UNM then appealed the CEC decision to the Tbilisi City Court. The city court overturned the Central Election Commission's decision and restored the registration of the UNM's Marneuli mayoral candidate on June 10. [11]

The Georgian Dream's Political Council issued a statement on June 12, advising coalition candidate in Marneuli Merab Topchishvili to withdraw his candidacy in favor of two Azerbaijani opposition

candidates. According to the Political Council, this decision was made by the coalition to avoid ethnic confrontation. However, according to the CEC, despite the decision of the Georgian Dream's Political Council, the coalition's candidate for Marneuli Mayor, Topchishvili would remain a candidate. Topchishvili himself refused to withdraw his candidacy and stated that he would still run. [12] The UNM candidate Akamed Imamkuliyeu ruled out the possibility of confrontation on ethnic grounds in Marneuli and said he would certainly win the elections on June 15. [13]

Candidates from the ruling party and the UNM campaigned actively. Nino Burjanadze – the United Opposition ran the election campaign of the opposition candidate, which encompassed certain settlements. The other candidates had a rather weak election campaign in the region.

Numerous irregularities were reported during the elections in Marneuli: four out of 87 polling stations in the district were annulled. [14] Georgian Dream candidate Merab Topchishvili won in 54 constituencies, Akmamed Imamkuliev of the United National Movement won in 21 constituencies, and Rashid Mammadov of Nino Burjanadze - the United Opposition won seven constituencies. Imamkuliev and Mammadov won support in Azerbaijani-populated constituencies, while gaining a relatively low percentage of votes in Georgian and Armenian villages. [14]

The representative of the ruling party, Merab Topchishvili, received 51.08% of the vote, which was one of the lowest results obtained by the Georgian Dream party in the first round in the whole country. It is also noteworthy that before that, any party in power was able to gain the majority of votes more easily in Marneuli. The National Movement, which preferred a candidate from the Azerbaijani community, in Marneuli achieved one of the best results in the country (32.4%). Nino Burjanadze – the United Opposition candidate Rashid Mammadov, received 13.28% of the vote. The other three candidates together gained 3.4% of votes. Overall, opposition forces won 49% of the vote. [15]

If we compare the results in Marneuli with those of neighboring municipalities, it turns out that in places where ethnic Azeri candidates did not run for the opposition, often the ruling party received a large share of the vote. For example, the candidates of Georgian Dream won the 23rd district (Bolnisi) with 71.06% and the 24th district (Dmanisi) with 71.86%. [15]

In the 21st majoritarian district (Gardabani), one out of four mayoral candidates was ethnic Azerbaijani. Telman Gasanov from the Political Movement of Law Enforcement Veterans and Patriots of Georgia, won 6.78% of the vote (the best result among the party candidates), while his party failed to get even 1% of the total number of votes nationwide (0.95%). Like other districts in the region, Georgian Dream candidate Garsevan Nioradze (56.77%) won here as well. As a result of the elections, in none of the municipalities densely populated by Azerbaijanis did the ethnic Azerbaijani candidate win the race for mayor. [15]

As for the majoritarian elections of the City Assembly, it can be said that for the first time the interests of the Azerbaijani community in the local elections was high. Seven independent ethnically Azerbaijani candidates from various districts in the region entered the assemblies. As a result of the elections, 42 (including seven independent) majoritarian candidates entered the Kvemo-Kartli and Kakheti Municipal Assemblies, but this number was also quite low considering the proportions of the population of this community.

Eleven of the 18 members elected in the Marneuli Assembly were ethnic Azeris. It is noteworthy that in two polling stations (1st and 11th polling stations) the representatives of the opposition from UNM and Political Movement of Law Enforcement Veterans and Patriots of Georgia won. The ruling

party candidates won the other 16 districts. In addition to the candidates nominated by the parties in Marneuli, eight independent candidates also ran. One of them, in the fourth district, received 42% of the vote in a very near victory. [16]

Among the majoritarian candidates for the Bolnisi Assembly, seven out of 14 were ethnic Azerbaijanis. One of them was an independent candidate, Kara Gulmamedov, who won the 11th district with 34.44%. All the remaining candidates were elected from the ruling party. [17]

Eight out of 16 members elected in the Dmanisi Assembly through the majoritarian system were ethnic Azerbaijani. Among them, the independent candidate Zulfugar Mikhailov won in the fifth district with 59.81%. In other districts, a representative of the ruling party won. [18]

In Gardabani, eight out of 19 majoritarian members of the Assembly were ethnic Azerbaijanis. Among them, two were independent candidates. Ilgar Muradov won the eighth, while Vidadi Eminov won the 15th polling station in Gardabani. [19]

In Sagarejo, four of the 21 elected were representatives of the Azerbaijani community. It is noteworthy that two of this four were independent candidates: Kazanfar Mammadov won in the eighteenth district (with 45.28%) and Hajan Aliyev in the twentieth district (with 41.19%). Another independent candidate was very close to winning in the 20th district. [20]

Two of the 30 members elected in Tsalka Assembly through the majoritarian system, one out of 15 in Lagodekhi, and one out of 18 in Telavi, were ethnic Azerbaijanis. In other municipalities densely inhabited by Azerbaijanis, such as Tetrtskaro, Kaspi, Mtskheta, and Rustavi, they were not represented on a majoritarian basis in the municipal assemblies. [21] [22] [23]

2016 Parliamentary elections

23 (2.60%) of the 846 majoritarian candidates in the 2016 parliamentary elections, were from the Azerbaijani community. [24] Of the 3,567 candidates running in the proportional lists of the 25 political blocs, only 59 (1.61%) were ethnically Azerbaijani. Of the 25 political parties, eight did not include ethnic Azerbaijanis in their proportional lists at all. [25]

The placement of candidates of ethnic Azerbaijani origin in the proportional lists, where political parties exceed the threshold, saw, out of 155 candidates of the Georgian Dream, three being ethnic Azerbaijanis (20th, 85th, 89th place). Among them, two candidates (Ruslan Gadjiev and Savalan Mirzoev) were running in the 31st and 35th majoritarian districts. In the proportional list of the National Movement six out of 200 were ethnic Azerbaijanis. The 26th, 94th, 96th, 97th, 144th, and 149th districts included four candidates (Samira Ismailova, Azer Suleimanov, Akamed Imamkuliev, Ramin Bairamov) who also ran for the majoritarian districts. The Patriots Alliance, which surpassed the 5% threshold, included only four ethnic Azerbaijanis in the proportional list out of 195 candidates (37th, 43rd, 83rd, 84th places). [25]

In the proportional lists of political parties, the representatives of the Azerbaijani community occupied such positions, that in many cases they had only a theoretical chance of entering Parliament. Several parties gave preference to Azerbaijani candidates in the first score of the proportional list: political union Peoples Government had three ethnic Azerbaijanis in the first score (5th, 17th, 18th); Topadze Industrialists - Our Homeland had one (20th). The United Communist Party of Georgia also had one (18th), as did Free Democrats (20th).

Of the 856 candidates in 73 majoritarian districts, 23 were ethnic Azerbaijanis. Georgian Dream had two Azerbaijani candidates out of 73; four out of 72 for the United National Movement; Paata

Burchuladze - State for the People, The Patriots Alliance, and Tamaz Mechiauri - for the United Georgia, each had three; The Democratic Movement and The Republican Party had two in each; while the Free Democrats, the United Communist Party, and Zviad's Way - In the Name of the Lord had one candidate each. In addition, one independent ethnic Azerbaijani candidate ran in the 23rd majoritarian district (Sagarejo). [24]

From the restoration of independence until 2012, when the ruling party won the vast majority of votes in the regions densely populated by Azerbaijanis, other political parties had almost no chance. This situation changed in the 2016 elections. Ethnic Azerbaijanis made up the majority of the population in the four districts of the region. These were majoritarian districts of Gardabani 31st, Bolnisi 33rd, Marneuli 35th and 36th. The ethnic Azerbaijanis voters comprised about a third of the population in district 34, incorporating the municipalities of Dmanisi and Tsalka, as well as the town of Kazreti from Bolnisi. This figure was about the same in the 23rd majoritarian district (Sagarejo).

The election campaign was lively in the regions densely populated by the Azerbaijani community, especially in the 31st, 33rd, 35th, and 36th majoritarian districts. The main opponents in these districts were the ruling party and the UNM. The election period was particularly active in the 36th (Marneuli) and 33rd (Bolnisi) districts. According to the assessments published by various NGOs, mobilization of support on ethnic grounds was observed in both districts. [26. P.34]

In the 36th majoritarian district (Marneuli), eight candidates fought for victory. Four political parties listed ethnic Azerbaijani candidates. The 36th District had a very diverse ethnic composition. The two districts of Marneuli were divided in such a way that the absolute majority of Georgian and Armenian settlements were allocated in this district (36th). Nevertheless, the population of Azerbaijani settlements accounted for about 70% of the entire district. The main battle was between Tamaz Naveriani from Georgian Dream and Akamed Imamkuliev from United National Movement. As a result of the election, Imamkuliev won in all districts of Marneuli (his hometown) and in the villages of the district populated with ethnic Azeris. Tamaz Naveriani showed the same results in Georgian and Armenian settlements. [27]

The UNM candidate Akamed Imamkuliev actively sought to meet and greet the population in Marneuli, while the election campaign of other opposition candidates was passive in the 36th district. Israfil Mamedov, the candidate of Paata Burzhchuladze - the State for the People, was barely noticeable.

The election day was quite noisy in the 36th district, especially at the 46th polling station (village Kizilajlo), leading the CEC to annul the results there. [27]

For the first time in the history of independent Georgia, during the 2016 parliamentary elections in Marneuli, which is densely populated by the Azerbaijani community, the opposition candidate in the 36th district overtook the ruling party. Akamed Imamkuliev received 48.11% of the vote (winning 28 of 45 polling stations). This was the best result for the UNM in the country. Tamaz Naveriani from Georgian Dream received 43.43% of the votes, Israfil Bairamov the candidate of Paata Burchuladze - State for the People received 5.16% of the vote. The overall number of votes for the other 5 candidates was 3.52%. [28].

Imamkuliev won the annulled elections in the 48th polling station (Kizilajlo) on October 23, but this was not enough to win a mandate. [29] The second round of elections took place on 30 October. According to the CEC, the majoritarian of Georgian Dream, Tamaz Naveriani, who gained 43.43% of the votes in the first round, then won with 72.15%. [30]

Candidates from eight political parties competed in the 33rd district (Bolnisi). Among them, four political parties gave preference to the representative of the Azerbaijani community. Here, as in other municipalities of the region, the main battle was between the candidates of Georgian Dream and the UNM. In this district, Georgian Dream chose an ethnic Georgian, while the United National Movement took on an ethnic Azerbaijani candidate. [28]. Like the candidate of the ruling party, the UNM candidate Samira Ismailova was an active campaigner. Along with public meetings, she campaigned on a door-to-door basis. According to the information spread by the candidate, in several villages there were attempts to block her campaign. [31] The election campaign of other candidates was slow, with most of them unable to campaign in all areas of the district.

As a result of the elections, Ismailova won the majority of votes in the villages populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis, while the ruling party candidate, Gogi Meshveliani, won in some Azerbaijani settlements, although he had more active support in the settlements populated by ethnic Georgians. [32] As a result, Gogi Meshveliani from Georgian Dream won 52.12% of votes, while Samira Ismailova won 39.74% (winning in 30 out of 62 polling stations). Ismailova, like Imamkuliev, showed one of the best results among the UNM majoritarian candidates. The total number of votes cast for the other six candidates was 8.14%. Among them, Ramiz Bakirov, the candidate of Paata Burchuladze - the State for the People, had the best result with 2.03%. [28]

In the 35th majoritarian district (Marneuli), representatives of ten parties fought for victory. The absolute majority of the population of this district were ethnic Azerbaijanis. Of the ten political parties, five chose ethnic Azeri candidates. [28]. The main battle here was between Azer Suleimanov from the UNM and Ruslan Gajiev from the Georgian Dream. Both candidates campaigned actively. The election campaigns of the other candidates were limited to certain settlements and did not include all areas within the district. As a result of the elections, Ruslan Gajiev received 56.31%. Azer Suleimanov, who had won the majority of votes in the 2008 and 2012 elections, got 36.58% of the vote. 92.89% of the vote was divided between these two candidates. Among other candidates, the best result was shown by Topadze – Industrialists, Our Homeland candidate, Polad Khalilov [28], who received 2.66% of the vote. It should also be noted that, unlike in the 36th Marneuli district, the pre-election period and the election day were both peaceful.

In the 34th majoritarian district (Dmanisi, Tsalka, Kazreti-Bolnisi), eight candidates ran. One of them was an ethnic Azerbaijani. In this district, the Alliance of Patriots gave preference to a candidate from the Azerbaijani community, Namig Bairamov. The pre-election period turned out to be noisy in Dmanisi. Bairamov and his party member were beaten by an infrastructure specialist of the Dmanisi Municipality. [33. P.17] As a result of the election, Bairamov gained about 2% of the vote. In the pre-election period, he was not distinguished with high activity. Kakhaber Okriashvili of Georgian Dream won in the aforementioned majoritarian district with 66.17%. [28]

In the 31st majoritarian district (Gardabani city and up to 15 villages), 11 candidates fought for victory. Seven of them were representatives of the Azerbaijani community. Like the areas densely populated by Azerbaijanis, here as well the main battle was between the Georgian Dream and UNM candidates. Both candidates, Savalan Mirzoev (Georgian Dream) and Ramin Bairamov (UNM), were active during the election campaign. As a result of the election, Savalan Mirzoev won by 50.02%. Ramin Bairamov took 33.53%, Gela Khutsishvili 6.27%, and Nini Metreveli of the Labor Party 4.33% of votes. 5.85% of the vote was distributed among the other seven candidates. [28]

The 32nd majoritarian district, which included certain villages in the Gardabani municipality and Tetrtskaro, had eight candidates running. None of them were ethnic Azerbaijanis. [28]

In the Kakheti region, from the municipalities of Sagarejo, Lagodekhi, and Telavi, compactly inhabited by the Azerbaijani community, only one ethnic Azeri, Kazanfar Mammadov, ran as an independent candidate in the 23rd district (Sagarejo). In total, in the 23rd district, seven candidates were registered. [28] It should be noted that ethnic Azerbaijanis make up about 1/3 of the population of Sagarejo Municipality. Mammadov's election campaign was limited to villages populated mainly by Azerbaijanis. As a result of the election, he received 4.24% of the vote. Mammadov won two of Sagarejo's 50 polling stations and received the bulk of his vote from ethnic Azerbaijani voters. This means that he could only gain the support of the Azerbaijani community. [34] In the first round, none of the candidates managed to acquire 50 + 1 percent of the vote. Roman Muchiashvili, the candidate for the Georgian Dream party, won in the second round. [35]

As a result of the parliamentary elections, four out of 150 members of the ninth parliament were ethnic Azerbaijani. Among them were members of the Georgian Dream, majoritarians Ruslan Gajiev and Savalan Mirzoev, and Makhir Derziev, through the proportional list. Through the proportional list of the United National Movement, Azer Suleimanov became a Member of Parliament for the fourth time. [28] [36]

2017 Local Elections

During the 2017 local elections, a total of seven mayoral candidates in the Kvemo Kartli region were ethnic Azerbaijanis. Five of them ran in Marneuli and two in Gardabani. In Bolnisi and Dmanisi, where the Azerbaijani community makes up the majority of the population, no political party gave preference to them. In the Kakheti region, where Azerbaijanis live compactly in several municipalities, none of the mayoral candidates were ethnic Azerbaijani. [37]

As in 2014, in the 2017 local elections, the ruling party chose no member of the Azerbaijani community as a mayoral candidate in any of the districts densely populated by Azerbaijanis. This decision of the ruling party was protested particularly by sections of the Marneuli population. Six weeks before the elections, Georgian Dream took an unexpected step in Marneuli and replaced its mayoral candidate, Amira Giorgadze, with an ethnic Azerbaijani, Temur Abazov. This was the first time the ruling party had nominated a representative of the Azerbaijani community as a mayoral candidate. [38]

A total of eight candidates ran for Mayor in Marneuli. Five of them were representatives of the Azerbaijani community. In addition to the ruling party, the main opposition parties, the United National Movement and European Georgia, also favored ethnic Azeri candidates. The election campaigns of the Georgian Dream and European Georgia candidates turned out to be more successful than that of the UNM. [37]

As a result of the elections, the candidate of the ruling party, Teimur Abazov, won with 69.71%. The newly formed political party, European Georgia, received 19.14% of the vote in Marneuli, which was one of the best results for this party in the country. The UNM candidate, who started his pre-election campaign later than his opponents, received 6.71% of the vote. 4.44% of the votes were distributed among the other 5 candidates. [37]

Seven candidates ran for Mayor in the 21st majoritarian district (Gardabani). In this district, two political parties, the European Georgia and Democratic Movement - Free Georgia, gave preference to representatives of the Azerbaijani community. As a result of the elections, the candidate of the ruling party, Ramazi Budaghashvili, won with 71.86%. UNM candidate Gela Nebunishvili gained 9.4%

of the votes, while candidate for European Georgia Tengiz Gasanov acquired 8.38%. The second ethnic Azerbaijani candidate, Alakhverdi Bakhdiarov, who represented the Democratic Movement - Free Georgia, received only 0.81% of the vote. [37] In the other municipalities of the region densely populated by Azerbaijanis (Bolnisi, Dmanisi), no candidate of Azerbaijani origin ran.

As for the majoritarian districts, of 20 Assembly majoritarians in Marneuli, 13 are ethnic Azerbaijani, seven out of 15 in Bolnisi, nine out of 21 in Gardabani, and eight out of 16 in Dmanisi. Among them, seven are from the Georgian Dream party and one is from the Development Movement; two out of 30 in Tsalka, four out of 22 in Sagarejo, one out of 20 in Telavi, and one out of 16 in Lagodekhi. [39]

Of the proportional lists of the City Assembly, the representation of the Azerbaijani community was very weak. Representatives of the Georgian Dream were in the majority when entering the City Council through the proportional lists. In Marneuli, none of the top twelve of the ruling party's 15-member proportional list were ethnic Azerbaijanis. All in all, of 35 members of Marneuli Assembly, 15 are Azerbaijanis, three ethnic Armenians, and 17 Georgians. Twelve out of 28 in Bolnisi, eleven out of 31 in Dmanisi, fifteen out of 36 in Gardabani, five out of 44 in Tsalka, four out of 35 in Sagarejo, two out of 28 in Lagodekhi, and one out of 33 in Telavi were ethnic Azerbaijanis. No community representatives were nominated to the Assemblies at all in Kaspi, Tetrtskaro, Mtskheta, and other municipalities, nor in the city of Rustavi, home of a number of Azerbaijani settlements. [40 - p.11]

In none of the municipalities in the region did an ethnic Azerbaijani become chairman of a City Assembly. In Dmanisi and Bolnisi municipalities, where the Azerbaijani community accounts for 2/3 of the population, and in Gardabani 43.5%, the highest position for a representative of this community has been Deputy Chairman of the City Assembly. [41], [42], [43] Interestingly, as a result of the 2017 local elections in Marneuli, which is densely populated by Azerbaijanis, a representative of the Azerbaijani community became neither the chairperson nor the deputy chairperson of the Assembly. [44] In Sagarejo, where the Azerbaijani community makes up 1/3 of the population, and in Lagodekhi, 1/4, representatives of the Azerbaijani community have not held any position higher than Assembly member. [45], [46].

The midterm mayoral elections were held in Marneuli in May 2019. Fifteen candidates ran in this election, including four ethnic Azerbaijanis. In those elections, the ruling party and the main opposition forces chose a candidate from the Azerbaijani community. Zaur Dargali, former Deputy Governor of Kvemo Kartli for the Georgian Dream, Agil Mustafaev, a young politician, for the United National Movement, and Akamed Imamkuliev for the European Georgia party fought for victory. Ali Badirov, an independent mayoral candidate, was also active in the election process. The candidates from other parties did not show any activity, and their candidacy was symbolic in character. The ruling party, as in 2017, gave preference to a candidate representing the Azerbaijani community in the midterm elections. It should also be noted that none of the ruling party candidates were local before (Merab Topchishvili was from Tbilisi and Teimur Abazov was from Kaspi). Zaur Dargali won the election with 78.44% of the votes. Agil Mostafaev received 11.49% of the votes, Akamed Imamkuliyeu 7.73%, and the independent candidate Ali Badirov 1.1%. The remaining eleven candidates received a total of 1.14% of the votes. [47]

CONCLUSION

The issue of the engagement of ethnic minorities, including the Azerbaijani community, in the electoral process and in the political life of the country in general, is gaining ever more urgency. Despite the positive trend in recent years, the participation of members of the Azerbaijani community in the legislative and local government is still low. The percentage of their representation in these bodies is much lower than their share in the country's population. No quotas practiced by political parties and low interest in the community negatively affect their political engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- There should be a quota or an incentive system in the legislation which will facilitate the involvement of ethnic minorities in political life, and consequently their participation as a candidate. This move will also encourage equal opportunities and the balancing of political power. In this case, the parties need to make the right choice regarding their candidates, as their political involvement will be more effective in terms of qualitative rather than quantitative representation.
- When selecting their own candidates and nominating them, the political parties should take into account the ethnic diversity of ethnic minorities, including in those areas densely populated by Azerbaijanis. In both legislative and local elections, community representatives on party lists should have a real chance of being elected. Their participation in the elections should not be limited to the municipalities of Marneuli and partly Gardabani, as it is necessary to engage candidates from Azerbaijani communities in other municipalities as well.
- Taking into account that, in addition to the ruling party, the opposition parties have also received a significant share of votes in elections held in recent years, the political parties should work more enthusiastically in this direction and should not limit this energy to the pre-election period alone. They should be more focused on ideology, and in this, it is necessary to take into account the problems and needs of ethnic minorities.
- Parties should strengthen the involvement of representatives of the Azerbaijani community in regional organizations, as well as their participation in the decision-making process. This will help strengthen the participation of community candidates in the elections and their engagement in the political process as a whole.

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THE ENGAGEMENT OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Orkhan Pirverdiev

This paper is dedicated to the study of the problem of the participation and the engagement of ethnic minorities in the decision-making process of self-government and its possible solutions. The low involvement of ethnic minorities in political processes at both central and local levels remains a pressing and acute problem. This problem manifests itself from time to time during the elections and in other political matters.

INTRODUCTION

One of the main features of democratic governance is the active involvement of citizens in the management and decision-making process which is especially important at the local level as it is precisely the authority of municipal governments to address the primary and communal needs of citizens.¹ Nevertheless, ethnic minorities in Georgia are not properly involved in political and social processes. The purpose and essence of local self-government is to give local people the right to solve problems facing the community independently, to be responsible for the fate of their society and to be able to take care of the common good. The engagement of the representatives of each ethnic minority in this process is essential. The more citizens are involved in the implementation of self-government, the higher is its quality.

The main purpose of this paper is to study the problems related to the participation of ethnic minorities in the decision-making process of local self-government and to determine what factors influence the participation of the population in the local decision-making process so as to correct the significant shortcomings that help to create barriers between the local population and the self-governing body. The paper covers Kvemo Kartli, inhabited by ethnic Azerbaijanis, as well as the Armenian populated Samtskhe-Javakheti.

PROBLEM DESCRIPTION AND SOLUTIONS

At present, ethnic minorities are represented in local self-governments as follows: Marneuli - out of 33 members of the Assembly, 20 representatives of ethnic minorities;² Bolnisi - 13 minorities out of 30 members;³ Dmanisi Municipality - 32 assembly members, 11 minority representatives;⁴ Gardabani Municipality - 14 minorities out of 36 Assembly members;⁵ Ninotsminda Municipality - 26 assembly members, 24 minority representatives⁶ and Akhalkalaki Municipality - 38 members of the City Assembly, 32 representatives of minorities.⁷ Only the Marneuli, Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki municipalities have mayors of ethnic minority origin. As the statistics show, the percentage of ethnic minorities in Samtskhe-Javakheti is higher than in Kvemo Kartli municipalities. Nevertheless, the problem of involvement is acute in regions populated by both Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

1 Transparency International - Georgia. Mechanisms for Citizen Involvement - Insufficiently Used Resource in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Municipalities. March 30, 2017. Internet:

<https://transparency.ge/ge/blog/mokalaketa-chartulobis-mekanizmebi-arasakmarisad-gamoqenebuli-resursi-samegrelo-zemo-svanetis-m>

2 Marneuli Municipality City Hall Official Website, Internet: <http://www.marneuli.gov.ge/sakrebulo/sakrebulo-tsevrebis/page/1>

3 Bolnisi Municipality City Hall Official Website, Internet: <http://www.bolnisi.gov.ge/sakrebulo/sakrebulo-tsevrebis>

4 Dmanisi Municipality City Hall Official Website, Internet: <http://www.dmanisi.gov.ge/sakrebulo/sakrebulo-tsevrebis>

5 Gardabani Municipality City Hall Official Website, Internet: <http://gardabani.gov.ge/sakrebulo/sakrebulo-tsevrebis>

6 National Association of Local Authorities of Georgian. Internet: <http://nala.ge/post/242306-ninotsminda-municipaliteti->

7 National Association of Local Authorities of Georgian. Internet: <http://nala.ge/post/241523-axalkalaki-municipaliteti->

A study conducted by the Open Society Foundation in 2019 showed that one of the main factors related to the engagement of ethnic minorities in public life is the level of the knowledge of the Georgian language which, according to the study, is connected to the general awareness of current ongoing events in the country and participation in specific processes. This problem is especially acute in Kvemo Kartli where ethnic Azerbaijanis are unable to work in local government because they cannot speak the language. As for Samtskhe-Javakheti, despite their poor knowledge of the Georgian language, ethnic Armenians are widely represented in local government and, usually, most of them do not speak the state language which hinders effective governance and communication with the central government. Moreover, the higher the level of the knowledge of the Georgian language, the higher the awareness of and participation in political processes on the part of the minority population. In particular, the study identifies the reasons for low activism: a lack of interest in politics, family workload and an insufficient knowledge of the Georgian language.⁸ A great deal of problems facilitate the low level of the involvement of ethnic minorities in local governments. One of the most important is the language barrier which is caused by a lack of communication with the Georgian-speaking population as well as some shortcomings in the education system having its origins in the 1990s such as the lack of qualified and bilingual Georgian language teachers in non-Georgian schools, the lack of methodological and scientific approaches to teaching a complete and modern language and so on.⁹

The 2018 presidential election is another example of low engagement. The lowest turnout across the country was recorded in Marneuli where only 36.47 percent of registered voters cast a ballot.¹⁰ Various factors can be the reason for this but the most important one is the lack of knowledge of the state language by the majoritarian deputies of the village assembly which prevents the population from being more actively involved in the political process.

Another reason for weak engagement in local government is the passivity of political parties. Political entities in their party programs superficially discuss or ignore important issues for minorities. Also, the parties do not have enough resources such as, for example, in densely populated regions they do not have a strong party infrastructure. They have no connection with potential voters and cannot provide them with information about their party program. As for the so-called passive right of ethnic minority to participate in the elections, 34 of the 850 majoritarian candidates in the 2016 parliamentary elections were ethnic minorities, representing 0.3% of the candidates. There were 12 candidates in the party proportional lists which is a very low figure considering the party lists 25 political entities. In contrast to the proportional system, in majoritarian constituencies where ethnic minorities live compactly, ethnic minorities are represented everywhere as candidates as political parties seek to gain the trust of the local population and garner as many votes as possible. The nominated candidates often do not have a solid political ideological platform and they change parties depending on which political force is in power.¹¹

It is also noteworthy that the political parties themselves cannot pick the local representatives who meet the requirements of minimal political education and capacities that would contribute to the proper conduct of local politics and reinvigorate the local population. For example, there are four

8 Open Society Foundation. May 17, 2019. Study on the Participation of Ethnic Minorities in Political Life. Internet: <https://osgf.ge/publication/etnikuri-umciresobebis-warmomadgenlebis-politikur-ckhovrebashi-monawileobis-kvleva/>

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ethnic Azerbaijani MPs in the Georgian parliament who are known for their passivity and absenteeism and only two of them more or less speak the state language, contradicting the Georgian constitution which requires a mandatory knowledge of a state language. Also, most of the members of the local government assembly of the Marneuli municipality do not speak the state language. A member of parliament and any public servant in general is the face of the local population in the highest state institutions and the legislature. I consider it necessary and obligatory for any public servant to know the state language, especially if they belong to an ethnic minority.

CONCLUSION

The involvement of ethnic minorities in local government decision-making remains an unresolved issue. Although there has been an increase in civil activism among ethnic minorities in recent years, this has not yet been reflected on their engagement in self-government issues. In order to solve this problem, we have developed a number of recommendations for various agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Non-Governmental Sector** - Increase activity in ethnic minority regions, support for non-formal education, aptitude trainings for political party and government officials, support for local media sources, recruitment of 1+4 graduates and their engagement in socio-political processes.
- **Local Government** - Establish a relevant consulting service in the local government in the Azerbaijani and Armenian languages to assist the local community in communicating with administrative bodies, utilize the resources of 1+4 graduates and hire them through a transparent competition for the position of a rural trustee, in a city hall non-commercial legal entity or as apparatus staff.
- **Political Parties** - In order to maintain the balance between the population and MPs, at least every tenth member in the parliamentary proportional list should be a representative of ethnic minorities, giving preference to those who are well versed in the Georgian language when selecting a candidate for the assembly list and majoritarian positions.

“GENDER BUDGET” OF THE AKHALKALAKI MUNICIPALITY

Rima Marangozyan

SUMMARY

“Gender budget” is a very important topic in today’s society, especially when it comes to women’s rights and equality.

While gender budget initiatives can take many forms, their primary purpose is to influence the budgetary process and help policymakers realize how public policy can help reduce gender inequality and improve economic outcomes.

We have considered several ways to solve this problem. In particular, the first way towards a solution is to prevent early marriage. The second way is to create suitable working conditions for women because they have a lot of work in their rural households which is unpaid. The third way to solve the problem is to promote the participation of women in the labor market.

Among these solutions, I consider the best to be the first - to create an organizational unit that will work with individual families to determine the correct age of marriage for their daughters. I find this way to solve the problem to be the most effective.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, our views on gender differences have been refined and they have somewhat improved. This also applies to the questions of why public policy has a different impact on women and men. These views affect the improvement of macroeconomic and, especially, fiscal policy.

In choosing this topic, I familiarized myself with the opinions of various experts working on gender budgeting. The aim of this study is to investigate the gender budget, specifically in Akhalkalaki and find ways to improve it. It was necessary to find relevant statistical information in order to present the gender budget to the population which would enable their understanding of the issue.

In order to achieve gender integration, it is essential to study the extent to which the Akhalkalaki municipality adheres to the necessary norms in the budgetary process.

Although gender budget initiatives can take many forms, their main purpose is to influence the real-life processes.

In the budget planning process, policymakers need to focus on how public policy can help reduce gender disparities and improve economic outcomes.

Taking into account the existing gender inequality in the formation of the local budget leads to a more efficient allocation of budget resources and contributes to the refinement of the budget process in this regard. It should be noted that gender budgeting does not imply creating a separate budget for women and men but, rather, it is the formation of a gender-oriented budgeting process.

During the research, I sought to study the budgets adopted by the Akhalkalaki Municipality for the last five years and investigate the situation in terms of the gender protection budget with a view to finding a solution to this problem.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND SOLUTIONS

Gender inequality is being maintained. Women still earn less, are overworked, suffer from gender-based violence, have fewer opportunities in the labor market and their rights are restricted in many other areas.

Knowing how to establish gender relations in society, institutions and governance, and understanding the need for gender mainstreaming to overcome gender inequality is a necessary step towards an equal society.

Adopting special programs and actions for women which provide help and support in specific areas is not enough. The approach where success is measured by the number of women involved in these special programs is extremely wrong. Increasing gender expertise in government institutions is important for knowing how to tackle the various situations of gender inequality.

The first step towards gender mainstreaming is to form an organization and a consciousness in order to develop a structural and cultural basis for equal opportunities. This step involves formulating budgetary policy goals and defining responsibilities.

The second step is to teach gender differences. In order to develop a gender fiscal policy, it is necessary to understand the possible impact on the lives of the population or on budgetary actions.

Accounting for various aspects is a part of the gender budget planning methodology. Gender budgeting is a relatively new concept that allows the integration of a gender perspective into state and local budgets. Gender budgets address the needs and interests of different groups of citizens - women and men, girls and boys - and aim to allocate public resources in such a way as to meet the requirements of individuals and groups in urgent need.

These attempts to integrate gender analysis into public policy have recently gained particular importance in part because of the strong impetus emanating from the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing.¹

Such a form of budgeting helps to improve accountability for government activities in terms of gender equality development and also focus budgets and policies on matters of gender equality. It aims not only to analyze programs specifically targeted at women, or to prepare a separate “feminine” budget, but rather it is designed to analyze the gender effects of all government programs and policies. For example, reducing the cost for supplying clean water can cause disproportionately great harm to women and girls as it is usually them who have to devote time and energy to provide the family with clean water if access is limited.

Similarly, an increase in school fees may disproportionately reduce the ability of girls to attend school while a rise in kindergarten costs may also increase the burden on women who have the child-rearing responsibilities. Because some of the benefits of reducing gender inequality, such as the impact of higher education on fertility and child health, may only appear in the medium term, it is important to incorporate the preparation of gender budgets in medium and long-term budget planning.

Even if reducing gender inequality is not necessarily conducive to economic growth but simply creates a fairer society, it is enough reason for the government to intervene.

1 «Beijing Platform.» National Parliamentary Library of Georgia, 2008
<<http://www.nplg.gov.ge/gwdict/index.php?a=term&d=5&t=10881>>

In the past, in many countries women were openly discriminated in terms of income tax, for example, but today their numbers are declining.

Key findings on gender budget implementation initiatives and the scope of the outcomes in different countries show that the extent of implementation depends largely on the availability of international assistance in the country.

This means that there must be the political will at all levels of a national government to draft gender budgets in state development programs.

NGOs and the public do not have a serious influence on gender mainstreaming in the budgeting process.

In many countries, gender equality laws are relatively easy to adopt and inscribed in the institutions; however, laws are not always implemented while the allocation of resources for gender programs is very weak.

The essence of the mainstream approach is that gender is a structural difference that affects the entire population. Pretentious political decisions about gender neutrality can have different effects on women and men, especially if such an effect was not envisioned.

State budget initiatives also have a serious impact on the lives of women and men but most of the population and even experts in the field of economics ignore the gender aspects of budgetary policy.

Gender scrutiny of budget initiatives around the world reveals that a “gender neutral” approach to economic policy, especially in budgets, necessarily ensures the reproduction of inequality structures caused by the allocation of women and men in social and economic strata.

Comparing the impact of state revenues and expenditures on the situation and socio-economic opportunities of women and girls, on the one hand, and of men and boys, on the other hand, ensures the fulfilment of government responsibility in terms of obligations established in the national policy of a country.

It is clear that working within the gender budget requires a wide spectrum in compiling the legislation and the budget. There are so-called “entry points.” The primary ones are as follow:

- Development of gender statistics which provide us with the necessary information for a better orientation and a correction of gender asymmetry and imbalance.
- Conducting information and educational work on gender issues, primarily to clarify national gender equality policies.
- Creating opportunities for women and men to participate in the gender budget.

In recent years, our views on gender behavior differences and why public policies on the various effects of women and men have improved and this influences the development of macroeconomic and especially fiscal policy.

Recognizing that gender inequality is critical and that government budgets are not gender-neutral means that gender considerations are necessary in the budgeting process.

Gender budgeting is one of the ways in which countries can clearly identify the policy measures needed to reduce gender differences. Gender budgeting includes a systematic analysis of budget programs and policy measures targeting women.

By creating and using appropriate methods and tools, women's budgets can make a decisive contribution to addressing important issues such as:

- Recognizing and reassessing the role and contribution of women in a market economy as well as in areas of "care economics" such as reproduction of offspring and households which obviously are not analyzed; however, they actually affect macroeconomic choices that reduced the cost of healthcare, education and welfare.
- Strengthening women's leadership in politics, economics and public life, parliament, business, media, culture, religious organizations, trade unions and civil society organizations.
- Organizing the transformation process to meet the interests and needs of the poorest and the most vulnerable members of society.
- Capacity building of women's organizations in the field of advocacy, in particular to protect women's participation in solving macroeconomic problems.

While gender budget initiatives can take many forms, their primary purpose is to influence the budgetary process and assist policymakers to realize how public policy can help reduce gender inequality and improve economic outcomes.

The first way to solve the problem is to prevent early marriage. It should be noted that according to 2019's data, 23 percent of women in Georgia are married at or before the age of 18 which makes them vulnerable as they are in no way ready for maternity and family. Such girls do not have the opportunity to acquire a higher education, they do not develop professional skills and their ability to establish themselves in society becomes limited. Policies should be pursued to encourage parents not to force their daughters into an early marriage and enable them to continue their education in order to develop certain professional skills. To this end, it is necessary to allocate funds to the local budget to create an organizational unit that will unite psychologists, sociologists, lawyers, and teachers to work with individual families to determine the right age of marriage for their daughters.

The second way to solve the problem is to create suitable working conditions for women because they have a lot of work in their rural households which is unpaid. It is important for women to have an income from their labor. It is advisable to open food and light industry enterprises in the region where rural women will have an opportunity for salaried work.

The third way to solve the problem is to improve women's participation in the labor market. Cultural and social norms prevent women from realizing their economic potential while security issues limit their physical and economic mobility. In addition, gender inequality and the lack of working conditions make it even more difficult for women to participate actively in the labor market.

Among these three solutions, I consider the best to be the first - to create an organizational unit that will work with individual families to determine the right age of marriage for their daughters. I think this way of solving the problem is the most effective as this will encourage efforts to start taking care of the future careers of women from an earlier age and, consequently, over time the number of early marriages will decrease and their labor and social activity will increase.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Traditionally, families and older members of the community decide when and whom a girl should marry. It is necessary to educate them in this regard through meetings, information campaigns and/or public speeches. To this end, an organizational unit should be set up in the municipality to bring together psychologists, sociologists, lawyers and teachers to work with individual families to determine the right age of marriage for their daughters. It is necessary to allocate special funds in the local budget in order to finance this organization.

POLITICAL CULTURE AS AN OBSTACLE TO THE FULL INTEGRATION OF THE ARMENIANS OF JAVAKHETI INTO THE GEORGIAN POLITICAL PROCESS

Amaliya Babayan

SUMMARY

This paper analyzes the political culture of the Armenian-populated region of Javakheti and its impact on the process of its integration into Georgian society. To achieve more effective results in this area, we propose several actions which include increasing the political literacy of the inhabitants of the region, introducing a balanced integration policy and encouraging the intensive study of the state language on the part of the local community. Of the three aforementioned actions, the first option seems to be the most suitable.

INTRODUCTION

Any multinational state faces obstacles on the way of the political, social, economic and cultural integration of its ethnic minorities into society. These obstacles include the language barrier, an informational vacuum, infrastructural and socio-economic conditions and limited access to education. An important factor to which researchers often do not pay due attention is the political culture of the particular region's inhabitants. Political culture determines the type of political participation of the population, its political values, the level of political awareness and much more - all of the above allows a person to fully participate in the political process of the country which, in turn, is one of the key conditions for further integration.

In modern Georgia, the main national minorities are the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities, compactly living in ethnically populated regions. Samtskhe-Javakheti is an Armenian-populated region of Georgia, home to about 81,000 ethnic Armenians.

The purpose of this study is to determine the content of the political culture of the Armenians of Javakheti and its influence on the process of integration into the political system of Georgia. The tasks of the research are to:

1. Define the concept of political culture.
2. Reveal the interconnection between political culture and integration into the political process.
3. Reveal the content of the political culture of the Armenian population of Javakheti.
4. Develop recommendations for working with the region populated by ethnic minorities in Javakheti.

The research methodology included the analysis of theoretical sources, conducting its own qualitative research using the in-depth interview method, and then analyzing the data obtained. The respondents were randomly selected from among the residents of the Javakheti region. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible to conduct a full-fledged study concerning the political culture of the Armenian community of Javakheti; however, using the existing statistical data and a small qualitative study, we will try to present an approximate picture of the political culture as well as the existing situation in the region.

STATEMENT (DESCRIPTION) OF THE PROBLEM AND SOLUTIONS

Concept and content of political culture. The category of political culture began to be studied most actively in the second half of the twentieth century¹ and has many interpretations. Within the framework of this study, the definition presented by Parsons and E. Shils can be taken as a basis since it reflects the main components of political culture and the interconnection between them. Thus, *political culture is a system of values deeply rooted in the consciousness of motivations (orientations and attitudes) that regulate human behavior in situations related to politics.*

After analyzing the theoretical elaborations of Almond, Verba, Batulov, Shestopal and other scientists, it can be generalized that the main *components* of political culture are cognitive (all information, knowledge and ideas of the individual about politics), affective or emotional (emotions and feelings of the individual, attitude towards one or another political phenomena), evaluative (the assessments that the individual gives to political phenomena or entity, to political institutions and, motivational (the needs and motivations of the individual for this or that political behavior).

There is no consensus in the scientific community about whether to include political behavior in the structure of political culture.² In this work, we will adhere to the opinion that political consciousness and political behavior are equally included in its structure since political culture directly determines the political motivation of a citizen and the model of their political participation.³

Just as everyday culture participates in the process of the socialization of an individual, political culture participates in the political socialization of the individual and is a part of the process of assimilation with the norms and values of the political life of a particular society and allows the individual to participate in the life of society and actualize his interests following the accepted political norms and rules which facilitates the forming of a sense of belonging in the political community.⁴

Summarizing the abovementioned, we see that it is the political culture that determines how a resident of Javakheti will interact with the political system of Georgia and realize his interests therein. Consequently, the political culture directly influences the integration process of a resident of the Armenian-populated region of Javakheti into the national political system and, as a result, into Georgian society as a whole.

Content of the political culture among the Armenians of Javakheti. The Armenian community of the Javakheti region of Georgia is a special ethnic group with a unique culture that is different from both Georgian and Armenian. In order to effectively interact with it, it becomes necessary to study its features which are also manifested in political culture.

From this point of view, the problem lies in the low political literacy and awareness which means that there are no active civic leaders in the Armenian community of Javakheti who could promote the advocacy of local interests at the state level. Representation takes place only through a majoritarian MP which is insufficient for the full realization of the needs and interests of the Armenian population of Javakheti. Moreover, in 2024 the institution of majoritarian MPs will be abolished and then the issue of representing the interests of national minorities will become more acute than ever.

1 G. Almond. "Comparative Political System." *Journal of Politics*, 1956, Vol. 18, No. 3; G. Almond, S. Verba. *The Civil Culture. Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 14.

2 On English political culture, see: Shestopal. E. *Personality and politics*. Moscow, Mysl, 1988, pp. 88 - 97.

3 A.P. Melnikov, S.E. Sokol. *Political Culture in the Life of Society*. Minsk, BSU, 2011.

4 G. L. Tulchinsky. *Russian Political Culture. Features and Perspectives*. SPB., "Aleteya," 2015.

According to the data of the Electoral Administration of Georgia (EAG), the number of voters in the Akhalkalaki municipality was 38,000 in the last presidential elections of 2018. Of these, 16,986 citizens took part in the first round which is 44.70% and 19,857 voters took part in the second round which comprises 52.15% of the turnout.⁵ We can see that in general, the turnout percentage in the region is not high but it does not differ much from the overall turnout in the country (46.83% and 56.36%, respectively). Therefore, in relation to the overall turnout in the country, the voter turnout in the Akhalkalaki municipality can be considered as normal. However, the numbers hide those factors that cannot be captured institutionally and that are in the field of view of political culture.

Who are these people (about 19,000 residents of the Akhalkalaki municipality) who voted for the selected candidate in 2018? What prompted and motivated them to come to the polling stations? Based on the results of interviewing 20 respondents selected at random in the city of Akhalkalaki, we will try to build up a picture of their political culture which will lay the foundation for a large-scale study of the political culture of the Armenian community of Javakheti.

Cognitive block. The respondents' interest in politics is at a rather low level (only 11 of the interviewed respondents are interested in politics, two more are interested in it to a small extent and seven respondents answered that they are not interested in politics at all). At the same time, the majority (eight respondents) named the information and cognitive component as the goal of their interest in politics ("to be aware, to be acquainted with what is happening in my country, in the world") while only two respondents connected this with political participation:

"I am interested in Georgian politics because I want my interests to be taken into account"
(Girl, 21 years old).

"In order to separate black from white and get used to life, and participate and invest your luma in the development of the state and humanity in general" (Man, 39 years old).

Speaking about the political awareness of the survey's participants, it can be noted that with a slight preponderance the majority of the respondents could not answer the question of how the representation of national minorities is carried out at the central level in Georgia (13). The remaining seven respondents answered this question accurately; however, not all of them described the procedure of representation.

Thus, the level of political literacy and awareness as well as direct interest in politics in this group are both rather low.

Motivational and behavioral block. As a result of the study, it was revealed that 19 of the 20 respondents participated in the elections as voters, including those who previously stated that they were not interested in politics. This fact indicates a very high level of political activity, although it should be noted that some of the respondents participate in the elections while being insufficiently informed as we found out in the previous block.

Nevertheless, the participants' answers to the question about the reasons and motivation for participating in the elections showed that the majority of them treats this institution responsibly and consciously. They named such motivators as: improving the life of the family, society, country (five respondents), civic duty (four respondents), participation in the life of society, providing benefits to society, feeling like a part of society (three respondents), helping the candidate to win (two respondents), preventing others from using their vote (two respondents):

⁵ <http://cesko.ge/res/docs/monacile_I_II_turieng.pdf>.

“Despite my skepticism, I believe that every person should have a sense of civil and social responsibility towards their country, even if you don’t believe in the current government or politics in general” (Woman, 44 years old).

Thus, the respondents show a responsible approach to the institution of elections and a high level of political activity and civic consciousness as evidenced by their motives. However, it should be borne in mind that the participants were not asked questions about other manifestations of political activity (membership in a party, in an NGO, participation in rallies, public activity, etc.). Thus, elections are the only way for the population of Akhalkalaki to express their political will and it depends only on the chosen candidate whether their interests will be realized or not.

Assessment-affective block. This part of the study identified the opinions and assessments of the respondents in relation to the institution of the representation of the rights of national minorities in Georgia. Most of the participants believe that their interests are not represented in the parliament or are represented at a minimum level (11 respondents). In addition, the majority of the respondents had a negative opinion about the quality of the protection of the interests of the Armenian community in Javakheti (13 respondents):

“Yes, the interests are represented but not at a level that would make them take these interests into account and this concerns not just the Armenian community but all ethnic minorities in general” (Girl, 21 years old).

“No, for example, the issue of dual citizenship. There are many Armenians who were granted foreign citizenship to support their families and now they have been deprived of their Georgian citizenship. In order to receive it again, you have to pass an exam and so how will a 50-year-old person pass an exam in the Georgian language?” (Girl, 26 years old).

Next, we tried to find out what the survey participants would like to change in terms of protecting their interests. The most frequently cited problem is the position of the native (Armenian) language in the region (six respondents). According to the participants, it should be on par with the Georgian language at the regional level:

“We need to give more importance to the native language. In schools, it is treated as a secondary subject” (Girl, 21 years old).

“It is necessary to legitimize the second language in the region - Armenian - with the state Georgian language. Legal proceedings and office work should be done in Armenian, together with Georgian...” (Man, 47 years old).

“There were cases when people at state institutions were simply not given information in an accessible language and were advised to address them with the assistance of an interpreter” (Woman, 35 years old).

The answers also raised problems such as the issue of citizenship, the lack of the knowledge of the state language and the lack of feedback from the center. The desire of the population to actively participate in the political life of the country as well as to increase the involvement of the youth in politics was also expressed. One of the respondents noted that the region lacks a specialized approach that would take local characteristics into account:

“What we lack is that in all matters, details are not taken into account; that is, the government initiates something but in many issues, the local peculiarities are not taken into account and, as a result, problems arise. I think it is necessary for national minorities to be represented in

the government, at least at the level of deputies and advisers, and not for the check-marks and as a show for Europe but for the involvement of truly experienced and smart guys” (Woman, 32 years old).

Among other answers, the following issues were also noted: infringement in matters of culture and religion (“not to desecrate or destroy our religious values, shrines, to give freedom to rehabilitate our churches and not to persecute our religious leaders”), the need to support agriculture (“to promote the interests of entrepreneurs so that they have the opportunity to freely sell their products throughout the country”) and the need to open state educational institutions in Akhalkalaki.

Some respondents noted that they feel discriminated against as compared to other citizens of Georgia:

“At the very least, I would like my people to be respected and treated in the same way as other citizens of Georgia” (Girl, 21 years old).

“I want Armenians to be hired in Akhalkalaki, not Georgians” (Girl, 23 years old).

“What is felt most from the Georgian side is discrimination. They should not perceive us as representatives of another nation but as the citizens of Georgia. They should not speak ill about Armenians on every convenient occasion” (Girl, 21 years old).

Thus, we can conclude that the respondents have negative attitudes towards the treatment they receive from some representatives of the rest of the Georgian population. The policy of the central authorities in Javakheti is assessed negatively - their inattention to the peculiarities of the region, their policy concerning the Armenian language and culture and the privilege given to Georgians when hiring is noted. Despite the formal equality of the inhabitants of Javakheti as citizens of Georgia before the authorities and the law, in reality there are many nuances and discriminatory manifestations that form negative assessments in the political consciousness of the studied group. All of this creates a negative image of the central authorities and, consequently, it interferes with the full integration of the region.

Taking into account the peculiarities of the political culture and the problems of the Armenians of Javakheti that were identified in the course of the study, the following solutions can be recommended.

In particular, **the first alternative to solving the problem** is to increase the political literacy among the population of the region, thereby giving them the opportunity to get acquainted with their rights and defend their interests in alternative ways. In recent years, the number of political training sessions for ethnic minorities has increased (from IAF, GFSIS, etc.); however, these trainings involve a very limited circle of people and are often held only among those who speak Georgian. Discrete trainings with the participation of 15-20 people have little effect on the development of political culture - events of this kind should be carried out on a larger scale.

At the same time, some of the events designed to promote the integration of the region are backfiring. For example, the policy of the intensified study of the Georgian language should not overshadow the native language. The respondents’ requests for the introduction of Armenian as a second official language in the region can be viewed as fair since this step contributes to more convenient communication in the region and also shows the population that the authorities treat them with respect. Other details also appeared in the aforementioned responses of the respondents to which the central authorities need to pay attention. Consequently, **the second alternative to**

solving the problem is to pursue an integration policy that is balanced and does not cause an even more aggressive reaction and opposition. Integration into Georgian culture and society must be balanced by the preservation of the Armenian culture and language. Realizing this alternative requires constitutional and personnel changes which are difficult to achieve in the short term.

The third alternative to solving the problem can be a qualitative improvement in the study of the state language of Georgia by the local population of Javakheti. Steps in this direction are already underway – the Z. Zhvania School has been opened where people of all ages can study the Georgian language on a paid basis and receive a corresponding certificate. Nevertheless, the mass knowledge of the Georgian language is more attainable for the younger generation while current generations face difficulties in their learning path.

Of the listed alternatives, the first is the most realistic from the point of view of operational feasibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to implement the first alternative to solving the problem; namely, increasing the political literacy of the inhabitants of the region, the following steps are recommended.

First, all political communication should be translated into Armenian (this includes the programs of political parties, election materials, television debates, campaign leaflets) which will make the population of Javakheti aware of the political process in Georgia. From our point of view, in the long term it is necessary to translate all legislative acts and codes into minority languages (at the moment, only the Constitution is available in the Armenian and Azerbaijani languages on the matsne.gov website and it can also be difficult to find the translated versions) in order for the population to have the opportunity to study, know and defend their rights.

Second, it is recommended to conduct political trainings for a wider circle of people and this should take place in the Armenian language. Since the population itself is not used to participating in these trainings, it is necessary to introduce other forms of political education. For example, these can be TV programs, educational videos on the Internet and columns in the local media sources published in Armenian. These materials must contain information concerning the rights of national minorities, the ways of representing and protecting their interests and their political participation.

Third, it is recommended to stimulate the development of NGOs involved in protecting the interests of the local population at the local level. These NGOs should regularly collect information from the public and pass it on to the central authorities.

Fourth, the authorities should organize regular visits to the districts of Javakheti which will facilitate feedback from the population and inform the center about the problems of the population as well as improve the reputation of the authorities in the eyes of the local community.

Fifth, it is recommended to develop and legislate alternative ways of representing national minorities in the long term. At the moment, their interests are protected solely by one or two majoritarian MPs in parliament. The creation of political parties on an ethnic basis is also prohibited in Georgia. Additionally, the representatives of national minorities must be presented in the executive branch of power, at least at the level of advisers.

IMPROVEMENT OF THE EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION PROGRAM 1 + 4

Margarita Khasanshina

SUMMARY

Integration of ethnic minorities is an important aspect for creating a democratic nation. In this context, the government has taken measures to improve the ethnic minorities' knowledge of the national language and their chances to gain a higher education. In particular, the "1 + 4" program has been developed, within which ethnic minorities can enter university by passing a general aptitude test in their mother tongue, and then spend a year learning the Georgian language before they can start their selected bachelor's study program in Georgian. Although the majority of students have welcomed the program as a good opportunity offered by the state, many also note problems associated with learning Georgian and insufficient knowledge of the language by the end of the program, which directly affects integration and often leads to students dropping out or moving to other departments or universities due to learning difficulties.

Some options have been proposed to address this problem. Resulting from the analysis, preference should be given to cultural and sporting events with the participation of ethnic Georgians, which would foster integration of the minorities and give them a chance to practice their skills in Georgian.

INTRODUCTION

Georgia is a multinational country: the regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli are mostly populated by ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis, most of whom do not speak Georgian, which limits their access to national media and their integration into Georgian society.

The Georgian government that came to power after the Rose Revolution carried out significant reforms in the education system. In 2010, a program referred to as "1 + 4" was introduced with the aim of providing access to higher education for ethnic minorities and fostering their integration and participation in Georgian society. The reform gave young people from ethnic minorities wider access to Georgian universities, bolstering their involvement in the country's economic, political and social life, and enabling them to become full members of society.

In order to enter universities, young people take a general aptitude test in their native language. After admission, they spend a year learning Georgian and then continue their selected bachelor's study program after passing their exams. The program has been quite successful, as evidenced by the continuous growth in enrolments. Yet, some aspects of the program remain faulty and need to be improved. Although the program promotes students' integration into university life, i.e. getting to know the assessment system, exam procedures and teaching principles, they still face a number of problems in their studies. In particular, their knowledge of the Georgian language is insufficient for them to actively participate in the studies, they lack knowledge of the necessary professional terms, and face difficulties during exams.

The purpose of this analytical brief is to evaluate the efficiency of this program in terms of ethnic minority integration, to identify its shortcomings, and to develop an action plan for improving the program.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND SOLUTIONS

For multinational countries that are homes to people of different cultures and languages, the language of education is a key factor of socioeconomic development. The “1 + 4” program aims at solving this issue and promoting the integration of Georgia’s ethnic minorities. In general, the program is quite operational and advanced, as evidenced by the increasing number of applicants, yet some shortcomings make it less effective than expected. Learning Georgian is especially problematic, despite its being directly related to the needed integration.

The “1 + 4” program has its pros and cons. Ethnic minorities receive a chance to get a higher education, yet the program fails to give them sufficient skills in the Georgian language, so the minority integration problem still remains. As a result, at the end of the one-year program, students do not have fluent knowledge of Georgian and do not feel sufficiently integrated into Georgian society: they cannot find a job nor actively participate in the political and social life of the country. This seriously discourages the ethnic minorities and actually isolates them from the country’s ethnic Georgian population, which is quite a challenge as the minorities often do not feel like full-fledged citizens and are limited in the exercising of their rights.

Every university offers a unique “1 + 4” program, thus placing students in different conditions and resulting in a situation when their Georgian language skills strongly depend on where they study. In some universities (for example, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and Ilia University) students are divided into groups according to their language proficiency, while others (Georgian Technical University and Tbilisi Medical University) ignore their current proficiency when forming the groups, so that students who have poor or fluent levels of Georgian language end up in the same group. This slows down and deteriorates the learning process, because stronger students find the learning material too easy and uninteresting, while the weaker students have difficulties with the studies, finding themselves in the shadow of the stronger ones and not getting enough attention. Therefore, first of all, consideration should be given to the fact that applicants’ proficiency levels in Georgian are different: for those with a lower level, a year of learning Georgian is often not enough to improve their skills sufficiently to continue their university studies in Georgian. On the other hand, students with above average levels do not get any new knowledge during this year and actually waste their time and money.

Another drawback of the program is the strong emphasis on Georgian grammar, which results in students knowing the grammar well, yet weak in their ability to speak Georgian or use the language in everyday life. The program fails to teach professional glossaries, so when the students continue their bachelor’s studies, they have poor command of Georgian in general and a lack of the necessary terms, further complicating the learning process.

After completing this preparatory program, students embark on their chosen university program, but in fact they are not sufficiently prepared for it, neither in terms of their knowledge of Georgian nor in terms of integration. As a result, many students are unable to get enough credits to advance to the next year and sometimes have to transfer to another university or department. In such cases, the financial factor plays an important role: students who fail to get a sufficient number of credits and have to study for additional semesters are sometimes unable to pay for their studies and have to drop out of university.

Another challenge of the program is the lack of integration. Sometimes, students find themselves discriminated against by their tutors, university administration or fellow students. In some universities, students of the ‘1 + 4’ program have to spend their first year studying separately from the Georgian students, so they have no chance to communicate with Georgians to practice their Georgian skills. In this context, Tbilisi State University and Ilia University are worth highlighting, as they have a tutorial program, during which university students help students from ethnic minorities to adapt, familiarize them with the university, and help them address different issues. In addition,

there is a higher level of integration between Azerbaijani and Armenian students at Ilia University, as different joint events are held for them.

For integration purposes, universities can conduct different activities engaging both ethnic Georgians and ethnic minorities, which would have a positive impact on their integration and would give them a chance to practice Georgian.

Some students enter the university with a fair command of Georgian, therefore a year of Georgian studies is quite enough for them, but for others who are not so fluent in Georgian, the year is not sufficient to master the language. It is therefore necessary to change the grading system and identify a certain level of knowledge that students should achieve to continue their bachelor's studies, otherwise they have to continue with the preparatory course. This would also be a good motivation for students in the learning process. Yet it could also have a negative impact, as the students may not be ready to "lose" two years on the preparatory program or may be unable to do so for financial reasons. It is also necessary to update the Georgian learning materials to reflect appropriate modern teaching methods, which would require extra cost, yet would help increase the effectiveness of the learning process.

Summing up, we can conclude that **the first solution of this problem** would be not only to divide students into groups according to their language proficiency, but also to offer relatively weak students another year of learning Georgian before starting the selected university program. In other words, the "1 + 4" program for students with a good command of the Georgian language should be supplemented with a "1 + 1 + 4" program aimed at students for whom a year would not be sufficient to master Georgian.

Another option would be focusing on improving the students' speaking and listening skills during the second year of the "1 + 1 + 4" system.

The third option would be introducing a variety of cultural and sports events into the university routine, engaging both ethnic Georgians and ethnic minorities.

The third solution is the cheapest of these three options and the easiest to implement. As for the other two options, they would take some time to solve certain organizational and financial issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The creation of a positive learning environment is very important for mastering a language. To this end, universities could conduct various sports and cultural events engaging ethnic minorities as well as ethnic Georgians, to enable communication with native speakers. In particular, these could be various interest clubs, for example, a reading club or a debate club, where various topics would be discussed, including those related to the students' future profession, thus allowing them to discover the specifics of the profession and to practice their language skills. Students would also gain experience in public speaking and the ability to defend their point of view, which would help them in their bachelor's studies. There could also be an essay competition or a university newspaper to foster creativity, or various intellectual games and quizzes. Another option would be joint trips, during which students would make new friends and practice their language skills in a natural environment.

It is especially important to regularly monitor the program to evaluate its effectiveness and identify and correct program shortcomings.

THE PROBLEM OF THE QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF FACULTIES AT THE UNIVERSITY AS A REASON FOR THE OUTFLOW OF YOUTH

Lilit Karakhanyan

SUMMARY

Acquiring a quality education is vital, and it can only be achieved under the right conditions. Due to these lack of conditions, young people in the city of Akhalkalaki often go elsewhere to study, and those who cannot go elsewhere are either left without a higher education, or are forced to choose a profession less interesting to them in the Akhalkalaki base of the Samtskhe-Javakheti State University. Three ways to solve the problem are discussed in this document, of which the least expensive and easiest solution was identified, according to which a minor program should be expanded to all existing faculties in Akhalkalaki.

INTRODUCTION

A quality education is both important and necessary in the 21st century. A large proportion of pupils, on finishing school, must decide upon which university to apply for. Most choose to study in big cities or abroad. But if they want to get an education in their home city, because for a number of reasons they cannot go elsewhere, the choice of the residents of our city Akhalkalaki, and the surrounding villages in Akhalkalaki district, is not so great. We have only one university - the Akhalkalaki branch of the Samtskhe-Javakheti State University, in which the number of faculties is very limited, namely, a total of three. It should be noted that the university has other needs besides this and, unfortunately, it lacks in many areas.

Researching this topic is very important for my friends and I, as I am a student of the Akhalkalaki branch of the Samtskhe-Javakheti State University myself and I often face such issues.

Through this research, I want to understand the position of youth, students, and lecturers on this issue, how important this issue is for them, and what they want to change. I would also like to find out how many young people were left without education due to the aforementioned problems and to study how many graduates of this university were able to find a job in their field.

After analyzing all these problems, I will aim to put the problems before the university leadership in order to solve them gradually, which should ensure the improvement of the quality of education in the future. And this is important for all students, the youth, and other residents of Akhalkalaki.

A number of challenges were expected in conducting this research, among them a reluctance to voice opinions, or indeed indifference to the issues. Limitations were also faced, among them the ability to make a comparison with other Georgian universities, as only the above university was known about and we lacked comprehensive information about the situation in other Georgian universities.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND SOLUTIONS

The problem of getting an education in Akhalkalaki has always existed and been topical, and to date nothing has changed in that regard. This is an important issue that affects all segments of society. First of all, it is significant for the state as a whole, as the country is much in need of educated

specialists in various fields, through which the country will become stronger and more developed.

It is also important for local society in Akhalkalaki, as there are some who do not have a job and blame this on their inability to get a good education locally. Although the university has been operating for 20 years, the number of faculties is limited. If a person did not graduate in previous years, he is forced to travel to Russia to find work, often on construction sites, which creates additional problems in the region: additional living expenses are needed for those living far away from family; moreover, obviously, not everyone can work in the construction field.

People are forced to seek some kind of job in Akhalkalaki. It should also be noted that the number of jobs in Akhalkalaki is limited, and there are many unemployed people there.

Of course, the issue of getting an education in Akhalkalaki is most relevant for youth: particularly for those who graduate every year from school and contemplate continuing their education in Akhalkalaki since they cannot afford to go elsewhere; more so because studying elsewhere will require not only accommodation expenses, but also tuition fees. Unfortunately, a large proportion of local households are unable to cover these costs.

This problem is also relevant for those who are already studying in the third building of Samtskhe-Javakheti State University, and experience all the abovementioned problems themselves, while at the same time trying to change even some minor things and help themselves and their peers to improve the situation.

There are many opinions on the matter. Some are grateful that such a small town as Akhalkalaki even has a university. For some, having a job is more important, and they pay less attention to acquiring a profession. Unlike them, a certain group of young people have chosen their dream profession, but unfortunately the third building of the Samtskhe-Javakheti State University does not have a relevant department. What should these young people do in such cases? Should they go to the capital and study there? But, if they have no opportunity to do so, then they are forced to choose a profession they do not want to, and in the future may even regret making this choice. They may have a job, but work will not give them pleasure, and they will be unable to find their place in life.

There are some young people who do not want to get an education at all and it does not matter for them whether there is a university in Akhalkalaki or not and / or if there is, what kind of faculties it has.

Some young people study with pleasure, saying that everything is good and the third building of Samtskhe-Javakheti University has all the opportunities and conditions for a decent education, and most importantly that the university has good lecturers who teach the subjects well. They believe that those who really want to get an education will study well everywhere and still achieve their goals. Problems can be found everywhere, they say - even in the best university.

On the one hand, I share the latter position, that if a person really wants to learn, they will learn everywhere. Personally, I find myself in this situation: I have been studying in the third building of Samtskhe-Javakheti State University for three years now, but I often face a number of problems. In particular, the lack of proper books, and I was not able to choose the profession I wanted, as there were no appropriate faculties.

To better understand the issue, I conducted interviews with 30 students. After conducting a pilot survey with students, I concluded that the majority of Akhalkalaki residents are concerned with this problem and are looking for ways to solve it. Both youth and their parents are involved in the

process, because they want better conditions for their children's education, but to date appropriate solutions to the problem have not yet been identified or realized.

The first way to solve the problem as I perceive it is to ask the population which faculty is a priority for most of them to open in the third building of Samtskhe-Javakheti State University. If many young people enroll in this faculty, then it will not put the university under financial strain.

Since the opening of a new faculty is not easy and requires hiring the right professors, we can consider a **second way to solve the problem**, according to which the existing minor program can be expanded, thus increasing the number of students and fulfilling the dreams of many young people.

No less important is the ability to choose a foreign language. It will be much easier for the students of Akhalkalaki to study if they are given the opportunity to choose Russian as a foreign language, while today the possibility of making such a choice is absent, as our department has only English language available. Because of this, if a student wants to choose Russian as a foreign language, they are forced to go to Akhaltsikhe and study in the first or second building of the Samtskhe-Javakheti State University. If a student is not able to go to Akhaltsikhe, then they learn Russian online, which obviously has its disadvantages (for example, a student will never be able to attend lectures in person and will not have direct contact with their peers).

A new college can also be opened to solve our problem, with professions different from that of the university. At least then students will be able to study in the college and choose more interesting professions, while not being left without education. Opening a college is a **third way to solve the problem**.

Of course, getting an education in college is not the same as getting it at university, but it is a kind of compromise option in order, at least, not to leave young people without an education. One cannot rule out that studying in college will ignite in them a desire to continue studies at university, and they will have the opportunity to do so.

I consider the second solution - to expand the minor program on the current faculty in Akhalkalaki -to be the most cost-effective and easily implemented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the third building of Samtskhe-Javakheti State University, we currently have two sections of the minor program: the minor program for teacher training and the historian minor. Here are some specific recommendations for improving the situation:

Recommendation 1: The university should first conduct a survey among students, as well as among education professionals and other stakeholders, to determine which minor program would be more appropriate, and only after that introduce a specific program.

Recommendation 2: The university should add a Russian alternative besides the English, as there are other languages in the first and second buildings of the Samtskhe-Javakheti State University (Akhalsikhe branch) and it is possible to do the same in Akhalkalaki.

Recommendation 3: Provide free transportation for those students who have taken Russian or other subjects at the Akhaltsikhe branch of the Samtskhe-Javakheti State University and need to travel frequently. I believe that besides the university, the local municipality can also be involved in this matter:

- The municipality can help the university financially to create a new minor program;
- Taking into account the existing needs, the municipality should provide affordable (preferably free) transportation for students to travel to Akhaltsikhe.

At this point, I will clarify that, in my opinion, adding a new minor program is more preferable, since it is more important than solving the transportation issue, as the quantity of students who have subjects in the first or second department of Samtskhe-Javakheti State University (Akhaltsikhe) is not so high, and this particular recommendation will have less impact on the local residents, unlike the second one.

THE PROBLEM OF THE LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF THE STATE LANGUAGE AMONG ETHNIC AZERBAIJANIS

Zakir Aivazov

INTRODUCTION

There are many ethnic minorities living in Georgia, most of them are Azerbaijanis. About 6.3% of ethnic Azerbaijanis live in Georgia, mainly in the Kvemo Kartli region.¹ In addition, compact settlements of Azerbaijanis are found in the Kakheti, Mtskheta-Mtianeti and Shida Kartli regions. The Azerbaijanis living in Georgia face a language problem and, as a result, the passivity in terms of political engagement as well as other problems are noticeable among them. It is clear today that the main reason for all of the problems among Azerbaijanis is the language barrier. The Marneuli Municipality is an area densely populated by ethnic minorities. According to the International Survey (PISA), the level of education in ethnic minority regions is four times lower than in other Georgian regions.² Due to the language barrier in the regions, the population has no information about the current socio-political situation in Georgia. In such marginalized conditions, the population is unaware of their rights.

The aim of this study is to analyze the problems of ethnic minorities, cover their current problems and suggest recommendations to local authorities so as to make them better aware of the mistakes they have made towards the Azerbaijani community. This study reveals numerous social, economic and political problems in the Azerbaijani community emanating from the language barrier. I use open sources for desk research such as the reports prepared by the Public Defender's Office and the EMC. In addition, I will develop my discussion based on the example of the village Aghmamedlo. Moreover, this paper will use materials from the central and regional media (television, websites, radio) related to the Azerbaijani population. I was unable to conduct a large-scale research due to the existing coronavirus pandemic.

PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

One cannot find accurate statistics on the knowledge and lack of knowledge of the state language among ethnic Azerbaijanis in Georgia. According to A. Kvakhadze's observation, the closer the Azerbaijani village is to Tbilisi or Rustavi, the better the Georgian language proficiency rate among the population and, conversely, the proficiency level worsens the farther away the village is from a large urban center.³ We should look for the reasons for the low level of state language proficiency in the Soviet system. During the 70-year occupation by the Soviet Union and under which the Russian language was dominant, schools in villages inhabited by ethnic Azerbaijanis did not pay attention to the study of the Georgian language. For example, there were five hours of the Russian language and only one hour of the Georgian language in secondary schools and in many cases the teacher did not speak Georgian. Moreover, the Russian language was used in administrative proceedings and as the language of communication between nations in Soviet times. The Azerbaijanis, Armenians,

1 National Statistics Office of Georgia: geostat.ge

2 Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation (2019) OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Georgia. Paris: OECD

3 A. Kvakhadze (2020). "Unknown Suburbs: Azerbaijani Settlements of the Gardabani Municipality," p. 13. Accessible: <https://www.gfsis.org/ge/publications/view/2772>

Russians, Georgians and Greeks living in Kvemo Kartli spoke to each other in Russian. As a result, the level of the knowledge of the Georgian language was very low. In addition, one of the reasons for the unsatisfactory knowledge of the Georgian language is the faulty education system. According to the official data, there are 18 Azerbaijani schools in the Bolnisi municipality, 51 in Marneuli, 17 in Dmanisi, 13 in Gardabani, two in Tetri Tskaro, two in Tsalka, two in Sagarejo and two in Lagodekhi. 5. ⁴ Most of these schools do not have a parallel Georgian sector. Also, the existing Georgian language program in Azerbaijani schools is unsatisfactory as a result of which most of the students do not learn Georgian. Most of the minority youth study Georgian either in the preparatory course of the 1 + 4 program or while working in the market or the Armed Forces. According to A. Kvakhadze, the residents of the village of Mughanlo believe that their children learn Georgian better in the market than at school.⁵

There are many problems arising from an inadequate knowledge of the state language. The first of them is a low awareness. According to the study by the Media Development Foundation, a large portion of Azerbaijani youth receive information from Turkish and Azerbaijani TV channels such as ATV, Star TV, TRT 1, Show TV, Kanal D, Xazar TV, Lider TV, Ictimai TV and others.⁶ Moreover, the same study shows a high rate of watching Russian propaganda channels.⁷ All this causes an information vacuum for Azerbaijanis living in Georgia and their dependence on foreign media. This problem became vivid during the Covid-19 pandemic when most of the population only became aware about the strict quarantine zone introduced in Marneuli afterwards due to the language barrier. This problem should not be understood from a biased perspective as indeed there is a language barrier; however, with the right communication strategy, the situation would have been radically different.

The second problem is the lack of access to public services. Many ethnic Azerbaijanis are unable to complete and submit their applications as a consequence of the language barrier. Because of this, many are unable to get services such as social assistance, land registration and more. Moreover, due to the fact that there is no Azerbaijani-speaking operator on the 112 hotline of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, a timely reporting of a crime or a call for a fire-rescue service is impossible. Failure to report a crime, on the one hand, increases violence against women, early marriage and, on the other hand, the influence of the criminal world.

The third and most important problem caused by the language barrier is unemployment. Due to their lack of knowledge of the state language, ethnic Azerbaijanis are unable to find employment either in the public or in the private sector. As a result, persons are brought to the Marneuli municipality from other regions of Georgia and appointed to professions as such as engineers, architects, accountants and others. Besides employment, the language barrier also prevents the population from selling their agricultural products because the price cannot be agreed with the resellers. All of the aforementioned problems have a serious impact on the economic situation of the Kvemo Kartli region.

Although in recent years the number of people proficient in the Georgian language has increased significantly as a result of the 1+4 program, the employment prospects for graduates of this program are still problematic. Moreover, individuals in various positions, including the assembly deputies,

4 Statistics about schools are available at this link:

http://www.catalog.edu.ge/index.php?module=school_info&page=main&district=14&school_type=3

5 A. Kvakhadze (2020). "Unknown Suburbs: Azerbaijani Settlements of Gardabani Municipality." p. 13. Accessible: <https://www.gfsis.org/ge/publications/view/2772>

6 Media Development Foundation (2017). "Research on the Needs, Communication and Sources of Information for Muslim Youth." Accessible: http://www.mdforgeorgia.ge/geo/view_research/145

7 *Ibid.*

village representatives and even members of the parliament, do not speak Georgian which somewhat demotivates the young generation to learn the state language.

CONCLUSION

The lack of the knowledge of the state language is a problematic issue among ethnic minorities, especially in the Azerbaijani community. This problem has a negative impact on the integration of the local population and the economic situation. Deficiencies in the education system and a lack of language learning programs contribute to this problem. Raising the level of the proficiency of the state language among ethnic minorities will significantly contribute to their integration into Georgian society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Opening kindergartens in villages populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis and strengthening the teaching of the Georgian language - this way children will learn the state language at an elementary level before entering school.
- Increasing the effectiveness of Georgian language lessons in secondary schools - this will allow pupils to better comprehend the existing material.
- Setting up summer schools where Azerbaijani school pupils will be exposed to a Georgian environment - as a result of intensive courses, Azerbaijani students will enhance their knowledge of the Georgian language and be better prepared for school.
- Setting up exchange programs which will allow ethnic Azerbaijani pupils to spend several months in a Georgian family in a region populated by ethnic Georgians and attend a Georgian school during their stay. This will allow Azerbaijani pupils to improve their knowledge of the state language, live in a Georgian environment and also make ethnic Georgian friends which will reduce alienation between the two ethnic groups.
- Enhancing non-formal education - this will enable school children to attend additional lessons where they will learn a variety of skills.
- Setting up Georgian language courses for the older generation who did not have the opportunity to learn Georgian at school will give them a chance to master the language.
- Adding Azerbaijani-speaking operators to the 112 service - in the case of an emergency, those who do not speak Georgian will have the opportunity to explain the essence of their problem and the exact location to the patrol police, the ambulance or the rescue crew in the Azerbaijani language.

INCREASING THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

Katya Mosoyan

SUMMARY

This paper focuses on the conditions that hinder the socio-cultural inclusion of ethnic minorities in Georgia. The language barrier and concomitant problems, such as limited access to information, is identified as the main problem.

More proactive moves from the state, and close cooperation with the measures taken by non-governmental and donor organizations, are identified as the best way to ameliorate this problem.

INTRODUCTION

Ethnic minorities in Georgia make up about 16% of the country's population. The Constitution of Georgia provides equal rights to every person and protects the identity of each individual. The social and cultural inclusion of ethnic minorities is one of the main tasks of any democratic state, including Georgia. Although, recently, many projects have been implemented towards this end, unfortunately, significant progress in terms of the social and cultural engagement of ethnic groups is yet to be realized.

Armenians and Azerbaijanis living in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions represent the majority of the ethnic minorities. Compact settlements and the existence of a unified, closed cultural space hinders the communication of minorities with the rest of Georgia, as well as with the state.

This creates one of the most important barriers for their further integration, limiting access to information and reducing their competitiveness, leading to limited opportunities for equal participation.

A significant barrier for ethnic minorities is language. To address this issue, the state is conducting a number of educational activities, which include teaching the Georgian language to non-Georgian ethnic minorities, and a 1 + 4 program aimed at improving access to higher education. In addition, measures are being taken to increase the awareness of ethnic minorities. Even though these actions are a serious step forward, it is not enough to ensure full integration.

The state should express more interest in creating an environment where minorities can participate effectively and freely in socio-cultural life.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND SOLUTIONS

Ethnic and religious diversity is a treasure for any country. Unfortunately, the representatives of ethnic minorities in Georgia do not have a sense of public and cultural connection with the state; most feel alienated from Georgian society. Consequently, one of the main challenges for the state is to increase the integration of ethnic groups.

The language barrier has been a major problem for ethnic minorities for years, and remains so to this day. The major problems that hinder the process of minority integration are largely related to this issue.

The language barrier of ethnic groups and related problems are less pronounced in the urban population, although in densely populated regions this issue is more acute and problematic. The population of the capital city, simply by the virtue of geographical proximity, is at least partially involved in social and cultural events organized by the state.

Due to the lack of knowledge of the Georgian language, ethnic groups are deprived of the opportunity to take an active part in state life. Insufficient knowledge of the state language often leads to a direct violation of rights and freedoms.

The state is undertaking several measures to solve the language-related problems. One of the most important measures is the opening of Georgian language houses in areas populated by ethnic minorities, which is focused on teaching Georgian to the adult population. In this regard, the “Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration,” which assists citizens in learning Georgian language, is noteworthy.

Also noteworthy is the rather successful “1 + 4” program. The project was developed in 2010 and allows hundreds of Azerbaijanis and Armenians to study in a public educational institution, which helps them develop their language skills.

The preferential “1 + 4” program prepares ethnic minorities for the General Aptitude Tests, within which a high school student takes an intensive one-year Georgian language course, then spends four years studying a profession of his choosing, which, in turn, increases employment opportunities and helps them become competitive citizens.

In addition, textbooks and programs are being adapted in schools specifically for the Armenian and Azerbaijani-speaking population.

Despite these undeniably positive steps, there is still room for improvement. For example, despite the activities of the Zhvania School, measures to increase language proficiency should be conducted in ethnic minority villages and not just in the regional centers. Rural training courses will help increase language skills in the adult rural population, directly impacting their lifestyle and future plans.

The elaboration of textbooks should also be refined. In the textbooks, part of the text is printed in Georgian, part in the minority languages, hindering the study of not only the Georgian language, but also of a specific subject. In such cases, the subject teacher often has to translate short texts into the students’ native language in order for them to understand it.

Certain subjects in schools for the ethnic minorities should be taught in their native language, and the quality of teaching in general requires more attention.

Although some programs broadcast news in the language of ethnic minorities, such as local media outlets jnews.ge, nor.ge, etc., this is not enough, and more efforts would be desirable in this direction, which will generally increase the level of awareness and engagement with the Georgian state. It should be noted that the aforementioned online media outlets cover the ongoing processes in the region although the online format might not be accessible to the elderly population, or to those living in rural areas.

Based on the abovementioned challenges, we think that a set of measures should be taken to increase the knowledge of the state language not only among young people and in the regional centers, but also among the village population of different age groups, as well as to improve the overall quality of teaching in schools and to refine the textbook adaptation process. Additionally, general awareness of minorities through various media outlets should be increased, presented in a format suitable for different age groups.

For this, it is specifically desirable to involve school pupils in more educational and sports projects. It is true that many NGOs are implementing such projects; however, this affects a small number of youth, and most of the people living in the region are not involved in these activities. The involvement of the state in this regard, through the organization of additional language courses, essay competitions, and summer camps, will directly benefit achieving this goal.

One of the most important issues to be discussed is the lack of information. Unfortunately, again, due to the language barrier, the majority of ethnic minorities do not receive information through the Georgian media. In many cases, the news of local media outlets does not reach everyone, or their translated and published articles are not credible, which may have a negative impact on the viewer or reader, while the information deficiency is directly related to lack of trust and misinformation.

More involvement from state structures is needed in this regard. **To solve the problem, we consider it expedient** to broadcast news programs in the native language of the ethnic minorities, offering a general overview of the top news, and most importantly the provision of quality information.

Given these problems, we believe that in order to increase the integration of ethnic minorities, the most important move is to address the issue of language, as we believe that a number of other issues arise from this. At the same time, the level of secondary education should be enhanced and the awareness of the population should be increased. Together, these three areas will help boost the engagement of minorities.

A successful outcome requires the close cooperation and coordination of all stakeholders: the state, international organizations, and non-governmental actors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a recommendation, we suggest eliminating the biggest problem faced by ethnic minorities living in Georgia - the language barrier, which significantly hinders their integration into society. The Government of Georgia, with the involvement of Parliament and civil society, should initiate a discussion and make appropriate legislative changes. Comprehensive measures for learning the Georgian language should be provided, which will ensure the teaching of the language in all settlements and among the population of different ages.

The state also needs to make changes via an education reform; in particular, to bring into the agenda the issue of raising the quality of teaching the Georgian language, as well as teaching quality as a whole, which directly affects the social integration of ethnic minorities and their competitiveness.

The government, as well as non-governmental and international organizations, should promote awareness raising in the minority areas. It is also desirable to better cover the constructive and friendly relations between the ethnic minorities and the rest of society, as well as the daily and cultural life, historical materials, social problems, traditional celebrations, etc. of ethnic minorities. For more effectiveness, it is important for journalists to undergo training and lectures to improve their skills, so as not to contribute voluntarily or inadvertently to the strife between the ethnicities.

We think that with this comprehensive approach, we will be able to make serious progress.

THE MAIN WAYS TO WEAKEN THE ROLE OF OVERSEAS SEASONAL WORK ON THE MIGRATION PROCESSES OF THE REGION

Varduy Kurginyan

SUMMARY

Labor migration is a result of the demand for labor in a host country that the host population is unable to meet. Accordingly, unemployed or part-time, low-wage workers are trying to go to a country where there is a demand for them and where the wages are better.

Labor migration is linked to a country's dire economic conditions, unemployment and deteriorating living standards. This paper discusses two ways to solve the problem of seasonal labor migration. The first is the creation of new jobs in the home country by the state and the second is to provide full information to the residents of a region about the ongoing construction projects in Georgia in order to enable their employment in these projects and allowing them to remain in Georgia. Between these two solutions, we gave our preference to the second one.

INTRODUCTION

Georgia is a developing country and, as such, developing countries are mainly considered as "providers" of migrants as people leave these countries in order to create better living conditions for themselves. Samtskhe-Javakheti is a predominantly ethnic Armenian-populated region. The lack of knowledge of the state language prevents the population from finding a job within the country and, as a result, the population is mainly self-employed in agriculture. The income from agriculture is not enough to meet the needs of the population. Therefore, people employed in agriculture, which represents about 80% of the population of Samtskhe-Javakheti, are forced to go abroad in order to earn more income. The price of the same labor varies from country to country and people prefer to go to the countries where the salaries for their skills and work are higher. The aforementioned situation then leads to labor migration.

The aim of this study is to determine the methods of weakening the situation of labor migration from Samtskhe-Javakheti.

The objectives of this study are to understand the pros and cons of labor migration and identify solutions for the problem.

The main sources of information for this research are the data available in the municipalities, surveys conducted by the non-governmental organizations and detailed information received from the local population.

The main limitations of the study were caused by the difficulties in obtaining information. They are mainly the result of the restrictions precipitated by the coronavirus epidemic in Georgia.

Problem Identification and Solutions

Labor migration in Georgia has become more and more widespread in recent years.

Migration is a problem for all countries, including Georgia. In particular, if labor migration exists within a country, it means that the country's economy is underdeveloped and that there are insufficient jobs and a lack of income which provide an impetus for labor migration. A demand for

specific professions in a host country may also lead to labor migration as the state attracts migrant workers to fill the gap.

Most migrants decide to go abroad for work mainly to help their family and create normal living conditions for their family members. But as soon as the basic needs are met, most people start thinking about saving a certain amount of money in order to be able to buy an apartment in their own neighborhood, or in Tbilisi, and thus improve their living conditions or start their own business, buy a car and so on.

Over time, human needs increase and so does the consumer basket of each individual and family. In particular, the items that can be considered a luxury today may enter the consumer basket tomorrow and, therefore, in parallel with these needs, it is necessary to increase the number of jobs and wages for certain work within a country; that is, if human demand rises and life becomes more expensive, wages should increase respectively. However, for a developing country like Georgia, human needs grow much faster than does the acceptable wage. Ultimately, this leads to labor migration, especially in an agrarian region such as Samtskhe-Javakheti as the income from agricultural products does not meet the growing needs of the population.

There are 64 villages in the Akhalkalaki district; five of them are inhabited by ethnic Georgians, five by Georgians and Armenians and the rest by ethnic Armenians.

Ethnic minorities face other problems as well. The lack of knowledge of the Georgian state language prevents them from being employed inside the country.

A person may obtain a higher education in another country but does not know the state language and, consequently, cannot be employed in Georgia (with some exceptions in agriculture). Therefore, most of the residents from the region's villages go abroad to work, mainly to Armenia and Russia.

Below, we present a table showing the number of people leaving the region for seasonal work (thousand people).

Years	2015			2016			2017		
Region	Total	City	Village	Total	City	Village	Total	City	Village
Samtskhe-Javakheti	160,6	54,7	105,9	160,5	54,6	105,9	160,6	54,7	105,9

Despite the special importance of labor migration in the socio-economic development of Georgia, it is still not fully studied. International migration organizations, such as the IOM and the ICMPD, are working on this issue in Georgia.

According to the results of various studies, the main factor determining intensive migration out of our country is the deterioration of socio-economic conditions and, consequently, the living standards of the population of Georgia.

Labor migration has become the most important matter in socio-economic life in Georgia which was naturally followed by public dissatisfaction. No less disturbing is the fact that scientific research on this problem which needs to be studied in greater detail is not supported by the state and is carried out with scarce resources which is adequately reflected in the incomplete assessment of this or that aspect of labor migration.

As we mentioned, while discussing the reasons for labor migration the main reason for the Georgian population going abroad in order to acquire sustenance is economic in nature and mostly serves the existential needs of the families left in the homeland.

Labor migration does not only have a negative impact on the country. It has both pros and cons. Let us identify each of them.

On the downside, the labor force is leaving the country due to a lack of jobs. In Samtskhe-Javakheti, 6.8% of the population of the region is unemployed (according to 2018's data) and while a large portion of the population is employed in agriculture, the income received from this sector does not fully meet their needs. As a result, the population is forced to leave their families and spend more than eight months in a year abroad which is quite difficult and also contains risks.

On the positive side, a significant part of the remittances to Georgia came from Russia. For example, according to the National Bank of Georgia, remittances to Georgia amounted to USD 143.6 million in June 2018 of which most – USD 34.78 million - came from Russia and with a significant part owing to labor migration. Since the incoming money is utilized in the country, we can say that, to some extent, it facilitates the growth of our economy.¹

Migration is a problem that always affects developing countries and finding ways to solve it is not easy. The problem should be solved mainly by creating new jobs. **Therefore, the first solution to the problem** is the creation of new jobs by the state. This requires widening the scope of the state Enterprise in Georgia program.

Large-scale infrastructure projects are being implemented in Georgia. If part of the population of Samtskhe-Javakheti goes to Russia and Armenia and works there in the field of construction, then they should be engaged in the ongoing construction projects in Georgia. Therefore, **the second solution to the problem** is to provide the residents of the region with as much information as possible about employment vacancies in Georgia in order to employ them within the country. The dissemination of information by the state should be done mainly through constantly updated websites. It is also important to disseminate information in the language appropriate for the ethnic minorities.

From these two ways of solving the problem, the second solution - providing full information to the population of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region about the ongoing construction projects in Georgia - is easier to implement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To solve this problem, it is necessary not only to create new jobs but also to ensure that the population is informed about the existing vacancies in the region which should be organized by the local government of the region. In other words, the local government should inform the people of the region about new jobs in the construction sector and support the employment of locals in the existing jobs. For example, the Marabda-Kartsakhi railway station mainly employs workers from Turkey and/or Marneuli which prevents locals from utilizing the job openings in the region. Therefore, we can argue that the lack of information is the main factor for unemployment as well as for labor migration.

1 <https://www.nbg.gov.ge/index.php?m=728>

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF GARDABANI MUNICIPALITY

Heydar Aliyev

Even 30 years after gaining independence, Georgia still has many economic problems. Economic hardship is more or less characteristic to all regions of the country. Gardabani municipality, whose population is mixed Georgian-Azerbaijani, is no exception. Apart from economic issues, there is also the problem of integration of ethnic minorities in the region, which is manifested in low engagement and insufficient knowledge of the Georgian language. The purpose of this publication is to review the economic problems of Gardabani Municipality, and discuss ways to solve them.

INTRODUCTION

Gardabani Municipality is a part of the Kvemo Kartli region. To the south, it is bordered by Azerbaijan, to the east Sagarejo Municipality, to the north the Mtskheta and Tianeti municipalities; and the Tbilisi, Tetrtskaro and Marneuli municipalities to the west. The population of Gardabani Municipality is 82,000, of which 53.2% are ethnic Georgians, 43.7% are Azerbaijanis, and 3.1% are of other nationalities.¹ The municipal center is the town of Gardabani. The municipality consists of 19 administrative units, which includes 43 villages.² Gardabani Municipality is directly adjacent to the country's capital, as well as to the one of the largest growing cities, Rustavi. The Georgian-Azerbaijani railway and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline run through the region, which once again emphasizes its strategic importance. Georgia's largest thermal power plant, which generates large amounts of electricity during the winter, is also located in this region.³

Despite such a favorable location, Gardabani Municipality still has many economic problems. Of these, unemployment and the scarcity of enterprises should be underscored. The purpose of this paper is to discuss ways to solve the economic problems of the municipality. The paper relies on open sources, the author's personal observations, and interviews with local residents. Although Gardabani was less affected by the coronavirus pandemic compared to the neighboring Marneuli municipality, due to the quarantine restrictions, the author was unable to cover the entire region and obtain information from a primary source, especially from villages in the north of the region.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND SOLUTIONS

As mentioned above, there is a shortage of industrial enterprises in Gardabani Municipality. During the Soviet era, the town of Gardabani was home to a cannery, and cardboard, sewing, and construction materials factories. The majority ceased operations in the 1990s.⁴ Moreover, many Gardabani residents were employed in the industrial facilities of Rustavi. During the Soviet era, many villagers were employed on the Soviet farms (Russian: совхоз), which also disintegrated in the 1990s. The privatization of Soviet farmland was often unfair, and many local residents were left without land. All of this led to a sharp rise in unemployment, with thousands of Gardabani residents going abroad in search of work, mainly to Russia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan.

1 Data is taken from the website for the 2014 Census of Georgia. See. <http://census.ge/> [Seen on July 14, 2020]

2 Approval of the Statute of the Gardabani Municipality (2013). Article N16. Available: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2169606?publication=0> [Seen on July 14, 2020]

3 Ministry of Energy of Georgia. Available: http://energy.gov.ge/energy.php?id_pages=59&lang=geo

4 Kvakhadze A. (2020). «Unknown Suburbs: Azerbaijani Settlements in Gardabani Municipality». P. 6. Available: <https://www.gfsis.org/ge/publications/view/2772>

Today, trade plays a big role in the economy of Gardabani Municipality. Numerous residents of the region are employed at Lilo market in the capital, Tbilisi, and also at various trade outlets in Rustavi. Many locals cultivate greens. Livestock farming is also common, with company representatives buying the milk from farmers directly.⁵ There is a poultry farm in the region, which is located in the village of Sartichala. In addition, near the town of Gardabani is a large greenhouse 'Planta,' which employs a number of locals.⁶ Furthermore, many residents are employed on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. From the private sector, we should mention the banks, pawnshops, gambling establishments, supermarkets, beauty and wedding salons located in the town of Gardabani, where numerous locals are also employed. Nevertheless, these facilities do not meet the employment needs of the population. There is almost no tourism or tourist infrastructure in the region. Although the Martkopi Deity Monastery has been rehabilitated and protected areas have been established near it, this region cannot boast a large number of visitors. The Karaya Hunting Farm near Gardabani suffers severely due to poaching.⁷

The problems in agriculture merit special attention. First of all, a shortage of water should be mentioned. This problem especially troubles the villages of Teleti, Kumi, and Tsalaskuri.⁸ Hundreds of hectares of agricultural lands have been left uncultivated due to this shortage, while cultivated land is limited. Typically, on average, one farmer owns less than one hectare. Too many grow greens on 600 square meters of their household land.⁹ Such scarcity of the land reduces the local ability to attract high-tech investments. There are also problems in livestock farming, where a lack of pasture and a shortage of high-yielding cow breeds are major issues.¹⁰

On top of all these is the problem of transportation. There is no fast or comfortable transport connecting Gardabani to either Tbilisi or Rustavi, which is why locals have to travel in outdated minibuses. Moreover, the Gardabani-Rustavi-Tbilisi train offers only one trip a day and so is also inconvenient.¹¹ This hinders the mobility of the population, which plays a major role in the region's economic development capabilities.

Another problem that must be mentioned is the language barrier. As in other regions populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis, a large part of the ethnic Azerbaijani population in Gardabani Municipality does not speak the state language.¹² As a result, they are unable to find employment, and the shortage of qualified workers in the region is problematic.

Due to these issues, a large part of the municipality population still lives in poverty. The outflow of young people continues either abroad or to the big cities of Georgia. In order to ameliorate these problems, we have developed a list of recommendations.

5 Interview with the residents of Kesalo village

6 Kvakhadze A. (2020). «Unknown Suburbs: Azerbaijani Settlements in Gardabani Municipality». P. 7. Available: <https://www.gfsis.org/ge/publications/view/2772>

7 Morgoshia m. (2019). «Median Group has started developing a hunting business - what does Karaya hunting farm offer tourists?» Commersant. Available: <https://commersant.ge/ge/post/samwuxarod-didia-brakonierebis-shemoteva-kerdzod-chvens-teritoriaze-samonadireo-meurneobis-xelmdzgvaneli-zaza-chitrekashvili>

8 Gza (2019). «The plight of the people of Zemo Teleti and the cheese magician who has moved from Tbilisi.» Available: <http://gza.kvirispalitra.ge/life/6838-zemo-thelethebis-gasatciri-da-thbilisidan-iq-gadasakhlebuli-yvelis-jadoqari.html>

9 Kvakhadze A. (2020). «Unknown Suburbs: Azerbaijani Settlements in Gardabani Municipality». P. 7. Available: <https://www.gfsis.org/ge/publications/view/2772>

10 Ibid

11 Ibid

12 Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (2019) OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Georgia. Paris: OECD

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Improving transportation** – solving this problem will increase mobility in the region, which will have a positive impact on the economic situation;
- **Infrastructural Improvements** - Improving roads, water, natural gas, and irrigation systems will make the region more attractive to investors;
- **Attracting investment** - Creating jobs requires active work on attracting investors, especially when the region has obvious advantages, such as proximity to the capital and highways;
- **Support for agricultural projects** - financial assistance to the farms in the region, as well as support in the export of their products;
- **Support for vocational training programs** - as a result of these programs, local qualified workers will be trained, further increasing their competitiveness in the labor market and employment in various fields;
- **Introducing Intensive Georgian Language Courses** – The Georgian language should be taught intensively in kindergartens and high schools, and language learning centers should be opened for adults, where anyone who did not have the opportunity to learn Georgian in their youth will be given a chance to improve their language skills;
- **Development of tourism** - Tourism in such promising areas as Martkopi, Lake Kumisi, Jandara Lake and Karaia, should increase the number of visitors, which will increase the number of visitors and have a positive impact on the local economy.

CONCLUSION

Despite the existing problems, Gardabani Municipality has great potential for development. The development of agriculture, industry, and trade will significantly contribute to the employment of the local population and the development of the region's economy. Proximity to Tbilisi and Rustavi is a great advantage for Gardabani Municipality, which can become a stimulus for economic development. And most importantly, the economy can play a positive role in integrating the region's multiethnic population. The better the ethnic Azerbaijanis know the Georgian language, the more competitive they will be in the labor market, which will ultimately benefit the region's economy.