



**THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**GEORGIA'S ETHNIC MINORITY INTEGRATION POLICIES:
THE CASE OF AZERBAIJANI MINORITY
IN THE KVEMO KARTLI REGION**

Master's Thesis

Amrah Jafarov

Political Science

July 2023



**THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**GEORGIA'S ETHNIC MINORITY INTEGRATION POLICIES:
THE CASE OF AZERBAIJANI MINORITY
IN THE KVEMO KARTLI REGION**

Master's Thesis

Amrah Jafarov

Thesis Advisor

Assist. Prof. Dr. Filiz Tutku AYDIN BEZİKOĞLU

Political Science

July 2023



**THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
SOCIAL SCIENCES**



THESIS APPROVAL

This is to certify that the defense examination for the thesis titled Georgia's ethnic minority integration policies: The case of Azerbaijani minority in the Kvemo Kartli Region prepared by Amrah Jafarov with student number 195415201 studying in the field of Political Science Program has been conducted in accordance with the related clauses of the Graduate Studies and Examination Code of YÖK (Council of Higher Education) on 28.08.2023 at 10:00, and has been approved by the majority of votes/unanimous vote.

Chair : Assoc. Prof. Dr. Murat BAYAR

Advisor : Assist. Prof. Dr. Filiz Tutku AYDIN BEZİKOĞLU

Committee Member : Assist. Prof. Dr. Yuliya BİLETSKA

Approval:

This thesis has been approved by the Graduate School/Institute Administrative Board with the decision dated/...../..... and numbered

...../...../.....

Director, The Graduate School

PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all materials and results that are not original to this work. I declare that this thesis is written according to the writing rules of the Social Sciences University of Ankara, Institute of Social Sciences.

Name and Surname: Amrah Jafarov

Signature:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply thankful to the Republic of Türkiye and the Turkish nation for funding my Master's degree education by granting a scholarship under the "Türkiye Scholarships" program by the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities. I will never forget the contribution of this opportunity to me and my academic life.

I would like to express my special gratitude to my thesis advisor, Assist. Prof. Dr. Filiz Tutku AYDIN BEZİKOĞLU, for her irreplaceable support, guidance and encouragement during this journey.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	iv
ÖZET	v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF CHART	viii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Research Questions	2
1.2 Thesis Statement	2
1.3 Method	3
1.4 Limitations of the Thesis	4
1.5 Historical Background of Kvemo Kartli and Ethnic Groups in the Region	5
1.5.1 Kvemo Kartli Region in the Pre-Modern Era	5
1.5.2 Kvemo Kartli Region During the Tsarist Era	6
1.5.3 First Independent Georgian Democratic Republic	6
1.5.4 The Kvemo Kartli Region During the Soviet Era	8
1.5.5 Geographic Location and Demographic Structure of the Kvemo Kartli Region	9
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	12
2.1 Literature Review	12
2.1.1 Literature on Georgian Azerbaijanis and Other Ethnic Minorities of Georgia	12
2.1.2 Literature on the Nature of Ethnicity and Nationalism	15
2.1.3 Literature on Management of Ethnicities and Citizenship	17
2.2 Conceptual Framework: Triadic Structure of Integration: Unity, Difference, Equality	19
CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDY	21
3.1 Independent Georgia and Kvemo Kartli Region	21
3.2 The case study of the Identity of Azerbaijani Minority in the Post-Soviet Period	26
3.3 Assimilation Policies and Discrimination Cases	31
3.4 Education and Ethnic Minorities	36

3.5 Effects of Foreign Influence in the Kvemo Kartli Region	39
3.6 Political Participation and Local Self-Governance in the Kvemo Kartli Region	43
3.7 Peaceful Co-Existence and Conflict Risks in the Kvemo Kartli Region	45
3.8 Media and Ethnic Minorities in the Kvemo Kartli Region	48
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION	50
REFERENCES	55
APPENDIX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES	62
APPENDIX 2: INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM	63
APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	65
APPENDIX 4: EXAMPLE OF AN INTERVIEW	67
APPENDIX 5: CODEBOOK	79



ABSTRACT

In multiethnic Georgia, the largest ethnic minorities are Azerbaijanis and they compactly and peacefully live in the Kvemo Kartli region which is also home to people from various ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. This thesis aims to explain the survival and maintenance of Georgian Azerbaijani identity in post-soviet Georgia. We delve into evolving circumstances of ethnic minorities in the Kvemo Kartli region over recent decades and we analyze the nature of Georgia's policies towards Azerbaijanis and other ethnic minorities. The study also endeavors to assess the consequences of governmental policies that have been implemented since Georgia's attainment of independence. We conducted a case study of Azerbaijanis in the Kvemo Kartli region which included documental analyses, and semi-structured expert interviews. For documental analyses, we examined main reports, websites, media analyses, and literature on Georgian Azerbaijanis and ethnicity, nationalism. Through conducting a case study, and historical and documental analysis of Georgia's policies for ethnic minority integration, as well as external influences on the region, this study sheds light on the principal accomplishments, shortcomings and future requirements. The research discerns that despite maintaining the cohesion of Georgian Azerbaijanis within the Georgian state and upholding the rich diversity of ethnic communities, disparities in ensuring equality among these groups persist as a hindrance to the successful ethnic-cultural integration of Georgian Azerbaijanis into Georgian society.

Keywords: South Caucasus, Georgia, Kvemo Kartli, Georgian Azerbaijanis, nationalism, identity, ethnic minorities, peace

ÖZET

Çok etnikli Gürcistan'da, en büyük etnik azınlıklar Azerbaycanlılardır ve onlar aynı zamanda etnik, kültürel ve dini farklılıklara sahip insanlara ev sahipliği yapan Kvemo Kartli bölgesinde yoğun ve barışçıl bir şekilde yaşamaktadırlar. Bu tez, Sovyet sonrası Gürcistan'da Gürcistan Azerbaycanlıları kimliğinin hayatta kalmasını ve sürdürülmesini açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Son yıllarda Kvemo Kartli bölgesindeki etnik azınlıkların gelişen koşullarını araştırıyoruz ve Gürcistan'ın Azerbaycanlılara ve diğer etnik azınlıklara yönelik politikalarının doğasını analiz ediyoruz. Çalışma ayrıca Gürcistan'ın bağımsızlığını kazanmasından bu yana uygulanan hükümet politikalarının sonuçlarını değerlendirmeye çalışmaktadır. Kvemo Kartli bölgesindeki Azerbaycanlılarla ilgili, belge analizlerini ve yarı yapılandırılmış uzman mülakatlarını içeren bir durum çalışması gerçekleştirdik. Belgesel analizler için Gürcistan Azerbaycanlıları üzerine ana raporları, internet sitelerini, medya analizlerini ve etnik köken, milliyetçilik üzerine literatürü inceledik. Gürcistan'ın etnik azınlık entegrasyonuna yönelik politikalarının yanı sıra bölge üzerindeki dış etkilerin bir durum çalışması, tarihsel ve belgeli analizi yoluyla bu çalışma, başlıca başarılarla, eksikliklere ve gelecekteki gereksinimlere ışık tutmaktadır. Araştırma, Gürcistan Azerbaycanlılarının Gürcistan devleti içindeki uyumunu sürdürmelerine ve etnik toplulukların zengin çeşitliliğini korumalarına rağmen, bu gruplar arasında eşitliği sağlama konusundaki uyumsuzlukların Gürcistan Azerbaycanlılarının Gürcü toplumuna başarılı etnik-kültürel entegrasyonuna bir engel olarak devam ettiğini fark ediyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Güney Kafkasya, Gürcistan, Kvemo Kartli, Gürcistan Azerbaycanlıları, milliyetçilik, kimlik, etnik azınlıklar, barış

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CoE	: Council of Europe
EU	: European Union
SOCAR	: The State Oil Company of the Republic of Azerbaijan
UN	: United Nations
USSR	: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics



LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. 11

Table 2. The number of ethnic Azerbaijani Students Admitted to the Bachelor's Degree
of the Universities in Georgia, from 2010 to 2020

38



LIST OF CHART

Chart 1. Map of the Kvamo Kartli Region in Georgia	10
Chart 2. Map of the Municipalities in the Kvemo Kartli Region	10



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

... Makkah and Qibla will forgive me

When I die, turn my face towards Borchali...

The famous Georgian Azerbaijani poet, public figure, former member of the Parliament of the Republic of Azerbaijan Zalmikhan Yagub (b. 1950 - d. 2016) from the Kvemo Kartli (Borchali) region of Georgia expresses his love and longing for his homeland with the above verses. Along with Georgians, Georgia is also home to a large ethnic Azerbaijani minority community, and most of them live in the Kvemo Kartli region.

Georgian Azerbaijanis and other ethnic minorities have lived in modern Georgia and since the declaration of the Democratic Republic of Georgia in 1918, they have actively participated in the state building and public life of Georgia. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, Georgia faced the most problematic challenge of managing ethnic diversity among all the post-Soviet states. As a result of Georgia's obvious incapability to manage outcomes in either the peacebuilding processes or internal developments in the seceded territories, and the demographic crisis in real terms, the achievement of independence has not allayed Georgian fears of either permanent territorial fragmentation or ethnic "degradation" (Broers, 2008). The largest ethnic minority in Georgia, which gained its independence through these territorial conflicts and ethnic, demographic crisis, were Georgian Azerbaijanis, and the governments of independent Georgia must define their relations and policies with Georgian Azerbaijanis in order to successfully implement their nation-building policies.

However, Georgian Azerbaijanis are not just an ethnic minority without a state. As they are bordering Azerbaijan, which is an "external homeland" for them, Georgian Azerbaijanis can be considered as a stranded minority group. Rogers Brubaker (1996) explains historical background and characteristics of stranded ethnic groups in nationalizing states of Europe. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, various ethnic groups became stranded in newly independent nation states along Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. Such ethnic groups have similarities, common demands and problems as they have "external homeland", while they are citizens of new nation-states. Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Georgia, Georgians in Azerbaijan can be considered stranded ethnic minorities under this category. Georgian Azerbaijanis are considered as a part of Azerbaijani ethnic identity, however they are not a diaspora community as they did not migrate to the region from Azerbaijan and originally lived in the region.

The case of Georgian Azerbaijanis as a stranded minority is unique in Georgia, as their cultural, religious background, demands and positions in Georgian society are not similar with other ethnic minorities in Georgia. Although Meskhetian Turks are also Muslim and Turkic community, historically existed along the border of Turkiye, their demographic, political and social situation is different from Georgian Azerbaijanis as they faced forced exile in 1944 and their struggle for regaining Georgian citizenship and property rights continues (Abbasov, 2021). The case of Muslim Ajarians in Georgia is also unique and different from Georgian Azerbaijanis as they are ethnic Georgians and they are subjected to more differential treatment than Georgian Azerbaijanis (Kahraman, 2020).

Thus, understanding Georgian Azerbaijanis and their position in the Georgian nation state assists us to understand nation-building policies of Georgia and the situation of other stranded minorities around the world.

1.1 Research Questions

This thesis aims to answer the following questions:

- How can we explain the survival and maintenance of Georgian Azerbaijani identity in post-soviet Georgia?
- How did the situation of ethnic minorities in the Kvemo Kartli region change in recent decades?
- How can we characterize the policies of Georgia towards Azerbaijanis and other ethnic minorities in the Kvemo Kartli region?
- What are the consequences of those policies?

1.2 Thesis Statement

Georgian Azerbaijanis managed to maintain their differences such as identity, language, and culture in recent decades despite all the noticeable problems about the management of ethnic minorities in Georgia. My thesis argues that the Georgian Azerbaijani identity is maintained through strong intraethnic community networks and foreign influences, especially active policy of Azerbaijan in the region as the result of favorable Georgia-Azerbaijan bilateral relations. Additionally, after the collapse of the USSR, Georgia provided available education in the mother language, strengthened local municipalities, and proposed special programs for the development of the education of ethnic minorities which sustained the unity of the new Georgian nation state, preserved differences of Georgian Azerbaijanis in the Kvemo Kartli and

other regions of Georgia. My thesis also argues that as the outcome of the policies implemented since independence, Georgia avoided possible separatist movements, serious interethnic clashes and achieved peaceful co-existence of different ethnic groups in the Kvemo Kartli region.

Although the ethnic minorities living in Georgia and Kvemo Kartli region have been able to maintain their identity and differences, they have not yet been able to integrate as equal citizens in Georgian society. Deficiencies in the field of education and teaching of the state language, widespread cases of discrimination, and insufficient inclusion in state institutions are the main obstacles to the integration process of ethnic minorities in the region. Consequently, despite maintaining the unity of Georgian Azerbaijanis within the Georgian state and preserving the diverse differences of ethnic groups, the insufficiencies in ensuring equality between ethnic groups remain as an obstacle to the ethnic-cultural integration of Georgian Azerbaijanis in Georgian society.

1.3 Method

For this thesis, we conducted a case study of Azerbaijanis in the Kvemo Kartli region. This included documental analyses, and semi-structured expert interviews. For documental analyses, we examined main reports, websites, media analyses, and literature on Georgian Azerbaijanis and ethnicity, nationalism. We scanned local media of Georgian Azerbaijanis, reports by international organizations, NGOs, and the Georgian Government in order to obtain detailed information about the situation of ethnic minorities living in the Kvemo Kartli region.

For the research, we conducted 10 interviews with Georgian Azerbaijani participants from the Kvemo Kartli region who are expertised in the fields such as education, law, media, political participation and civil society. 5 of the participants are men, and 5 are women all are based in the Kvemo Kartli region or Tbilisi. I reached informant participants through my personal network and social media. I decided to choose participants who have actively been involved in the social, cultural, educational, and political life of Georgian Azerbaijanis, so this number of participants was enough to collect a wide variation of experiences. All participants were either university students or graduated, most of them have master's degree education and even some of them have PhD degree. All participants have professional backgrounds and careers. There was not much to gain if we had more interviewees, but only some thoughts and experiences would repeat.

Due to the pandemic and border restrictions, interviews were conducted on the online platform (with video). The aim of the study and the interview were explained to the participants

in detail. Their confidentiality, if they wish, anonymity was guaranteed by the researcher. With the Social Sciences University of Ankara Ethical Commission's approval, an information letter about the study and a consent form was prepared. According to the ethical rules, the consent of interviewees was requested before starting the interview and all of them signed the form beforehand. All participants accepted to be audio recorded, the interviews took from half an hour to one and a half hour. The conversation language was Azerbaijani as it is the mother language of participants and it is more comfortable to express themselves in this language. All the interviews were recorded by the computer and were transcribed as in the original conversation and without changing any word and expression, except for minor mistakes.

Interview questions were classified into the following issues: personal questions, questions related to the general situation of democracy and minority rights in Georgia, language and education related questions, questions about local municipalities and political participation, questions about the influence of Azerbaijan in the region, and other personalized questions related to the background of the person interviewed and topics in which they have been expertised. Participants were allowed not to answer a question if they did not want to. They were also allowed to stop the interview if they wanted.

Following the interview and transcription process, all transcripts of interviews were coded by the researcher. Totally 14 repeating codes emerged from interviews, they were classified in categories and themes and interpreted by the researcher with input from the thesis supervisor.

1.4 Limitations of the Thesis

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and border restrictions, conducting participant observation and face-to-face interviews on the field was impossible, and all interviews were conducted via online platforms. I think the face-to-face interview would create a better space for interviewees and increase the level of trust. It would be insightful if we had a chance to visit and observe the neighborhoods of participants and participate in national events and activities.

Additionally, the interviewer was not from the Georgian Azerbaijani community and it may prevent participants from honest disclosure of the topic and sharing negative issues about their community. This however also could be regarded as a benefit as the researcher is not a complete insider and can evaluate the problems from an objective viewpoint.

1.5 Historical Background of Kvemo Kartli and Ethnic Groups in the Region

1.5.1 Kvemo Kartli Region in the Pre-Modern Era

The South Caucasus region where modern Georgia is located has been one of the first human settlements because of its geographical position, natural conditions, and livable climate. The oldest traces of human habitation, dating back 1.7 million years, were found near Dmanisi, in the Kvemo Kartli region of Georgia, and provided significant insights into the development of *homo erectus*. This finding is the oldest evidence of humans in the world outside of Africa.

All Caucasus region was inhabited by different tribes belonging to various language groups since primordial times. This diversity since the prehistoric era is the main reason for the multicultural, multiethnic, and multiconfessional Caucasus region. The first Greek colonies were established on the Black Sea coast and the region suffered from Cimmerian incursions in the seventh–sixth century BCE. At the same time, territories of modern Georgia were affected by the rise of powerful median and later Persian kingdoms. In 65–64 BCE, Roman General Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus conquered the region. In the 3rd century, the Sassanid kingdom rose in Persia and took control of the South Caucasus. In the 7th century, the region was conquered by Arabs. Eastern parts of Georgia remained under the control of Muslim states until 1121 when King David IV (r. 1109-1125) of Georgia captured Tbilisi, the last Muslim enclave remaining from the Arab occupation. During the prospering reign of David “the Builder” IV, under whom the Turks were driven from the country and Georgian political and cultural influence spread throughout the region, all the way to the Caspian Sea, Georgia entered its own “Golden Age” (Mchedlishvili, 2010).

From the 13th century to the early 14th century, Georgia was under the occupation of Mongols. From the late 14th century Eastern parts of modern Georgia, including the modern Kvemo Kartli region were regularly and continuously under the control of Iranian-Turkic Karakoyunlu, Akhkoyunlu, Safavids, and Afsharids dynasties. In 1744, Nadir Shah Afshar conceded the throne of Kakheti to Teimuraz II and that of Kartli to his son Erekle II. In 1795, Agha Muhammad Khan Qajar invaded eastern Georgia and its capital Tbilisi and controlled it until he died in 1797 (Stefes, 2008).

1.5.2 Kvemo Kartli Region During the Tsarist Era

In 1801, Emperor Alexander of Russia annexed the Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti. Then, new Russian laws and administration were introduced to the eastern parts of Georgia (King, 2008). After the annexation of Georgia, Russians started to settle in the region.

In 1846, Georgia was reorganized into the Kutaisi and Tbilisi Gubernias (governorates). Tsar Russia restructured territories of Kartli and Kakheti into governorates, with subdivisions of its own, five of which were referred to as the Tatar (Azerbaijani) uyezds, namely Borchali, Pambak, Shoragel, Kazakh, and Shamshadin. Although these uyezds had Turkish-speaking and Muslim populations, they became part of the governorate where Christians and Georgians were the majority. In 1868, Kazakh and Shamshaddin uyezds became part of the Elisabethpol Gubernia, while the former three were incorporated into the Tiflis Gubernia as the Borchali uyezd. Modern boundaries of the Kvemo Kartli region were part of mainly Borchali uyezd and partly Pambak uyezd in Tbilisi Gubernia. According to the only census carried out by the Russian Empire in 1897, ethnic Georgians made up just 6.1% of the population of Borchali uyezd. The rest of the population were Tatars, Armenians, Greeks, Russians, and other ethnic groups (Troynitsky, 1905).

The social structure of Georgian society was also gradually changed by the Russian Empire. In 1890, imperial policymakers of the Tsar regime began to see the relatively meager ethnic Russian demographic and economic presence in Transcaucasia as a threat to the stability of imperial control there. In 1899, Transcaucasia was opened up to civilian Russian colonization, and in the early twentieth century, an additional Russian colonization program was introduced, now against a backdrop of politicization and radicalization on the part of local ethnic elites. These programs seriously affected the ethnic composition of the region in favor of the Russians (Tsutsiev, 2014).

1.5.3 First Independent Georgian Democratic Republic

In 1917 February, after the Revolution in Russia, independent Transcaucasia was proclaimed. When the Russian Bolshevik Party staged a successful coup against the Tsarist regime and established Soviet control in October 1917, political leaders of Transcaucasia refused to acknowledge the new power of Russia and established the Transcaucasian Commissariat. In March 1918, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed between Soviet Russia, Germany, and Turkiye. In April, the Transcaucasian Federation of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan was established.

On May 26, 1918, the National Council of Georgia declared the Democratic Republic of Georgia's independence, ending 117 years of Russian rule, under the Social Democratic (Menshevik) Party. According to the Act of Independence of Georgia, "the Democratic Republic of Georgia equally guarantees to every citizen within her limits political rights irrespective of nationality, creed, social rank or sex". On February 21, 1921, the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia was adopted. As the main law of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, it established representative democracy as well as a system of democratic governance based on popular sovereignty by ensuring an independent judicial system (Papuashvili, 2012).

In 1919 Parikhanim Sofiyeva, a 34 years old Turkic woman from the village of Karajalari near Karayazi (Gardabani), won the election in her constituency, becoming the first democratically elected Muslim woman in the history of the Caucasus and one of only five Georgian female MPs at the time (Report, 2018).

The borders of Azerbaijan and Georgia were at the same time the imperial administrative borders between the gubernias of Elizavetpol, Tbilisi, and the Zakatala okrug. In the 19th century, these imperial borders in the region complied with the former borders of various Muslim khanates in Azerbaijan and Shirvan and numerous Christian principalities in Georgia, Mingrelia, and in Abkhazia. However, during the 19th century, they were altered and they never overlapped with economic, ethnic, linguistic, or religious reality. That is why, there were territorial disputes over Zakatala, Borchali, and other regions between the two countries. Additionally, Georgia claimed the Kazakh and Gokcha Gol (Sevan) regions of Elizavetpol gubernia and Zakatala okrug in their share, as these territories had been part of Georgian kingdoms and principalities in the Middle Ages. Thus, while Azerbaijani claims were made on demographic or religious grounds, most of the Georgian justification was based on history. Borchali, Lori, and Kazakh were simultaneously claimed by Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. There were military clashes between the Armenian and Georgian forces for two weeks at the end of 1918 and in the first days of 1919 over Borchali and Lori regions. In contrast to the Georgian–Armenian and Armenian–Azerbaijani wars, however, Georgian–Azerbaijani relations did not initiate an open confrontation. The Sunni Muslim (especially Karapapakhs tribes) population in the Borchali region did not want to be a part of the newly found Georgian Republic and in a petition to the sultan of Ottoman Empire stated that they either wanted regional autonomy within Turkiye or union with Azerbaijan (Yilmaz, 2009). The dispute, however, never led to hostilities, and relations between the two countries were generally peaceful until the Sovietization of both countries.

1.5.4 The Kvemo Kartli Region During the Soviet Era

On May 7, 1920, Soviet Russia and Georgia signed a treaty under which Soviet Russia was to recognize the sovereignty of the Georgian Democratic Republic. However, this recognition was to be short-lived. Just one month before Russia's dealings with the newly independent Georgian Democratic Republic, the Red Army invaded the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. Meanwhile, Georgia grew stronger as an independent state, as did the people's hopes that it would, at last, be recognized as such. But, shortly after the Sovietization of Azerbaijan and Armenia, Bolshevik armies invaded Georgia and, in February 1921, made their way to Tbilisi. In 1924, the Social Democrats of Georgia organized an uprising, but the local Communist regime violently suppressed the rebels and executed most of their leaders (Suny, 2011).

In nearly 70 years as part of the USSR, Georgia maintained some cultural independence, and Georgian nationalism remained a significant issue in relations with the Russians. In economic and political terms, however, Georgia was thoroughly integrated into the Soviet system.

After Lenin's death, the fact that his successor, Josef Stalin, as well as Stalin's chief of the secret police, Beria, were sons of Georgia did not spare its people any of the horrors of his reign. Georgia and Azerbaijan both experienced the pains of collectivization and mass purges. But, latent desires for independence remained strong amongst the Georgian people, and the death of Stalin in 1953 saw a revived nationalist struggle against the mandates of the central government.

Between 1955 and 1972, Georgian communists used decentralization to become entrenched in political posts and to further reduce the influence of other ethnic groups in Georgia. As party first secretary, Eduard Shevardnadze used purges to attack the corruption and chauvinism for which Georgia's elite had become infamous even among the corrupt and chauvinistic republics of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, a nationalist group of dissidents coalesced around academician Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who emphasized the danger that Russification policies presented to the national identity of Georgians. The central Soviet power and Georgian nationalism clashed in 1978 when Moscow ordered the revision of the constitutional status of the Georgian language as Georgia's official state language. Bowing to pressure from street demonstrations, Moscow approved Eduard Shevardnadze's reinstatement of the constitutional guarantee the same year. In the 1970s and early 1980s, Eduard Shevardnadze successfully walked a narrow line between the demands of Moscow and the

Georgians' growing desire for national autonomy. He maintained economic and political control while listening carefully to the demands from the people and making strategic concessions. Eduard Shevardnadze dealt with nationalism and dissent by explaining his policies to hostile audiences and seeking compromise solutions. The most serious ethnic dispute of Eduard Shevardnadze's period happened in 1978, when leaders of the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic threatened to secede from Georgia, alleging unfair linguistic, cultural, economic and political restrictions imposed by Tbilisi. Eduard Shevardnadze took a series of steps to diffuse the crisis, including an affirmative action program that increased the role of Abkhazian elites in running the autonomy (Library of Congress Country Studies, 1994).

Under the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, Azerbaijanis, like the other non-Georgian nationalities, were considered as second-class citizens. This tendency was due to the Soviet determination of nationhood along ethnic lines: under the rule of the USSR, ethnic differences were institutionalized, as the “titular” nationality - in this case, the Georgians - of a country would reap the benefits from affirmative action policies at the expense of others in their republic. This policy of the USSR gave ethnic Georgians a series of socioeconomic advantages, including access to a variety of social and economic benefits, including education, housing, and employment. Though fully integrated politically and economically into the Soviet Union, Georgians retained a certain amount of cultural independence. Ethnic minorities in the country, too, experienced a certain freedom of cultural expression under Soviet rule. Azerbaijanis in Georgia were never forced to assimilate into Georgian society: rather, they lived in ethnically and culturally homogenous enclaves - most of them located in the aforementioned regions in Southeastern Georgia - where the languages of everyday use were Azerbaijani and Russian, not Georgian, and education was also pursued in Azerbaijani and Russian, not Georgian. (Broers, 2008).

These sentiments remained strong throughout the next several decades, and, following Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika, culminated in the republic's departure from the central state before the actual fall of the Soviet Union. In April 1990, after a multi-party election, parliament declared Georgia an independent state.

1.5.5 Geographic Location and Demographic Structure of the Kvemo Kartli Region

Kvemo Kartli is one of the administrative regions of Georgia, with an area of 6528 km², located in the southeastern part of the country and borders Armenia and Azerbaijan on the south. As a special status city, Rustavi is the administrative capital and Marneuli, Gardabani, Bolnisi,

Dmanisi, Tsalka, and Tetritsqaro are municipalities of the Kvemo Kartli region. In the Georgian language, “kvemo” means lower, so Kvemo Kartli literally means “Lower Kartli”. The region is also sometimes unofficially called as “Borchali” by Georgian Azerbaijanis and Azerbaijanis generally.



Chart 1. Map of the Kvemo Kartli Region in Georgia

Source: <https://hello-georgia.org/georgia/kvemo-kartli/>



KVEMO KARTLI REGION

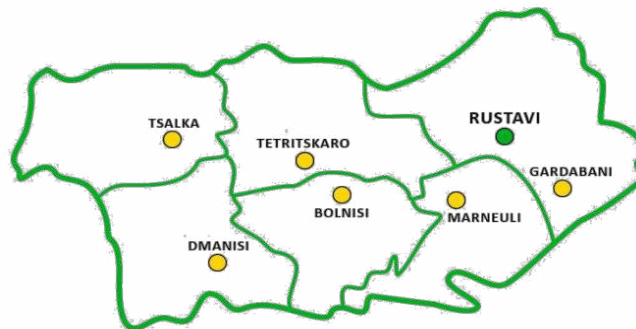


Chart 2. Map of the Municipalities in the Kvemo Kartli Region

Source: <https://www.lifebeyondtourism.org/places/la-regione-di-kvemo-kartli/>

Kvemo Kartli region has important geopolitical and economic importance due to its fertile lands, industrial centers, tourism destinations and the location at the intersection of important transportation routes. The ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity of the Kvemo Kartli region are also factors that increase its importance. According to the latest 2014 General Population Census Results in Georgia, 423,986 people with different ethnic, religious, and

cultural backgrounds live in the Kvemo Kartli region (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2014). Population and ethnic composition of municipalities of Kvemo Kartli region are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Ethnic Composition of the Kvemo Kartli Region

	Georgians	Azerbaijanis	Armenians	Russians	Greeks	Other ethnic groups	Total population
Rustavi	114,819 ⁽⁹⁾ (1.78%)	4,661 (3.73%)	1,965 (1.57%)	1,459 (1.17%)	166 (0.13%)	2,033 (1.62%)	125,103 (100%)
Marneuli	8,952 (8.58%)	87,371 (83.77%)	7,291 (6.99%)	230 (0.22%)	182 (0.17%)	274 (0.26%)	104,300 (100%)
Gardabani	44,398 (54.23%)	35,642 (43.53%)	602 (0.74%)	414 (0.51%)	63 (0.08%)	757 (0.92%)	81,876 (100%)
Bolnisi	16,565 ⁽³⁾ (0.91%)	33,964 (63.38%)	2,690 (5.02%)	135 (0.25%)	125 (0.23%)	111 (0.20%)	53,590 (100%)
Tetritsqaro	17,424 (82.47%)	1,548 (7.33%)	1,544 (7.31%)	277 (1.31%)	186 (0.88%)	148 (0.70%)	21,127 (100%)
Dmanisi	6,345 (33.15%)	12,530 (65.46%)	87 (0.45%)	67 (0.35%)	87 (0.45%)	25 (0.13%)	19,141 (100%)
Tsalka	8,802 (46.70%)	1,316 (6.98%)	7,321 (38.84%)	49 (0.26%)	1,304 (6.92%)	57 (0.30%)	18,849 (100%)
Kvemo-Kartli region	217,305 (51.25%)	177,032 (41.75%)	21,500 (5.07%)	2,631 (0.62%)	2,113 (0.49%)	3,405 (0.80%)	423,986 (100%)

Source: 2014 General Population Census Results by National Statistics Office of Georgia

Other ethnic groups mentioned in the table are mainly Ossetians, Ukrainians, Assyrians and Yezidi Kurds who settled in the Kvemo Kartli region in different periods of Georgia's history. According to the 2014 General Population Census results, 51.4% of the population are Orthodox Christians, 42.9% are Muslims, and 3.3% are Armenian Apostolic Christians. Most Georgian Azerbaijanis are Shia Muslims, while there are Sunni Muslim communities too.

The 2014 General Population Census shows that 233,024 Georgian Azerbaijanis live in Georgia and they constitute approximately 6.3% of the total population. Nearly 76% of Georgian Azerbaijanis live in the Kvemo Kartli region, while others mainly live in the capital Tbilisi, Kakheti, Shida-Kartli, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, and other regions.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the literature on citizenship, ethnicity, nationalism, Georgian citizenship, and management of ethnicities in Georgia, Georgian Azerbaijanis, and other ethnic minorities of Georgia are reviewed. Next, a conceptual framework has been formed by using concepts from ethnicity, nationalism, and citizenship literature.

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Literature on Georgian Azerbaijanis and Other Ethnic Minorities of Georgia

Mirian Tukhashvili (2017) analyzed considerable changes in the demographic composition of the population in the Kvemo Kartli region after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As a result of economic, social, and other factors, Kvemo Kartli has turned from a polyethnic into a biethnic region, where ethnic Georgians and Azerbaijanis are now dominated. The report by Jonathan Wheatley (2005) is intended to uncover an overview of the general social, political, and economic situation in five districts of the Kvemo Kartli region. By identifying and providing broad information about the problems impeding the regional integration of those parts of the Kvemo Kartli region where ethnic minorities are concentrated, this fieldwork tries to define priorities and ensure more informed intervention in the region. According to the report, there is a serious potential for conflict in the Kvemo Kartli region and the two main points for the conflict are considerable discrimination facts against the Azerbaijani community and the controversy for resources between local people and newcomers in the region.

The reaction of ethnic Azerbaijanis, who live inside Georgia but bordering Azerbaijan, to the reorganization of political space along national lines after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was examined by Berglund (2020). Drawing on elite interviews and data from a matched-guise experiment, the article concludes that Georgian Azerbaijanis have come to accept their host state after its state-building nationalism took an inclusive turn, so the distinction between aliens and natives faded. Hulya H. Sakarya (2012) analyzes the efficacy of liberal policies designed to realize cultural variation and improve the integration process of ethnic minority communities in Georgia. The liberal policies were part of a reform attempt by former president Mikheil Saakashvili after the Rose Revolution in 2003 and reflected his reimagining of the Georgian nation in civic terms instead of ethnonationalist ones. For investigating public opinion and observing the main changes in heritage-related endeavors,

ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in the city of Tbilisi over nine months. The author of the study concludes that these specific policies by the government were going to fail to achieve their goals because of the nature and an elitist vision of those policies, and social structure of Georgian society. Jonathan Wheatley (2009) also points out the main noticeable problems related to the management of the ethnic diversity in post-Soviet Georgia and tries to explain the causal factors of these problems. According to the study, the internal conflicts that followed the independence of Georgia and remain unresolved today are a partial legacy of the Soviet Union.

For understanding the Georgian Government's planned policies related to the new nation-building initiative following the Rose Revolution, a public speech by President Mikheil Saakashvili during the President George W. Bush's famous visit to Georgia in 2005 is considerable and explanatory. A textual analysis of President Saakashvili's welcoming speech is conducted by Maia Matashvili (2008) to uncover the embedded ideology and to identify the frames highlighted in the speech. The main ideology identified in that speech was liberal democratic ideology, so the democratic ideology was presented as a worldview of the new Georgian administration. This speech can be considered as an announcement of liberal-democratic reforms that seriously affected the situation of ethnic minorities of Georgia as well.

As one of the most effective tools of the nation-building process, religions and religious differences among ethnic groups must be highlighted too. The article by Jonathan Fox (2000) examines two populations from the Minorities at Risk dataset: the 105 religiously differentiated minorities and the 163 minorities that are not religiously differentiated. The study concludes that religious elements influence the process that leads to discrimination and that the motives of religious discrimination are quite distinct from the motives of other types of discrimination. The countries of the former USSR witnessed religious revivalism in the final years of the regime, although following the collapse, the revivals of the various religious communities have had diverse characteristics. Field research and in-depth interviews were conducted with elites and experts, to explore differences between Orthodox Christianity and Islam in Georgia (Köksal, Aydingün, Gürsoy, 2018). The article by Aydingün (2013) clarifies the increasing religious nationalism in post-Soviet Georgia. It is argued that religious nationalism and the prioritization of nation-state building are exercised at the expense of democracy and minority rights, and thus endanger national and territorial integrity. Religious identity has been studied alongside gender issues and education too. Book chapter by Asker and Öğütücü (2016) explains Islam, religion and sectarian related problems of Borchali Turks and concludes that the biggest problem experienced about the religion among Borchali Turks is due to the ineffectiveness of the All Georgian Muslims Administration and Religious Agency established by the state, and

as a result of the questioning of the functions of these institutions and the interventions of different religious groups from outside, a negative opinion about the institutions has been formed in some segments of the society. Authors also explain that in accordance with various international agreements and the Council of Europe legislation, it is seen that Georgia has largely prepared the legal legislation that will meet the religious needs of Borchali Turks. In this context, it is understood that the problems arise from effective applications of this legislation. Nani Gelovani (2017) researched interrelation matters of Islam, gender, and education in modern Georgia by the example of the Azerbaijani population in the Kvemo Kartli region during the period 1992-2016. The author tries to analyze the history of Muslim religious education centers in Tbilisi and Kvemo Kartli, and the results of sociological interrogation. As a conclusion of the research, she found that Georgian Azerbaijani women in the Kvemo Kartli region mostly get their education in Georgia and Azerbaijan. Cultural and Educational Institutions are mainly inaccessible for most Georgian Azerbaijani women. The key reasons are the lack of educational and religious institutions at their residence places and Georgia's state policies towards Muslims.

A book chapter by Yılmaz and Öğütücü (2016) has been one of the most comprehensive studies addressing the socio-economic and political situation of Georgian Azerbaijanis. According to the research, Georgia has signed many international agreements requiring the protection of human rights and minority rights, and within this framework, national legislation has been brought into line with international legislation. As a result of these developments, although steps have been taken to solve many problems experienced by Georgian Azerbaijanis, improvement has remained limited. For example, in the interviews conducted in the Kvemo Kartli region within the scope of field research, Georgian Azerbaijanis expressed their concerns about their historical and cultural assets being ignored, drawing attention to issues such as educational problems, economic difficulties, fear of assimilation caused by changes in the demographic structure, and low political participation.

Interethnic relations in multiethnic Georgia have also been investigated by the researchers. The book chapter by Oganessian (2020) uncovers intermarriage along linguistic, ethnic, and religious groups in multicultural Georgia. Using historical and anthropological approaches, the chapter focuses on two ethnically and religiously mixed marriages in Georgia: Georgian-Armenian, one of the most common, and Armenian-Azerbaijani, one of the least common. In his book chapter, Thomas De Waal (2013) gives an example of co-existence in Sadakhlo which is one of the multiethnic villages of the Kvemo Kartli region. His field research points out that ethnic Azerbaijani and Armenians, even Greeks live together peacefully in

Sadakhlo and nearby villages of Marneuli municipality despite the bloody war between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Since independence from the Soviet Union, active nation-building efforts have been implemented by each government of Georgia. Although each government has its tactically different approaches to construct the Georgian nation and ethnic minority integration policies, all of them used primordial roots such as Georgian history and Georgian language as a tool. The role of the Georgian Orthodox Church and its equalization with “Georgiannes” must also be highlighted. Thus, the ethnosymbolist approach to nationalism by Anthony Smith (1991) coincides with the main nation-building policies of the governments in Georgia, as it has noticeable primordial and symbolist elements.

Although Georgian Azerbaijanis share a mutual contemporary history and certain cultural similarities with ethnic Georgians, they cannot be a part of that ethnosymbolist nation-building process since they have a completely different language, and religious belief from Georgians, and are under the consequential political, economic, and cultural influence of kin state Azerbaijan. These consequences do not allow the construction of a civic nation in Georgia and make the nation have more ethnic characteristics. So, attempts to construct a civic nation in Georgia are naturally followed by minority rights violations, and thus, these actions pose a threat to the territorial and national integrity of Georgia, as argued by Aydingun (2013). Thus, the main concerns of ethnic minorities living in Georgia are lack of services in the mother language, mass Georgianizations of toponyms, special legal status, and power of influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church and Christianization policies which are related to efforts to construct a civic nation with deep ethnic, religious and primordial roots.

Thus the literature shows that Georgia has not resolved its minority issues especially in the Kvemo Kartli region due to various reasons related to the construction of Georgian nation and inability to apply a liberal framework of minority rights. The literature however does not look into the topics such as discussions about the ethnonym of Georgian Azerbaijanis, discriminative cases against ethnic minorities in Georgia and the foreign influence over ethnic minorities in the Kvemo Kartli region.

2.1.2 Literature on the Nature of Ethnicity and Nationalism

Although academic scholars mainly agree that elements such as language, religion, culture, societal interaction, and history of migration are among key elements for maintaining ethnic identity, nation-building, and citizenship, there have been various narratives to explain

these phenomena. There are many approaches to nationalism to be found in political theory, just as there are many varieties of nations with diverse roots in the modern world. Primordialism and modernism are two grand, well-known narratives of nationalism. Both narratives agree that ethnicity is a real phenomenon while having variances about the roots of ethnicity and nationality and how they change over time.

For primordialist scholars, ethnic identities and nations are ancient and natural, so each individual has an inborn ethnic identity independent of political and historical events. According to Antony Smith (1986), primordialism, also labeled as perennialism, considers that units and sentiments found in the modern world are larger and more effective versions of similar units and sentiments that can be seen in earlier periods of human history. Primordialist narrative is divided into sociobiological and cultural approaches. The biological approach of primordialism explains that almost all species favor their kinship ties knowingly or unknowingly. As a result, kinship and nepotism create nationalism and nations. One of the main biological primordialist scholars, Pierre L. Van den Berghe (1981) states that humans are biologically selected to be nepotistic by favoring kin like other social animals. Small human societies were separated by physical boundaries of territory and social boundaries of inbreeding throughout history.

Modernist narratives of nationalism give preference to sociocultural factors rather than biological ones and argue that modern conditions provided fertile soil for the emergence of nationalism and nations (Gellner, 1983). Situationalism, instrumentalism, and structuralism are among the modernist approaches by scholars. David Brown (2000) classifies theoretical approaches to debates on nationalism and links primordialism with instinct, situationalism with interests, and constructivism with ideology. According to his explanation of the situationalist approach, ethnicity, and nationalism emerge during changing situations, when people face threats and opportunities, so their options and responses also change. David Brown summarizes that according to constructivist approaches, national identity and ethnicity are constructed on the basis of institutional and ideological frameworks which offer simple formulas of identity, and diagnoses of contemporary problems. This approach matches up with Benedict Anderson's (1983) concept of "imagined communities" which highlights the importance of media and propaganda.

Though Anthony Smith's approach to nations and nationalism has primordialist elements, he preferred the "ethno-symbolist" label. Ethno-symbolist approach to nations and nationalism also accepts that the nation is a construction while underlining the role and amount of history and primordial roots such as language.

Anthony Smith suggests that dominant ethnies furnish the nation with its myths, symbols and public culture, and that this limits the degree to which ethnic minorities and new immigrant groups can alter the national culture. Anthony Smith mentions: “Though most latter-day nations are, in fact, polyethnic, many have been formed in the first place around a dominant ethnie, which attracted other ethnies or ethnic fragments into the state to which it gave a name and cultural charter... The presumed boundaries of the nation are largely determined by the myths and memories of the dominant ethnie, which include the foundation charter, the myth of the golden age and the associated territorial claims, or ethnic title-deeds” (Smith, 1991, p. 39). However, in polyethnic Georgia, Georgians as a dominant ethnie, still can not attract all ethnies, especially stranded minorities such as Azerbaijanis in the Kvemo Kartli region. It can be explained with the fact that they don’t have distinct myths, historical and cultural background separate from ethnic Azerbaijanis in Azerbaijan.

2.1.3 Literature on Management of Ethnicities and Citizenship

The nature of the nation-building process: Ethnic, civic or something else?

Exploring the civic-ethnic dichotomy has been very essential for scholars to understand the overall situation and problems related to minority groups. One of the early examples was Kohn's argument that Western civic nationalism in Europe, emphasizing cosmopolitan and liberal values, was superior to the backward Eastern European 'ethnographic' nationalism (Kohn, 1944). In their article, Hansen, Holley E., and Vicki L. Hesli (2009) use the case of Ukraine and follow recent calls to move beyond the civic-ethnic dichotomy for understanding national identity and propose four identity variants that can be found at the mass level: civic, ethnic, hybrid and atomized.

With her article, Elke Winter (2007) emphasized the relations between different national imaginations and various types of pluralism, such as multinationalism and multiculturalism. A sociological framework for the constitution of pluralism within the nation state has been explained. The article shows that processes of racialization and ethnicization are at the center of social relations. Secondly, it claims that nations are constituted in inter- and intra-national relations of conflict and power. This approach allows one to deconstruct the civic/ethnic dichotomy without losing the theoretical value of these concepts. Additionally, the article defines normative pluralism as being resulted through conflict and struggle between the dominant group and various minorities.

Academic sources about ethnicity, citizenship, and nationalism usually conclude that collectivistic orientations and political cultures form the basis of illiberal conceptions of citizenship and national identity, while non-collectivistic or individualistic orientations are more likely to result in liberal conceptions of citizenship and national identity. In his thesis, which includes field research in Georgia, Blauvelt (2001) challenged this assumption. By using the more complex four-fold distinction of social orientations that Cultural Theory offers, a more complex and compelling description of variations in attitudes toward conceptions of ethnicity, citizenship, and nationalism is presented. The research finds out that the most widespread orientation throughout almost every level and grouping in Georgian society is the hierarchy. With some noteworthy exceptions, the tendency toward hierarchy pervades Georgian social classes, categories, and groups. In Georgia, there are also many instances and contexts in which the presence of egalitarianism is clearly noticed.

The case for multiculturalism and ethnocultural justice

Most of the countries, including Georgia, are home to various ethnic groups, languages, cultures, and communities. During the twentieth century, issues related to ethnic and national groups became more common than previous centuries. According to Kymlicka (1996), most of the demands by ethnic groups are consistent with liberal principles of individual freedom and social justice. And ethnic groups deserve ethnic, cultural, and language rights since no state can be neutral despite the liberal assumption. However, the potential abuse of rights by ethnic groups which have more power is very high. The author underlines that one formula can't be applied to all cases and that the aspirations and needs of immigrants are too different from those of indigenous peoples and national minorities. Separation of powers, the language of schooling, courts, and bureaucracies, even the choice of public holidays may affect political life and social justice. Such rights must have limits for liberal justice: rights of ethnic minorities should not allow one group to dominate other groups; and they should not enable a group to oppress its own members.

Ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, so members of these groups are usually subjected to injustice and discrimination. This reality makes the protection of the rights of minorities one of the oldest and important concerns of international law (Alam, 2015). Questions associated with citizenship and the rule of law in the Caucasus region have been investigated by Irina Levin (2017), who explores the case and situation of Meskhetian Turks. She argues that while the law offers Meskhetian Turks the hope of redress, the ambiguous and changing nature of the

modern international legal landscape has continuously dislocated their efforts to find solid ground as individuals and as a community.

The dilemma between national cohesion and rights of minorities can be transcended

Daniel Skobla's (2001) approaches to surmount misconceptualizations shaped by modernism by calling for a much more 'constructivist' definition of ethnicity. Additionally, the author tries to overlook the sharp dichotomy of individual and collective rights by employing a wide-ranging application of those theoretical concepts. Skobla suggests preserving the territorial unity of a nation state and, at the same time, for pursuing a normative goal of equality among ethnic minorities and the majority nation. The result should be integration that transforms the demarcation line between the ethnic minority and nation state into a triadic structure: unity, difference, equality. He emphasizes that ethnic integration should respect all distinct cultural needs, including the right to mother language education. At the same time, this education should avoid the hidden elements of ethnic segregation both in the school system and social life as much as possible. The article also points out that there is no 'good' and 'once and forever' solution that would get rid of ethnic nationalism.

2.2 Conceptual Framework: Triadic Structure of Integration: Unity, Difference, Equality

Based on Daniel Skobla's (2001) definition of the demarcation between ethnic minorities and nation states with a triadic structure and normative arguments about the necessity of ethno-cultural justice we suggest the following conceptual framework to resolve contradictions between minority and majority rights. We will use this framework to interpret the current state Georgian - Kvemo Kartli Azerbaijani relations, point out shortcomings and unresponded demands, and suggest policies for improvement of relations in a more just and peaceful manner. This framework can be applied to the situation of other stranded minorities around the world.

This conceptual framework firstly highlights the importance of the territorial and national unity of the nation state which is mainly based on the rights of majority. As a newly independent country, Georgia is still trying to overcome the fallout from the Soviet era, resolve separatist conflicts and secure democratic state institutions. national unity, will and goals are essential for Georgia in order to tackle mentioned issues. Georgia compulsory educate the Georgian language in schools as a main tool for maintaining the nation state. At the same time, as emphasized in the thesis, problems in the teaching of the Georgian language complicate the integration of ethnic minorities in Georgian society and become a big obstacle. Another

important point for territorial and national unity is the national education system and main media propaganda. Skobla (2001) mentions that such integration tools should avoid as much as possible the latent elements of ethnic segregation both in the school system and social life. However, in the Kvemo Kartli region, external influences on the education system and media organizations, especially the influence of Azerbaijan, can be considered other main obstacles to integration to the majority group and unity of the nation state. Therefore, the Georgian state itself should provide ethnic minorities with high-quality mother language education and finance local media in their mother language.

Our conceptual framework also underscores that ethnic integration should respect all distinct cultural needs, including the native language education for the minority group. The exercising of collective ethnic rights is related to collective claims and demands of the minority ethnic group. For stranded ethnic minorities such as Georgian Azerbaijanis, education in their mother language is the main cultural need for preserving differences. Additionally, other cultural and religious needs must be provided. It is no coincidence that education and cultural issues are at the forefront of collective demands of Georgian Azerbaijanis, and they explain this by protecting their existence and differences. It is important for the Georgian state to respect and meet these collective demands of ethnic minorities in order to preserve the rights and presence of ethnic minorities in the Georgian nation state.

Finally, the framework emphasizes that the rights of the minority and the majority should be balanced with the principle of equality. According to the theory, if the state necessitates preserving unity and at the same time wants to guarantee equality among ethnic groups (and equality between ethnic minorities and the majority nation), the political outcome must be ethnic-cultural integration. In order to achieve equality, it is first important to sustain basic liberal and democratic rights, create equal legal and political opportunities for all ethnic groups. Systematic discrimination in state institutions and society seriously violates the principle of equality, and in this case, it is impossible to achieve ethnic-cultural integration even if national unity is ensured. Despite the steps taken by the Georgian state to ensure national unity and protect differences, problems in the field of ensuring equality between ethnic groups make it difficult to achieve successful ethnic-cultural integration of ethnic groups.

We will use this triadic framework to evaluate whether needs of national cohesion, needs of minority cultural preservation and need for a workable balance were fulfilled case by case within the issues of Kvemo Kartli Azerbaijanis.

CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDY

3.1 Independent Georgia and Kvemo Kartli Region

Following the secession and independence of Georgia from the USSR in April 1991, a new era started for Georgian citizens, including ethnic minorities of the country. Ethnic minorities already were not citizens of a multiethnic world superpower, but a newly independent and tiny nation-state. The Georgian Civil War followed the independence and finished in 1993 with the de-facto independence of the separatists in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) regions. In contrast to the Abkhazians and Ossetians, other ethnic minorities such as Azerbaijanis and Armenians who mainly live in southern and south-eastern parts of the country avoided serious conflicts and became citizens of the country with *de jure* equal rights. However, ethnic minorities faced new challenges or opportunities during the period of each government.

In this chapter, I am going to explain the situation of ethnic minorities in the Kvemo Kartli region of Georgia during the three governments after independence with details from the findings of my research. The chapter analyzes how the principles of territorial and national unity, distinct cultural differences and needs, and equal rights of the minority and the majority have been sustained under each government.

Georgia as a nationalizing state during Gamsakhurdia's presidency

In 1991, following the independence of Georgia, famous Georgian writer, dissident, and leader of the independence movement, Zviad Gamsakhurdia who had nationalist ideology, became the first president of the country. So, the independence movement was led by the “titular” nationality, who defined their new statehood on ethnic grounds: under the leadership of president Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the definition of Georgian nationhood was that Georgia belonged to the Georgians, and “Georgian-ness” was an identity based on ethnicity as determined by one’s ancestry, and, not unimportantly, given the revival of the Georgian Orthodox Church that came hand-in-hand with the rising nationalism, on religious affiliation (Berglund, 2020). Thus Azerbaijanis, being culturally Muslim and ethnically non-Georgian, were mainly excluded from Georgia’s post-Soviet “nationalising” state-building process (Brubaker, 1996).

As one of his most well-known, and controversial slogans was “Georgia for Georgians”, Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s presidency could be described as a nightmare for the ethnic minorities

of the country. Gamsakhurdia's principal goal was to establish an ethnically homogenous society (Abashidze, 2019). Zviad Gamsakhurdia rejected the status of ethnic minorities as Georgia's indigenous peoples, and obviously called them "immigrants on Georgian territory", "newcomers" and "Kremlin agents". The Supreme Soviet of Georgia enacted discriminatory legislative regulations against ethnic minorities too. Discriminatory "Language law" was adopted which demanded obligatory use of Georgian language throughout Georgia, ignoring the fact that most of ethnic minorities in fact could not speak Georgian (Zurcher, 2007).

The analyses of interviews show that Azerbaijanis and other ethnic minorities have been oppressed and heavily discriminated against in the early 1990s, especially during the government of Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Nationalist and chauvinist ideologies were on the rise during this period and Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his former companion Merab Kostava were iconic heroes for ultra-nationalist groups.

After the 1987 landslide killed dozens and robbed hundreds of people of their ancestral homes in Georgia's mountainous Svaneti region, ethnic Svans, who are an ethnic subgroup of the Georgians, were resettled in Kvemo Kartli and other regions of Georgia as eco-migrants. This resettlement raised interethnic tensions in the region. In addition, as a result of the government's resettlement plan, hundreds more were also forced to move. With the coming to power of a nationalist government under the leadership of Zviad Gamsakhurdia in 1990, resettlement policies were largely guided by a nationalist agenda to populate minority-inhabited and border regions of Georgia with ethnic Georgians. Ecologically displaced persons soon found themselves as tools to advance such policies. Ethnic tensions between eco-migrant Svans and local Azerbaijanis eventually led to the emigration of thousands of ethnic Azerbaijanis from the Kvemo Kartli region, especially from Bolnisi and Dmanisi towns, who left Georgia for Azerbaijan, out of fears of a further deterioration of the inter-ethnic climate (Trier, Turashvili, 2007). On her "Facebook" post in 2021, famous Baku based Azerbaijani lawyer, and International Women of Courage (IWOC) Awardee Shahla Humbatova who was born in the Dmanisi region of the Kvemo Kartli remembered these years as such:

... Then everything changed. Two horrors entered our lives - Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Svans. Georgians gathered and went to rallies in Tbilisi, bringing the slogan "Georgia for Georgians" from there. Non-Georgians were removed from their positions, I remember that in Dmanisi the district committee, judge, prosecutor, deputy head of the militia, and various chairmen were Azerbaijanis, and they were all fired, and "foreign" Georgians who were not from Dmanisi were brought in their place. The "Georgia for Georgians" process has started for Georgia... The Svans were moved to Dmanisi and Bolnisi, where Azerbaijanis lived most compactly. We were children, so we did not understand that it was purposeful. What followed was like a horror movie, our lives turned

into hell... Even in the afternoons, they attacked Azerbaijanis, beat them, stabbed them, kidnapped girls, broke into houses and robbed them, drank, and indulged in obscenity on the street... And there was no one to say a word to them, it was as if the police, prosecutor's office had disappeared. The beautiful Dmanisi had turned into a bandit shelter (Shahla Humbatova, 2021).

Despite a year of leadership, Zviad Gamsakhurdia's racist and chauvinist policies were partly achieved as some Azerbaijani settlements were ethnically cleansed. My interviewee, activist Samira Bayramova explains the scale of the ethnic cleansing in Bolnisi city, the center of Bolnisi Municipality with the following speech:

At that time, in 1990-1991, more than 80 percent of the houses in Bolnisi were inhabited by Azerbaijanis. But today it's empty, they chased it all away. And now other people live there who are not related to the city. (Samira Bayramova, 33 years old activist from Marneuli)

The nationalist and chauvinist "Georgia for the Georgians" hysteria launched by the followers of Zviad Gamsakhurdia "played a decisive role" in "bringing about Bosnia-like inter-ethnic violence" (Khutsishvili, 1994). The government's ultra-nationalist attempts to control and assimilate ethnic Azerbaijani minorities in the Kvemo Kartli and ethnic Armenian minorities in Samtskhe-Javakheti regions met with harsh resistance from both ethnic groups, however, this resistance never erupted into violent separatist conflict, as in the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Ethnic and separatist war in the country was followed by civil war. As a result of these developments, many of Gamsakhurdia's supporters turned against him and invited Shevardnadze, the former Communist Party chief, to return to Georgia. Only then citizens of Georgia were able to begin the painful and long process of rebuilding the fractured country. But South Ossetia and Abkhazia resisted the government's efforts to bring them under Georgian sovereignty (Suny, 2011).

The steps taken during Gamsakhurdia's presidency and the problems faced by ethnic minorities drastically changed the general situation against ethnic minorities, and it took a long time to recover from the problems and traumas experienced. Thus, during the presidency of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the principles of respecting distinct cultural differences and ensuring equality among ethnic minority and majority were cruelly sacrificed for the national unity of the newly independent state, and not only the integration process but even the existence of ethnic minorities was threatened during those years.

Come-back of Soviet-style management of ethnicity during Shevardnadze's presidency

Geopolitical situation also changed after the dissolution of the USSR. The new Russian state – Russian Federation began to reassert its special role in the South Caucasus region. Diplomatic ties were established between Azerbaijan and Georgia on 18 November 1992. When

the former Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Eduard Shevardnadze came to power in Georgia in early 1992, the civil war in the country was still ongoing. During the first years of Shevardnadze's leadership, Georgia signed ceasefire agreements with Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatists under Russia's terms, so Russian peacekeepers deployed on the territory of Georgia. Further conflicts were avoided in Adjara, Javakheti, and Kvemo Kartli regions (Shavtvaladze, 2018). After the overthrow of Zviad Gamsakhurdia in 1992, the new president Eduard Shevardnadze refused to pursue nationalist and chauvinist policies, and his good relationship with his former fellow Politburo member Heydar Aliyev, then president of Azerbaijan, ensured safety for Georgia's ethnic Azerbaijani community. However, the government of Shevardnadze didn't make any remarkable attempts to integrate ethnic minorities such as Azerbaijanis and Armenians in the country. During this period Azerbaijan's influence in the region increased. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, "neo-Stalinism" has continued to inform the policy decisions of elites in the post-Soviet region (Aydın Bezikoğlu and Şahin, 2019). Policies by Eduard Shevardnadze were not so different from former soviet policies in the region, therefore his approach to ethnic minorities can also be considered as "neo-Stalinist".

On 24 August 1995, the current Constitution of Georgia characterized by strongly centralizing and majoritarian tendencies was adopted. Article 11.1 of the new Georgian constitution stated full equality of persons in front of the law, regardless "of race, color, sex, origin, ethnicity, language, religion, political or other views, social affiliation, property or titular status, place of residence." In addition to this, Article 11.2 stated:

"In accordance with universally recognized principles and norms of international law and the legislation of Georgia, citizens of Georgia, regardless of their ethnic and religious affiliation or language, shall have the right to maintain and develop their culture, and use their mother tongue in private and in public, without any discrimination" (Constitution of Georgia, 1995).

The new "Law on Education" which was adopted in 1997, established the obligation of the government to create conditions for mother-language primary and secondary education to be provided for ethnic minorities. Although these rights of Georgian Azerbaijanis already existed, this law was important for the legal protection of these rights.

It can clearly be seen that after the horror of ethnic nationalist policies of the early 1990s, civic nationalism was exploited as a source of peaceful consolidation, and for the integration of ethnic minorities of Georgia in the long-term perspective. During Shevardnadze's presidency, cultural needs of ethnic minorities began to be recognized again, as the Soviet-style management of ethnic groups was used again. However, the unity of the nation weakened as no

remarkable attempts had been implemented to integrate ethnic minorities in Georgian society and the influence of Azerbaijan increased in the region.

Advance of minority rights and multiculturalist policies after the “Red Rose” revolution

After the Rose Revolution in November 2003, Mikheil Saakashvili came into power and took remarkable steps towards integrating the country's ethnic minorities. Mikheil Saakashvili declared that the restoration of the territorial integrity of Georgia was one of his top priorities. In May 2004, the Adjara leader Aslan Abashidze was forced from office after protests, so the Adjara Autonomous Republic was brought back under the full control of the central government. However, Georgia's attempts to restore its territorial integration by bringing back Abkhazia and South Ossetia under the effective control of the state like the Adjara region failed. In August 2008, a deadly war erupted between Georgia and Russia, as a result, Georgia lost more territories, the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were recognized by Russia, and Russian troops were deployed to these breakaway states (Wheatley, 2009). The analyses of interviews and media findings show that ethnic minorities, including Georgian Azerbaijanis, also actively participated in the war against Russian occupation which is currently considered one of the most important unifying nation-building factors when discussing the rights of ethnic minorities in Georgia.

Following the Rose Revolution in 2003, the new “United National Movement” Government launched a series of reforms at legal and institutional levels. The Civic Integration Committee of the Georgian Parliament elaborated a formal policy conceived to bring a new dynamic to ethnic minority issues. The new government brought a new priority of “civic nationalism”, based on the idea that all citizens of Georgia, regardless of their ethnicity, have the right to fully participate in political and public life (Wheatley, 2009). One of my informed interviewees explains the significant improvements about the general situation of the ethnic minorities following the Red Rose Revolution: Laws were strengthened, ethnic minorities became more respected, equality rights were recognized... (Samira Bayramova, 33 years old activist from Marneuli)

In 2009, the Concept on Tolerance and Civil Integration, which envisioned civil integration and the protection of group identities was adopted in Georgia. The National Security Concept of Georgia was adopted in 2012, which also included several items prioritizing the protection of ethnic minorities and the importance of their inclusion in the society (Abbasov, 2016). Such legal reforms highly improved the actual condition of ethnic minorities. However, although positive legal arrangements have been made to improve the rights of religious and

ethnic minorities, serious problems are observed in the implementation of the laws, the cases of discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities are still observing, and ethnocentrism with religious motives continues to be the dominant view in the society and in the eyes of the Georgian state (Biletska and Tuncel, 2016).

In October 2012, the victory of the opposition "Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia" coalition in the elections ended Mikheil Saakashvili's government period. Findings show that after the "Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia" coalition came to power in Georgia, serious political changes took place in the country, however the programs and progress achieved for ethnic minorities during the previous government remained in force.

From the Rose Revolution until today, important steps have been taken to ensure the ethnic-cultural integration of ethnic minorities. Steps were taken to protect the unity of the nation, distinct cultural differences were emphasized and efforts were made to ensure equality among ethnic groups. In general, governmental policies after the Rose Revolution accelerated the ethno-cultural integration of Georgian Azerbaijanis in Georgian society and developed their conditions.

3.2 The case study of the Identity of Azerbaijani Minority in the Post-Soviet Period

Special identification and maintaining the culture, especially preserving the mother language are essential for the existence of ethnic minorities. At the same time, language of the dominant ethnic group is an important tool for preserving the unity of the nation-state. With the help of interviews, articles, and daily news, it is observed that the ethnonym is one of the most controversial topics among Georgian Azerbaijanis. However, a strong focus on maintaining the culture and use of the mother language is also common.

The nature of ethnic identity of Azerbaijanis in Georgia

Azerbaijanis are turkic-speaking nation which have been called Turks, Azerbaijani Turks, Tatars, Caucasian Tatars, and Azerbaijanis throughout history. Until 1937, the Soviet Union and its official documents referred to the titular nation of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan as "Turk". After 1937, the "Azerbaijani" ethnonym replaced "Turk" on official documents of Soviet Azerbaijan. According to Harun Yilmaz (2013), Soviet rulers had no choice but to construct an independent Azerbaijani identity. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly constructed "Azerbaijani" ethnonym was discredited by the new leadership under Abulfaz Elchibey, the second president of the Republic of Azerbaijan. However, after the overthrow of Abulfaz Elchibey's government, "Azerbaijani" ethnonym has been promoted

again. The newly constructed “Azerbaijani” identity is still in use by the Azerbaijani government and most scholars. The Georgian government and international institutions such as the European Council also refer to the official way of identification by the Azerbaijani government. However, the way of identification and choosing the relevant ethnonym is still a tense and controversial topic for all Azerbaijanis, including ethnic Azerbaijanis in Georgia (Altstadt, 1992).

According to the analyses of interviews, defining the way of identification is an important debate for the community and the topic comes up again and again. According to the interviewee Sakhavat Bediev from Marneuli, almost all people living in Georgia, if we ask any of them, they will give us different answers. “Georgian Azerbaijanis”, “Georgian Turks”, “Borchali Turks”, “Azerbaijani Turks”, and “Garapapakhs” are among the most popular names for self-identification. Indecision about identification makes the situation difficult for Georgian Azerbaijanis:

When we are in Georgia they say you are Azerbaijani, when we are in Azerbaijan they say you are Georgian. We are stuck in the middle. As if we are the border. We cannot feel ourselves belonging either to this side or to that side. This led to a lot of problems. (Emil Badraddinov, 22 years old youth worker from Marneuli)

Some interviewees highlight that the identity of Georgian Azerbaijanis is not different from Azerbaijanis. One of them adds:

If someone asks me what is your national music and dance, I can’t answer only about the Borchali region. Great composer Uzeyir Hajibeyli belongs to not only Azerbaijanis in Azerbaijan, but also all Azerbaijanis around the world. I am proud that Uzeyir Hajibeyli composed the first opera in the Eastern world. But if I call myself a Borchali Turk, it would mean that I refuse such great persons and achievements and culture. It is the same for all branches of the culture, such as dance, music, political figures, scientists, etc. (Aygul Isayeva, 36 years old Doctor of Philosophy, activist from Marneuli)

Other interviewees underline that the terminology and understanding of ethnonyms in the Georgian language are different from the Azerbaijani language, which makes the situation more complex:

When we say "Azerbaijani" in Georgian, it means someone from Azerbaijan, who lives in Azerbaijan and is a citizen of Azerbaijan. Or, there is no such word as "Georgian" which means citizen of Georgia, there is "Kartveli" which means ethnic Georgian. (Ziaddin Huseynov, 23 years old lawyer from Marneuli)

The fact that “Georgian” ethnonym has ethnic meaning in Georgian language and there is no clear naming for all Georgian citizens including ethnic minorities as a unified nation can

be considered as another obstacle for ethnic minority integration, as such a linguistic approach does not unify the nation and does not make ethnic minorities feel equal and included.

If we consider that the construction of identity for Georgian Azerbaijani community is the responsibility of the states, it can clearly be seen that the construction of identity for Georgian Azerbaijanis has not been completed and all efforts by the USSR, independent Azerbaijan, and independent Georgia have failed during the last century. However, it is also important that the community itself has not achieved any noteworthy results in this matter either. One of the informant interviewees concludes this complex situation as such:

We still don't know who we are. And I'd say I've been searching for an identity ever since. I still don't know who I am. If I take the current identities, it does not match my ideology, the universal system, whichever one I take. And so I think that the identity search process is not complete and I haven't found an identity for myself, that is who I really am. (Samira Bayramova, 33 years old activist from Marneuli)

Overall, almost all 9 interviewees who were asked about the identity and ethnonym issue of Georgian Azerbaijanis, answered variously and explained their views in different ways. Today, there are many ethnic groups around the world that do not have a precise ethnonym such as Crimean Tatars, Iraqi and Syrian Turkmens. The findings show that Georgian Azerbaijanis are also one of them and the naming of the identification issue of the Azerbaijani minority of Georgia is still far from solving and it is one of the main obstacles to the integration process. It is necessary for the minority community to articulate their demands for ethnonym and ethnic identity recognition more clearly.

Maintaining the culture for identity

Culture is essential for ethnic minorities to maintain their identity. That is why, language, national dances, cuisine, and national holidays have a significant place for Georgian Azerbaijanis. For successful ethnic-cultural integration of ethnic groups, this integration process should respect all distinct cultural needs of ethnic minorities (Skobla, 2001).

We may count Nowruz as a special national holiday, Eid al-Fitr (Ramazan), and Eid al-Adha (Gurban) as religious holidays for Azerbaijanis in Georgia. Mikheil Saakashvili's government declared Nowruz (21 March) a national holiday in Georgia on 21 March 2010. It was a great step for recognizing distinct cultural needs of ethnic Azerbaijanis and multicultural coexistence in the region. However, Nowruz is still not an official holiday and it is a workday for Azerbaijanis.

On the eve of the Nowruz holiday in 2021, the Azerbaijani community of Georgia requested to lift the coronavirus curfew for just only one day for the holiday, however, the

authorities didn't take into account this request. In request, on March 21, when the curfew began on the whole territory of Georgia, some Azerbaijani activists gathered in the center of Marneuli city and began dancing to express a protest and civil disobedience against the refusal from the Government of Georgia to their request. Hundreds of Marneuli citizens and some ethnic Georgians came from Tbilisi to support, and celebrated the holiday, despite curfew restrictions (Vardiashvili, 2021). In 2021, Georgian Azerbaijani activist Samira Bayramova proposed a legislative initiative to make Nowruz an official holiday in Georgia (Marneuli FM, 2021).

Additionally, Georgian Azerbaijanis try to maintain their culture through community centers, folklore groups, and various art events.

Daily use of languages and knowledge of the Georgian language

The scale of how ethnic minorities use both their mother language and the state language, which is the language of the ethnic majority, is an essential factor in understanding how distinct cultural and linguistic diversity, equality and justice are ensured, and how the unity of the nation-state is achieved (Skobla, 2001). According to the Constitution of Georgia, Georgian is the official language of Georgia, and Abkhaz language is an officially recognized regional language in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. Other spoken languages in the country such as Azerbaijani, Armenian, and Ossetian have no official status.

According to the findings and analyses of interviews, the mother languages of ethnic groups are more common for daily use in the Kvemo Kartli region. Only some Azerbaijani families who live out of the Kvemo Kartli region use the Georgian language daily, however, such cases are so uncommon. So, Azerbaijani is a more common language in Azerbaijani populated parts of the Kvemo Kartli region. In Marneuli municipality, the role of the Azerbaijani language is more than a daily communication tool of ethnic Azerbaijanis, it can be considered as lingua franca:

We speak Azerbaijani with all my close ones. We speak Azerbaijani at home, and with my circle of friends. I also have Georgian friends who started learning Azerbaijani after a while. At the moment, I am working at the bank, "Kredo Bank". When entering the credit department, even Georgians speak Azerbaijani, and so do Azerbaijanis. Because they live in such a place where 90 percent of Marneuli residents are Azerbaijanis, and the rest are Georgians and Armenians, so all of them know the Azerbaijani language. Armenians and Georgians are working with us and everyone knows our language. (Emil Badraddinov, 22 years old youth worker from Marneuli)

Findings from interviews show that as alternatives for Azerbaijani and Georgian, at government or commercial institutions of the Kvemo Kartli region, sometimes Russian and

even English may be used for inter-ethnic communication by the old and young generations, respectively.

Despite noteworthy developments made since the independence of Georgia, the knowledge of the Georgian language among ethnic minorities is still low. According to the analysis of interviews, the main reason is the education system which is not able to teach the Georgian language:

Our youth, Azerbaijanis in general, are sometimes accused of not knowing Georgian. There are about 1,000 students in the school, and there are only 3-4 Georgian language teachers in the school. There are almost 1-2 hours of Georgian language lessons per week. There is this problem. One student speaks Azerbaijani at home, goes out on the street in Azerbaijani, speaks Azerbaijani at school, and takes a total of 15 hours of Georgian language lessons per month. That is, the language cannot be learned by this. In fact, 3-4 teachers in a school for a thousand people are not able to teach physically. (Sakhavat Bediev, 25 years old lawyer, activist from Marneuli)

He also highlights the difficulty of the Georgian language as well and mentions that old words of the Georgian language are known by only fluent Georgian speakers and such words are an obstacle to being a fluent Georgian speaker. Additionally, the historical background is also important, as ethnic minorities didn't feel compelled to learn the Georgian language during Tsar Russian and Soviet times, as the Russian language had more importance.

Findings show that ethnic Azerbaijanis protect their linguistic differences by asserting their mother tongue in their daily and cultural lives. However, their problematic and limited opportunities to learn the national language remain an obstacle to unify the nation-state.

Barriers for ethnic minorities who don't know Georgian

Despite the use of other languages for inter-ethnic communication, ethnic minorities still face barriers if they don't know Georgian. Interview findings show that adults and illiterate young people who are the majority of Georgian Azerbaijanis don't know Georgian. Participants highlight that adults had no opportunities to learn Georgian during the USSR, as Russian language had far more priority than Georgian language. Today, only literate young Azerbaijanis in the region know Georgian. Barriers for ethnic minorities who don't know Georgian mostly occur in state institutions. My interviewee who personally examined such barriers mentions:

For example, many workplaces require you to speak Georgian. But according to the laws, I have the right to go to any state body in my own language, in the place where I live, of course, to apply and solve my case. There is even a law that if the state body does not have an employee who speaks the language of an ethnic minority, the state is obliged to bring a translator at its own expense. However, you can't see it in any state body... For example, I myself have repeatedly applied to the Marneuli court in the Azerbaijani language, and they

demand that you have to write in Georgian. And it caused a lot of tension. There are such problems. (Sakhavat Bediev, 25 years old lawyer, activist from Marneuli)

Another interviewee concludes as such:

We are facing big problems almost everywhere. When you go to a market, if the seller is Georgian, if you want something, if you cannot say it in Georgian, they look at you very badly and have a psychological effect on you that you have not been able to learn Georgian language. There are so many serious problems. (Samaya Hasanova, 20 years old journalist from Marneuli)

Additionally, the internet websites and social media pages of the municipalities with the Azerbaijani majority population (except Marneuli Municipality) post only in Georgian language which evidently limits the information flow for ethnic minorities.

In order to achieve national unity, which is one of the elements of the triadic structure of the integration conceptualized by Daniel Skobla (2001), Georgia compulsorily educates the Georgian language across the country. However, because of the problems in the education system, the state language cannot be taught effectively, which weakens equal opportunities among ethnic minorities and harms the integration process.

3.3 Assimilation Policies and Discrimination Cases

Many modern nation-states choose a policy of assimilation of ethnic minorities living within their territories for sustaining the unity of the nation. The 'eye' of a nation-state often sees only one dominant ethnic-cultural nation - the other self-articulated ethnic groups are just residual, unimportant cases (Skobla, 2001). However, such an approach ignores distinct cultural needs of ethnic minorities and leads to inequality between minority and majority groups. Interview results show that it is possible to encounter these examples in Georgia too. The changing of original toponyms into Georgian and the promotion of Georgian Orthodox Church can be included in these examples.

This chapter, in addition to assimilation policies, tries to clarify cases of discrimination by the state institutions or ordinary society members.

Changing toponyms into Georgian

Toponyms are one of the strongest of national symbols, because, sometimes the national toponymy is the only witness to verify that a territory belongs to a particular ethnic group. The existence of these names clearly defines the territory of the indigenous ethnic group and is one of the most essential expressions of the national identity. The daily and official use of national place names ensures historical continuity, preservation of the uniqueness of a nation (Pospelov,

1992). The deliberate change of toponyms by states can be seen as an instrument to preserve the unity of the nation or the construction of national identity. However, such a policy by nation states undermines the equal rights and distinct ethnic-cultural differences of minority groups.

The change of region, city and village names in Georgia started from the Soviet period, as the Soviet practice of altering toponyms for their political or ideological purposes is well known. For example, until 1947, the name of Marneuli in the Kvemo Kartli region was Borchali, Dmanisi was Bashkhechid, and Gardabani was Garatepe (Chobanov, Chobanli, 2012). The study about changing toponyms in Soviet Georgia by Ahmadzada (2022) reveals that the sense of insecurity against the ethnic Azerbaijani population intensified, and the change of Azerbaijani toponyms was carried out more rapidly, especially after the Second World War. The policy of altering historical toponyms advanced following the independence of Georgia and such policy is opposed with constant concerns and protests from local residents of the settlements. All participants in interviews mentioned that they were extremely worried about the policy of changing toponyms. One of them explains how the officials tried to justify this policy:

People didn't even know what they were signing. They didn't know the Georgian language and they were informed wrongly and given the documents for signing. In reality, they were signing on the documents about changing the name of the village. (Aygul Isayeva, 36 years old Doctor of Philosophy, activist from Marneuli)

Additionally, interviewees highlight that for some Georgians, Azerbaijanis are newcomers, therefore changing toponyms is justifiable. However, interviewees add that Georgian Azerbaijanis are indigenous people of the region, so the toponyms ought not to be changed.

Christianization policies and Georgian Orthodox Church

Georgian Church is an autocephalous Eastern Orthodox church and has influence over both state and ethnic minorities. Despite various challenges at each period of the post-Soviet independent Georgia, God and the symbolic attachment to religion played an essential role in Georgian society, therefore religion or religious aspects are quite often referred to by officials. It could be argued that the post-Soviet internal and external politics of Georgia is a mixture of symbolism, authority of religion and cultural values (Matsaberidze, 2014). As the Georgian Orthodox Church has transformed itself into a national symbol, nationalism in Georgia is ethnic-religious rather than civic-secular, and it is quite challenging to develop an inclusive national identity with such a strong link between religion and identity. Since the Georgian Orthodox Church is highly legitimate in the eyes of Georgian citizens, it has the potential to

influence the public opinion and to mobilize people for political aims. The strength of religion as a component of national identity is closely related to discrimination, minority rights violations and violence. The stronger religious nationalism is, the greater the probability of discrimination, minority rights violations and violence (Aydingun, 2013).

In October 2002, the special constitutional agreement between the Georgian State and Georgian Orthodox Church was signed which was the demonstration of the growing religious influence of the church over the society and state. The agreement reminds medieval concordats between pope and governments. The concordat contemplates “the constitutional agreement between Church and State” and recognizes “the Georgian Orthodox Church’s special role in the history of Georgia” (Zedania, 2011). Such supremacy of the religious institution of the majority ethnic-religious group of the state creates an obstacle for minority groups to realize their ethnic-religious freedom equally.

Interview findings also show that the special power and influence of the church is one of the main obstacle for ethnic minority integration process:

In general, I would say that the biggest problem in Georgia is the Georgian church. Which in no way wants to see the ethnic minorities living in Georgia as citizens with equal rights. And in no way do they want them to develop more here, live here and have a certain status. (Samira Bayramova, 33 years old activist from Marneuli)

Additionally, the Georgian church usually determines official religious holidays, therefore such decisions exclude ethnic and religious minorities.

As a part of the Christianization process, crosses are built on remote mountainous areas in the Kvemo Kartli region by religious Georgians. Interviewees add that the Georgian church confiscates the areas of the local people around the churches.

Discrimination by state institutions

Common attitude towards ethnic minorities in Georgia is usually associated with discrimination cases, as almost all interviewees confirmed that. Ayhan Hasanov, law student in Tbilisi State University, describes discriminatory attitude by state institutions with the following speech:

In general, Georgia's state policy never shows its discrimination plainly, but there is deep and systematic discrimination against ethnic minorities. In all these state structures, it seems that they have systematically created a framework in their imagination for ethnic minorities, in which their rights should be realized only within this framework. If you try to get out of this framework or demand more, they create other artificial barriers and start seeing ethnic minorities as a threat. (Ayhan Hasanov, 22 years old lawyer, activist from Tbilisi)

Some participants underline the issue that the government does not approve the construction of new mosques:

We also cannot explain why mosques should not be officially registered. Or the construction of a new mosque is not allowed. When a new church is built, it can be built freely, without any problems. We ethnic nations do not object to this. However, when ethnic minorities want to build a mosque, this is a major problem, either by government agencies or by other nationalities, and is not officially registered. (Sakhavat Bediev, 25 years old lawyer, activist from Marneuli)

The participants add that the safety of the mosques are also not being protected effectively by the state institutions. Municipalities in ethnic Azerbaijani majority regions allocate far more money to churches than mosques. In the 2023 budget, Marneuli City Hall has allocated a total of 420,000 lari for religious and historical buildings. The Municipality allocated 400,000 lari to the buildings under Georgian Church, and just 20,000 lari for communal expenses of mosques and other religious institutions. The decision was followed by protests of social activists and they appealed to the court due to discrimination, however the higher courts did not grant the appeal (24News, 2023).

Unfair land privatization is another example of discriminatory and problematic approach by the state which increased tensions in the region. After the fall of the Soviet Union, large areas of state-owned lands could not be maintained by the new Georgian government any longer, and a need for their privatization arose. Nationalist government of Georgia argued that privatization of lands populated by ethnic minorities who lived in border regions may lead to irredentist sentiment. In 1992, privatization law was passed on certain conditions with regard to the border regions, such as the ban on owning land within 21 kilometers from the state border. Large areas of arable land in Gardabani and Marneuli regions were transferred to the control of the Ministry of Defense, and many families lost their land. In March 2006, there was an Azerbaijani demonstration held in Marneuli against unfair land privatization, and several participants of the rally were detained (Caucasus Institute of Peace, Democracy and Development, 2006). Additionally, the privatization process of the lands could not be carried out in a transparent system and the privatized lands were transferred to people close to the Georgian administration and a very small number of Georgian Azerbaijanis. Most of the people who buy these lands were ethnic Georgians, and since some of the people who buy the lands did not live in this region, they rented the lands they bought to the local farmers. This situation worsened the economic situation of Georgian Azerbaijanis in the region (Yılmaz and Öğütücü, 2016).

Owning real estate has also been a problem for Georgian Azerbaijanis, especially in certain regions. For example, some of the participants approve that officials and ethnic Georgian residents don't sell real estate to ethnic Azerbaijanis in the Bolnisi region of Kvemo Kartli:

There is no Azerbaijani living in the center of Bolnisi. For Azerbaijanis living there, whether for business or living, etc. the house is not for sale. Natarius doesn't register it either. (Samira Bayramova, 33 years old activist from Marneuli)

Although, discrimination based on ethnicity and religion is common in military units in post-soviet countries, the attitude towards ethnic minorities in Georgian military can be considered satisfactory, according to the findings from interviews:

As for the fact that national minorities face some problems in the military, I would say that there is no discrimination in the military units. Of course, there are misunderstandings among the soldiers themselves on some issues, but no cases of discrimination are allowed by the commanders and management. Even though Christians are the majority in the military units, conditions are created for praying of Muslims. I have not heard of cases of discrimination in recent times. (Mamed Mirzayev, 40 years old school manager from Marneuli)

The analyses of interviews summarize that although there is enough legal basis for the rights of ethnic minorities, declaration equality of minority groups is usually not implemented properly in real life. According to the findings, the equality element of the triadic structure of integration has been grossly violated by the state.

Discrimination by society

The chauvinist leader of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia was overthrown from power in 1992, however his followers did not forget his nationalist and chauvinist ideas so quickly. Interviewees mention that Georgian Azerbaijanis are called "tatrebi" (tatar) by some Georgians which is not a simple naming but racist and discriminatory approach:

Some Georgians think that Azerbaijanis, they also say "tatrebi", are newcomers to those regions. No, from their grandparents, they lived in that region, grew up there, took root there. That is, they didn't come from any region of Azerbaijan. From any other region, Central Asia, etc., as some people think. But they didn't come. (Ayhan Hasanov, 22 years old lawyer, activist from Tbilisi)

Another informant interviewee, Sakhavat Bediev also emphasizes the fact and adds that such hostile, racist approaches are usually not common among the new generation, but older people.

Interviewees mention various discrimination cases at the workplace such as the priority to Georgians when ethnic Georgian and Azerbaijani apply for the same job. Additionally,

discriminatory cases at workplace are also common, as one of our informant interviewee mentions:

If there is a conflict between two people, if some disagreement takes place and one of them is Azerbaijani and one is Georgian, the advantage here is on the side of Georgian, not Azerbaijani. We see this in our daily life and where we work. (Emil Badraddinov, 22 years old youth worker from Marneuli)

Azerbaijan and Georgia share a 480-kilometer-long border line, a third of which has not yet been delimited since the collapse of the Soviet Union and independence of states. Disputed zones on the border include some parts of the large medieval monastery complex that is composed of over 20 monasteries, as well as hundreds of monastic cells and chapels which are called “David Gareja” by Georgia and “Keşikçidağ” by Azerbaijan. On 14 July 2019, Georgian Orthodox Christian parishioners and a group of ultra-nationalist activists confronted Azerbaijani border guards and events led to serious tensions between two countries (OC Media, 2019). Following the tension, Azerbaijani and Georgian authorities tried to avoid this topic in public discussions and negotiations for the delimitation process are still continuing. However, it is important to mention that the tension was followed by discriminatory speech in the society against ethnic Azerbaijanis of Georgia. Georgian Azerbaijanis were the object of the target of radical and ultra-nationalist Georgians during the issue. 22 years old ethnic Azerbaijani law student Ayhan Hasanov describes that the David Gareji issue was an opportunity for far-right groups in Georgia. Another interviewee explains the situation as such:

We were discriminated against in such a way that “you remain silent. You live in Georgia, but you take the side of Azerbaijan when it comes to these issues. Why?!” (Emil Badraddinov, 22 years old youth worker from Marneuli)

Another case, which was followed by discriminatory, and sometimes racist approach against Georgian Azerbaijanis was the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in Georgia. As one of the first coronavirus infected people in Georgia was ethnic Azerbaijani from the Kvemo Kartli region, discriminatory approach stereotypes emerged against Georgian Azerbaijanis. Following this case, ethnic Azerbaijani majority regions were declared as “red zones” by the government for several months because of coronavirus risk, so scapegoating and stereotypes continued as well.

3.4 Education and Ethnic Minorities

Education system has always been one of the most essential tools for ethnic minorities to preserve their identity, culture and mother language, while states use it to assimilate or integrate and unify ethnic minorities around the dominant ethnic group according to their

nation-building policies. This chapter clarifies how education policies for ethnic minorities have been changed since the independence of Georgia, how these developments affected the situation of ethnic minorities and what kind of education policies are expected by ethnic minorities.

How has education for ethnic minorities changed?

During the Soviet period, Georgian Azerbaijanis had their own schools in their mother language and higher education in mother language or in Russian was approachable around the USSR, including in Azerbaijan SSR. According to the analyses of interviews, after gaining independence from the USSR, Georgia mainly continued the same education policy, in which Georgian Azerbaijani schools were mainly integrated into the education system of Azerbaijan rather than Georgia. During the first years of the independence, the textbooks for Azerbaijani sections were brought from Azerbaijan and Georgian Azerbaijanis preferred universities in Azerbaijan to the universities in Georgia. The situation of textbooks in mother language is still in bad condition which makes the quality of education low. Some participants express that there is a textbook shortage, some textbooks are sent by Azerbaijan, which increases the Azerbaijani influence and mentality which is also considered as an obstacle for the integration of Georgian Azerbaijanis.

From the independence of Georgia to 2010, ethnic minorities did not have enough opportunity to get higher education in universities of Georgia, as they did not know Georgian language well and all exams were in Georgian language. This tendency was remarkably changed after 2010, thanks to the “1+4” system which allows non-Georgian speaking university applicants to take only the general skills exam in their native language. “1+4” system which gives an opportunity to ethnic minorities to learn Georgian language for a year in the university, then study a Bachelor's degree for four years was introduced by Mikheil Saakashvili's government following the Red Rose Revolution. After the introduction of the “1+4” system in 2010, the number of ethnic Azerbaijani students in the universities has significantly increased. The chart below shows the number of Georgian Azerbaijani students entered Georgian universities from the start of “1+4” program to the COVID-19 pandemic, from 2010 to 2020, respectively:

Table 2. The number of ethnic Azerbaijani Students Admitted to the Bachelor's Degree of the Universities in Georgia, from 2010 to 2020

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of students	182	252	389	714	468	541	668	690	806	912	956

Source: National Assessment and Examinations Center of Georgia

Interviewees highlight that the new generation has more interethnic and interregional friends than the older generation thanks to the “1+4” program which boosts not only interethnic, but also integration among Azerbaijanis from various municipalities. One participant describes as such:

It helps the integration too, as five years is not a short period. One leaves the village, develop their language skills for five years. They communicate and attend the same classes, lectures with Georgians. It is the opportunity to show their culture to them, as well as learn their culture. There will be opportunities to deepen friendship and brotherhood. (Aygul Isayeva, 36 years old Doctor of Philosophy, activist from Marneuli)

Details from the findings uncover problems related to the “1+4” system too. The program was introduced as a pilot program, however it has not been updated or improved since its launch. Additionally, “1+4” program is not effective in all universities as the Georgian language is not taught well enough in every university and in some cases students graduate from the university without knowing the Georgian language.

Georgia's educational policies for ethnic minorities have gradually improved since independence, despite remarkable shortcomings and problems. The system respects distinct differences by recognizing the right of ethnic minorities to education in their mother language, contributing to the unity of the nation by trying to teach the state language, and ensuring equality for ethnic minorities and ethnic majority with special programs such as "1+4". That is why despite shortcomings and problems, the education system of Georgia can be considered as a factor that has a positive influence on the ethnic-cultural integration process.

“Bilingual university” suggestion

Findings uncover that there is a lack of teachers in Azerbaijani sectors of the schools. Specifically, there is a serious demand for Azerbaijani language and literature teachers. In order to solve the shortage of teachers in Azerbaijani sectors of the schools, activist Aygul Isayeva suggested opening a bilingual university in which both Georgian and Azerbaijani languages will be taught and the pedagog shortage problem will be solved (Aktual, 2022). Pedagogue,

former school director from Marneuli, Mamed Mirzayev confirms the importance of such a university and adds:

One of the advantages of a bilingual university will be that the person who graduates from teaching will know the state language, and because of that, innovations in education in Georgia, implemented projects, will all be accessible. Otherwise, if we only finish with the Azerbaijani language, we will remain outside the processes and development will be very difficult. (Mamed Mirzayev, 40 years old school manager from Marneuli)

However, some of the informant interviewees disagreed with the idea and mentioned that there is no need for such a university, and it may avoid the integration process of ethnic minorities.

3.5 Effects of Foreign Influence in the Kvemo Kartli Region

The South Caucasus region covers a complex geography at the intersection of Europe and Asia, where geopolitical interests overlap. In the center of the South Caucasus region, at the meeting point of the three countries located in the region, on strategic transport routes and as it covers areas inhabited by groups belonging to different backgrounds, the Kvemo Kartli region is in the sphere of interest of foreign powers.

Findings show that Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russia, Iran, Türkiye, United States and EU are among the countries which have special interests and strategies in the region. Türkiye's influence in the Georgian Azerbaijanis is rooted in ethnic ties and it is deeper in Sunni Muslim communities. While Iran has effective influence on religious Shia Muslim Georgian Azerbaijanis (Asker and Ögütücü, 2016). External influences can in some cases have a positive and in some cases a negative effect on the process of integration of ethnic minorities into the nation-state while preserving their distinct differences. In this chapter, the influence of Azerbaijan and Western institutions such as the Council of Europe and European Union and the effect of this influence on the integration process of ethnic minorities in the region are explained.

Influence of Azerbaijan in the region

Because of the historical, geographic, geopolitical, economic and cultural background of Kvemo Kartli, Azerbaijan is undoubtedly the most influential foreign country in the region and a keen state for Georgian Azerbaijanis. Today, infrastructure megaprojects such as railroads, gas and oil pipelines that connect Azerbaijan to Türkiye and Europe run through the Kvemo Kartli region of Georgia. Azerbaijani state-run oil company SOCAR (The State Oil Company of the Republic of Azerbaijan) and its subsidiary SOCAR Georgia Petroleum is one

of the largest investors in Georgia and the largest taxpayer for many years (Report, 2021). While most of the participants describe Georgian Azerbaijanis as beneficiaries of Georgia-Azerbaijan economic, political and cultural partnership, some interviewees describe this partnership as a great obstacle for the integration process of Georgian Azerbaijanis, as both sides have their own political and business interests.

When interviewees were asked about the influence of Azerbaijan in the Kvemo Kartli region, almost all of them underlined payment of university tuition fees for Georgian Azerbaijani students by SOCAR as the most effective and productive support. Details from the findings show that the majority of Georgian Azerbaijani families are economically disadvantaged and they may not be able to study at universities if the SOCAR don't pay tuition fees. 36 years old Doctor of Philosophy, activist Aygul Isayeva from Marneuli, calls attention to the reality that even the "1+4" program would not have such importance and effectiveness, if there was no SOCAR's annual fee payment as the majority of Georgian Azerbaijani families are low-income. She adds that thanks to the payment of the tuition fees by SOCAR, Georgian Azerbaijanis will be well educated and aware of their rights. Another interviewee describes this support as such:

This itself has a great impact on the literacy of Azerbaijani children. Because the situation in the village is such that every family does not have the opportunity to educate their children. SOCAR's funding helped more young people to continue their studies. (Emil Badraddinov, 22 years old youth worker from Marneuli)

The informant participants mention that SOCAR not only pays tuition fees of the university, but also funds public organizations such as "Tea House" which prepares young people for the university exams. They add that schools, kindergartens, sport complexes, and social projects for people with disabilities have regularly been realized by either SOCAR or Heydar Aliyev Foundation.

Another presence of Azerbaijan in the region is the Integration Center of Georgian Azerbaijanis which has been established in 2019 and is funded by The Diaspora Committee of Azerbaijan (Report, 2019). Aygul Isayeva, former director of the Center informs that many courses for young people are taught at Integration Center of Georgian Azerbaijanis and it helps young people to spend their time productively, learning languages.

While affirming the benefits of the payment of tuition fees by SOCAR, Georgian Azerbaijani activist Samira Bayramova also reminds of the obligations of the Georgian state:

As a citizen of Georgia, why should the state of Azerbaijan provide for my educational, cultural and social life? I am a taxpayer here like everyone else. I do not pay quota tax. As Georgians pay 24 percent tax, I pay 24 percent tax. Why

should SOCAR build the school for me? Why should SOCAR protect my culture? Why should SOCAR pay my tuition fee? (Samira Bayramova, 33 years old activist from Marneuli)

According to the analysis of the interviews, migration to Azerbaijan has always been a common option among Georgian Azerbaijanis since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Thousands of Georgian Azerbaijanis have switched their citizenship as dual citizenship is not officially permitted both in Georgia and Azerbaijan. One of the informant participants mentioned that following the collapse of the Soviet Union, access to Azerbaijani citizenship caused the mass fleeing of Azerbaijanis from the Borchali (Kvemo Kartli) region. When the interviewees were asked about their point of view about dual citizenship in the future, a half of them expressed their intentions, while another half of them opposed the idea as it may weaken the integration process and may cause doubts among Georgians about the loyalty of Georgian Azerbaijanis to the state.

Although the serious influence of Azerbaijan on the Kvemo Kartli region has a positive effect on the preservation of the distinct cultural needs and development of the ethnic Azerbaijanis living there, in some cases, it slows down the unity of the nation and the nation-building process in Georgia.

Council of Europe membership of Georgia and ethnic minorities

Following independence in 1991, Georgia became a full-fledged member of the Council of Europe in 1999. Georgia has pledged to respect “its statutory obligations and specific commitments in order to improve democracy, the rule of law and human rights in the country” following the adoption of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. In the same year, the line indicating ethnicity was removed from newly issued Georgian ID cards and passports. Shortly before adopting the European Convention, Georgia joined the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, “obliging the state to protect the rights of minorities” (Council of Europe, 2015). Georgia was accepted into the European Union’s European Neighborhood Policy Program in 2004. In 2005, the Framework Convention of the Council of Europe for the Protection of National Minorities was ratified (Aslanov, 2016).

All interviewees agree that obligations accepted by Georgia following the Council of Europe membership led to a positive tendency related to ethnic minority rights. 36 years old Doctor of Philosophy, activist Aygul Isayeva from Marneuli, stated that Georgia's admission to the Council of Europe opened the way for financial assistance and grants for projects for ethnic minorities and education.

Potential European Union membership of Georgia and ethnic minorities

Following the Red Rose Revolution in 2003, Georgia turned its direction to Euro-Atlantic space. Even this European ambition is included in the Georgian Constitution, as it states: “The constitutional bodies shall take all measures within the scope of their competences to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.”

The Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union was signed in 2014 which was a great step to European integration and it also affected the welfare of citizens (Kawecka-Wyrzykowska, 2015). In the same year, anti-discrimination law was adopted by the Georgian Parliament. This legislation became an essential tool for the legal protection of the rights of minority groups. As a result of the success achieved by the Georgian government about the European integration and visa liberalization process, all Georgian citizens can travel visa-free to all European Union member countries from 2017. The implementation of these agreements with the European Union is a major external stimulus for democracy, rule of law, human rights, and minority integration in Georgia. According to the findings from interviews, such developments reduced mass emigration of Georgian Azerbaijanis from Georgia.

The analyses of interviews show that all participants positively assessed Georgia's European Union candidacy and potential European Union membership. They mentioned that potential European Union membership will definitely improve the situation of ethnic minority rights in Georgia:

Of course, the accession of Georgia to the European Union will change the situation positively. Because joining the European Union means the positive and high implementation of the obligations imposed by the European Union. One of the main components of this is the high legal status of ethnic minorities within the state... Both positive and negative rights of ethnic minorities will be protected by the state, and they will have real opportunities to exercise their rights. (Ayhan Hasanov, 22 years old lawyer, activist from Tbilisi)

Some of the participants also mention that non-governmental organizations that represent ethnic minorities can receive more funding from European institutions for their projects, so potential European Union membership will have a positive effect on the issues of ethnic minorities.

In 2022, 19 non-governmental organizations and community centers that mostly represent Georgian Azerbaijanis jointly manifested that they support Georgia's European integration and potential European Union Membership (Gundalik - Gurbatov, 2022).

3.6 Political Participation and Local Self-Governance in the Kvemo Kartli Region

Skobla (2001) defines ethnic rights as collective rights and argues that any majority-minority ethnic relations and institutional arrangements should reflect the principle of collective rights. Political participation of ethnic groups is among the main elements of these collective rights. Active political participation in different branches of governance such as legislative, central executive, court and local municipality is one of the most essential ways to protect the identity, culture and rights of ethnic minorities. According to the findings, although ethnic minorities are hardly represented in the central executive and judicial branches, they are represented in the Parliament of Georgia and in the governance of the municipalities where they compactly live. This section explains how ethnic minorities and politicians among them participate in the political life of Georgia and how effective political configuration and local self-governance are in order to solve problems of ethnic minorities.

Politicians of minority groups and elections

Georgian Azerbaijanis participated in the legislative bodies throughout the history of the Republic of Georgia. For example, Akif Hasanov, Georgian Azerbaijani from Marneuli, was one of the parliament members who signed the declaration about the independence of Georgia from the Soviet Union in 1991 (Radio Marneuli, 2023). Political participation of ethnic Azerbaijanis in Georgian Parliament continued during the following years including Eduard Shevarnadze's and Mikheil Saakashvili's period and increased significantly during the ruling of the "Georgian Dream" government since 2012. The 2016 Parliamentary Elections became one of the most active and competitive ones in the Kvemo Kartli region. As a result, 4 Georgian Azerbaijani candidates were elected as the Member of Parliament representing both ruling and opposition parties (Shiriyev, 2016). Despite participation in the legislative branch of Georgia, former candidate for municipal council in Marneuli, Sakhavat Bediev thinks that Azerbaijanis are still underrepresented in political life of Georgia:

Almost half a million ethnic Azerbaijanis live here, but we don't have enough politicians. In reality, our politicians are very few. (Sakhavat Bediev, 25 years old lawyer, activist from Marneuli)

In regard to Georgia's democratic and political development, it is essential to note the 2017 constitutional amendments which have started to be implemented after the 2018 presidential election. According to the changes in the political system, Georgia moved from the existing mixed electoral and semi-presidential system to a proportionally elected parliamentary system where the president is chosen by the special electoral council instead of direct election

(Venice Commission, 2018). However, it should also be mentioned that despite noticeable progress, the political system of Georgia can still be described as a hybrid, unstable, and unconsolidated democracy. This is due to the negative effects of the chaotic transformation Georgia has undergone while engaged in building an independent and new state from the ashes of the Soviet totalitarian regime.

The lack of equality principle of the triadic structure by Skobla (2001) manifests itself more clearly in the issues related to political participation in the current political system of Georgia.

Local governance and rights of ethnic minorities

Local self-governance of the municipalities has an essential role in daily life of the citizens of Georgia. The Kvemo Kartli region consists of 6 municipalities and 1 special status city, Rustavi. According to the Local Self-government Code of Georgia (2018), the bodies of self-government at the level of municipalities are a representative council (sakrebulo), directly elected for a four-year term, and an executive branch, headed by a mayor, directly elected for a four-year term.

Details from the findings show that, despite being a majority, Georgian Azerbaijanis have not been elected as a mayor in Bolnisi and Dmanisi municipalities. As there are no ethnic Azerbaijani mayors and not enough Azerbaijani workers in Gardabani, Dmanisi, Bolnisi municipalities, communication with local inhabitants fails. Public service in the mother language of ethnic minorities is not provided either:

In accordance with the requirements of the Georgian legislation on the mother language and the framework convention, services in the language of ethnic minorities should be provided and this opportunity should be created for them in municipalities in regions where ethnic minorities live compactly. However, it can be said that such a service is not implemented in any region where ethnic minorities live compactly. This is a violation of the law. (Ayhan Hasanov, 22 years old lawyer, activist from Tbilisi)

In Marneuli municipality, the situation is slightly different, as mayors are ethnic Azerbaijanis, and they are represented in various works within the municipality. However, participants mention that although more than 80 percent of the population in Marneuli are ethnic Azerbaijanis, far less percent of workers of the municipality are Azerbaijanis and they are in low positions. Additionally, municipalities in the Kvemo Kartli region allocate more money and investment to cultural houses and community buildings of Georgian villages than Azerbaijani villages. The analyses uncover that the situation of the infrastructure is also unequal:

If you are clearly comparing Georgian village and Azerbaijani village, one village still does not have drinking water for the community, but sports complexes are being built, race tracks are being built, and a cultural center is being built in another village. However, in the places where Azerbaijanis live, there is still no drinking water, transportation, or roads. Can you imagine how many barriers there are? (Samira Bayramova, 33 years old activist from Marneuli)

Such noticeable differences between Azerbaijani and Georgian villages of the Kvemo Kartli region can be considered as the appearance of a discriminative and unequal approach by the state institutions and bureaucrats.

Non-governmental organizations and community centers are also essential for minority communities in order to preserve their culture and identity. Such centers not only preserve local culture, but also bring young people from various backgrounds together and provide them with non-formal education. Some interviewees also confirm that in the last 6-7 years, new NGOs and community centers have been founded which are effective and useful for young people.

3.7 Peaceful Co-Existence and Conflict Risks in the Kvemo Kartli Region

The Kvemo Kartli region of Georgia differs from other multi-ethnic regions of the South Caucasus due to the peaceful co-existence of various ethnic groups such as Azerbaijanis, Georgians, Armenians, Russians, Greeks and others, as well as people of different faiths, such as Shia Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Orthodox, and Armenian Apostolic Christians. This chapter analyzes main reasons for peaceful co-existence of ethnic groups and potential conflict risks in the region and how these risks may damage the unity of the nation-state of Georgia and may lead to segregation.

Reasons for peaceful co-existence of ethnic groups in the Kvemo Kartli region

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, many regions with significant ethnic minorities faced deadly conflicts. However, the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia or Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) regions was not repeated in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions which are mostly populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians, respectively. Radio Free (2020) video reportage published following the Second Karabakh War presents how ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians live peacefully together in Tsophi village of Marneuli region. The residents of the village mention that they try to avoid sensitive discussions that may lead to conflict and try to keep up with their daily life.

Interview findings show that the long-lasting Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis have not been able to cause serious inter-ethnic conflicts in the

Kvemo Kartli region either. When they were asked about the main reasons for peaceful co-existence, participants mentioned various but constructive points. One of them highlighted multi-ethnic education system:

For example, In Marneuli, there are Georgian and Azerbaijani schools. Azerbaijanis, Georgians, Ajars, and Armenians study together in these schools. Everyone supports each other. (Emil Badraddinov, 22 years old youth worker from Marneuli)

Another interviewee emphasizes cultural similarities among these ethnic groups:

One of the main reasons in general, although we may not admit it, is the cultural similarity of the people living in the Caucasus region, despite the many conflicts, the similarity of our roots. (Ayhan Hasanov, 22 years old lawyer, activist from Tbilisi)

Sakhavat Bediev gives an example from Marneuli, and calls attention to the benefits from peaceful co-existence:

For example, if I take Marneuli, there are also large Armenian villages, such as Shulaver, Shaumyan. They are neighborhoods, and there are mixed villages. Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijanis are neighbors. You don't want to be an enemy to your neighbor, you don't want to quarrel every day when you go out the door. You study together, you work together, you shop together, you use the same market. In general, in view of such things, hostility does not benefit both sides, and if hostility arises, it is an obstacle to almost everything. Education, work, living in the state, and the new generation become in danger. For example, if large villages are hostile to each other, you can no longer let your child out. (Sakhavat Bediev, 25 years old lawyer, activist from Marneuli)

Most of the participants approve that people accept peaceful co-existence as normal from their childhood, as they live in close neighborhoods in the region. However, some interviewees focus attention on international factors, especially the role of Azerbaijan:

And, I think, another main factor is the Azerbaijan factor. Azerbaijan gives a great advantage to Georgia in economic relations and uses it as a transit, whether it is from the point of view of oil and gas pipelines, or from the point of view of access to Turkiye and the world in general. Therefore, Azerbaijan has a great interest in stability here. (Mamed Mirzayev, 40 years old school manager from Marneuli)

Findings show that respect for distinct cultural differences and efforts by the Georgian state to unify the nation have avoided serious conflicts and led to peaceful co-existence in the region.

Potential conflict risks in the Kvemo Kartli region

Despite the peaceful co-existence in the region, some scandals that have occurred in recent years and the tense atmosphere that happened after them make us think about potential conflict risks.

The Gakh region of Azerbaijan is on the agenda of irredentist ideologies of Georgian far-right groups, while the Kvemo Kartli (Borchali) region of Georgia is also sometimes referred to as “historical part” of Azerbaijan. In 2015, a football scandal happened between Azerbaijani and Georgian football fans. During the games, nationalist and irredentist banners which claim “historical lands” in the territory of Azerbaijan and Georgia were raised by football fans of both sides. These provocations led to several clashes between Georgian and Azerbaijani football fans. The Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gharibashvili expressed concern over the hostilities between the two football clubs (Caucasian Knot, 2015). Findings show that the scandal increased and fueled discriminatory approaches against Georgian Azerbaijanis too.

Because of inter-ethnic clashes in early 1990s and mass eco-migration of Svans to the region after the 1987 landslide in Svaneti region, the relationships between ethnic Azerbaijanis and Georgians can be characterized by a high degree of mutual distrust in Dmanisi and Bolnisi regions, unlike other regions of Kvemo Kartli. In May 2021, in Dmanisi city of the Kvemo Kartli region, a fight occurred at a local shop between dozens of eco-migrant Svans and local ethnic Azerbaijani groups. On the same night, ethnic Azerbaijani community announced that a protest rally would take place in the city the next day. During the next day, the situation became worse and unmanageable for most of the day: two communities armed with stones and truncheons clashed. The conflict was pacified only after the arrival of Special Forces of the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Interior Minister of Georgia, state officials, and religious leaders arrived in Dmanisi to assess the situation. Azerbaijani Embassy in Georgia also reacted to the incident. Clashes of this magnitude in the surrounding Kvemo Kartli region last occurred in the 1980s (Jam News, 2021).

The analyses of the interviews show that the historically cold relationship between ethnic Azerbaijanis and ecomigrant Svans is the main reason for Dmanisi events. Unlike other regions of Kvemo Kartli, in Dmanisi, various ethnic groups, mainly ethnic Azerbaijanis and Svans have lived together for many years, but they don't know each other's culture deeply. Some interviewees accuse state bodies for their persistent inaction and unequal, discriminatory approach:

Because the state bodies were too late, they did not intervene in time. Everyone knew that the reason for the conflict there was not beer, but something deeper. Conflicts were happening for years, but no necessary steps were taken. The reason was that the state authorities, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, did not provide the necessary answers. Many Azerbaijanis were beaten and subjected to violence by ethnic Svans, but the police did not initiate any criminal proceedings in this regard. Similarly, after the Dmanisi incident, there is no information about how many people were arrested and how many people were punished. No one was caught or punished. (Ayhan Hasanov, 22 years old lawyer, activist from Tbilisi)

According to the interviewees, urgent and fair action by state bodies during the conflicts and ethnic integration can eliminate the conflict risks in the problematic regions such as Dmanisi Municipality. Findings show that failure to apply an equal approach to the ethnic groups increases the risks of conflict in the region, thereby endangering both the unity of the nation and the preservation of ethno-cultural differences, thus leading to the failure of the integration process as a whole.

3.8 Media and Ethnic Minorities in the Kvemo Kartli Region

Sometimes referred to as the “fourth estate” of governance, media has a great impact on other branches of governance, as well as on the thoughts of the people. Media occupies a key site and performs a crucial role in the public representation of unequal social relations and the play of cultural power. In multiethnic societies, media may be used both as a mechanism for publicizing the concerns, preserving the culture, language of ethnic minorities and as a tool for integration, nation-building or assimilation policies (Cottle, 2000).

This chapter analyzes the situation of the media and the approach of the locals to media in the Kvemo Kartli region. Findings show that the influence of Azerbaijani and Turkish media far exceeds Georgian media among Georgian Azerbaijanis, while local Georgian Azerbaijani media is also emerging.

Influence of foreign media in the Kvemo Kartli region

As most Georgian Azerbaijanis don't know Georgian, Georgian media is not so popular in the region. According to the analyses of interviews, instead of Georgian media, foreign TV channels and other traditional and online media organizations have been more popular since the Soviet Period. Influence of Azerbaijani media in the region is especially observed. One of the participants describes the situation as such:

At home, we watch Azerbaijani TV channels, we don't watch Georgian channels. We even match the weather forecast with Kazakh (Region of Azerbaijan). The weather will be the same here as it is in Kazakh. (Emil Badraddinov, 22 years old youth worker from Marneuli)

Influence of Turkish and Russian media is also remarkable in the region, as most of the people have no language barrier to watch them.

Some informant interviewees mention that the domination of foreign media in the Kvemo Kartli region is also one of the obstacles for the integration of ethnic minorities and it causes these people to be left out of the country's real daily agenda, so the community becomes apolitical.

Local media in the Kvemo-Kartli region

According to the World Press Freedom Index by the organization of Reporters Without Borders (2023), Georgia is in the 77th place among 180 countries, with the “problematic” category. Despite noticeable problems about media freedom, there are independent media organizations, including local media and media in the mother language of ethnic minorities.

Media organizations that operate in the Azerbaijani language in the Kvemo Kartli region or Tbilisi are considered as local media. Local media mainly include online media organizations, such as internet web pages and social media channels. Findings show that there are at least 5 bilingual online media resources, 2 radios, and 2 TV channels operating for ethnic Azerbaijanis in Georgia. Most of them are based in Marneuli. Findings from interviews show that in recent years, even older and middle-aged people start to prefer local media instead of foreign ones:

You can already see that older and middle-aged people prefer local media. When you go to the village center in the countryside, you see what the conversations are about. Six years ago, I would not have seen anyone in the village talking about the local media, or talking about something shared in the local media in the village. But now you see that the public is able to take advantage of new opportunities and technology, and follow the local media through technology. (Sakhavat Bediev, 25 years old lawyer, activist from Marneuli)

However, interviewees highlight that the quality of local media is poor and sometimes unprofessional. Additionally, they mention that most of the local media organizations are somehow financed by Azerbaijan.

Thus, the dominance of foreign media in the Kvemo Kartli region and the low quality of local media, as well as foreign funding of local media, have a negative impact on the unity of the nation state and this impact challenges the successful integration process of ethnic groups too.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

The identity of Georgian Azerbaijanis, who are the largest ethnic minority in Georgia and its Kvemo Kartli region, is maintained through the multiethnic education system and multicultural policies of Georgia, strong intra-ethnic community networks and active bilateral relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan. However, there are several complications about the identification of Georgian Azerbaijanis and integration process of ethnic groups of the Kvemo Kartli region.

Georgian Azerbaijanis' ethnonym is still a controversial issue for them as there is no consensus about the topic among the community. This disagreement is one of the main obstacles for maintaining identity and integration of Georgian Azerbaijanis. Although the community is officially named as Georgian Azerbaijanis, the study explores that this naming is not common among the community and various ethnonyms are offered by the members of the community.

My thesis examined that various nation-building perspectives by the Soviet Union, then by each government of Georgia have been implemented and absence of a single policy also has been an obstacle that slowed down the integration process of Georgian Azerbaijanis. Specific national delimitation and multi-ethnic nation-building policies of the Soviet Union were replaced by far-right nationalist and chauvinist policies of Zviad Gamsakhurdia's government following the independence of Georgia. Following that, Eduard Shevardnadze's government mainly restored the former Soviet perspective for ethnic minorities in Georgia. After the overthrow of Eduard Shevardnadze with the Red Rose revolution, Mikheil Saakashvili's government, and then "Georgian Dream" government, each introduced their own agenda of policies for nation-building process and integration of ethnic minorities. Most of the reforms and policies implemented by the latest two governments are currently in force.

Since the Kvemo Kartli region of Georgia has an important geopolitical position, where transport routes and mega-projects pass, and with a diverse ethnic and religious composition, my thesis examined the role of external powers in the region. As a keen country of Georgian Azerbaijanis and neighboring to the region, Azerbaijan's role in the Kvemo Kartli has been decisive and effective since the independence of Georgia. Findings show that Azerbaijan supports ethnic Azerbaijanis in the Kvemo Kartli region, mainly in the areas of education and culture, even in some cases replacing the Georgian government. Thus, SOCAR's coverage of higher education expenses of Georgian Azerbaijanis is one of the most important factors for the

development of their education and successful integration into Georgian society as the number of Georgian Azerbaijani students in universities increased. Our thesis finds out that sometimes SOCAR's activity in the region increases kinship ties of Georgian Azerbaijanis with Azerbaijan while supporting integration of them in Georgian society. Another effective external power in the region whose role has been examined in the thesis is European institutions such as the EU and CoE. Findings uncover that European integration is considered as an essential process by ethnic minorities, as support by European institutions and reforms during the process improve the situation of ethnic minorities and guarantee equal rights as a citizen of Georgia.

After gaining independence from the USSR, Georgia provided available education in the mother language and strengthened local self-governance in the country, which was essential for integrating ethnic minorities in the country and in the Kvemo Kartli region. Consequently, Georgia avoided possible separatist movements, and harsh interethnic clashes and achieved peaceful co-existence of different ethnic groups.

According to the results of the research, although the multi-ethnic and inclusive educational system for ethnic minorities in Georgia has gradually improved since independence, many problems are still noticeable. The shortage of teachers for some subjects in Azerbaijani-language schools and lack of textbooks are among the problems in education. Ethnic minorities of Georgia had not enough opportunities to learn Georgian during Soviet times and Russian language was prioritized instead. The inability of the education system in schools to teach new generations the Georgian language at a sufficient level seriously hinders the successful integration of ethnic minorities and subsequently promotes cases of discrimination against ethnic minorities. Such daily barriers for ethnic minorities who don't know Georgian language occur mainly at state bodies and even in the private sector and public places.

Although the ethnic minorities in the Kvemo Kartli region are represented in the governing branches of the state, this representation is obviously very limited. Thus, although the representation of ethnic minorities in the local self-governing bodies and in the parliament, which is the central legislative body, is always noticeable, ethnic minorities are hardly represented in the central government of Georgia. Representation at the mayor's level in local government is only in Marneuli, but there is also an imbalance in the representation of ethnic minorities in the offices and cadre of the municipality. In other regions of Kvemo Kartli with a majority of ethnic Azerbaijanis, mayors are also ethnic Georgians, and ethnic minorities are represented in less important jobs. In the state institutions of Georgia, even in the local municipalities of the Kvemo Kartli region, the service to the ethnic minorities in their mother

language is limited, which hinders the integration of the ethnic minorities as equal citizens of Georgia.

Despite significant multi-ethnic policies of recent Georgian governments, in some cases assimilation policies are also noticeable. Even though the cases of changing toponyms, which began in the Soviet Union and intensified during the governance of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, have decreased, the process continues, and efforts are not being made by the government to return the previously changed toponyms to the original ones. According to the study, the special legal status and influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church is considered as another barrier for the integration of ethnic minorities as equal citizens.

Ethnic minorities living in the Kvemo Kartli region of Georgia faced serious conflict risks in the early 1990s, and some settlements in Bolnisi and Dmanisi where ethnic Azerbaijanis lived were subjected to ethnic cleansing as a result of the government's discriminatory approach and resettlement policy. Nevertheless, with the coming to power of Eduard Shevardnadze in 1993, the situation stabilized and the peaceful co-existence of different ethnic and religious groups has largely been ensured until today. The problems experienced in the integration of the ethnic groups living in Kvemo Kartli, the inadequacies of the state in fulfilling its obligations on some issues, create conditions for the risk of conflict in the region in the future. In particular, the fact that Georgian-Azerbaijani became a target by the society during the changes in Georgian-Azerbaijani relations, as well as discrimination by Georgian state institutions during minor incidents can be considered as the main factors causing conflict in the Kvemo Kartli region.

Georgia's current situation regarding media freedom allows ethnic minorities, as well as Georgian Azerbaijanis, to have online and traditional media in their native languages. Nevertheless, ethnic minorities turn to foreign media, especially to the media of keen countries, as the quality level of local media in their mother language is not sufficient. This is one of the main factors that prevent ethnic minorities from following Georgia's daily agenda and integrating into Georgian society.

According to the findings of the thesis, the main factors and achievements about maintaining the identity of Georgian Azerbaijanis and equally integrating them in Georgian society by the state can be summarized in these points:

- Education in the mother language of ethnic minorities;
- Special “1+4” program that allows ethnic minorities to enter university with the exam in their mother language and learn the Georgian language prior to starting studies;

- Existence of active NGOs, community organizations dealing with the rights of ethnic minorities, the problems of the areas where they live, using the current conditions;
- The existence of a local municipal system separate from the central government and the possibility of ethnic minorities electing mayors, a representative body member of municipalities and to be elected as well;
- Active cooperation with the government of Azerbaijan and its institutions and companies in order to solve the problems and create opportunities for Georgian Azerbaijanis;
- Achievements in areas such as the rule of law, democracy, and transparency after the Rose Revolution.

However, there are still visible problems that must be addressed by the government. We sum up such points:

- Lack of unified and inclusive nation-building and identity politics in Georgia;
- Low political participation and underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in central government, parliament, and local municipalities;
- The inadequacy of the education system to teach the state language of Georgia;
- Lack of teachers for some subjects in Azerbaijani-language schools in the Kvemo Kartli region;
- Lack of services in the mother language for representatives of the ethnic minorities who do not know the Georgian language;
- Special legal status and power of influence of Georgian Orthodox Church and Christianization policies;
- Existence of stereotypes and discriminatory approaches against ethnic minorities in society;
- The one-sided and discriminatory approach of government agencies when conflicts or problems occur in the region;
- Mass Georgianization of toponyms since the independence of Georgia;
- Unfair land privatization and non-sale of real estate to ethnic minorities in some regions of Kvemo Kartli;
- Low quality of local media in the mother language.

On the basis of my research, the following steps and policy recommendations are suggested to the Georgian Government in order to solve current problematic issues about ethnic minorities in the Kvemo Kartli region:

- A long-term and particular nation-building policy should be implemented by the state and a platform should be created for ethnic minorities, especially Georgian Azerbaijanis, to decide on the naming of their ethnic identity;
- To improve the quality of the teaching of the Georgian language in schools;
- Special higher education institutions can be established for the training of teachers in different subjects for Azerbaijani-speaking schools;
- In municipalities where ethnic minorities live compactly, they should be provided with services in their mother language;
- During conflicts, as well as during the sale of real estate, relevant state institutions should treat citizens equally and fairly, regardless of their ethnic identity;
- An equal approach to religious communities and entities must be ensured and the dominance of the Georgian Orthodox Church over the society must be avoided by the state;
- To promote the prevention of discrimination against ethnic minorities in society;
- Inclusive opportunities for ethnic minorities for celebrating their national and religious holidays;
- The process of Georgianization of toponyms in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities should be stopped and the changed names should be returned to their original ones in consultation with the residents;
- Injustices in land privatization following the independence should be investigated and affected communities should be compensated;
- Financial state support should be provided for ethnic minorities to have qualitative local media in their mother language.

Although my research uncovers the general situation of ethnic minorities in the Kvemo Kartli region, especially ethnic Azerbaijanis, since the independence of Georgia to the present day, there are many more issues related to the topic that need to be studied in the future. For future research, the influence of Azerbaijani-Georgian relations and Azerbaijan-related organizations and companies on Georgian Azerbaijanis, the situation of local media organizations of Georgian Azerbaijanis and the main narratives in the media, the impact of the “1+4 program” on the education of ethnic minorities, the interests and influence of countries such as Russia, Iran, and Türkiye in the region can be addressed as separate research topics.

REFERENCES

- Abashidze, Zviad (2019). Discourse on Ethnic Minorities and Civic Integration in Georgia during 1991-90: Analysis of Zviad Gamsakhurdia's Official Speeches, Statements and Interviews, Tbilisi.
- Abbasov, Emin (2021). "İnsan Hakları Açısından Ahıska Türklerinin Geri Dönüş Sorunu", Ankara.
<https://dspace.ankara.edu.tr/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12575/72841/?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Abbasov, İlham et al (2016). "Ethnic Groups and Conflicts in the South Caucasus and Turkey," *The Caucasus Edition—Journal of Conflict Transformation*.
<http://caucasusedition.net/ethnic-groups-and-conflicts-in-the-south-caucasus-and-turkey/>
- Ahmadzada, Shujaat (2022). "Contested names: (re)naming of places and nation-building in Soviet Georgia".
http://dspace.ut.ee/handle/10062/86742?fbclid=IwAR2bFXRbWWvRqoKBo6yV-U3kd_E5eO9BCsbq8k7YHq9UBWcgL62a6rkBeMo
- Asker, A. and Ögütücü Ö. N. (2016). "Borçalı Türkleri: İslam, Mezhep ve Din Temelli Sorunlar", *Gürcistan'daki Müslüman Topluluklar: Azinlik Hakları, Kimlik, Siyaset*.
- Aydın Bezikoğlu, F. T., & Şahin, F. K. (2019). The Politics of Recognition of Crimean Tatar Collective Rights in the Post-Soviet Period With Special Attention to Russian Annexation of Crimea. *Communist and Post-communist Studies*, 52(1), 39–50.
- Aydınün, A. (2013). "The ethnification and nationalisation of religion in the post-Soviet Georgian nation-state building process: a source of discrimination and minority rights violations?", *The International Journal of Human Rights*. Vol. 17, Nos. 7–8, 810-828, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2013.859136>
- Aktual (2022). "The role of the joint Azerbaijan-Georgia University in solving educational problems of the Azerbaijanis of Georgia".
<https://aktual.ge/Read/24829?fbclid=IwAR2bEnRS-jaTRlhFtV8Qqlv2H75926uJAIBc1YI8hkwrDHySPweHClbm6c>
- Alam, Aftab (2015). "MINORITY RIGHTS UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW." *Journal of the Indian Law Institute* 57, no. 3: 376-400. www.jstor.org/stable/44782787.

- Altstadt, Audrey L. (1992). *The Azerbaijani Turks.: Power and Identity under Russian Rule*. Stanford, Calif.: *Hoover Institution Press*.
<https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/2202778>
- Anderson, Benedict (1983). *Imagined communities*, *Verso*.
- Berghe, Pierre L. Van Den (1987). *The Ethnic Phenomenon*, *Praeger*.
- Berglund, C. (2020). Accepting Alien Rule? State-Building Nationalism in Georgia's Azeri Borderland. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 72:2, 263-285, DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2019.1679091
- Biletska, Y., & Tuncel, T. K. (2016). Gürcistan daki Müslüman Topluluklar Azınlık Hakları Kimlik Siyaset. Terazi (1st ed., pp. 0–0). Terazi.
- Blauvelt, Timothy K. (2001). *Cultural Theory and Conceptions of Citizenship and Nationalism in the Republic of Georgia*.
- Broers, Laurence (2008). "Filling the Void: Ethnic Politics and Nationalities Policy in Post Conflict Georgia." *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 2: 275–304. doi:10.1080/00905990801934363
- Brown, David (2000). *Contemporary Nationalism. Civic, ethnocultural and multicultural politics*, *Routledge*. p. 4-29.
- Brubaker, Rogers (1996). *Nationalism reframed: nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*. Cambridge University Press. https://nationalismstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Nationalism-Reframed-Nationhood-and-the-National-Question-in-the-New-Europe-by-Rogers-Brubaker-z-lib.org_.pdf
- Caucasus Institute of Peace, Democracy and Development; German Organization for Technical Cooperation (2006). "Potential for Conflict Related to Land Problems in Georgia's Marneuli and Gardabani Districts".
http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00003218/01/potential_for_conflict.pdf
- Caucasian Knot (2015). "Football fans beat up their Azerbaijani colleagues in Tbilisi".
<https://web.archive.org/web/20210602134537/https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/32252/>
- Chobanov Madad, Chobanli Mushfig (2012). *Borchali toponyms*. Baku.
- Constitution of Georgia (1995).
https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/8153/file/Georgia_Const_am2018_ENG.pdf
- Cottle, Simon (2000). "Ethnic Minorities and the Media: Changing Cultural Boundaries", *Open University Press*.

- https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268518927_Ethnic_Minorities_and_the_Media_Changing_Cultural_Boundaries
- Council of Europe Secretariat (2015). "Action Plan for Georgia 2013–2015". *Strasbourg: Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe*. <https://rm.coe.int/16804e99c7>
- De Waal, Thomas (2013). "Sadakhlo: "They Fight, We Don't". In *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War*, 10th Year Anniversary Edition, Revised and Updated, 279-83. *NYU Press*. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qfhv5.25.
- Eulau, Heinz H. F. "Kohn, Hans (1944). *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in Its Origins and Background*. Pp. Xiii, 735. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1944" *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 235, no. 1. pp. 135–135, doi:10.1177/000271624423500120.
- Fox, Jonathan (2000). "Religious Causes of Discrimination against Ethno-Religious Minorities." *International Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 3: 423-50. www.jstor.org/stable/3014006.
- Gellner, Ernest (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*, *Cornell University Press*.
- Gelovani, Nani (2017). *Islam, Gender and Education in Contemporary Georgia: The Example of Kvemo Kartli*. *World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol:11, No:7. 1795-1799.
- Gundalik - Gurcusan (2022). Facebook post. <https://www.facebook.com/gundalikgurcusan/posts/pfbid0VRo96wavspVBxmJgybdSTYCFmJvZA6BtAPyhs5QhabgWoi5gkBPTbTaY25mT9UGQl>
- Hansen, Holley E., and Vicki L. Hesli (2009). "National Identity: Civic, Ethnic, Hybrid, and Atomised Individuals." *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 1: 1-28. www.jstor.org/stable/27752205.
- Hulya H. Sakarya (2012). *Georgian Polyphonic Imaginaries: The Politics of Representation in the Caucasus*.
- Humbatova, Shahla (2021). Facebook post. <https://www.facebook.com/100000790674646/posts/pfbid02uxpiTSjECF32dQRQAicyRJZoywgHMNurmAzK7ZkAykoriTZhfVh18MZMvCAZyjfQl/?mibextid=cr9u03>
- Jam News (2021). "Conflict in Dmanisi between Georgians and Azerbaijanis. Why did it go so far?". <http://web.archive.org/web/20210521134226/https://jam-news.net/conflict-in-dmanisi-between-local-georgians-and-azerbaijanis-why-did-it-go-so-far/>
- Kahraman, Alter (2020). "Azeris and Muslim Ajaris in Georgia: The Swing between Tolerance and Alienation". *Nationalities Papers* 49(2), DOI:10.1017/nps.2020.7.

- Kawecka-Wyrzykowska, Elżbieta (2015). The EU-Georgia Association Agreement: An Instrument To Support The Development Of Georgia Or Lip Service? / Układ Stowarzyszeniowy Ue – Gruzja: Instrument Wsparcia Rozwoju Gruzji Czy Deklaracja Bez Pokrycia?, *Comparative Economic Research*. 10.1515/cer-2015-0013.
- Khutsishvili., George (1994). “Intervention in Transcaucasus”.
<https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Intervention-in-Transcaucasus-Khutsishvili./d7284fc086f3e443e5c7447cbd350e4c6182edb4>
- King, Charles (2008). *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-517775-6.
- Köksal, P., Aydingün A., Gürsoy, H. E. (2018). Religious Revival and Deprivatization in Post-Soviet Georgia: Reculturation of Orthodox Christianity and Deculturation of Islam, Religion and Politics Section of the American Political Science Association. doi:10.1017/S1755048318000585
- Kymlicka, Will (1996). *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. DOI:10.1093/0198290918.001.0001
- Legislative Herald of Georgia (2018). “Organic Law of Georgia Local Self-Government Code”.
<https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/2244429?publication=65>
- Levin, Irina (2017). “Uncertain Returns: Citizenship and Law in the Caucasus”, *New York University*.
- Library of Congress Country Studies (1994). “Azerbaijan History Index”.
http://workmall.com/wfb2001/azerbaijan/azerbaijan_history_index.html
- Marneuli FM (2021). “Gürcüstanda Novruzun milli bayram elan olunması məsələsinə baxılır”
https://marneulifm.ge/az/xeberler/article/43245-gurcustanda-novruzun-milli-bayram-elan-olunmasi-meselesine-baxilir?fbclid=IwAR0LxVpEFvNFPBmgx28vS7h_5FTAm-RWHfkLcPlzzBTMKwjtpiJTUYuM9uw
- Mateshvili, Maia (2008). *Government Public Relations in the Nation-building of Georgia*.
<https://doi.org/10.17615/gy09-2f93>
- Matsaberidze, David (2014). “The Role of Civic Nationalism in Transformation of the Internal Ethnic Politics of Post-Soviet Georgia”, *European Centre for Minority Issues*.
https://www.ecmi.de/fileadmin/redakteure/publications/pdf/ECMI_Working_Paper__83.pdf
- Mchedlishvili, David A. (2010). “About Georgia,” [ggdavid.tripod.com](http://ggdavid.tripod.com/georgia/index.htm).
<http://ggdavid.tripod.com/georgia/index.htm>

- National Statistics Office of Georgia (2014). *2014 General Population Census Results*.
<https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/737/2014-general-population-census-results>
- OC Media (2019). "Azerbaijan–Georgia row reignites over Davit Gareja monastery complex"..
<https://web.archive.org/web/20210604083925/https://oc-media.org/azerbaijan-georgia-row-reignites-over-davit-gareja-monastery-complex/>
- Oganesyan, Milena (2020). "Of Intermarriage, "Hats," and Identity in Georgia." In *Intermarriage from Central Europe to Central Asia: Mixed Families in the Age of Extremes*, edited by Edgar Adrienne and Frommer Benjamin, 225-50. *Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press*. doi:10.2307/j.ctv1220r7d.11.
- Papushvili, George (2012). 'The 1921 Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia: Looking Back after Ninety Years', *European Public Law, Issue 2*, pp. 323-349,.
<https://kluwerlawonline.com/journalarticle/European+Public+Law/18.2/EURO2012018>
- Первая всеобщая перепись населения Российской Империи (1905). Под редакцією Н. А. Тройницкаго. — СПб.: Изданіе центрального статистическаго комитета министерства внутреннихъ дель. (The First Total Census of Russian Empire. A publication of the central statistical bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Editor N. A. Troynitsky.)
- Pospelov, E. M. (1992). "Natsional'naia politika SSSR i toponimiia," in *Toponimika i mezhnatsional'nye otnosheniia*. Moscow. p. 3
- Radio Free (2020). "Ermənilərlə azərbaycanlıların mehriban yaşadığı kənd".
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_avIAh_gdB0
- Radio Marneuli (2023). "Gürcüstan tarixində yeganə Azərbaycanlıyam ki, müstəqilliyin bərpasında iştirak etmişəm – Akif Həsənov".
<https://www.marneulifm.ge/az/marneuli/article/70674-gurcistan-tarixinde-yegane-azerbaycanliyam-ki-musteqilliyin-berpasinda-istirak-etmisem-akif-hesenov>
- Reporters Without Borders (2023). "World Press Freedom Index". <https://rsf.org/en/index>
- Report News Agency (2018). "Governor of Kvemo Kartli: "Socio-political activity of Georgian Azerbaijanis increased". <https://report.az/en/foreign-politics/governor-of-kvemo-kartli-socio-political-activity-of-georgian-azerbaijanis-increased/>
- Report News Agency (2019). "Gürcüstan Azərbaycanlılarının İnteqrasiya Mərkəzi açılıb".
<https://report.az/diaspora/gurcistan-azerbaycanlilarinin-i-nteqrasiya-merkezi-acilib/>

- Report News Agency (2021). "SOCAR marking 15th anniversary in Georgia".
<https://report.az/en/energy/socar-marking-15th-anniversary-in-georgia/>
- Shavtvaladze, Mikheil (2018). "The State and Ethnic Minorities: The Case of Georgia." *Region* 7, no. 1: 43-68. doi:10.2307/26537991.
- Shiriev, Zaur (2016). "A Move towards Greater Political Participation among Ethnic Azerbaijanis in Georgia?", *The Central Asia-Caucasus ANALYST*.
<http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13417-a-move-to-wards-greater-political-participation-among-ethnic-azerbaijanis-in-georgia?.h>
- Skobla, Daniel (2001). "Nation States, Ethnic Minorities and Human Rights. Some Conceptions and Misconceptions Criticized." *Polish Sociological Review*, no. 134: 139-55.
www.jstor.org/stable/41274795.
- Smith, Anthony (1986). *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Blackwell Publishing. p. 12.
- Smith, Anthony (1991). *National Identity*, Penguin. p. 39.
- Stefes, Christoph (2008). *Historical Dictionary of Georgia*, Alexander Mikaberidze (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 1, 733 pp. + maps, illustrations. Nationalities Papers, 36. 10.1017/S0090599200017396.
- Suny, Ronald Grigor (2011). "The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States". *Oxford University Press*. ISBN: 978-0-19-534055-6
- Trier T., Turashvili M. (2007). "Resettlement of Ecologically Displaced Persons. Solution of a Problem or Creation of a New? Eco-Migration in Georgia 1981–2006". The *European Centre for Minority Issues*. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/39504/monograph_6_en.pdf
- Tsutsiev, Arthur (2014). *Atlas of the Ethno-Political History of the Caucasus*, trans. by Nora Seligman Favorov, Yale University Press.
- Tukhashvili, Mirian (2017). Population of Kvemo Kartli: From Polyethnicity to Biethnicity ქვემო ქართლის მოსახლეობა : პოლიეთნიკურობიდან ბიეთნიკურობისკენ . 9. 144-154.
- Vardiashvili, Manana (2021). "For Whom the Curfew Is Lifted and for Whom not: Governmental Privileges for the Chosen".
<http://www.humanrights.ge/index.php?a=main&pid=20362&lang=eng>
- Venice Commission (2018). "Constitutional Reforms".
https://www.venice.coe.int/WebForms/pages/?p=02_Reforms&lang=EN
- Wheatley, J. (2005). Obstacles Impeding the Regional Integration of the Kvemo Kartli Region of Georgia, *ECMI Working Paper*, 23, Flensburg: European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI). <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-63120>

- Wheatley, J. (2009). Managing ethnic diversity in Georgia: one step forward, two steps back, *Central Asian Survey*, 28:2, p. 119-134. DOI: 10.1080/02634930903034880
- Winter, Elke (2007). "How Does the Nation Become Pluralist?" *Ethnicities* 7, no. 4: 483-515. www.jstor.org/stable/23890656.
- Yilmaz A. and Öğütücü Ö. N. (2016). "Borçalı Türkleri: Sosyo-Ekonomik Durum, Siyasi Katılım ve Entegrasyon", *Gürcistan'daki Müslüman Topluluklar: Azinlik Hakları, Kimlik, Siyaset*.
- Yilmaz, Harun (2009). An unexpected peace: Azerbaijani–Georgian relations, 1918–20, *Revolutionary Russia*, 22:1, 37-67. DOI: 10.1080/09546540902900288
- Yilmaz, Harun (2013). The Soviet Union and the Construction of Azerbaijani National Identity in the 1930s, *Iranian Studies, Volume 46, Issue 4*. pp. 511-533. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2013.784521>
- Zedania, Giga (2011). "Rise of Religious Nationalism".
- Zurcher, Christoph (2007). "The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus". *New York University Press*.
- 24News (2023). "Marneuli meriyası kilsələrə 400 000 lari, məscidlərə isə 20 000 lari illik vəsait ayırıb". https://24news.ge/read/id/78792?fbclid=IwAR3qqoN03ZDwfMIF4q79kmSS_HI3xqfg7uKmRuoAryNIrpoGNeBlBmH4M-A

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Name and surname:	Year of birth:	Gender:
Aygul Isayeva	1985	Woman
Sakhavat Bediev	1996	Man
Emil Badraddinov	1998	Man
Samira Bayramova	1988	Woman
Ayhan Hasanov	1999	Man
Gulgun Mammadkhanova	1998	Woman
Ziaddin Huseynov	1998	Man
Samaya Hasanova	2001	Woman
Anonym interviewee	1989	Woman
Mamed Mirzayev	1982	Man

APPENDIX 2: INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM

Date

Dear Madam/Sir,

I am a Master's Degree student in the Political Science Program at the Social Sciences University of Ankara. I am conducting a dissertation project entitled *Georgia's ethnic minority integration policies in Kvemo-Kartli region* to explore what kind of policies have been done by the Georgian government for integrating Azerbaijanis and other ethnic minorities in Kvemo-Kartli region and how successful these policies are. I am requesting your cooperation as a resident of the Kvemo-Kartli region.

With this letter, I am inviting you to assist my study by agreeing to be interviewed. The interview will focus on your personal background and your views on various aspects of the social-political situation in Georgia. The expected length of the interview is no longer than one hour. If you do not want to be audio-taped, I may record the interview by hand. If you do not want your name to be cited, you may choose to remain anonymous. You may also, at any time, raise questions about the interview, withdraw your consent to the use of already provided information, or withdraw from the interview. Only I will have access to the data provided by this interview, and I will protect the data to the best of my ability.

Your participation in this research project does not involve any foreseeable risks or harms for you.

Although the findings of this study will not benefit you directly, by participating in this study you will be contributing to the production of new and potentially illuminating knowledge about co-existence in the Kvemo-Kartli region.

By signing the attached consent form, you agree to the use, storage, and publication of the information you provided to the interviewer. You may, however, request that your name be deleted from the publication that will result from this research.

If you have further concerns, you can contact me or my thesis advisor at the following addresses:

Researcher
Amrah Jafarov
E-mail:
Telephone:

Thesis advisor
Dr. Filiz Tutku Aydın Bezikoğlu
E-mail:

By signing this consent form, I confirm that I have read, and understood this letter and have had the opportunity to ask further questions. I understand that I am under no obligation to agree to participate. I understand that I may refuse to answer any questions, stop the interview at any time or withdraw from the study without any direct or indirect consequences affecting me. I may also at any point ask any part of the interview, or, the full interview to be stricken from record. I understand that my name will be kept anonymous if I request. I understand that there are no risks or benefits involved for me as a result of my participation in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form. Please check the appropriate boxes:

_____I consent to be personally cited.
anonymous. _____I consent to be audio-taped.
be audio-taped.

_____I would like to remain
_____I prefer not to

Name:

Signature:

Date and Place:

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Personal Questions:

- What is your name, surname?
- How old are you?
- Which part of Kvemo-Kartli are you from?
- What is your educational status?
- What is your profession and current job?
- Are you a member of any political party or organization?
- Do you consider yourself as a religious person?
- How do you identify yourself? Why? (eg. Azerbaijani, Turk, Georgian Turk, Georgian Azerbaijani, Karapaphak, Borchali, etc.)
- How do you maintain your culture and your identity? (music, food, dance, clothing style, religion, etc.)
- Do you speak your mother tongue in your family?

Questions related general situation of Georgia:

- What do you think about the general situation in Georgia related to democracy and minority rights?
- What kind of changes did you feel in your life after the Rose Revolution?
- Do you think that EU membership will improve the situation of ethnic minorities in Georgia?
- Are people with different ethnic backgrounds able to be successful in Georgia? Do you know such successful people?
- What is the main reason for peaceful coexistence in the Kvemo-Kartli region?
- Do you see the special privileges of the Georgian church as a threat to minorities? Have you or your family ever been in conflict with the church?
- How much do you worry about the renaming of Turkic (Armenian) villages by the Georgian government? Rate 1 (I don't worry) to 10 (extremely worried).

Language and education related questions:

- How well do you know the Georgian language? Rate 1 (don't know) to 10 (fluently).
- How accessible and applicable do you consider education opportunities for ethnic minorities in the Kvemo-Kartli region? Rate 1 to 10.

- Were you able to get an education in your mother language? How did the education opportunities for minorities change in the last 30 years?
- Is founding a dual language pedagogical university a good solution for solving pedagogical shortage in Azerbaijani sections of the schools?
- What kind of difficulties do ethnic minorities face if they don't know Georgian well?
- Do you think that the Azerbaijani (or Armenian) language must have a special status in Georgia? Why?
- Do you follow the media in your own language? How frequently? (0 being none to 10 being regularly)

Local government and political participation related questions:

- How effective do you consider the local self-governance (municipality) system in Georgia in order to solve the problems of ethnic minorities? Rate 1 to 10, 1 being totally ineffective to 10 being extremely effective)
- Do you think that ethnic minorities must have their own political parties for better representation?

Azerbaijan related questions:

- What is your opinion about Azerbaijan's impact on the region? Does the Azerbaijani government provide you with any economic, political, or cultural support?
- How do you consider the impact of SOCAR on the Azerbaijani minority in Georgia? Rate 1 (completely destructive) to 10 (very useful). Why?
- Do you have or intend to get dual citizenship?
- How frequently do you visit Azerbaijan (0 being never to 10 being regularly)
- Do you follow Azerbaijani media? How frequently? (0 being never to 10 being regularly)
- Do you have a plan about moving to Azerbaijan?
- Have you ever faced any ethnic discrimination related to the David Gareji (Keshikchidagh) issue between Azerbaijan and Georgia?

Other personalized questions related to the background of the person interviewed:

- Is there anything we haven't covered that you would like to talk about?

APPENDIX 4: EXAMPLE OF AN INTERVIEW

Name: Aygul Isayeva

Date of birth: -

Gender: Woman

Date of interview: -

Researcher: Ms. Aygul, which part of Kvemo-Kartli are you from?

Interviewee: From Gardabani region. Kosali village.

Researcher: What is your educational status? Please, give a brief info about your educational background.

Interviewee: I graduated my bachelor's degree in Azerbaijan, from Khazar University. The faculty was Economics and Management. Then, I graduated my Master's degree in Norway, from BI Norwegian Business School. I studied my Master's degree for two years in Norway, with gaining the special scholarship program of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry for the Caucasus. Then, I studied my PhD in Marketing in Georgia, International Black Sea University.

Researcher: Thanks. You have a very good and interesting educational background. Please, give information about your profession and current job.

Interviewee: I work at SOCAR Energy Georgia. It is related PR. Before that, as you know, I worked as executive director of Integration Center of Georgian Azerbaijanis, for approximately a year and a half. I worked as a lecturer both at Khazar University of Azerbaijan and International Black Sea University and International Caucasus Universities of Georgia. Now I work at SOCAR.

Researcher: Well, are you a member of any political party or organization?

Interviewee: No, I have never been and am not going to be a member of any political party. I am not a member of any organization either. Only there is one association related to my profession and I have been its member.

Researcher: Do you consider yourself a religious person? I would like to remind you that you are free to reject answering any question.

Interviewee: Actually, it is not a secret. I am open to any questions. I am not religious, and I respect everyone, such as Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, etc. and their religions. But I can't say that I am a religious person or that I go to mosque regularly. Our mentality and our religion have some accordance and, how to say, I support this.

Researcher: How do you identify yourself? Why? (eg. Azerbaijani, Turk, Georgian Turk, Georgian Azerbaijani, Karapapak, Borchali, etc.)

Interviewee: Georgian Azerbaijani. If I answer briefly, it is that. Generally, discussions about national identity are the most tense and controversial topics in Georgia. As you mentioned, some call themselves Karapapak Turk. Karapapak Turks lived in Borchali region and Gazakg, Aghstafa regions. As you know, our dialects also have similarities. As I know, they live in Turkiye too, they were forced to move there.

And, some groups of people prefer “Borchali Turk” term and they are many. But, “turk” is the name of the nation, so some people don’t accept “Azerbaijani” name as a national identity. It is a controversial topic in Azerbaijan too. But now, Georgian Azerbaijani is officially named and used all over the world, including in Azerbaijan and Georgia. You can see it on official documents of Georgia as well, they call us Georgian Azerbaijanis. It means that Georgia is the country where we were born and Azerbaijani is the national identity. Additionally, it is accepted by the European Council as they have many projects related to national minorities in Georgia. We are officially called as Georgian Azerbaijanis on such documents too. To conclude, how it is accepted in Azerbaijan, we also have to use the same. It is not true to call Azerbaijanis who live in Azerbaijan and to call “Georgian Turks”, “Borchali Turks”, or “Karapapak” etc. who live in Georgia. It leads to separation of the nation. It is not good to separate. On the contrary, we must be together. There are many who prefer “Borchali Turk” too. But, Georgia itself is a small country and dividing a small country into a small region is not logical. The question arises that Azerbaijanis don’t live only in Borchali. They live in Tbilisi, Kakheti, Ajara and other regions of Georgia as well. Actually, I support using of Borchali name. Sometimes, this word irritates Georgians. But, calling like that lessens the nation and the culture. There are some public activists in Georgia who prefer to use “Borchali Turk”. Even, they try to show the culture of Borchali different from the culture of Azerbaijan. But, in fact, it is not true. As I mentioned before, Georgia itself is a small state, dividing it to Borchali, means to lessen the culture. My culture is not limited by Borchali, it is greater. Historical figures were born in Borchali. If someone asks me what is your national music and dance, I can’t answer only about Borchali. Great composer Uzeyir Hajibeyli belongs to not only Azerbaijanis in Azerbaijan, but also all Azerbaijanis around the world. I am proud that Uzeyir Hajibeyli composed the first opera in the Eastern world. But if I call myself as Borchali Turk, it would mean that I refuse such great persons and achievements and culture. It is the same for all branches of the culture, such as dance, music, political figures and scientists, etc. I would like to say that, limiting it with Borchali lessens Georgian Azerbaijanis, our culture, history and everything. ... I want to say that a nation was established, formed year by year, and finally Azerbaijani is declared officially as a national identity. Actually, it must not be a discussion topic. Someone may say that, call me Gipchak Turk. As you know from history, David the Builder brought 40.000 Gipchak Turks to Georgia and he won the Didgori war in 1121 thanks to Gipchak Turks. Some argue that Gipchak Turks have been assimilated among Georgians. But, some Ahiska Turks also say that their ancestors are Gipchak Turks. We have been called Tatar for a period too. ... And as you know Tatar (Tatrebi) is still used in Georgia for humiliation context... Some say that Azerbaijani is a fake term and started to be used after Stalin. But Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani words have been used in the research of German researchers when Stalin was not born or he was 4-5 years old. So, associating it with Stalin is not true. ... Calling and identifying as Azerbaijani doesn't mean separating from our Turkic roots. Vice-versa. Azerbaijani, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, etc. All of their roots are Turkic. It is like an axiom that the roots of Azerbaijanis are Turkic. But, as I mentioned, Azerbaijani has already been accepted as a national identity. And this policy must start in Azerbaijan. After gaining

independence, Azerbaijan may change this policy. But I watched a famous video of the meeting of Heydar Aliyev and political actors, linguists, poets, where all of them clarified their arguments and finally Azerbaijani and Azerbaijani language terms have been accepted. Maybe it has some political benefits too.

Researcher: Thank you for your detailed answer. My following question is also related to this topic. Maybe you have already answered it. How do you and your family maintain your culture, your identity? (for example, music, food, dance, clothing style, religion, etc.)

Interviewee: We have ties with Azerbaijan. Culture of us is the same with the culture of Azerbaijan. For example, Nowruz is celebrated ceremonially in Georgia as it is celebrated in Azerbaijan. It is the same for other holidays such as Gurban, Ramazan. Of course, there are some differences even in various regions of Azerbaijan. For example, in Gazakh people may cook plov slightly differently, or they may add some various ingredients to dolma. There may be such minor varieties in Georgia too. But dolma is dolma everywhere, and plov is plov everywhere. It looks like differences in dialects. Sheki dialect is different, Gazakh dialect is different, it is spoken differently in Lankaran, and Borchali also has specific dialect, as well as culture. But in general, there are no any plain differences.

Researcher: In which language do you usually communicate with your family and relatives?

Interviewee: We always use our mother language, Azerbaijani. The main criterion for maintaining national identity of the nation is mother language. Our Azerbaijani is the same with the language that is used in Azerbaijan. Additionally, during Soviet times there was no border between Georgia and Azerbaijan. The whole USSR was considered as a homeland. Communication was easier. So, the relationship has been close since Soviet times. Here, the majority, maybe 90 percent of people have close relatives, friends who are in Azerbaijan. Such marriages are so common. Or someone moved for educational purposes. I mean we are the same nation and have the same culture as we are closely linked. When we look famous Georgian Azerbaijanis, such as Topchubashov, Narimanov, Rashid Behbudov, Niyazi, etc. They were born in Georgia, but the main focus of their activity was related to Azerbaijan. If you asked Rashid Behbudov about his national identity, he would not answer Borchali Turk or Georgian Turk. He always represents Azerbaijan. As well as Zalimkhan Yagub. That is why choosing a name that is different from a common name in Azerbaijan is not useful for us and it lessens our culture. If we separate our literature from the literature of Azerbaijan, we, Georgian Azerbaijanis need to form new literature as our textbooks come from Azerbaijan. If we form a new literature textbook, then whom we can see in it? If we add the poems of Zalimkhan Yagub, we see that he actually is the citizen of Azerbaijan and member of the parliament of Azerbaijan.

Researcher: Our following questions will be related to the general situation in Georgia. So, what do you think about the general situation in Georgia related to democracy and minority rights?

Interviewee: As you know, Georgian Azerbaijanis get irritated about the “minority” term. We always say that we are also aborigen and local people of Georgia and calling us national or ethnic minority is not true. After Georgia became independent, it joined some international agreements as a state, including

documents and commitments introduced by the Council of Europe. Additionally, rights of national minorities are mentioned in the Constitution of Georgia too. According to the 11th chapter of the Constitution, everyone has the same rights regardless of their national identity, color, race, etc. So, these rights are protected by both the Constitution of Georgia and international commitments. But in reality, of course, we face discriminatory events. For example, if Azerbaijani and Georgian apply for the same job and send their CV, of course Georgian will be given priority. Or, I would like to see Azerbaijanis as workers, mayor or deputy in the municipalities where Azerbaijanis live. But again Georgians are given priority.

Researcher: What kind of changes did you feel in your life after the Rose Revolution in terms of democracy and rights?

Interviewee: Witnesses of the events of the period before the Rose Revolution, the 1990s are still alive. Not only Azerbaijanis, but also other national minorities were inflicted reprisals in early 1990s. Kidnapping was common. Even pregnant women were kidnapped during these times. People could not walk in the streets or buy bread from the rayon center, as they were Azerbaijanis. They even didn't sell bread to Azerbaijanis. The Azerbaijani state intervened in that situation in a positive way, then these events gradually left behind. Then, the Red Rose Revolution happened in Georgia in 2003 and I think that many positive changes happened. The authority was completely changed. If we compare the period of Shevarnadze's presidency and the first period of Saakashvili's presidency, first of all we see differences related to corruption. Putting an end to corruption affected all other fields. There were serious educational reforms. Police, health policy... Serious reforms and positive changes happened following the Red Rose Revolution.

Researcher: Do you think that being an EU member will improve the situation of ethnic minorities in Georgia?

Interviewee: Yes, I think that it will improve the situation. Georgia itself became a member of the Council of Europe in 1999. By being a member of CoE, it accepted some responsibilities. One of these obligations is protecting the rights of national minorities. Of course, Georgia itself has some projects for integration processes. But, I always say that the main reason for these projects is CoE membership of Georgia. If Georgia was not accepted to CoE, maybe, it wouldn't realize those projects. It seems that there is pressure from CoE and EU. They demand realization of the obligations, for being the member of their family. Of course, Georgia gets a large amount of Euros, finance for projects and all of them must be shown on reports. So, I see it as a positive tendency. We mentioned national minority issues. Yes, this term irritates us, but there is only one positive side of using this term, using it doesn't allow abusing our rights, as there is some pressure from CoE. I want to mention one more issue. There was a booklet published by CoE in 2016, which gave some information about national minorities. But, unfortunately, the date of arrival of Georgian Azerbaijanis to the Caucasus was shown as 11th or 17th centuries. ... But the date of arrival of the Armenians was mentioned as 2000 BC in the same booklet. Unfortunately, our history was belittled in that situation.

Researcher: What is the main reason for peaceful coexistence in the Kvemo-Kartli region?

Interviewee: Do you mean Armenians and Azerbaijanis who live here?

Researcher: Actually, I mean all of them. As we know, this region is colorful. Greeks live in Tsalka (Barmagsiz) region, there are even Assurians live. But we have to highlight Armenians and Azerbaijanis especially, who are parties of the war in neighboring countries.

Interviewee: As I mentioned, in the 90s, there was serious repression against not only Azerbaijanis, but also all national minorities. But then, probably pressure from the EU, as well as the change of the government made Georgia change its policies. The center of Bolnisi was completely emptied within a week. Then they did the same in Dmanisi. During the period of Gamsakhurdia, there was a slogan: “Georgia is for Georgians”. Probably, you know about it. Unfortunately, this slogan is still used by some chauvinist and racist Georgians. They accept and consider Gamsakhurdia as a hero. As well as his assistant Miri Postava. They consider both of them as national heroes. But then, Georgia evolved as a civil state. The policies demanded peaceful coexistence. When Georgia’s president or prime minister, or other officials visit Europe, they often mention that Georgia is a tolerant, colorful country during their speeches at CoE or European Parliament. Of course, there must be relevant documents which confirm these words. ... Azerbaijanis live in Kvemo-Kartli region, Armenians live in Samtskhe-Javakheti region. They look like little organizations within the state. They are compactly formed. And, they are isolated from each other. Maybe, this also avoids conflicts. But in Tbilisi, there are Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Russians and other nations. They live friendly lives. But maybe they do not have so much contact and communication. Yes, there are some NGOs and when they realize projects, such projects include Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Georgians, Russians and other nations. They meet in such projects. But, as they live compactly, they have limited communication. This may also be the reason for limiting conflicts.

Researcher: How much do you worry about renaming of Turkic (Armenian) villages by the Georgian government? Rate 1 (I don’t worry) to 10 (extremely worry).

Interviewee: (10) Of course, I am worrying. Changing names started from the Soviet period. Then, it happened in the 90s. As I know, people didn't even know what they were signing. They didn’t know Georgian and they were informed wrongly and given the documents for signing. In reality, they were signing on the documents about changing the name of the village. So, the names of the villages were changed all together in the 90s too. Changing the names means eliminating the history. It is done for removing all signs and traces, and showing us as arrivals and guests. But we say that we are aborigin people here, who live for centuries and millennia. In short, they change history. They put crosses everywhere, even the entrance of some Muslim-Azerbaijani villages. Even when I go on excursions to other places, to high mountains, I climb and see that they put crosses there. I don’t understand how they put it there. There is no road to get there. Only they can do it with a helicopter. Can you imagine? They put crosses everywhere to show that this place is ancient christian land and belongs to Georgians.

Researcher: There will be some questions related to language and education. How accessible and applicable do you consider education opportunities of ethnic minorities in the Kvemo-Kartli region? Rate 1 to 10 and explain, please.

Interviewee: As I mentioned before, the educational rights of Georgian Azerbaijanis are also protected according to the Constitution of Georgia. Every national minority has the right to education right in their mother language. Additionally, as I mentioned before, Georgia signed relevant conventions of CoE, so this right is protected according to these conventions too. Education, speaking in your mother language in university is also your right. In Georgia, there are up to 120 Azerbaijani schools now. But, because of personnel shortage, the situation of these schools is bad. Actually, education is my sensitive topic. I raised this issue in 2019. Maybe you have seen it on social media. About founding a university.

Researcher: Actually, my following question is about this issue. Is founding a dual language pedagogical university a good solution for solving pedagogue shortage in Azerbaijani sections of the schools?

Interviewee: Yes, completely. The main problem of schools is personnel shortage. Some people think that there is a personnel shortage for only Azerbaijani language and literature lessons. But actually, the situation is different. Currently, there is a personnel shortage problem for all branches, such as physics, chemistry, history. Yes, today the young study in Georgian in the high schools of Georgia. But, there are special terminologies which cause difficulties. So, it is not enough. So, parallelly both Georgian and Azerbaijani must be taught in the university which I offered. I think that it would be an ideal university. And it would create solutions for most of the problems of the schools. But, there were some difficulties. Even some ministries - our Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, we call it the Ministry of Integration, I was called by the representative of them. And, I was asked why I raised this issue on social media, why I didn't tell them about it. I faced such problems. At that time, they told me that they have an idea about opening it as a department or faculty within one of the universities of Georgia. And they want to organize it for Azerbaijani language and literature. But, I answered that the problem is not only about Azerbaijani language and literature. There is a shortage for other subjects too. Of course, founding this university means a complete solution for many problems. As you know, today Azerbaijani history isn't taught in almost any school. Azerbaijani culture is also overlooked. If we created this university, one of the main points that I offered was that teaching of Azerbaijani language, literature, history, and culture must be taught compulsorily regardless of their faculty. And, of course, Georgian language also must be compulsory regardless of the faculty. If someone is studying for a Bachelor's degree, he or she must learn Georgian everyday. Additionally, regardless of the faculty, all must learn Georgian history, literature and culture. There was another idea of sending 40 Azerbaijani students to Azerbaijan, maybe Baku, or Gazakh for studying. But, for me this is not an effective offer. In my opinion, if these young people go to Azerbaijan, they will be far from Georgia for four years, so they will forget the Georgian language. When they return, as you know, teacher have special statuses as senior teacher, leading teacher, so gaining these status they must pass a certification exam which includes Georgian language

too. So, these young people may forget what they have already known by staying four years in Azerbaijan. So, when they return, they can work as a practitioner teacher for a lower salary. For example, for gaining senior teacher status, they have to learn the Georgian language and pass the exam. This is a long process. I thought that founding that university means great opportunities for all aspects. If the university was founded, not only the problems of teachers, but also other problems, such as theater which is one of the most concerning issues would be solved. The theater culture of Azerbaijan started from Georgia, Tbilisi. It is one of the oldest theaters. It was founded in 1873. This theater is going to be shut. Professional actors are not prepared. As a culture center, the university would be a solution for personnel problems for theater, dance, film etc. It may be a bridge between Azerbaijan and Georgia. Because, despite political and economic relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia being very good, the culture sector has problems. This university would fill this gap too.

Researcher: What kind of difficulties do ethnic minorities face if they don't know Georgian well?

Interviewee: Of course, we live in Georgia, Georgian is our state language. Many documentations, writing forms, communication with local and central institutions, all are in Georgian language. So, of course, some difficulties occur. But, for example, if teachers work in Azerbaijani-language schools, they may not face much difficulty with their work. But, if they go to a doctor, bank, or Ministry of Justice, they may use Russian as an alternative language. Actually, it is a duty of call operators, they must know a few languages, not only Georgian. Knowing many languages is important for customer service. But, as an alternative language, they use Russian to some extent. Or, young people sometimes may use English. People can set things off. But, they still face difficulties. For example, they ask someone who knows Georgian to filling forms. In general, it causes some problems. Maybe, in the places where Azerbaijanis live compactly, they don't face these problems as they don't go to the bank, or doctor everyday. It is up to the situation. In Marneuli, some workers of the Bank of Georgia are Azerbaijanis. I myself have seen it repeatedly that if someone doesn't understand any documents, they call Azerbaijanis and the problem is over.

Researcher: Our interview is going to be long. I hope it is not boring.

Interviewee: No, it is not a problem. I want to answer all questions.

Researcher: Our following questions will be about local self-governance and political participation. How effective do you consider the local self-governance (municipality) system in Georgia in order to solve the problems of ethnic minorities? Please, rate 1 to 10.

Interviewee: (2) Compared to the central government, local governance is very weak. I would like to see mainly Azerbaijanis in self-governance in Kvemo-Kartli. In recent years, we see Azerbaijani only in Marneuli as a mayor. But, in other regions, Gardabani, Dmanisi, Bolnisi, where majority of the population are Azerbaijanis, I would like to see mainly Azerbaijanis. We don't see Azerbaijani mayors in these regions. Even the majority of the workers are Georgians. So, communication fails, as people avoid expressing their problems. The barrier occurs between them. That is why this causes some problems. Additionally, all municipalities have their own page on Facebook, all of them post in

Georgian, except Marneuli Municipality. So, posting only in Georgian causes displeasure among people. If the majority of the population are Azerbaijanis, of course they must be aware of what is happening in the municipality, how the budget is spending. But they can't. As there was the only homeland during Soviet times in which the Russian language was more common, so older people don't know the Georgian language well, or completely don't know. They are unaware of what is happening in their region, and what decisions are made. Of course, it is the obligation of municipalities. But, probably, posting in one language for misunderstanding by people is in favor of them. I think, activity of NGOs is also ineffective. If special projects would be realized with NGOs, it would lead to the development of the region. Municipalities are close to cooperation. It seems that cooperation happens openly only in Marneuli. I can't see work with young people. They may do projects related to young people, or integration. But, unfortunately, I can't see this kind of work. Previously, we talked about changing names. The problem related to Narimanov was also widely discussed. Maybe you already know about it. It is also related to the municipality's area of activity. Before every election, they politicize the topic. They say that the monument of Narimanov will be removed, his name will be removed, etc. But, we, people gathered, signed a petition, and sent it to the municipality. They haven't decided anything until today about both removing the name of Narimanov from the Cultural Center, and about the monument. His name was removed from the Marneuli Cultural House, and from the Gizilhajili village school in which he worked as a teacher. Additionally, we called to name the park as "Narimanov", in which his monument is located. In total, we applied for three topics. From one side, it is discrimination. Enough people signed a petition, but there is no answer or work until today.

Researcher: Do you think that ethnic minorities must have their own political parties for better representation?

Interviewee: I am far from politics, as well as parties. I think that there is no need for establishing such a party. Because, in Georgia there must be an inclusive environment in which all must be accepted as equal citizens. Actually, there must not be a need for such a party. The policy of the state must be equal for everyone. But, unfortunately, there are some disruptions related to the policy of the state. If you remember, the first coronavirus case was found in Georgia on February 26, last year. Then, Azerbaijani who passed the Red Bridge cross was infected, so unethical words, insults against Azerbaijanis started. The state could prevent it, but otherwise, they closed Marneuli, Bolnisi. Today, we see that the majority of cases are in Tbilisi itself. But, at that time, there were one or two infected people, but they closed everywhere and Azerbaijanis stayed in a shutdown situation. And, it continued for so long. Even after the opening of the ways, they behaved Azerbaijanis as "infected" people. It could be prevented timely. But it didn't. Vice versa, insults against Azerbaijanis were supported. I want to say again that many things are related to the policies of the state. You saw it during the Dmanisi scandal too. It is easily possible to fire spark - ethnic conflict, instead of adding water on it. But, the policy of the state must be fundamental for preventing such events...

Researcher: As we know, nowadays there is an active campaign to nationalize the ending of surnames. What is your opinion about this topic?

Interviewee: Actually, this topic also was controversial when it was started. There was -zadeh ending in that campaign. Some people argued that the -zadeh ending has Persian origin. I welcome the campaign positively. I think that the majority of the people will not change the ending of their surname even after the proposal is realized. Because, people must change their diplomas, all documents. Additionally, changing every document requires additional finance. Because of such problems, the majority will not do it. But for the future generation, it is a good opportunity, as they will be able to select the surname ending that they want. Generally, I think that investigation is needed about this topic. It is not researched well. It is interesting to me too. When I see documents from the 1920s, or around this period, we see that some people have surnames, while the majority don't have. Some used the name of their fathers. For understanding the real situation, serious research has not been conducted. Is -li, or -zadeh really ours? Firstly, we have to explore these points to find out which one is suitable for us. But, generally, I think positively about it, as future generations will be able to change if they want.

Researcher: Well. Last few questions will be about Azerbaijan, and the relations of your community with Azerbaijan. What is your opinion about Azerbaijan's impact on the region? Does Azerbaijani government provide your region any economic, political or cultural support?

Interviewee: As I mentioned before, relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan were founded by Shevarnadze and Heydar Aliyev. These two persons have an important role to build these relations. But we saw the peak during the period of Saakashvili and Ilham Aliyev. I think that the main beneficiary from good relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan is Georgian Azerbaijanis. So, if the economic, political and cultural relations are good, Georgian Azerbaijanis will benefit from that. As you know, big projects such as oil and gas pipelines, railroads cross Georgia, they have some effects. Some important projects related to Georgian Azerbaijanis are realized by Azerbaijan. The main goal of the majority of the finance by SOCAR itself as cooperative social responsibility is Azerbaijanis. Many schools were renovated by either SOCAR or Heydar Aliyev Foundation, however they must be renovated by the government. These works have been realized with the finance of Azerbaijan. Schools, kindergartens, sport complexes, projects for people with disabilities have been realized. Tomorrow, the opening ceremony of the great sports complex will be in Gizilhajili. This project has been started in 2018. There will be the opening ceremony of kindergarten in another village which is populated by Azerbaijanis. It is also the project of 2018 and funded by SOCAR, in other words, by Azerbaijan. There are many little projects too. There are usually calls by the people. For example, if someone has a serious illness, they call. SOCAR doesn't even publicize these works. There are many aids to Georgian Azerbaijanis. But, the biggest assistance is paying for the education fees of young people. Education is the starting point of the solution of every problem. From 2009-2010, "1+4" program was realized, which is the state program for ethnic minorities. Students prepare for the Georgian language for a year, then study for a Bachelor's degree for the following four years. SOCAR fully fund these five years. As I mentioned,

education is the starting point of the solution of every problem. Investing in education is the greatest support of Azerbaijan to his compatriots. Educated man means, good economist, good lawyer, good engineer, good doctor. It means that educated Azerbaijani young people who are aware of their rights will be in every sector, such as education and medicine. Yes, sometimes we see young people who are educated with the funds of SOCAR speak against SOCAR and protest it. Despite this, the education fee of everyone was paid, regardless of their political view. Among them, there are even the people who insult, abuse Azerbaijan. Because, the main purpose is the young people who are educated and aware of their rights. The education fee of the majority of activists was paid by SOCAR, Azerbaijan. Of course it is very good that they are active, know their rights and can speak in Georgian well. In my opinion, the purpose of Azerbaijan is independent, educated young people. Demanding rights from Georgia would be better. I would like to mention one issue about the integration process. "1+4" program of Georgia is prepared specially for ethnic minorities. Every year, about 900 young people use it. But, in reality, it would not have such importance and effectiveness, if there was no SOCAR. If we think about it, the majority of Azerbaijanis here are socially disadvantaged, they have financial problems. I know young people that can't even pay for their rent, despite SOCAR's fee payment for five years. They pay hardly for coming from the village to Tbilisi, daily spendings, and meals. If there was not such financial support, I think that even 9 of 900 students couldn't continue their study in the university. That's why educational support is the greatest support among the projects that I mentioned. The young people must appreciate it. It helps the integration too, as five years is not a short period. One leaves the village, develop their language skills for five years. They communicate and attend the same classes, lectures with Georgians. It is the opportunity to show their culture to them, as well as learn their culture. There will be opportunities to deepen friendship and brotherhood. Petroleum and gas are limited resources. They are not limitless. Today Azerbaijan pays, maybe tomorrow it will not be able to pay. Today the fee of these young people is paid, but tomorrow maybe there will not be an opportunity to pay for children and grandchildren. That's why Georgian Azerbaijanis must take maximum advantage of this program and they must form love, mutual respect from Georgians towards us. When events such as Dmanisi happen in the future, and the state keeps silent and creates conditions for it, unity, friendship among Georgians and Azerbaijanis must not give chance. Or any Georgian shouldn't say slogans such as "Georgia is for Georgians", "Go to your historical homeland" as it was said during Gamsakhurdia's period. So, these young people must benefit from these five years. But, unfortunately, young people sometimes come here, they don't use their father's money, they waste their time, don't study, can't pass the exams, then they ask others to pay their education fees.

Researcher: Have you ever had a plan about moving to Azerbaijan? Do you have or intend to get dual citizenship?

Interviewee: I have lived in Azerbaijan for nearly 10 years. As I mentioned before, I studied there. I graduated from Bachelor's degree there. Then, after studying for 2 years in Norway, I returned to Azerbaijan and worked there for a few years. Approximately, I lived for 9 years in Azerbaijan. But, I

always wanted to come to Georgia. Here is my homeland, I was born here, my parents live here. Yes, I have enough relatives in Azerbaijan too. I have relatives who have citizenship there too. Georgian citizenship is very important for me. I would never change my Georgian citizenship. But I would agree if there is dual citizenship opportunity, with the condition of keeping my Georgian citizenship. Great. Azerbaijan is a national and spiritual homeland. It would not be bad, but as I mentioned, only with the condition of keeping my Georgian citizenship.

Researcher: My last question is about the Keshikchidag events that happened in 2019. Have you ever faced any ethnic discrimination or racism related to David Gareji (Keshikchidagh) issue between Azerbaijan and Georgia?

Interviewee: I am sorry about such an incident. I think that this incident between two countries must not be an issue that is discussed at low levels. At a high level, heads of the states must solve this problem. Both of the countries recognize their state borders. There is a mutual agreement. Probably, demarcation and delimitation processes also will be solved soon. There are some political parties here, which are also mentioned as agents of Russia. As a result of their efforts, this issue was incited, so the two nations were confronted. Of course, Georgian Azerbaijanis especially suffered. I always heard. I use public transport, metro, and bus frequently. I remember that once an old woman in the metro was screaming that “David Gareji is Georgia”. Of course, I have Georgian friends. Whether you like it or not, you feel a certain coldness. Even if they don’t tell you directly, the coldness is felt. Again, I am very disappointed that such an incident happened and we, Georgian Azerbaijanis mostly suffered. I hope that this issue will be solved and we will not return to this topic.

Researcher: Lastly, is there anything we haven’t covered that you would like to talk about?

Interviewee: I forgot one issue. You previously asked about the projects that are realized by Azerbaijan in Georgia. I mentioned only SOCAR. But, the Diaspora Committee of Azerbaijan also has projects with organizations here. Actually, only one organization was established in 2019, in which I also worked there as a director. Integration Center of Georgian Azerbaijanis. This Center involved pupils too. As I mentioned before, education is the solution for every problem, so “Education is the future of the nation” project is still continuing. Approximately 12 courses are taught there. It helps young people to spend their time productively, learning languages. Georgian Literature course is not taught in any school. The Integration Center of Georgian Azerbaijanis is the only center where Georgian Literature is taught. Additionally, “Tea House” by SOCAR is led by Marneuli Youth Organization. Some courses are taught in this center. Hundreds of young people are admitted to the universities by attending these courses. These young people not only study at university, but also prepare for the university with the finances of Azerbaijan. For the “1+4” program, the young people must pass the exam on math and logic. There are math and logic courses both at “Tea House” and Integration Center. 12th class students come there, and by attending these courses, Azerbaijan help them even to get admitted to the university. In villages, the cost of this course is approximately 100 lari. As I mentioned, Georgian Azerbaijanis are socially and financially disadvantaged. For a family, paying 100 lari for a course is a great amount. But it is organized

for free and hundreds of young people, as I know from the teacher who works there, this year nearly 100 young people attended courses at “Tea House” and got admitted to the university. As well as at the Integration Center. Not only courses are taught, but also attending to museums of both Georgians and Azerbaijanis, excursions to the historical places of Georgia, “Young Leaders” Summer School, “Young Leaders” Winter School and various other events were organized. Georgians, foreigners were also invited to such events. Let’s say comprehensive development. These events still continue. In the end, I want to mention that education means solutions for many problems. And the biggest support of Azerbaijan for its compatriots is their help for the education sector. Educated man means the man who knows his/her rights and such man knows where to address, how to address, how to defend his/her rights.

Researcher: Thank you very much!



APPENDIX 5: CODEBOOK

Excerpt	Condensation	Code	Category	Theme
Almost all people living in Georgia, if you ask any of them, they will give different answers. (Sakhavat)	People will give different answers about the naming of ethnic identity.	Naming of identity among Azerbaijanis	Complexity of the identification issue (3.1.1)	Ways of identification of Azerbaijanis (3.1)
Generally, discussions about national identity are the most tense and controversial topics in Georgia. (Aygul)	Identification issue is tense and controversial.	Naming of identity among Azerbaijanis	Complexity of the identification issue (3.1.1)	Identification of Azerbaijanis (3.1)
If someone asks me what is your national music and dance, I can't answer only about Borchali. Great composer Uzeyir Hajibeyli belongs to not only Azerbaijanis in Azerbaijan, but also all Azerbaijanis around the world. I am proud that Uzeyir Hajibeyli composed the first opera in the Eastern world. But if I call myself as Borchali Turk, it would mean that I refuse such great persons and achievements and culture. It is the same for all branches of the culture, such as dance, music, political figures and scientists, etc. (Aygul)	Different identification such as Borchali Turk separates the nation.	Naming of identity among Azerbaijanis	Complexity of the identification issue (3.1.1)	Identification of Azerbaijanis (3.1)
We are in Georgia. When we are in Georgia they say you are Azerbaijani, when we are in Azerbaijan they say you are Georgian. We are stuck in the middle. As if we are the border. We cannot feel ourselves belonging either to this side or to that side. This led to a lot of problems. (Emil)	There are various identifications in Azerbaijan and Georgia.	Naming of identity among Azerbaijanis	Complexity of the identification issue (3.1.1)	Identification of Azerbaijanis (3.1)
There is no Azerbaijani living in the center of Bolnisi. For Azerbaijanis living there, whether for business or living, etc. the house is not for sale. Natarius doesn't register it either. (Samira)	Officials and local people don't sell real estate to Azerbaijanis in the Bolnisi region.	Real estate owning limitations	Discrimination by state institutions (3.6.1)	Discrimination (3.6)
There are churches in Marneuli. Municipality does not allocate as much money to our mosques as the money allocated to churches. This is a great evil against us. (Emil)	Municipality allocates more money to churches than mosques.	Budget distribution by the municipality	Discrimination by state institutions (3.6.1)	Discrimination (3.6)
If 1 million budget is allocated for the population living here, for their culture. I can't understand why this is intended for 5 Georgian villages? Their culture houses are renovated, their holidays are celebrated, festivals are held in their villages, etc. Culture houses in our villages are either teahouses, or warehouses, or are generally closed, falling apart and in bad shape. (Samira)	Municipality allocates more money to culture houses of Georgian villages than Azerbaijani villages.	Budget distribution by the municipality	Discrimination by state institutions (3.6.1)	Discrimination (3.6)