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**ETHNIC MINORITIES INTEGRATION
AND CONFLICT PREVENTION IN SOUTH CAUCASUS.**

Strengthening Azeri ethnic minority in Georgia:
working in Kvemo-Kartli region.

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INTRODUCTION

After months of increased tension, and recent low-level hostilities, the conflict between Georgia and the breakaway region of South Ossetia escalated in the early morning of 8th August 2008.

The fighting became the most serious confrontation since the 1992 truce.

On August the 7th 2008 the present government reacted to border provocations and shelling of Georgian villages by invading South Ossetia which sparked the counter-invasion by Russia.

Some other fighting between Georgian and Russian forces took place on the administrative border with Abkhazia, another breakaway region of Georgia.

On August the 12th the Russian president Dmitry Medvedev announced the termination of hostilities in Georgia and accepted the six-points peace plan proposed by France on behalf of the European Union. On the next day, a cease-fire agreement was signed between Georgia and Russia.

But this adjustment is far from ensuring a durable and peaceful solution.

This war is not the first in the region. In fact, Georgia hosts two separatist territories which have been involved in open conflicts against the Georgian State during the last twenty years, in correspondence with the disintegration of the Soviet Union: South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

In the case of South Ossetia, the decision of the Supreme Soviet of the Autonomous Region of South Ossetia in November 1989 to upgrade its status from Autonomous Region to Autonomous Republic was revoked by the Georgian Supreme Soviet. In 1990, South Ossetia appealed to Moscow to recognize the region as an independent subject of the Soviet Federation. This went against the Soviet constitution which specified that territorial changes affecting Union Republics could not be taken without their agreement. In December 1990, the Supreme Soviet of Georgia abolished the autonomy of South Ossetia. The escalation of violence, leading to the flight of tens of thousands of civilians, ended only in June 1992 when a cease-fire agreement was signed.

Unilateral decisions were also characteristics of Georgian-Abkhaz relations. On August 25th 1990, the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia passed a declaration of State sovereignty. The Military Council in Georgia, which took power in January 1992 under the leadership of Shevardnadze, abolished the 1978 constitution and unilaterally reinstated the Georgian constitution of 1921, which included only a vague clause on Abkhaz administrative autonomy. This unilateral move by Tbilisi was then countered by the unilateral decision of the Abkhaz parliament to

reinstate a draft constitution prepared in 1925, which declared Abkhazia to be a sovereign state. In August 1992, the Georgian State Council decided to intervene militarily in the escalating political conflict between the Georgian and Abkhaz communities in Abkhazia itself trying to take military control of the whole territory. Support from the Northern Caucasus combined with Russian assistance made the conflict turn in favour of the Abkhaz who defeated Georgian troops in autumn 1993.

Georgia belongs to that 90% of states named multiethnic or multinational which incorporate two or more ethnic groups or nations.¹ In fact, Georgia's population is historically diverse. Apart from ethnic Georgians, Jews, Armenians, Kurds, Russians, Ukrainians, Chechens, Ossetians, Abkhaz, Azeris and other ethnic groups currently reside in Georgia.

Nevertheless not all of them fought or are openly fighting against the Georgian State for the autonomy or independence of the territories they are occupying. One of the ethnic groups not ever involved in open violent conflicts, as opposed to Abkhaz or South Ossetian, is the Azeri community.

The Azeri population in Georgia is closely related to the Azeris in Azerbaijan and groups from which the Azeris are descendants have lived in Georgia at least since the 11th century. The ethno-genesis of the group is complex and is based on a mixture of Caucasian Albanian, Turkish and Iranian influences.

The Azeris in Georgia are the fastest growing minority and today comprise the largest ethnic group in the country. It's living almost compactly in one region of southern Georgia, named Kvemo-Kartli, close to the border with Azerbaijan.

The Azeris in Georgia are relatively homogeneous and, in its overwhelming majority, rural. In Kvemo-Kartli, the Azeris suffer from a low level of education. Following Georgian independence, many rural Azeris have found themselves poorly integrated into Georgian state structures, with only a small minority being speakers of the new state language. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, emigration to Azerbaijan has been significant, although due to a traditionally high birth rate the population has not declined in numbers, in contrast to most other minority groups in Georgia.

Thus, because of historical and environmental reasons, this community is meeting nowadays with several difficulties which impede an effective integration in the Georgian State.

¹ TARAS, Raymond, GANGULY, Rajat, *Understanding ethnic conflict : the international dimension*, New York, Longman, 2008, p. 2.

Chapters 2 and 3 of the present work will be consecrated to the presentation of the Azeri minority, to those mentioned problems it is facing today and to the consequences on its insignificant integration in the Georgian society.

In spite of these problems, Azeri community is living peacefully with the non-Georgian community installed in the area, which is quite ethnically mixed, and with the central power based in Tbilisi.

However, some authors express the concern about a potential conflict in the region of Kvemo-Kartli because of those problems which hinder their integration in the Georgian society. Wheatley (2005) agrees and affirms there is then a “urgent need for action”².

This last opinion has been validated by a personal journey to Kvemo-Kartli, in September 2008, in a village called Gardabani, situated a few kilometres from the border with Azerbaijan. I had the chance to meet some members of a local NGO named Bridge. This organization, founded in 2000 to promote cross-cultural communication in Kvemo-Kartli, was probably the most active and well-established NGO during the early years of its existence. Its aim was to bring together the different ethnic communities in Kvemo-Kartli through civic education and youth work. Following the “Rose Revolution”, the director of Bridge, Ramin Bairamov, belonging to the Azeri ethnic group, was appointed first deputy of Gardabani *rayon* (district) and left his position in the NGO. Consequently, a young man, Rustam Mailov, substituted Mr. Bairamov bringing with him some young people belonging to the Azeri community. This new board is closely concerned by all the problems of the Azeri community and during my visit at Bridge’s office it perfectly illustrated all of them showing how important it is to act properly and quickly for the integration of the Azeri community in the Georgian State.

In chapter 4, some aspects of a potential conflict in Kvemo-Kartli will be more deeply explored through the help of some theoretical contributes.

Following all these evidences of lack of action in the field of integration in Kvemo-Kartli, it has been decided to carry out a research work in the field.

² WHEATLEY, Jonathan, *Obstacles Impeding the Regional Integration of the Kvemo-Kartli Region of Georgia*, Tbilisi, ECMI Working Papers, 2005, p.40.

In fact, the main purpose of this work is to present and illustrate a work field implemented during a working period in Georgia (September-December 2008). This research consists in 11 semi-structured interviews with relevant actors of the Georgian and Azeri civil societies working in the field of strengthening the Azeri minority in Kvemo-Kartli in several fields, with the common goal to improve its integration in the Georgian society.

This work aims to analyse those actions taken by civil society to integrate Azeri minority and to find eventual gaps to be filled for a more efficient action in a inter-ethnic conflict perspective.

Some authors, as well as I, think that a root of potential conflict in Kvemo-Kartli does exist. That's why I consider necessary, if not urgent, to strengthen Azeri community in order to give it the means for an efficient integration in the Georgian society to avoid any ethnic conflict.

In this perspective, chapter 6 seeks to explore those actions. After some methodological elements (chapter 5) and a brief presentation of the players interviewed, the results of the research will be illustrated.

In order to better understand the some key terms used in this work a literature review will be undertaken in chapter 1 to establish functional definitions of “ethnic group” and “minority”.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW.

Ethnic groups and minorities: efforts toward functional definitions.

As mentioned in several points in the introduction, we agree to define the Azeri group as an ethnic group. Therefore, it is clearly important to explore some definitions of this term. Barth (1989) borrows from Narrol (1964) an anthropological definition of ethnic group which is understood as “a population which:

- is largely biologically self-perpetuating
- shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms
- makes up a field of communication and interaction
- has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.”³

In his essay on ethnopolitical conflict, Ellis (2006) is also exploring this complex term, clearly distinguishing it from the term of “race”. Four key issues are given by this author to define an ethnic group and they partially coincide with the characteristics individuated by Narrol.

Those are:

- “belief of the group that their members share interests (these interests are typically political but particular importance is assumed by collective interests);
- recognition of the membership in the group, which is an important resource in generating meaning and communication;
- awareness of who is in the group and who is not: this is the essence of social identity that is based on the recognition of similarity and difference;
- members of an ethnic group are communicatively formed.”⁴

Ellis does not mention the biological perpetuation but confers special attention to the identification component and to the social interaction process that builds up an ethnic group. The importance of the identification is emphasized by stressing that the ethnicity concerns inclusion: “it’s about believing and recognizing your membership in a group with common national origins”⁵.

³ BARTH, Fredrick, *Ethnic groups and Boundaries. The social organisation of culture differences*, Bergen, London, Boston, 1989, p. 10-11.

⁴ ELLIS, Donald, *Transforming conflict : communication and ethnopolitical conflict*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2006, p. 34.

⁵ *Id.*, p. 32.

Another similar definition of ethnic group or community is prompted by Tallis and Ganguly (2008) who suggest that an ethnic group could be defined “as a large or small group of people [...] who are united by a common inherited culture (including language, music, food, dress, and customs and practises), racial similarity, common religion, and belief in common history and ancestry and who exhibit a strong psychological sentiment of belonging to the group.”⁶ Moreover, these two authors put forward the possible distinction between homelands societies and diaspora communities which in our case is relevant. The Azeri community is actually homeland society which could be defined as a long-time resident of a given territory. Tallis and Ganguly would add that this type of society claims exclusive legal and moral rights of ownership over the land it occupies designating historical and archaeological evidences. We will find out afterwards that this is not actually the case for the Azeri community living in the region of Kvemo-Kartli in Georgia and this is what distinguishes this ethnic group from the Abkhaz and Ossetian ones: the seeking of territorial rights.

For a formal definition of the term “minority”, we will follow the path traced by Inder Singh (2001) who is keen to employ the international law even though she cites a phrase of the first OSCE’s High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max van der Stoel, on the difficulty of agreeing on what constitutes a minority: “the existence of a minority is a question of fact not of definition”⁷. The author refers to some international instruments such as the *Copenhagen Document* (1990), the *UN Declaration on Minorities*⁸ (1992) and the *CE Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (1995) which affirm that it is up to individuals to decide whether they belong to a minority or not. In *Democracy, ethnic diversity, and security in post-communist Europe*, a minority is defined as “an ethnic, religious, linguistic or national group which constitutes a numerical minority and it has a non-dominant position in the state.”⁹

Since this concept it is hardly definable, we would like to go further and explore other opinions. We would propose some reflections made by Jackson Preece (1998) who seeks a working definition of the term proposed above. She pursues this objective in two ways:

⁶ TARAS, Raymond, GANGULY, Rajat, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

⁷ INDER SINGH, Anita, *Democracy, ethnic diversity, and security in post-communist Europe*, Westport, Praeger, 2001, p. XX.

⁸ *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*.

⁹ INDER SINGH, Anita, *op. cit.*, p. XX.

“by surveying the history of how international organizations concerned with minority questions have sought – and as of 1995 failed – to establish a common definition of the term minority; and by evaluating the various meanings adopted by some of the leading academic commentators on the subject of minority rights”¹⁰. We will omit here Jackson Preece’s entire analysis and we will directly jump to her conclusion which is actually what we are interested in now. On the base of the UN Secretary General’s Memorandum of 1950, she identifies the main definition of national minority as a particular type of community, particularly a national community, which is dissimilar from the majority group of the state. But this specification is so wide that she deems necessary to specify that “variations to this core definition arise as a result of the different kind of criteria – objective, subjective, or both – which are used to identify and explain the concept of a national or similar community”¹¹. Hence, taking into consideration the influences of these variations, the author eventually offers a complete and useful definition of the national minority as “a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, well defined and historically established on the territory of that state, whose members – being nationals of the state – possess ethnic, religious, linguistic, or cultural characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion, or language.”¹²

¹⁰ JACKSON PREECE, Jennifer, *National Minorities and the European Nation-States System*, Oxford, Clarendon press, 1998, p. 14.

¹¹ *Id.*, p. 27.

¹² *Id.*, p. 28.

2. THE CASE OF STUDY: PRESENTATION OF THE AZERI COMMUNITY OF GEORGIA

2.1 The origins. The result of natural migrations and demographic engineering practices.

The emergence of Azeris in Georgia is closely related to the ethno-dynamics on the territories today constituting Azerbaijan and south-eastern Georgia and the migrations of Turkic tribes to the region in the 11th century, Mongol tribes in the 13-14th centuries, and the Kizilbash tribes in the 15th and 18th centuries.

A massive influx of Turkic tribes to the south-eastern parts of the Georgian lands took place during the Seljuk Turk invasions in the 11th century. The Seljuks initially came as nomads, but from around 1080, they began settling permanently in south-western Georgia. King Giorgi II (1072-1089) was forced to sign a peace treaty, reducing Georgia to a tributary state of the Seljuk sultanate until Seljuk hegemony was brought to an end by Giorgi II's successor, David IV "the Builder" (reign 1089-1125).

Like other parts of the Caucasus, Georgia was not spared from the invasions of the Mongols and Turco-Mongols in the 13th -14th centuries, which brought an end to Georgia's "Golden Age". After the decline of the Mongols, the 15th -18th centuries were marked by the struggle between the Ottoman Empire and Persia for dominance over the Caucasus and throughout the disintegrated Georgian Kingdoms and Principalities, the populations were constantly menaced by the two external powers. Several wars were fought between the Ottomans and the Persians over Georgia in the 16th -17th centuries. From the 1540's, Persia dominated eastern Georgia, and in the following centuries thousands of Turkish tribesmen, the so-called Kizilbash (which means "redheads" after their characteristic red head scarves) with their families, were resettled in Borchalo (parts of today's Kvemo-Kartli) and Kakheti (a region of the eastern Georgia). With the help of population transfers and demographic engineering, the Persian Shahs replaced Georgians with Kizilbash tribes. The resettled tribes, referred to in Georgian sources as Eli, came from regions poorly integrated into Persia and often beyond the control of the Persian governors. Largely, they did not identify as Persians and spoke Turkic languages rather than Farsi (Persian).

In the early 17th century, after several rebellions in Kakheti and Kartli, Shah Abbas (reign 1587-1629) defeated Georgian insurgents, massacred 70.000 people and deported over 200.000 nobles and peasants from eastern Georgia to Iran in 1614-17. To repopulate the largely emptied lands, he brought in additional Kizilbash tribes in large numbers. Continued resettlement led in 1659 to a general uprising, which not only involved the local Kakhetian peasantry, but also Khevsur, Pshav and Tush tribes. As a result of the uprising, the newly settled Kizilbash were forced to leave the region. Later, Kizilbash were again resettled in large numbers and the two-decade period beginning in 1735 is known in Georgia as Kizilbashoba (“Time of the Kizilbash”).

However, the efforts of Persian rulers to radically change the power balance in Kartli and Kakheti largely failed and Eli finally became subject to Georgian laws. The Dasturlamali (the “Collection of Laws”) introduced by King Vakhtang VI (reign 1703-11 and 1719-24) has a separate chapter on the Eli, where their rights and responsibilities, such as tax collection, justice and other governing issues were defined. Other measures were taken by Georgian nobles to change Eli’s lifestyle from semi-nomadic to sedentary, which was carried out through encouragement to construct irrigation systems and engage in agriculture. According to 18th century accounts, Eli were mostly occupied with animal herding but also with agriculture, cultivating grain, cotton and rice. Some of the names of these tribes are preserved in the place names of their settlements or regions where they eventually settled such as Borchalo, Keshalo, Hasanlu, Ahmadlu, Iormughanlo and others.

The Russian dominance of the Turkic populations in the South Caucasus in the 19th and 20th centuries significantly impacted on the shaping of their socio-political and cultural life. In contrast to the Christian Georgians and Armenians, who at least in the first three quarters of the 19th century were seen as natural allies of the Russian rulers, the Muslim populations were largely considered unruly and uncivilized, and while policies towards Georgians and Armenians were designed to educate and “enlighten” local national elites, the Muslim populations dragged on a marginal existence. Until the 1880’s, there were hardly any schools for the Muslim population, thus providing no basis for an educated Muslim strata that could study at universities in Russia or abroad. At the same time, there were efforts at the russification of the Azeri Turks, and many last names with Azeri endings were replaced with Russian endings such as –ov and -ev. This process continued during the Soviet period. While Georgians and Armenians had developed political parties already by the 1860’s, it was only around the 1905 Revolution that a national consciousness had emerged among the urban Azeris in Tbilisi and Baku.

2.2 The Soviet period. The linguistic standardization and the Soviet policy toward nationalities.

During the Soviet period, policies of education of the masses were introduced and the widespread illiteracy among Azeris was gradually reduced. Especially after World War II, Russian became the *lingua franca* in the Soviet Union, while Azeri language continued to be taught as the first language in schools both in Azerbaijan and in Azeri inhabited minority regions in Georgia. Hence, Azeris along with many other minority groups in Georgia did not need to learn the Georgian titular language, and for the compactly settled Azeri enclaves there were few opportunities or reasons to do so, as interaction with Georgians was limited.

As mentioned earlier in this text, ethnic Azeri population in Kvemo-Kartli has never fought for the independence of its territory as other regions in Georgia did after the collapse of the Soviet system. We could try to explain this paradox via the Soviet policy toward nationalities. The USSR was composed by fifteen Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR) corresponding to fifteen nationalities. It is pertinent to precise that in the Soviet Union citizenship and nationality were different and respectively Soviet and Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian, Azerbaijani, etc.

Moreover, within the SSR existed twenty Soviet Socialist Autonomous Republics, eight Autonomous Regions, and ten Autonomous Districts.

In 1922, Abkhazia became an Autonomous Republic, South Ossetia an Autonomous Region. These political structures gave these territories also some protection from the Georgian dominance which had strong tendency to Georgianization.

Hence, totally fifty-three nationalities were in possession of constitutionally recognized territories which represented political and territorial entities. All of them were embryos of states because they had political and cultural institutions, boundaries, own languages and local military forces. This federal ethnically-based structure was a tool of the Soviet centralism and at a later stage became the seed of the separatism. All these tools became powerful spurs for independence demands.¹³

We can suggest that the fact that the region of Kvemo-Kartli was not a precise and specific entity of this system is one of the reasons why the Azeri population never claimed for the independence or autonomy of its territory and never openly fought with the Georgian majority.

¹³ BALIVET, Thomas, *Géopolitique de la Géorgie. Souveraineté et contrôle des territoires*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2005, p. 84-86.

2.3 The independence of Georgia. The raise of ethnic tensions.

As a rural population with a very limited segment of educated persons and almost no members within the *intelligentsia*, Azeris were not politically active and did not engage in politics other than in strictly local matters. However, with the upsurge of nationalism in Georgia ethnic tensions between Georgians and Azeris in Kvemo-Kartli region emerged. In June 1989, the climate became extremely tense and confrontations between ethnic Georgians and Azeris broke out, resulting in several incidents of street-fighting. Residents in Marneuli, Bolnisi, Dmanisi¹⁴ and in other areas of compact Azeri population mobilized in protest. In some cases, violent confrontations took place, and the situation went particularly out of control in Bolnisi, where a number of Azeri houses were burned down. Although this did not lead to serious blood-shed.¹⁵

Radical elements of the Georgian nationalist movement publicly voiced their concern with the high birth rate in the Azeri community, which contrasted sharply with much lower birth rate of the Georgian population. They said the resultant ethno-demographic balance would be unfavourable for Georgia. On the other hand, petitions for the so-called “Borchalo Autonomy” also attracted some public attention. Some activists of the community sent these petitions to the Soviet leadership in Moscow, demanding a special autonomous status for Azeri ethnic enclaves. Nevertheless, the community abstained from any further activity, and Azeri organizations did not raise any political demands.¹⁶

The situation relatively stabilized in the following months. The escalation of political struggle in Tbilisi and serious conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia diverted public attention from the problems of the Azeri community for quite a long time.

However, hundreds of Azeris had been dismissed from their jobs in Bolnisi and Dmanisi and, out of fear of repressions, several thousands of ethnic Azeris left Georgia. Most of them moved to Azerbaijan, while a smaller portion went to Russia. In the town of Bolnisi, practically all members of the large Azeris community left, often after selling their houses for nominal charges.

During the period 1992-1994, Kvemo-Kartli fell under the influence of various criminal gangs associated with the *Mkhedrioni* and other criminal organizations. The province

¹⁴ See also Appendix A.

¹⁵ NODIA, Ghia, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

experienced a high level of bandit activities because the main road to Azerbaijan and Armenia were used for smuggling contraband and were therefore controlled by paramilitaries.¹⁷

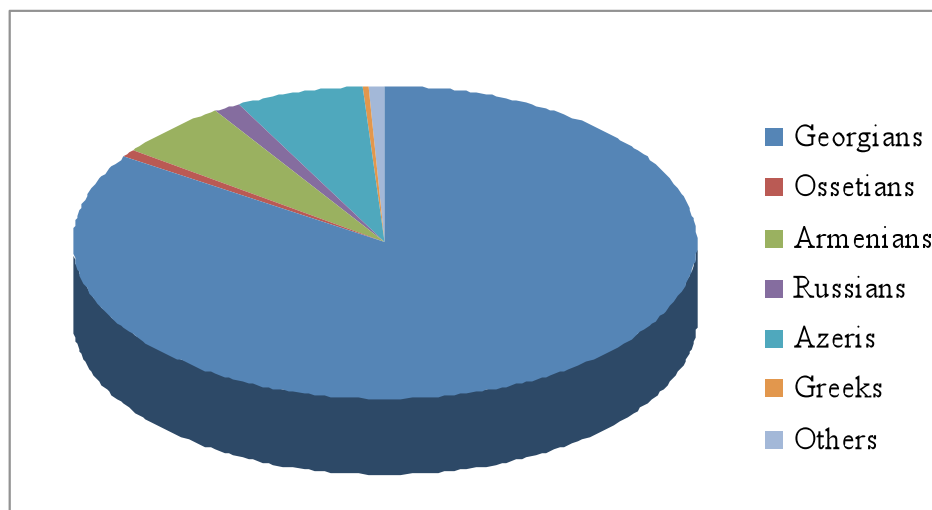
In the following years, the situation improved. From 1995 stability returned to Kvemo-Kartli as the government of Eduard Shevardnadze completed its crackdown on the *Mkhedrioni* and other paramilitary groups. At the provincial level, power was now held by Levan Mamaladze who managed to keep stability by means of patron-clients network.¹⁸

2.4 The Azeri community today. The most numerous minority in Georgia.

Out of the anonymous data gathered through census, Georgia does not keep statistical data on national minorities as such or disaggregated per ethnicity.¹⁹ While this protects private information, this naturally makes certain statistics unavailable to researchers. Therefore, in this work we will use data from last census undertaken in 2002 which is likely the most updated count of the Georgian population.

The graph below indicates ethnic distribution in Georgia, regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are excluded.

Graph 1. Ethnic Minorities in Georgia²⁰



The census shows Azeris as the most sizeable minority with 284 thousand people (6,5% of the total population), closely followed by Armenians who are 248.000 (5,7% of the total

¹⁷ WHEATLEY, Jonathan, *op. cit.*, p. 13-14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia. Assessment survey report 2007-2008*, United Nations Association of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2008, p.16.

²⁰ *Id.*, Annex D.

population). Among other minorities only Russians exceed 1% (67 thousand people). Ukrainians, Abkhazians, Kists and Yezids are included in the category “Others”.

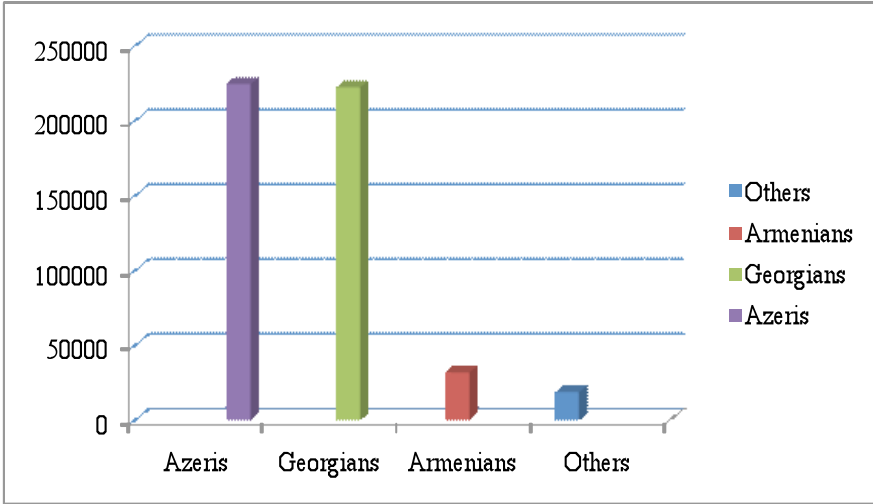
“Ethnic Azerbaijanis living in Georgia call themselves Georgian Azeris and consider Georgia to be their homeland.”²¹ As illustration of this, Fazil Hasanov, director of the Azeri Cultural Centre (Tbilisi) said: “I spent all my conscious life in Georgia, my ancestors lived in this country. I have relatives and friends here; therefore, my homeland is Georgia.”²²

2.5 Localisation. The dominance of the Kvemo-Kartli region.²³

The 2002 census says that 78% of the total Azeri population living in Georgia is concentrated in the province of Kvemo-Kartli. In this area, 45,1% of the population is Azeri. In this province there are six *rayons* or districts: Bolnisi, Dmanisi, Gardabani, Marneuli and Tsalka and Tetrtskaro.

The graph below clearly illustrate the ethnic distribution of the population in the province of Kvemo-Kartli. Out of a total of 497.530 individuals, the majority is ethnic Azeri, as 45,1% (224.606 persons). Closely following, we find the Georgian ethnic population with 222.450 individuals, as 44,7%. Armenians and other ethnic groups are numerically far.

Graph 2. Ethnic distribution of population in Kvemo-Kartli²⁴



²¹ *Multiethnic Georgia*, National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia Program, filmed by Public Broadcasting of Georgia, UNAG/USAID, 2008.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ See also Appendix A.

²⁴ *National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia. Assessment survey report 2007-2008*, United Nations Association of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2008, Annex D.

The town of Rustavi, located some 25 kilometres away from the capital is the administrative centre of the province. It significantly differs from the rest of the province economically and socially. Rustavi population is ethnically more mixed than the rest of the province, and does not differ significantly from the country wide composition: Rustavi grew notably in Soviet times, attracting qualified workers – mainly Georgians but also Russians – to the steel plant, the town’s main employer. The original local population constituted only a minor part of the factory workforce.

The towns of Marneuli and Gardabani are also close to the capital (at distances of 39 kilometres and 42 kilometres respectively) but less connected with it. The western *rayons* of Dmanisi and Tsalka are geographically more distant from Tbilisi, and are rather mountainous. According to the 2002 census, Azeris form the absolute majority of the population of Marneuli, Bolnisi and Dmanisi districts and more of than 40% in Gardabani *rayon*.

Mainly ethnic Georgians live in Tetrtskaro district. This location will therefore not be discussed in this paper.

All those data are clearly showed in the table here below. Those concerning Azeri population distribution are highlighted.

Table 1. Distribution of Azeri population in Kvemo-Kartli province²⁵

	Georgians	Azeris	Armenians	Greeks	Russians
Gardabani	53,20%	43,72%	0,93%	0,21%	0,87%
Marneuli	8,04%	83,10%	7,89%	0,33%	0,44%
Bolnisi	26,82%	65,98%	5,81%	0,59%	0,56%
Tsalka	12,02%	9,54%	54,98%	21,97%	0,60%
Dmanisi	31,24%	66,76%	0,52%	0,78%	0,56%

²⁵ WHEATLEY, Jonathan, *Obstacles Impeding the Regional Integration of the Kvemo Kartli Region of Georgia*, Tbilisi, ECMI Working Papers, 2005, p. 6.

2.6 Economy. A primary sector faced to a problematic distribution of the land.

The Azeri population residing in the rural areas (mostly in Kvemo-Kartli and Kakheti) is mainly occupied with small-scale agriculture, horticulture and cattle-breeding. Azeris in Kvemo-Kartli are mainly engaged in potatoes growing, while fruits and vegetables are also grown as well as grain (mainly maize and wheat), especially in Marneuli and Gardabani districts. Cattle-breeding is more common in the mountainous parts of the region, where hayfields and pastures constitute a large part of the lands. Because of the fertile soil and the availability of land in this lowland region of Georgia, the conditions for agriculture and animal husbandry are good, and certainly much better than many other regions of the country. In the Soviet period, Kvemo-Kartli was the breadbasket of Georgia, and even in post-Soviet times, based largely on small scale farming, the production has been significant. In 2002, 41.8% of total potato production and 25.4% of all the vegetables grown in Georgia were produced in Kvemo-Kartli, and 11% of the livestock of the country were concentrated in the region.²⁶

In addition, since the early 1990's many Azeris have engaged in petty-trade in agricultural products with Azerbaijan as a means to supplement the meagre profit they can draw from rural production. In Kvemo-Kartli, the proximity and easy access to the capital makes agriculture profitable and the big wholesale market in Lilo is the main hub for the sale of the products. There are also busses connecting different towns in Kvemo-Kartli to Azerbaijani urban centres several times daily.

A major economic problem which is becoming quite social nowadays involves the distribution of land that previously belonged to collective farms (*kolhozy* and *sovkhozy*). According to a 1992 law, which specified how those lands had to be distributed, the strip of land within 21 kilometres of the Georgian border could not be allotted to private individuals (but could be leased). This strip included much of Gardabani, Marneuli, Bolnisi and Dmanisi *rayons*. For the most part, land that was not privatized, was leased out in a non-transparent way. Very often, those properties were rented by local notables, frequently former *sovkhoz* directors or individuals with close links to members of the local administration. Most of those people were ethnic Georgians and only a small part of them was ethnic Azeri. Some private

²⁶ *Id.*, p. 7.

individuals renting the land even lived in other areas of Georgia and often were sub-letting the land to local residents at inflated prices.

Even though this law became less rigid in the mid-1990's, allowing inhabitants to own small household plots, the (mainly Azeri) residents of Gardabani, Marneuli and Bolnisi *rayons* were given merely a fraction of the land that rural households received in most other regions of Georgia, where collective lands were fully privatized.

A further problem was that after the collective farms had been abolished, most of the farm machinery was either sold by the former collective farm directors or fell into disrepair. Thus, many villages were left without machinery to cultivate or irrigate the land. Therefore, despite the high quality of the soil, the economic potential of the land was far from being fully achieved.

In 2005 the new Law on Privatization of State-Owned Agricultural Land was approved and entered into force.²⁷ This law revoked limitations imposed by previous decrees: the land would now be sold through an auction if had not been leased, while leased land could be bought through direct sale.

According to the *National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia - Assessment Survey Report 2007-2008*, the new law has been implemented in Kvemo-Kartli but the process of implementation was slow and raised grievances. The residents complained of delays, lack of transparency and attempts by the local administration to hide information on auctions or mislead the public. In March 2006 in the villages of Marneuli district a number of local Azeris were detained following a demonstration over unfair land privatization.²⁸ Some local Azeris expressed dissatisfaction at large amount of land being purchased by "outsider"-principally well-off landowners from the rest of Georgia who are interested in developing agro-business.

However, within the first seven months of 2006, about 8 thousand ethnic Azeris received 0,5 hectares of land each.²⁹ Some contracts were cancelled due to failure to meet contractual obligations and commissions were created locally to distribute land more transparently and fairly. Nonetheless, it remains true that the local population continues to be sceptical to these efforts.³⁰

²⁷ *National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia. Assessment survey report 2007-2008*, United Nations Association of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2008, p. 68.

²⁸ *Id.*, p. 6-8.

²⁹ *Georgia's Armenian and Azeri minorities*, International Crisis Group, Europe Report #178, November 2006, p. 5.

³⁰ *National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia. Assessment survey report 2007-2008*, United Nations Association of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2008, p. 69.

Finally, it is clear that the indigenous population of Kvemo-Kartli is mainly excluded from this process of privatization. A part from the lack of financial means, certainly one of the main causes is the lack of knowledge of the Georgian language and consequently of the state legislation and of their rights.

2.7 Infrastructures. A serious underdevelopment.

As in most rural areas of Georgia, Kvemo-Kartli suffers from serious infrastructure problems. The supply of electricity and water is highly irregular and especially in rural and remote zones residents have to rely on natural sources like springs. In many areas, the roads are in a state of disrepair. Gas suppliers are another big problem.³¹

Finally, cultural and educational facilities are often in very bad conditions: many schools need repairing and most villages have no kindergartens, libraries or sports' centres.³²

2.8 Religion. Peaceful relations between Muslim and Christian Orthodox.

Georgia's Azeris are characterised by being divided between Shia and Sunni followers, and the Azeris in general are split almost evenly among Shias and Sunnis, with the numbers of followers of Shia slightly prevailing. While the 2002 census indicates that 9.9% of Georgia's population was Muslim³³ – this figure, that also includes Muslim Georgians, and other smaller Muslim groups such as Avars and Kists, does not provide a breakdown of Shia and Sunni denominations. Influences from Turkey and the North Caucasus, where Sunni Islam is dominant, have contributed to the strength of the latter faith among Muslims in Georgia. The Azeris in Kakheti close to the Caucasus Mountain ridge are almost exclusively Sunni Muslims, while in Kvemo-Kartli, there is a mixture of Sunni and Shia communities.

Until World War II both a Shia and a Sunni mosques functioned in Tbilisi. Relations up to this point were still somewhat strained between the two communities, and the two groups had their own cemeteries and avoided observable contact with one another. In 1951, the Soviet authorities destroyed the 16th century Shia temple known as the Blue Mosque. The Shia community had to pray along with the Sunnis, who, on their side, were forced to share their mosque, the Juma Mosque, with the Shia. From 1951 to 1996, a black curtain divided the

³¹ WHEATLEY, Jonathan, *op. cit.*, p. 9-10.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia. Assessment survey report 2007-2008*, United Nations Association of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2008, p.18-19.

mosque during prayers, so that Shia and Sunni Muslims could pray separately. In 1996, the Imam had the curtain removed and since then the two congregations have prayed together. Today, the Imam is a Sunni Muslim, while the Mullah is a Shia Muslim and relations between members of the two denominations are cordial.

Apart from some disagreements within the Muslim community, there are no evidences of any religious conflict or even friction between Muslim Azeris and Christian Orthodox Georgians. According to Nodia (2002), ethnic Azeris do not consider religious problems among their priorities. There are no reasons to deem that they are being discriminated against, on the ground of religion. However, the situation has somehow changed since September 11th, 2001. The Georgian government now keeps a closer eye on the activities of Islamic organizations. “To the displeasure of the Azeri community, the Georgian government ordered the suspension of construction of 11 mosques for suspicion that some of them might have been financed by foreign fundamentalist organizations.”³⁴

2.9 Language. The perilous lack of knowledge of the state language.

According to the *National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia - Assessment Survey Report 2007-2008*, the lack of language skills seem to be the most acutely felt deficiency hindering the integration of persons belonging to national minorities in Georgian society. The same assumption is formulated by the authors of the working paper *Conflict Potential Related to the Problems of Language and Education in Georgia's Kvemo-Kartli Province* who claim that the inability of the Azeri population of Georgia to speak the state language is an element that “[...] has long hindered the Azeri community’s integration into Georgian society.”³⁵

We will afterwards try to demonstrate that the language problem could be considered as the source of many difficulties creating obstacles to the integration.

The Azeri language (also known as Azerbaijani or Azeri Turkic) is the state language of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The language belongs to the Oghuz branch of the Turkic language family, and is closely related to and mutually intelligible with Turkish, although significantly influenced by Arabic, Persian and Russian. As a spoken language, Azeri became the dominant

³⁴ NODIA, Ghia, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

³⁵ *Conflict Potential Related to the Problems of Language and Education in Georgia's Kvemo Kartli Province*, German Organization for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and Caucasus Institute of Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD), Tbilisi-Marneuli-Gardabani, 2006, p. 3.

tongue during the 15th -16th centuries, and written Azeri Turkic began to develop from the early 1880's, while a unified written standard was only introduced in 1930.

During the Soviet Union, Russian was the main language of communication among various ethnic groups. Following Georgia's independence, Georgian language became the State language and almost entirely replaced Russian in mass media. Because the knowledge of the Georgian language was not a priority in the Soviet times among ethnic minorities, a significant portion of persons belonging to national minorities do not speak Georgian, which constitutes a major contributing factor to their further isolation and economic hardship.

As stated by the *National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia - Assessment Survey Report 2007-2008*, only 16,9% of the non-Georgian population living in Kvemo-Kartli can speak the state language.³⁶

This fact can be explained by the structure and the characteristics of the Georgian educational system and has as a major direct consequence the estrangement of the Azeri population in Kvemo-Kartli from the Georgian mass-media. We will expand on these two aspects in the following chapters.

2.10 Education. A school system not yet adapted to minority's needs.

The article 14 of the *Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* ratified by Georgia on 22nd December 2005 establishes the right for every person belonging to a national minority to learn his or her minority language. The same article obliges the state to ensure, as far as possible and within the framework of its educational system, that persons belonging to national minorities have access to teaching of their language in areas traditionally or substantially populated by minorities. However, this article specifies that such practice should not prejudice the learning of the state language.³⁷

The article 4.1 of the Georgian Law on General Education says Georgian is the language of study. As a notable exception to this rule, article 4.3 says that citizens of Georgia whose

³⁶ *National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia. Assessment survey report 2007-2008*, United Nations Association of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2008, p. 50.

³⁷ *Id.*, p. 53.

native language is not Georgian can receive complete general education in their native language.³⁸

As a matter of fact, in general this right is fulfilled by the existence of public schools teaching in minority languages. Such schools already existed under Soviet Union and remain part of the general education system. In 2007, the Georgian Ministry of Education estimated that 50.000 pupils were studying in Armenian and Azeri schools.³⁹ This makes that the majority of Azeri children today attends Azeri-language schools, although in recent years some parents tend to enrol their children at Russian-language school in preparation for studies abroad. Lately, a growing number of parents have also chosen to send their children to Georgian-language schools, but this still remains a marginal phenomenon.

According to the Georgian National Education Program (NEP), approved in 2006, the study of the state language is compulsory in non-Georgian language schools. Moreover, Georgian Literature, History and Geography should be studied in Georgian language.⁴⁰

In the facts, merely a few schools respect these obligations due to the fact that teachers belonging to national minorities are not enough fluent in Georgian in order to teach it successfully. This problem raises critics and fears because those teachers are worried to loose their job and be replaced by ethnic Georgians. In addition, the Georgian language text-books used to teach the state language appear outdated and below the new educational standards.

As a result, the students of non-Georgian language schools often lack proficiency in Georgian language.

We can try to partially explain this situation through history. Under the Soviet Union, Georgian language was taught rather superficially in the schools for other ethnic groups, and knowledge of Georgian was little encouraged in comparison with Russian. Deep crisis after the Soviet Union's collapse and during the first turbulent years of independence prevented state educational institutions from addressing the problem.

However, albeit the fact remains marginal, during recent years parents have started sending their children in Georgian schools, aware that this may represent a good investment for their future. Fazil Hasanov, director of the Azeri Cultural Centre (Tbilisi), affirms: "Azeri of my generation have difficulty in speaking Georgian. During the Soviet times, although we studied in national schools, we communicated with each other in Russian. The new generation is well

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*, p. 53-54.

aware of the importance of learning the state language and does so with pleasure. I think that it is necessary to help them in this transitional period.”⁴¹

Concerning higher education, the Georgian law is more restrictive than the one on General Education: it does not provide special conditions for the citizens of Georgia for whom Georgian is not the native language to establish higher education institutions teaching in native language.⁴² Currently in Georgia there are no universities teaching in language of the most numerous national minorities in Georgia, and students belonging to national minorities may only receive higher education in Georgian or in a third language. Thus, national minority students are underrepresented in the university system. Minority students very often leave Georgia to go for studying abroad and hence seek and take up employment there, mostly in Russia. Ali Alyhev-Akhundi, the Georgian representative of the Caucasian Muslim Department, confirms: “Some Georgian Azeris go to Baku to continue their education. [...] That’s why there are many Georgian Azeris in the Government of Azerbaijan. The most deserving ministers and scientists in Baku are Georgian Azeris.”⁴³

In this situation, the general level of education is very low among the members of the Azeri community in Kvemo-Kartli and with the decline of the role and importance of the Russian language, the young generation is becoming mono-lingual.

We can easily conclude that, broadly, “in terms of future integration policy of independent Georgia addressing this issue is one of the key policy concerns.”⁴⁴

2.11 Mass-media. A national lack of concern reinforcing Azeris’ isolation.

During the previously mentioned personal journey to the town of Gardabani, it has been impressive to note that satellite dish aerials are collocated out of almost each terrace. And this is true for all main centres of the province of Kvemo-Kartli.

The need to reach foreign TV channels is, in this region more than in the rest of the country, quite vital. The reason is clear: “[...] residents of Kvemo-Kartli [...] belonging to ethnic

⁴¹ *Multiethnic Georgia*, National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia Program, filmed by Public Broadcasting of Georgia, UNAG/USAID, 2008.

⁴² *National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia. Assessment survey report 2007-2008*, United Nations Association of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2008, p.57.

⁴³ *Multiethnic Georgia*, National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia Program, filmed by Public Broadcasting of Georgia, UNAG/USAID, 2008.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

minorities prefer to receive information in their native language [...]”⁴⁵. Consequently, the Azeri population watches mostly Azerbaijani channels and, secondary, Russian and Turkish channels. Georgian channels are not favourite sources for entertainment or getting information. It’s not surprising if we deem that usually the “[...] knowledge of the language of broadcast is a defining factor in choosing the channel [...]”⁴⁶ and if we remind that 83,1% of the Azeri population in Kvemo-Kartli do not speak Georgian⁴⁷. The main consequence of this practice is that citizens of Georgia, although ethnic Azeri, daily receive the news about their own country produced in foreign states. Hence, because of the language problem, ethnic Azeri citizens are largely unable to get comprehensive and adequate information about ongoing developments in their country. One may suggest that this can presumably cause the phenomenon of distortion of information.

The problem touches the newspapers to a lesser degree because, the television being the major source of information in Georgia-wide, about 70% of the Azeri population living in Kvemo-Kartli do not read newspapers.⁴⁸

From the Georgian side, efforts are not remarkable.

The Department of Information and Social Political Policy of the Public Broadcaster prepares a daily 25-minutes news program called “Moambe” in five languages spoken by the most sizeable minorities in the country: Abkhaz, Ossetian, Armenian, Azeri and Russian. It includes information about key social and political development of the week and feature overview. The public radio airs 5-minutes news in the same five minority languages.⁴⁹

Concerning the coverage of national minorities issues in Georgian television the situation is not better: “[...] the Georgian television channels barely focus on persons belonging to ethnic minorities and issues related to them. The integration of minority themes into the general TV programming appears to be less than successful and balanced.”⁵⁰ Out of the total of 1020 stories broadcasted during prime-time, only 5,7% touched upon ethnic minorities and most of these concerned political and security issues related to secessionist provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.⁵¹

⁴⁵ *National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia. Assessment survey report 2007-2008*, United Nations Association of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2008, p. 63.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Id.*, p. 50.

⁴⁸ *Id.*, p. 63.

⁴⁹ *Id.*, p. 61-62.

⁵⁰ *Id.*, p. 62.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

To improve the situation, in February 2006 the Public Broadcaster began translating news programs in Azeri language in real time, through local TV companies.⁵²

The problem, a part the insufficiency of national mass-media in the minority languages, is that the few Georgia's efforts in that direction are dependent on state-funded outlets which clearly hinder the possibility for the minorities to get independent information.

Finally, it's worth noting that in the regions populated by national minorities, the access to Internet is practically nonexistent : 1% of families in Kvemo-Kartli have an Internet connection.⁵³

It is not surprising that this situation reinforces the cultural isolation of the ethnic Azeri minority in Kvemo-Kartli from the Georgian society.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Id.*, p. 63.

3. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PRESENT SITUATION.

The weak integration as a source of brain drain or social apathy.

Basing on the examination of all major concerns of the Azeri community living in Kvemo-Kartli, we will now point out some consequences. Most of them are directly related to the fact that the majority of ethnic Azeri citizens of Georgia do not speak Georgian. But we would also remind that the economical and geographical factors play a big role in the present situation.

We would like as well to note that the following elements do not obey to an order of importance. Moreover they are often, if not always, intermixed and they mutually reinforce.

The first consequence is linked to the fact that due to the language problem ethnic Azeri citizens have difficulty in communicating with public services and getting jobs in state-run organisations. This is obviously linked with a lack of equal opportunities for professional and career development. With the lack of knowledge of Georgian, Azeris have very limited or no access to the labour market, which prompts many able-bodied young and middle aged men to seek employment abroad, especially in neighbouring Azerbaijan, Russia or Turkey. This migration creates a brain drain in the Azeri communities, as typically the young and educated Azeris find employment and stay abroad after completing their education.

The second consequence includes difficulties in obtaining adequate information about current developments in Georgia and obstacles to the participation of ethnic Azeris in the country's social and political life. This means that ethnic Azeris' incapacity to speak Georgian keeps them from becoming full citizens of Georgia. This point has been expanded on when illustrating the political and social participation of the Azeri community and the mass-media issue.

One of the main consequences, which is strictly related with the potential social conflict between minority and majority or between two or more minorities is the lack of social interaction with other ethnic groups. In fact, this may raise suspicion and mistrust, even prepare the groundwork for ethnic tensions.

Consequently, “[...] the Azeri and Georgian communities of the region seem to be growing more and more estranged from one another.”⁵⁴

In Soviet times Azeri and Georgian residents used to communicate with each other basically in Russian. Although the Russian language remains a major communication tool for the two communities, it is gradually loosing this function, as both the Azeri and Georgian youth speak Russian worse than older people, or do not speak it at all. As a result, it is increasingly difficult for the Azeri and Georgian communities, especially for young people, to find a common language of communication. “There is a real danger that the new generation in Kvemo-Kartli will live in total isolation from – and in total ignorance of – other ethnic communities.”⁵⁵

Moreover, the insufficiency in speaking the state language hinders the knowledge of the national legislation. Accordingly, this factor prevents citizens from protecting their rights effectively.

Furthermore, we can mention the social apathy or weak participation in the public and political life.

In Soviet times and in the following period, the main way for ethnic Azeris to participate in the civic life was through the lodging of various complaints to governmental agencies.

The poor knowledge of Georgian language is also a major impediment for political participation resulting in an information vacuum, the inability to pursue higher education and to pass qualification exams required for obtaining higher public positions (judges, doctors, school directors, etc). Yet another reason for the lack of involvement in political and public life of the state is the low level of political activism, absence of civic consciousness and lack of motivation because persons belonging to ethnic minorities without command of state language are unable to be employed in public positions. This finds its expression in a widespread perception among Azeris of being second-grade citizens. The social apathy and almost complete lack of participation in political and public life exhibits itself during elections in unanimous support for the ruling party and the president – regardless of who is in power. Such support is considered by most Azeris as a demonstration of their loyalty to the Georgian state.

⁵⁴ *Conflict Potential Related to the Problems of Language and Education in Georgia's Kvemo Kartli Province*, German Organization for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and Caucasus Institute of Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD), Tbilisi-Marneuli-Gardabani, 2006, p. 10.

⁵⁵ WHEATLEY, Jonathan, *op .cit*, p. 37.

For instance, Shevardnadze and the Citizens' Union of Georgia, which was considered the ruling party until 2002,⁵⁶ have traditionally won an overwhelming majority of the Azeri vote, while opposition candidates and parties had a little chance. This trend was already evident during the 1995 parliamentary and presidential elections and was further strengthened in the 1998 local elections (when the CUG collected around 70% of the vote in Kvemo-Kartli) and in the 1999 parliamentary elections.⁵⁷ While electoral frauds obviously played a role in those unrealistic figures, it is true that an overwhelming majority of voters subscribed to the incumbent. In 2001, when Citizens' Union fell apart, all six ethnic Azeri members of the Georgian parliament joined the pro-presidential faction, Alliance for New Georgia.

Even though the 2003 parliamentary elections were highly controlled, once again, electoral frauds have been denounced. Also in this occasion, Azeris remained loyal to President Shavardnadze.

Following the so-called "Rose Revolution" and Shevardnadze's resignation, presidential elections were held on 4th January 2004 and repeated elections for the 150 members of the parliament elected by party list were held on 28th March 2004. In both elections voters in Kvemo-Kartli expressed full support for the new authorities in pretty the same way as they had for the old.⁵⁸

The last elections in 2008 confirmed again this unconditioned support for the ruling party.

Voters belonging to national minorities feel that the best way to protect their interests is to show full loyalty to the incumbent or ruling party following the majority's willingness.

The last, but not the least, consequence we deem necessary to cite is that the Azeri community is closed and secluded.

The lack of language skills and associated discomfort can create obstacles to physical mobility and social interaction with other ethnic groups. Even in their home rural areas, communities tend to stay unilingual.

Moreover, the community usually keeps its problems and worries for itself, avoiding making them public. Nodia⁵⁹ suggests that this trend for seclusion of the community can be easily vindicated by sociological surveys in Azeri enclaves. Mass opinion polls often proved useless there, as questionnaires revealed no signs of open dissatisfaction or even basic pluralism in expressed opinion. These research surveys produced such results when ethnic Azeris were

⁵⁶ NODIA, Ghia, *op. cit.*, p.9

⁵⁷ WHEATLEY, Jonathan, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁵⁸ *Id.*, p. 17.

⁵⁹ NODIA, Ghia, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

interviewed by ethnic Georgians. Ethnic Azeri interviewers have usually been able to get better information but, nevertheless, there are enough grounds to assume that responders preferred to hold back their deepest concerns. When approached by “the outsiders”, particularly those associated with Tbilisi (and especially with the government) ethnic Azeris prefer to stress that they live well and have no problems in relations with the Georgian population and authorities. But in conversation with their fellow community members and in their written complaints, ethnic Azeris voice more serious concerns with regard to a number of problems.

3.1 Relations with Azerbaijan. The Georgian-Azerbaijani friendship as a tool of conflict prevention.

One should pay special attention to the importance of contacts with neighbouring Azerbaijan, especially because of all foreign states it has the greatest influence over the region of Kvemo-Kartli. Azeri citizens of Georgia maintain close relations with their ethnic homeland and their actions are greatly influenced by Azerbaijan’s policy.

The crucial factor for the Azeri population is the personal relationship that exists between the Presidents of Georgia and Azerbaijan. The Azeri community supported Shevardnadze because of his close relationship with Azerbaijan’s President, Heidar Aliyev. These strong alliance and friendly relations were widely publicised. “Azeri residents claim that they are advised by Baku to support the Georgian government, learn the Georgian language and abstain from raising problems that may irritate Georgian society.”⁶⁰

Despite the fact that “some analysts feared that the replacement of both presidents would weaken this special relationship between the two countries and lead to instability in Kvemo-Kartli”⁶¹, the new presidents, Mikheil Saakashvili for Georgia and Ilham Aliyev for Azerbaijan, proceeded rapidly to consolidate their relationship.

The most important influence of Azerbaijan on the Kvemo-Kartli society is indeed cultural. As mentioned in the part covering the media problem in Kvemo-Kartli, well-off Azeri residents are eager to purchase satellite aerials to watch Azeri and Turkish TV.

Furthermore, local Azeris often cross over Azerbaijan for purposes of trade, mostly in agricultural products. Another sign of the strong cultural link between the Azeri group in

⁶⁰ *Id.*, p. 11.

⁶¹ WHEATLEY, Jonathan, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

Kvemo-Kartli and Azerbaijan is the fact that many Azeris go from Georgia to Baku to participate in certain relevant social happenings.

In addition, due to the language barrier, young people belonging from Azeri community in Kvemo-Kartli are unable to obtain a high degree of education in Tbilisi and consequently they migrate in order to get it in Baku.

Finally, almost all large villages of Kvemo-Kartli with a dominant Azeri population have direct bus communication with Baku and other major cities of Azerbaijan (buses also regularly run to Turkey).

Wheatley affirms that “the government of Azerbaijan has made every effort to maintain a good relationship with Georgia and has, in general, done its utmost to avoid exploiting tensions in Kvemo-Kartli.”⁶²

Hence, Azerbaijan’s influence on the Azeri community living in Georgia may be considered positive as it contributes to the integration of the community.

It’s worth and pertinent to mention the importance of the geopolitical and geostrategic element which plays a crucial role in the Tbilisi-Baku relation. Azerbaijan, like Georgia, often feeling menaced by Russia’s desire to keep its influence in the South Caucasus, is member of the GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova) whose aim is counterpoising Russian hegemony within the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States). Moreover, Georgia and Azerbaijan are now closely linked by an economical cooperation established by the decision to build a major oil pipeline through the territory of Georgia from the Azeri port of Baku to Ceyhan in Turkey (BTC). Thus, it is very difficult to image Baku supporting a conflict in Kvemo-Kartli compromising this big economic opportunity. “Azerbaijan has historically good relationship with Georgia and it has no interest in creating problems by encouraging or mobilizing the Azeri community living in Kvemo-Kartli. The present economical cooperation between the two countries is very important, especially after the recent events.”⁶³

Wheatley⁶⁴ suggests that, at the present, there are no signs of willingness either Georgia or from Azerbaijan to exploit today’s grievances of Kvemo-Kartli’s Azeris to transform the existing latent conflict into an open one. Nevertheless, any change in the outside environment could conceivably provide an element which could turn this conflict into one that is expressed more openly or even violently.

⁶² *Id.*, p. 30.

⁶³ Interview with Tom Trier, Regional Representative for the Caucasus, European Centre for Minorities Issues (ECMI), Tbilisi, 24th November 2008.

⁶⁴ *Id.*, p. 40.

Even though the Georgian-Azerbaijani friendship can be considered as a tool of preventing conflict, “potential risk factors that may be activated by a rise of ethno-nationalistic sentiments either in Georgia or in Azerbaijan should not be ignored”⁶⁵.

⁶⁵ NODIA, Ghia, *op. cit.*, p.12.

4. THE POTENTIAL CONFLICT

A dangerous cocktail of discrimination, struggle for resources and bad communication.

In his working paper elaborated for the ECMI, Wheatley (2005) simply states that “there is a potential conflict in Kvemo-Kartli [...]”⁶⁶.

He determines the main direct cause which could provoke a conflict involving the Azeri minority in the province: the discrimination against Azeri community in Marneuli and Bolnisi.

Moreover, during the field researches carried out for this work, an interviewee declared that “[...] it is obvious that there are problems in tolerance towards national minorities in Georgia”⁶⁷.

We may find an evidence of these opinions in Ellis (2006) who, describing the potential causes of ethnic conflicts, confirms that “discrimination plays a role”⁶⁸ because one of the basic ways cultures keep hierarchies and status differences is through discrimination.

Ellis is pushing his analysis of causes of ethnic conflict beyond the simple discrimination.

He asserts that, even though normal relations between ethnic groups are peaceful, ethnicity emerges as a relevant theme when social conditions become controversial or undetermined. Conflict where ethnicity is prominent are mainly incited by fear. Assimilation or cultural extinction could be a strong dread. Moreover, ethnic groups could also be worried about their safety but this concerns more situations when groups are relatively equal and the state authority is in decline or weak. We cannot recognize our case of study in none of those two categories.

A fourth cause individuated by Ellis is the struggle for resources. This clearly concerns the case of Azeris in Kvemo-Kartli: the problem of the land can be easily classified in this category. Generally speaking “the state can adopt a policy of producing aggregate wealth because it benefits the most people, or it can favour one group over another.”⁶⁹ Those policies could not match with minority group specific needs or expectations. Thus, there can be tensions and groups easily fall prey to conflicts. The problem of land is crucial for the Azeri community since its economic activity is focused on land cultivation. As prior mentioned,

⁶⁶ WHEATLEY, Jonathan, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁶⁷ Interview with Ramaz Aptsiauri, National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia – Chief of Party, United Nations Association of Georgia, Tbilisi, 16th December 2008.

⁶⁸ ELLIS, Donald, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁶⁹ *Id.*, p. 43.

several concerns have been raised by the Azeri population because of unclear procedures (delays, lack of transparency and attempts by the local administration to hide information on auctions or mislead the public) of the 2005 law on land. Consequently, large areas of land are still used inefficiently, if used at all, while some local peasants have to work as hired hands. “Such situation seriously upsets the Azeri community.”⁷⁰

Ellis claims that problematic communication and bad interaction between opposite groups can as well cause conflicts. Problems in communication are naturally more often caused when it does not exist any common language between different ethnic groups which is actually the case for most of the members of the Georgian and the Azeri ethnic groups living in Georgia. As we vastly explained, the language problem is one of the most acute among the Azeri community in Kvemo-Kartli: more than 80% of the members of this community does not speak the state language and in addition new generations do not even speak Russian which was the *lingua franca* during the Soviet times. This last statement is actually true also for the new Georgian generation that is hardly and not very extensively studying the Russian language.

“The [Azeri] community claims that the language problem is very complex and hard to solve, and it will take time for the Georgian language to be adapted in Azeri ethnic enclaves.”⁷¹

“The effect of this situation is that people are becoming monolingual and this is a complete disaster because individuals belonging to different minorities do not have any tool to communicate between them. The lack of a proper communication is one of the strongest sources of ethnic conflict. We should pay particular attention on this.”⁷²

It is noteworthy to mention the opinion of Wheatley (2005) according to whom many experts are neglecting the possible arising of serious tensions in Kvemo-Kartli because, generally speaking, the Azeri community does not express its concerns openly as others minorities in Georgia do. “However, conflict avoidance – the failure to address potential sources of conflict and to find solutions to problems that may cause discord – does little to prevent conflict in the medium to long term.”⁷³

Wheatley also states that currently there are no signs that the latent conflict that exists will become active as there is no external agitator in either Georgia or Azerbaijan ready to exploit

⁷⁰ NODIA, Ghia, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁷¹ *Id.*, p. 16.

⁷² Interview with Tom Trier, Regional Representative for the Caucasus, European Centre for Minorities Issues (ECMI), Tbilisi, 24th November 2008.

⁷³ WHEATLEY, Jonathan, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

the resentments of Georgia's Azeris. As explained in the previous chapter, political relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan are definitely friendly and make hope in an even stronger cooperation in the future.

“However, changes in the outside environment at some time in the future – particularly in the political structure of Azerbaijan – could conceivably provide a fuse that could turn this conflict into one that is expressed more openly or even violently.”⁷⁴

As announced in the introduction of the present work, Wheatley asserts that in Kvemo-Kartli “there is an urgent need for action [...]”⁷⁵ to be done with and for the Azeri community to seek the resolution of the problems arisen.

Is actually on that need of action that we founded our field research on.

In fact, this work aims to analyse actions recently or currently taken by the Georgian civil society to integrate Azeri minority and to find eventual gaps to be filled for a more efficient action in a inter-ethnic conflict perspective.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

5. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

Depth interviews for a qualitative research method.

As mentioned in the introduction, the main purpose of this work is to expose the results of a field research carried out to find out what are the most important actions implemented in the field of conflict prevention in Kvemo-Kartli through strengthening the Azeri ethnic group.

The research has been qualitative.

The main tool used for this research is the semi-structured (or depth) interview. This kind of interview is pretty flexible, allowing new questions to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says and elicits detail, vividness, nuance and richness.

In fact, the characteristic of a depth interview is the mixing of three kinds of questions: main, follow-up and probes.

Main questions are the skeleton of the interview: they encourage the conversational partner – the interviewee – to talk about the topic that motivate the study.

Follow-up questions are specific to the comments that the interviewee makes. “Such follow-up questions are intended to obtain depth, detail and subtlety while clarifying answers that are vague or superficial.”⁷⁶

Probes questions are techniques to keep the discussion going while providing clarifications. They ask the interviewee to keep talking on the topic, to complete ideas or to fill in a missing piece.

One or two staffs from each structure have been interviewed to obtain a coherent picture of which and how many projects on inter-ethnic conflict prevention and integration of Azeri minority they are implementing and where. Moreover, they have been asked what are, according to them, the main problems that the Azeri community living in Kvemo-Kartli is facing today in terms of future integration in the Georgian society. The interviewer was proposing one initial question (question number 1, see below) and the interviewees were given all the time needed to freely reply, since the quantity of information required was quite big. The interviewer was then asking the other questions (number 2, 3 and 4) which were taking less time of reply since they were more focused. It is relevant to mention that most of the time the interviewees were spontaneously including replies to the question number 2, 3

⁷⁶ RUBIN, Herbert, RUBIN, Irene, *Qualitative interviewing. The art of hearing data*, London, SAGE Publications, 2005, p. 134.

and 4 in the answer to the question number 1. Moreover, given the nature of the interview, new questions have been added during the discussion, following the characteristics of each interviewee.

The questions proposed:

1. What are the main activities/projects you are implementing in preventing interethnic conflicts, in integration and strengthening Azeri minority and civil society in Kvemo-Kartli?
2. What are the main problems on the issue according to the association you are working for and what are you doing to solve them?
3. What are the main barriers to an efficient and effective integration of the Azeri minority living in Kvemo-Kartli?
4. Having a wide knowledge and understanding of the present situation, what are the main gaps in the field in terms of interventions?

The method to collect data during the interviews has been double.

The audio-recording has been used for most of the interviews but sometimes interviewees were asking for the tape recorder to be switched off. In this case, hand notes have been taken. Some interviewees became shy or hesitant when they realized that they would have been electronically recorded; many, however, appreciated to be recorded because used or because recording ensures that their message would be got out accurately.

“The obvious advantage of audio-recording is that it frees up the researchers from note-taking thereby allowing them to concentrate on the job in hand, to listen to what is being said and to be prompt for further responses, where appropriate. Furthermore, as data are not depending on the researcher’s recall or selective attention, audio-recording improves the reliability of data collection.”⁷⁷

Moreover, it should be added that the research has been carried out also with the help of two other methods which had a supplementary role in the data collecting.

The first is the documentary method. Project documents, working papers, annual reports have been carefully examined to complete the data gathered from the interviews. The documentary

⁷⁷ BLOOR, Michael, WOOD, Fiona, *Keywords in qualitative methods. A vocabulary of research concepts*, London, SAGE Publications, 2006, p.17.

analysis “is often used in conjunction with other research methods, for example [...] to supplement interview data”⁷⁸.

The second is the method of the fieldnotes which have been taken during all the period spent in Georgia (September – December 2008) to record observations, fragments of remembered speeches and personal impressions and sensations.

We consider now necessary to warn the reader about possible bias of the research: “any influence that distorts the results of a research study”⁷⁹.

Bias could have been provoked by some particular characteristics in the relation built between the interviewer and the conversational partner. “In responsive interviewing, the researcher and the interviewee develop a relationship within a conversational partnership that influences the interviewing process.”⁸⁰ Even though this kind of bias occurs more often when personal questions are asked because it depends on emotional involvement, we can deem that in our research only a few times the emotional component appeared and results could have been slightly distorted.

Moreover, “within interview-based research, bias may occur as a consequence of particular questions being asked in an interview, the way in which questions are being asked, [...]”⁸¹. In these regards, we can consider possible this kind of bias in our research because each interview has been different from another: different follow-up and probes questions have been asked according to the course of the conversation.

The last bias individuated is related to language. All interviews have been carried out in English but neither the interviewer nor the interviewees were English native speakers. Therefore, some errors or small misunderstanding could have occurred.

5.1 The interviewees. Eleven relevant actors of the Georgian civil society.

The actors chosen as interviewees were 11 persons working for 9 different structures in Georgia dealing with the theme already mentioned above. These structures have been selected according to different criteria.

⁷⁸ *Id.*, p. 58.

⁷⁹ *Id.*, p. 21.

⁸⁰ RUBIN, Herbert, RUBIN, Irene, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁸¹ BLOOR, Michael, WOOD, Fiona, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

The first criterion was the belonging to the big family of the Georgian civil society.⁸² The reason of this choice will be illustrated afterwards.

The second criterion was the relevance of the actions undertaken by the structure for the purposes of the research. This first step has been done through an intensive web-based research during the period October – November 2008. After that, an initial list of 19 potential structures to visit and interview was composed. The second step in that direction was a review of this list with a Georgian colleague very well connected and deeply involved in the Georgian NGO sector. This review made the list shorter: some of the information found on the Internet were not reliable or outdated. Hence, 4 contacts have been removed because their action seemed to be not very relevant or not at all for the purposes of the research. The list ended up with 15 contacts.

The third criterion was the availability of the staff to grant an interview. In 5 cases it has not been possible to join the person in charge of the programs or projects relevant for the research. It is important to mention that this has been a true obstacle especially for the local structures based in Kvemo-Kartli. As mentioned before, communication tools are not very developed in the region: the Internet is not really available and most of the time the phone was found out of service. Therefore, the list was reduced to 10 contacts.

The reason why the list of structures visited and used in this work is 9, is that one interview carried out showed that the Civil Society Institute, based in Tbilisi, was not dealing with minorities issues. In fact, the Institute's aim is to facilitate the formation and development of civil society and a democratic state by promoting democratic values and the rule of law, educating social actors and increasing their civil activity and creating a facilitating legal environment for civil society organizations. However, this interview, carried out with the Chairman, Mr. Vazha Salamadze, gave interesting outcomes: the personal point of view of a well-known personality in the Georgian NGO sector and some other possible relevant contacts.

We would now like to go back to the decision to focus the research on the civil society's action and not on governmental organizations or international organizations.

⁸² Here, the term "Georgian" is not used in its ethnic meaning but refers to the civil society based in Georgia.

The exclusion of the governmental action has been made for two main reasons.

The first is that we deemed that the political power is always influenced by interests that may not be purely associated with the aim of integration of the minorities and it must often deal with many powers, external and internal interests, compromises. Moreover, the present political situation in Georgia is quite unstable: especially after the August war, the President and the ruling party are periodically attacked by critics and the opposition, as well as a big part of the population, is asking for Mr. Saakashvili's resignation.

The second reasons is that the state intervention in this field is very limited.

The policy of the Georgian state towards Kvemo-Kartli during Shevardnadze period can best be characterized by the term "benign neglect".⁸³ The Georgian state established control over national minorities in the region by means of patron-client linkages and made little efforts to integrate the non-Georgian population with the rest of the country in any meaningful way. The Georgian authorities manipulated this patron-client relationships so as to weaken any independent centres of power in the region and to deliver the required number of votes to the incumbent president and to the dominant party, as explained earlier. Furthermore, the desperate economic situation of the province hindered the development of any form of civil society at the local level.

Despite that fact, some progresses have been made since the "Rose Revolution" and the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili.

In fact, since 2005, some consultation mechanisms and specialized bodies were established. Those act as contact points, protection agencies or policy and law making agencies on national minority issues. Without going into details, the following institutions have been created: the State Minister for Civil Integration Issues, the Civil Integration and Tolerance Council, the Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights and Civil Integration (created in 1995 but engaged in national minorities issues in 2004). Furthermore, some actions in the field of language and education of the minorities have been undertaken by the government: the Ministry of Education launched a series of programs aimed at enhancing Georgian language learning in non-Georgian schools. For instance, a project for training Georgian language teachers in the non-Georgian schools was tested. In addition, concerning the media issue, in 2006 the advisory Board of Ethnic Minorities at the Public Broadcasting was created to improve the quality of the programs on national minority issues.

⁸³ WHEATLEY, Jonathan, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

International organizations actively work with the national minorities residing in Georgia. Almost all big projects implemented by international organizations involve the component dealing with national minorities, although some projects are intended exclusively for national minorities.

The exclusion of the intervention undertaken by international actors from this research has been made, first of all, for practical reasons. It would have been quite hard to reach and properly interview all international NGOs and International Organizations that work in Georgia nowadays (some of them are Mercy Corps, World Vision, CARE, Urban Institute, Norwegian Refugee Council and several United Nations' agencies).

It should be reminded that in the period after the collapse of communism, much attention has been focused on the new independent states arisen from this event. The proliferation of ethno-political conflicts there from the late eighties of the 20th century onwards, the new geopolitical situation and new economic and political opportunities for the former west bloc facilitated the increased engagement of International Organizations and NGOs in the region. This happened first in the central and eastern Europe, thanks to the progresses in the process of European integration, and it's actually being happening in the Caucasus.

A focalized choice has been necessary to make the fieldwork more feasible.

Secondly, we considered more interesting to explore the action of the national civil society. One of the present paradoxes of the international cooperation for development is that the action is often imposed to the local population from external actors. Consequently, that action is actually not thought out and shaped on the real needs of the beneficiaries and it's eradicated from the reality. The impact of such action is therefore meaningless or can even create perilous consequences.

This is the reason why it seemed more appropriate to focus the research on the activity of national and local actors. In fact, they are usually supposed to better know and understand the field, carry out programs better shaped on the local reality and hence obtain more successful results.

However, three international institutions have been retained because of several reasons: their strong attachment to the field, their deep involvement in the issue, the big influence they exert on the work structure of other relevant actors and because they are run mostly by a national staff: the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the OSCE's High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM).

Finally, we would try to explain the reason why we chose the national civil society.

It seemed that the civil society is perceived as a neutral actor, free from political influences and more close to the grass roots level of the society from where needs are supposed to come up. Non-Governmental Organizations are thought to be closer to local communities and likely to get better results because their work in a participatory way. In this sector the willingness to improve the local capacity is very strong and this can be considered as a demonstration of independence from any national political power.

Moreover, NGOs are perceived as more efficient and effective than the state sector, due to their specialist experience, more appropriate management structures and system, leading to leaner cost structures, sectorial flexibility and staff motivation. One reason why they are the main implementing agencies is because donors prefer not to channel funds through government structures due to a lack of transparency and inadequate local capacity.

We are going to structure the group of actors interviewed following the three main levels which they belong to: international, national (mostly based in Tbilisi) and local (based in Kvemo-Kartli).

What all these different organizations and institutions have in common is that they seek to improve social and political life of the Azeri community of Kvemo-Kartli for a better integration in the Georgian society. Beyond this commonality in aims, there are some differences in the strategies and in the methodologies to reach the target, which partly derive from their history and original missions.

5.1.1 The international level

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe: democratization to prevent ethnic tensions.

The OSCE Mission to Georgia was established in December 1992 in response to armed conflicts in the country. The Mission now assists the Government of Georgia in the fields of conflict settlement, democratization, human rights and the rule of law.

In the context of this work, we will be particularly interested in the democratization component. The OSCE Mission to Georgia works to strengthen the capacity of Georgian society and its institutions to move the democratization process forward, boosting their ability

to conduct free and fair elections and establish democracy at all levels. The Mission works towards helping Georgia to successfully integrate its national minorities into mainstream society. With a view to stimulate this process the Mission has funded a number of community-based projects in the Kvemo-Kartli region. By promoting the integration of the national minorities in this region, the Mission contributes to the prevention of ethnic tensions and potential conflict in the region.

While the Organization specializes in conflict prevention, its High Commissioner on National Minorities more focus on conflict management.

The interviewee was Mrs Lola Ansede, Democratization Officer.

High Commissioner on National Minorities: finding early solutions for ethnic conflicts.

Ethnic conflict is considered one of the main sources of large-scale violence in Europe today. To respond to this challenge, the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (former CSCE, now OSCE) in 1992 decided to establish the post of High Commissioner on National Minorities. The High Commissioner's function is to identify and seek early resolution of ethnic tensions that might endanger peace, stability or friendly relations between the participating States of the OSCE.

The general mandate of the High Commissioner on National Minorities is to find early solutions for inter ethnic tensions in order to prevent conflict raising.

“The HCNM Mission to Georgia was not dealing with frozen conflicts until recently but the approach has changed after August 2008 events which demonstrated that those conflicts don’t exist because, in spite of appearances, conflicts are never frozen.”⁸⁴

The High Commissioner in Tbilisi does work with Azeri and Armenian minorities in the fields of education and language, media and public participation development.

The interviewee was Mrs Nino Bolkvadze, National Program Manager.

European Centre on Minority Issues: a highly specialized institution on minority-majority relations in Europe.

The European Centre on Minority Issues is a Germany-based non-partisan and interdisciplinary institution with several centres all around Europe, including the Caucasus.

⁸⁴ Interview with Nino Bolkvadze, National Program Manager, High Commissioner on National Minorities – OSCE, Tbilisi, 9th December 2008.

The Centre was founded in 1996 by the governments of Denmark, Germany and Schleswig-Holstein.

The European Centre for Minority Issues conducts practice-oriented research, provides information and documentation, and offers advisory services concerning minority-majority relations in Europe. It serves European governments and regional intergovernmental organizations as well as non-dominant groups in the European area. The Centre also supports the academic community, the media and the general public through the timely provision of information and analysis.

The Centre organizes its activities around three principal themes.

The first is concerned with the evaluation and further development of universal, regional, bilateral and national standards that may assist in consolidating democratic governance on the basis of ethnic diversity and human rights.

The second is related to implementation procedures and mechanisms for such standards and the study of their effectiveness.

The third strand of ECMI's activities concerns constructive conflict-management.

The interviewee was Mr Tom Trier, Regional Representative for the Caucasus.

5.1.2 The national level

National NGOs operating in Georgia and dealing with ethnic minorities' issues could be split into two groups.

One group is composed of organizations where the founders are representatives of national minorities.

The most influential of them is the public movement Multinational Georgia, that unites representatives of different minorities. The organization actively works on the national minorities' problems in Georgia, publishes appeals to the State and international community and works on draft laws. Unfortunately this NGO is part of that group of actors that could not have been contacted for the interview. Another one is the Civic Integration Foundation.

Civic Integration Foundation: a motivated youth assisting civic integration of minorities.

The Civic Integration Foundation (CIF) is a non-governmental, non-profit and non-political organization committed to promotion of civic integration, human rights and civil society. The CIF is a leading NGO institution in Georgia in the field of civic integration and minority

rights protection. The goal of the foundation is to assist civic integration of minorities' representatives, resident in Georgia; so that every citizen of Georgia apart from ethnical, religious or other group belongings could evenly execute rights and obligations conferred by international contracts and acknowledged by Georgia and constitution of Georgia.

The CIF is composed by young members who represent different ethnic minorities in Georgia. The foundation also has numerous young members with Georgian ethnicity who together with ethnic minorities try to promote civic integration and human rights protection in Georgia. Therefore, the most important target groups of the foundation are young people who live in Georgia and who give their share in development of democracy and civil society in Georgia.

The interviewees were Mr Zaur Khalilov, Executive Director, and Mr Irakli Chedia, Assistant Executive Director and Project Assistant for “Independent Media for Civil Integration”.

The other group is composed of the organizations that are not founded by the ethnicity principle, but work on national minorities' problems – protection of rights, increasing civic activities, education, independent media strengthening – and help their integration in the Georgian society.

Three national NGOs also have influence in those parts of Kvemo-Kartli in which national minorities are concentrated.

United Nations Association of Georgia: the “National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia Program”.

The United Nations Association of Georgia (UNAG) is a non-governmental organization that has been worked since 1995 to promote the principles of human rights and democratic governance and to provide Georgian society with the necessary skills for successful integration into the international community. The UNAG has been a member of the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) since 1996.

The UNAG aims to advance the development of democracy and civil society in Georgia and the South Caucasus. It works to enhance civil participation in decision-making on national and international levels. The Association is committed to delivering cutting-edge expertise and professional consultation to its stakeholders and beneficiaries.

The UNAG employs 35 people in its head office in Tbilisi and its field offices in Gori, Batumi and Kutaisi. Staff members work in four main program areas: Democracy and Governance, Youth and Education, Refugees and Migration, and Information and Analysis. The Association implements its activities throughout Georgia and maintains an operational network of communication and collaboration with civil society counterparts in most major towns.

We are going to anticipate at this point the main current program on integration of national minorities implemented by the UNAG because it represents a huge 4-years activity which involves several actors. Afterwards we will detail it in its different components. The “National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia Program” (NITG) is funded by the United States Agency for the International Development (USAID) and is implemented by the UNAG in partnership with the Government of Georgia, Georgian Public Broadcasting, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, Partners-Georgia, Freedom House Europe, and other local and international partner institutions. The program aims to empower people and organizations to effectively discuss, debate and resolve a range of issues related to building a cohesive multi-ethnic nation through policy development, media programming, grant-making, training and research. The main objective of the NITG program is to promote an increased sense of national unity among the citizens of Georgia through supporting the Government of Georgia in the formation of a national integration strategy and action plan.

The interviewee was Mr Ramaz Aptsiauri, “National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia” – Chief of Party.

Open Society Georgia Foundation: promoting the values of open societies.

The Open Society Georgia Foundation was established in 1994 by New York Open Society Institute. The foundation is a member of a network of foundations established by George Soros. The aim of the foundation is to promote values of open society in Georgia.

The mission of OSGF constitutes in active support of structural and cultural transformation towards building open society. The Foundation implements and supports those initiatives from organizations and individuals which aim at establishing the rule of law, good governance and principles of transparency, development of civil organizations and media, promotion of civic values, regional cooperation and European integration, development of the field of healthcare, economic and social needs.

The interviewees were Mrs Lana Ghvinjilia, Program Manager for “Media and Civil Society Support” and Mr Mikheil Mirziashvili, Program Manager for “Integration and Civil Education”.

Liberty Institute: studying and furthering freedoms and liberties.

The Liberty Institute is a Georgian research and advocacy organization affiliated with Ilia Chavchavadze State University. The Institute has always been the cornerstone of established Georgian values. It has been transformed into classical liberal tradition by Ilia Chavchavadze himself. Drawing on traditions and resources of the university bearing his name, organization aims to research and advance freedom of individual, society, economy and state.

Through civic campaigns, debates, surveys and educational activities, the Liberty Institute strives to promote the values of civil liberties, active citizenship, public accountability, the rule of law, transparency and the free market in public life, politics, legislation and within public agencies.

The interviewee was Mr Giorgi Meladze, Program Director for “Rule of Law”.

Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development: a flagship institute in the democracy development.

The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development is a public policy think-tank, specialized in a broad area of democracy development. The CIPDD was founded in 1992 in Tbilisi, Georgia. It is a non-governmental and not-for-profit organisation. It advocates policy goals such as the development of a vibrant and diverse civil society, effective and accountable public institutions based on the rule of law and an integrated political community, which at the same time respects and preserves identities of different ethnic and religious communities in Georgia. The Institute seeks to contribute to the implementation of these goals through producing relevant and high-quality public policy documents, and encouraging a pluralistic and informed public policy debate in Georgia. Respectively, main activities of the CIPDD include public policy research, publishing and disseminating its results, and organizing different forms of debate – professional, political or public – around this work. In addition, the CIPDD is involved in advocacy efforts, including public advocacy and lobbying, and training related to its work.

Target groups for the Institute's activities are: the Georgian government, Georgia's political parties, opinion-makers in Georgia on the national and local levels, a wider public understood as a broad circle of citizens who want to be politically informed, international community players that are or wish to get involved in developments in Georgia.

The main geographical area where the CIPDD operates is Georgia. However, CIPDD sees great value in cooperation with organizations in countries of the South Caucasus and Black Sea regions.

The interviewee was Mr David Losaberidze, Program Director.

5.1.3 The local level

Before illustrating the nature and the activities of local NGO interviewed, it is noteworthy to clarify some issues.

First of all, the local civic society based in the region is scarce. Formal non-governmental organisations are a new phenomenon in Kvemo-Kartli due to the fact that the donor organisations that provide grants to NGOs have been more or less absent in the province until very recently. Nevertheless, in the recent years there has been a surge of NGO activity, especially in Marneuli and Gardabani *rayons*. In early 2004, there were estimated to be around twenty-five registered NGOs in these two *rayons*, although only a minority of these are active grant-seekers. Mr. Tom Trier, of the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), kindly provided with a list of all registered NGOs based in Kvemo-Kartli and run by Azeri ethnic people as of November 2008. This list includes 17 associations but merely a few of them are really active. According to the *National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia-Assessment survey report 2007-2008*, only 12 are functioning on a regular basis.⁸⁵ If they are active, they are heavily supported by national or international NGOs or they work in cooperation between them and they hardly can be defined as independent actors.

It should also be noted that NGOs established by national minorities and especially those regionally-based are institutionally and financially weak.

The NGO sector in Bolnisi, Dmanisi and Tsalka *rayons* remains very weak and has virtually no impact on the lives of members of national minorities living there.

⁸⁵ *National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia. Assessment survey report 2007-2008*, United Nations Association of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2008, p. 31.

This helps to explain the second problem faced during the selection of actors to be interviewed: the difficult to access and to contact. As mentioned before, the insufficiency of communication means, which touches in particular Kvemo-Kartli, hindered a complete and proper availableness of all relevant actors needed.

Those two elements can partially explain why the impact of the local civil society on the local population is very limited. According to the *National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia - Assessment survey report 2007-2008*, the 88,4% of the population in Kvemo-Kartli has no information about NGOs' activities. Only 1% has complete information while 5,4% has partial information on civil society activities. 5,2% is not interested.⁸⁶ Obviously, this decreases the participation of local population in public life through civil society which remains still an exception. When it comes to NGOs specialized in national minority rights, the level of information is even lower: 94,7% of the population in Kvemo-Kartli is not informed.⁸⁷

According to several but outdated sources examined, the most active and well-established NGO was, till 2004, the Bridge, founded in Gardabani in 2000 to promote cross-cultural communication in Kvemo-Kartli. Its aim was to bring together the different communities in the province through civic education and youth work. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the introduction, this NGO is not really active any more: it faces problems with the capacity of the young staff and, since 2004, when the leader of the association left it for a political career, it has been implementing nothing more than a couple of small projects. Therefore, it seemed not worth carrying out an interview with their members because it would have represented just a prolongation of the informal talk had during the personal trip mentioned in the introduction of this work.

Another important NGO is the Union of Azeri Women of Georgia (UAWG) which is the only local actor that could have been interviewed.

Union of Azeri Women of Georgia: from Marneuli, for the feminine emancipation and a better inter-ethnic relations.

⁸⁶ *Id.*, p. 32.

⁸⁷ *Id.*, p. 34.

The union of the Azerbaijan Women of Georgia (UAWG) is a non-governmental, non-commercial, non-political organization. The UAWG was born in 2000 and has been registered by Marneuli regional court in 2001. The head of the organization is Leila Suleimanova. Supervising body of the Union is the Board. The execution body of the organization is the apparatus, which the secretary general supervises.

The UAWG mission is to promote association of the Azeri women of Georgia for protection of their rights and support of democratic reforms and a civil society in Georgia.

The basic purposes of the Union :

- assistance in strengthening between peoples of humanistic and harmonious relations;
- assistance to integration of the Azerbaijan women in the Georgian society;
- assistance to involving of the Azerbaijan women in decision-making process;
- to interfere with discrimination of women to a sexual attribute;
- to promote the statement of friendship between Azerbaijan and Georgian people;
- establishment of connections and cooperation with women's NGOs in Georgia and abroad.

The interviewee was Mrs Leila Suleimanova.

6. THE FINDINGS

6.1 Some preliminary details: the High Commissioner approach on integration of national minorities.

The results of the interviews, or the actions undertaken in the field of integration of the Azeri minority, will be presented in accordance with a scheme developed by the High Commissioner on National Minorities. This plan has been obtained from the HCNM's approach on integration of national minorities and assembles four main categories of actions, tools and techniques that should be provided for the goal of integration. These elements are: education, language, participation and media.

In reality, the original scheme is made of five categories but it has not been taken into account during this research because his development and improvement mostly depend on the state policy and the governmental action and hardly can be worked out by the civil society. This fifth elements is the policing.

The police, as the most public manifestation of government authority, has direct contact with all ethnic communities of a state. It often represents the sole agency of the criminal justice system with which various ethnic communities ever come into contact. This means that the police has the power to influence the attitudes and perceptions of national minorities about the rule of law and the state's capacity to act in a fair, legitimate and accountable way.

A police service that is representative of the society it serves and responsive to the concerns and wishes of all ethnic communities enhances the legitimacy of government. It does this by demonstrating on a daily and practical basis that the authority of the state will be used in the interests of all citizens regardless of their ethnic background. Policing is, therefore, an essential factor in maintaining a free, open and peaceful society.

The High Commissioner has determined that one of the key ways to impede ethnic conflict is to ensure that police services mainstream a minority perspective in their work and build lasting partnerships - based on trust - with all ethnic communities within the state. This calls for measures that focus on fundamental areas such as recruitment and representation, training and professional support, engagement with ethnic communities, operational practices, and the prevention and management of conflict.

We would now like to go back to the point and to review in details the four elements mentioned, according to the High Commissioner official position.⁸⁸

The education: a human right and the best investment to prevent ethnic conflicts.

To help preventing conflicts at the earliest stage, the High Commissioner on National Minorities seeks to address the underlying causes of tension between minorities and majorities. The most effective means of achieving this, is to invest in education policies and practices designed to meet the special needs and concerns of both.

Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable way of realizing other human rights. Increasingly, education is recognized as one of the best financial investments states can make.

Education is also central to promote the identity of individuals and expressing identity within cultural groups. It is particularly important in multi-ethnic societies because it allows persons belonging to national minorities to pass on their culture to future generations, preserving and developing their minority characteristics.

Having a deep impact on the society, education can play an essential role in promoting inter-ethnic communication. It can help to break down stereotypes, explain the value of diversity and widen understanding of universal human rights and values.

High-quality education is vital because it provides children with the necessary skills to effectively participate in political, social and economic life.

A key issue in education is the issue of language, which is usually a defining element of a group and is central to the right of national minorities to maintain and develop their identity.

It should be borne in mind that while members of national minorities have the right to education in their mother tongue, they also have a responsibility to integrate into the wider society through acquiring a sufficient knowledge of the state or its official language. It should be kept in mind the importance of finding a fair balance between promoting minority rights and policies of integration. If such a balance is not achieved, polarization between minorities and majorities within the state may become a source of considerable tension.

Education is a field which mostly concerns political power and governmental policies. However, we may anticipate that the Georgian civil society does implement some educational

⁸⁸ The point of view expressed in the following paragraphs (*The education, The language, The participation, The media*) reflects the official position of the OSCE's High Commissioner on National Minorities.

projects in some different directions. In the illustration of the findings, they will be categorized as follows:

- support to the Georgian government;
- informal education;
- capacity building for the school boards (executive organs in schools).

The language: a double-edged sword for minority-majority relations.

Because of its functional and symbolic significance, language can be one of the most contentious issues in multi-ethnic societies.

Language is at the core of our individual and collective identities.

It is important to find practical ways of using language to help integration and build social cohesion rather than to exclude, repress or even assimilate. Too often there is a tendency to approach language issues in “zero-sum” terms, whereby one language is promoted at the expense of others. Such thinking is harmful not just to minorities but also to majorities.

The best way to accommodate the legitimate concerns of both majorities and minorities is within the context of a set of integration policies, where language plays a critical role. While language can, on the one hand, be a major source of division within diverse societies, on the other hand, with the right kind of policies, it can be used as a tool for integration.

Fluency in the state and minority languages is particularly important because it promotes the public and political participation by all. Such participation is an essential component of a peaceful and democratic society.

For this to function properly both the majority and the minority must be willing to compromise, as integration involves responsibilities and rights on both sides. The minority should be prepared to learn and to use the language or languages endorsed by the state, normally the language of the majority. At the same time, the majority must accept the linguistic rights of persons belonging to national minorities, which in practice, may not be an easy balance to establish or maintain.

For the scopes of this research, findings about education and language will be presented together since it appeared that very often activities belonging to those two topics are intermixed.

The participation: a social and political responsibility.

The effective participation of minorities in public life is an essential part of a peaceful and democratic society. For their proper integration into society, it is important that minorities are involved in public decision-making – especially when it affects them directly – and that they feel they have a stake in society. The risk of inter-ethnic tensions occurring will be significantly reduced when everyone affected by decisions feels a sense of ownership in decision-making.

Participation in public life and democratic society can be achieved through different ways. Every actor, governmental or not, chooses, according to its priorities, tools and working techniques, which kind of activities or strategies implement to attain this goal.

In the findings of this research, the participation category will include different elements, following the ample spectrum of actions of the actors interviewed. However, the main element retained will be the implementation of citizenship and human rights educational activities as tools to promote and stimulate a public and civic participation of minorities.

Citizenship education is widely construed to include the preparation of people, mostly young, for their role and responsibilities as citizens. “The purpose of citizenship education [...] is to make secure and to increase the knowledge, skills and values relevant to the nature of participative democracy [...]”⁸⁹

On the other hand, human rights education could be defined as a dissemination of information intending to develop a clear understanding of people’s rights and responsibilities through building a culture of peace, democracy, development and social justice.

“The citizenship definitions perhaps focus more on inclusion or integration into a particular society; the human rights definition provide more feeling of internationalism in the understandings and actions [...]”⁹⁰

Moreover, from the research carried out, it seemed that several programs are focusing the field of capacity building of the civil society, particularly of local NGOs. As mentioned earlier on in this text, civil society in the regions, in particular in Kvemo-Kartli, is quite underdeveloped. Even though some deem that “the development of the civil society should

⁸⁹ DAVIES, Lynn, *Citizenship education and human rights education. Key concepts and debates – vol.1*, The British Council, 2000, p. 5.

⁹⁰ *Ib.*, p. 6

not be imposed from the top but should grow spontaneously”⁹¹, many think that the first step toward the integration of minorities is the social integration which should be originated by the action of the local civil society.⁹² That’s the reasons why one of the main activities of the actors interviewed is supporting local NGOs in different ways. Therefore, we will explore this topic in the section dedicated to the participation because we would consider that a civil society well developed is a mean by which the public participation can be achieved.

The media: the importance of free access to the information in minority languages.

Access to the media in one's own language is particularly important for persons belonging to national minorities. Being able to read magazines and newspapers, listen to the radio and watch TV programs in minority languages is vital for maintaining and developing their cultural and linguistic identity. Furthermore, it determines whether minorities have access to social, economic and political opportunities.

In practice, minorities encounter a number of obstacles in accessing TV and radio programs in their own language. This can result from economic circumstances limiting the commercial viability of producing and broadcasting programs in small minority languages. In some cases, however, it may result from deliberate exclusion and be part of a political strategy to protect one language at the expense of others, for example by means of quotas, restrictions on ownership, refusal of broadcast licenses, or discriminatory regulation or taxation.

6.2 Findings

6.2.1 The education and language

It appears that out of nine actors interviewed, six are implementing educational and language activities targeting the Azeri community in Kvemo-Kartli.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe is involved in the education of the Azeri community in Kvemo-Kartli by the establishment of two centers: a youth centre in Bolnisi and a communal centre in Marneuli. The first is run by a local NGO under World

⁹¹ Interview with Giorgi Meladze, Rule of Law Program Director, Liberty Institute, 26th November 2008.

⁹² Interview with Mikheil Mirziashvili, Integration and Civil Education, Program Manager, Open Society Georgian Foundation, Tbilisi, 24th November 2008.

Vision⁹³ umbrella while the second is run by a local NGO based in Marneuli (Union of Azeri Women of Georgia which has been object of an interview). “In both cases OSCE’s role consists basically in supervision and monitoring”⁹⁴.

Both centres host Georgian and English languages teaching, computer teaching, skills development activities (“which increase possibilities to find a job”⁹⁵), trainings for NGOs, capacity building and civic education seminars. Bolnisi centre offers, in addition, sport activities for kids while Marneuli centre offers summer camps. At present, the Bolnisi Youth Centre hosts around 100 attendants, the communal centre in Marneuli around 70.

The activities proposed in those centres evidently belong also to other categories than merely to education but for more clarity we are putting them together. We will mention them again afterwards in the other findings’ groups.

The High Commissioner on National Minorities is implementing language activities in three different directions but under the same umbrella and in cooperation with Georgian Ministry of Education and Science.

The first direction is the improvement of the Georgian language teaching as a second language. As we already mentioned in this work, Georgian language has never been taught as second language in Azeri-speaking schools. The national language was taught through a first language methodology “which was completely wrong and inefficient - a waste of time, basically”⁹⁶. Almost 20% of Georgian language teachers didn’t even speak Georgian.⁹⁷

The HCNM’s program provides a training for trainers (ToT) for the best 32 teachers in the region who are supposed to train all other Georgian language teachers at a later stage. The ToT has been conducted during one week for 5 times during one year. The main subject of the training has been the teaching methodology of Georgian as a second language: new curricula have been delivered and introduced in all schools.

The second element aims the elaboration of standards to enhance Azeri language teaching as a first language. In the same way as for the Georgian language, “teaching methods were quite outdated and the level of teachers was below zero”⁹⁸. Thus, 26 teachers have been trained on new teaching methods and approaches. One of the general expected results was ensuring the

⁹³ International NGO based in the United States of America.

⁹⁴ Interview with Lola Ansele, Democratization Officer, Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Tbilisi, 2nd December 2008.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Interview with Nino Bolkvadze, National Program Manager, High Commissioner on National Minorities – OSCE, Tbilisi, 9th December 2008.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

minority, generally scared to be assimilated to Georgian population, that the aim is the integration and that there is willingness to preserve Azeri language and culture. The general problem faced in training teachers has been the distrust towards those new methods and fear to lose the job. Teachers found very difficult to change teaching methods after 20 or 30 years using the same old Soviet approach and thought not to be capable to get those new teaching guidelines.

The third direction is the teaching of Georgian language for civil servants. The outcome of this part of the program has been 18 months of Georgian language teaching classes for civil servants involved in the minority's self government. The lessons were structured in 3 modules, 6 months each: first, intermediate and proficient levels. "Political and public participation is very low into minorities areas and public servants don't hold key positions also because they don't speak good Georgian or they don't speak it at all."⁹⁹ According to the interviewee this program has been quite challenging because of constant movements and shifting in civil servant positions and a lack of motivation of the attendant.

Besides to this three-direction program, the HCNM is carrying out an initiative on multi-lingual education. At present, there is a pilot project in 12 schools in Samtskhe-Javakheti¹⁰⁰ and Kvemo-Kartli regions. Two languages (Georgian and the minority language) are taught from the first class following a progressive method: at the end of school children are supposed to speak fluently both languages. The idea of the High Commissioner is to sell the project to the Georgian Ministry of Education who has already started developing a multi-lingual education policy paper and an action plan. A pilot project including 40 schools in 4 Georgian regions (Kvemo-Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kakheti and Shida-Kartli) has been already foreseen in the state budget.

The European Centre for Minority Issue is carrying out some language activities. Without any detail, it has been told that ECMI is offering some language trainings for teachers of Georgian language working in Azeri speaking schools. According to the interviewee "the most important aspect of integration is the learning of Georgian language"¹⁰¹.

The Civic Integration Foundation is implementing (2007-2008) a project named "Supporting ethnic minorities for democratic political participation". The target groups are both Armenian

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Samtskhe-Javakheti is a Georgian southern region mostly populated by ethnic Armenian residents.

¹⁰¹ Tom Trier, Regional Representative for the Caucasus, European Centre for Minorities Issues (ECMI), Tbilisi, 24th November 2008.

and Azeri communities living in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli. The project supports the target group population for resorting to their civil (including electoral) rights effectively. The outputs of the project encompass the state language learning, civic education, voter education, and political parties' capacity building in regards with the project's target group. These outputs will be obtained through some key activities which include training of trainers for the Georgian language teaching through interactive methods, training of local opinion multipliers in Georgian language.

It seems however that the main component of this project is civic and citizenship education.

The Liberty Institute's educational action on minorities is focused on capacity building in minorities' schools. The point that has been made clear during the interview is the importance of their work on the education system. Following the decentralization of the education in Georgia, in each school it exists a School Board which is the organism responsible for all decisions regarding the schools. The members of these boards are not really aware of their powers and not capable to make good decisions. That's why the Liberty Institute is working in training those people in order for them to properly use their powers. "We are working in an institutional building perspective."¹⁰²

Moreover, the Institute promotes some informal education activities.

The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development is working on the integration of the Azeri minority via a project named "Supporting ethnic minorities for democratic political participation". This project has four components. One of them aims to promote the teaching of Georgian language: in all main cities of the province of Kvemo-Kartli, a free of charge teaching is delivered in CIPDD regional centres. Since we can count 3 or 4 learning groups per each city in the region, this program reaches a total of about 300 people – adults and kids – receiving lessons. In those centres is also available an Internet connection. "They are places where people, especially young, can gather and build a social life."¹⁰³

The Union of Azeri Women of Georgia, the only local actor interviewed, is actively working in educational and language issues with the support of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. As mentioned before, the UAWG is running the Marneuli Community

¹⁰² Interview with Giorgi Meladze, Rule of Law Program Director, Liberty Institute, 26th November 2008.

¹⁰³ Interview with David Losaberidze, Program Director, The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD), Tbilisi, 5th December 2008.

Centre. The main objective of the Centre is the integration through education pursued by the organization of:

- cultural events
- summer camps for kids (in Kobuleti – on the Georgian coast)
- Georgian language teaching: 2 levels
- Computer teaching: 2 levels
- English language teaching: 2 levels

The events are open to everybody but they are mostly attended by 12-22 years old people.

6.2.2 The participation

It appears that all nine actors interviewed are carrying out activities with the final aim to increase and improve the public participation and the social life of the Azeri community in Kvemo-Kartli.

As cited in the preceding chapter, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is supervising the activity of two centers, in Bolnisi and Marneuli, which are offering, in addition to language and education activities, trainings for NGOs capacity building and civic education seminars.

The High Commissioner on National Minorities is dealing with participation through the deliver of trainings on management of interethnic relations. In fact, a chain of training has been organized for civil servants from the minority during the past 2 years. The main subject of those trainings was awareness-raising about minorities burning issues. “It was also a kind of discussion place - the idea was to let people speak out about their problems.”¹⁰⁴ The project lasted 2 years but it’s not planned anymore. However, the interviewee underlined a certain satisfaction about this project due to the fact that now the same curriculum is active in Kutaisi School of Public Administration. This institute host civic servants from the minorities in Georgia during 6 months: 3 months are dedicated to Georgian language teaching, 3 months to public administration lessons.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Nino Bolkvadze, National Program Manager, High Commissioner on National Minorities – OSCE, Tbilisi, 9th December 2008.

The European Centre on Minority Issues is heavily involved in activities which are supposed to enhance the participation of the minorities in the public and political life of the country. Hence, the Centre is very active in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli regions.

In both regions regional citizens' fora have been created to support the process of regional integration and minority rights protection. Through these fora local civil society can exchange information with government state officials. The regional stakeholders are also able to participate in consultations with government officials.

Concerning the province of our interest, Kvemo-Kartli, the ECMI is focusing its attention on the Tsalka district "because it used to be the most underdeveloped area concerning civil society"¹⁰⁵. We did not previously mention this *rayon* because, although it is situated in Kvemo-Kartli, the biggest minority is Armenian. In fact, out of 20,888 persons, Armenians are more than a half of the population (11,484 persons).¹⁰⁶ The Azeri community is the fourth minority by number, after Armenians, Greeks and Georgians. However, it seems that in this case it is worth to mention activities in this district because they also concern the Azeri community.

In Kvemo Kartli, ECMI has founded the Tsalka Citizens' Forum as well as a resource centre in 2006. It is now establishing itself as the only network where civil society actors from all national minority groups can meet and discuss how to solve the issues of development and integration that the Tsalka district faces.

This project aims to ease the ethnic tension in the multiethnic Kvemo-Kartli region, through achieving the following objectives:

- enhancing communication and improving relations between the regional authorities and the province and state power structures; to assist in prevention of ethnically based disputes between the Azeri, Greek and Armenian populations and the Georgian dominated municipal, province and state governance structures;
- helping to address issues of concern to the ethnic communities and other civil society groups and to communicate these concerns to the municipal, province and state levels;
- enhancing informed dialogue between civil society practitioners and government officials at the regional level, but with the inclusion of government representatives from the province and state levels, on issues of public policy and supporting the

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Tom Trier, Regional Representative for the Caucasus, European Centre for Minorities Issues (ECMI), Tbilisi, 24th November 2008.

¹⁰⁶ National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia. Assessment survey report 2007-2008, United Nations Associations of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2008, Annex D. Also, see Table 1.

evolution of open, transparent and accountable governance through higher standards in policing;

- facilitating improvement of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations regionally in Kvemo-Kartli by enhancing the inter-ethnic dialogue, also ensuring the inclusion of smaller ethnic and religious minorities.

Furthermore, ECMI established in Tsalka a resource centre where trainings for local NGOs are regularly provided. This structure is also a place where people belonging from different ethnic groups can gather and be involved in social activities. “We are bringing them together, trying to give them some tools to work out policies and recommendations on their situation. On the first level we are trying to capacitate the local community, to make its voice clear and to formulate recommendations about minorities’ concerns, in order to engage local community in policy making. At a second stage we are proposing them to bring these proposals at an upper level: the central government. This is possible, bringing together people belonging to different ethnic communities, because they feel that they can work together, because they have common interests across ethnic boundaries.”¹⁰⁷

In 2005, ECMI created the Ethnic Minorities Council in Tbilisi, under the auspices of the Public Defender. This Council is a mechanism for institutional dialogue between the minorities and the central government. It is self-regulated under a Memorandum of Understanding among 80 NGOs and minority representatives. This Memorandum foresees that these partners work in consultation with other specialized agencies to improve national minorities’ rights protection and foster dialogue between national minorities’ representatives. The Council is organized in topical Committees intended to cover various areas of minorities integration. According to the interviewee’s opinion, the Council is mostly focused on the problems that minorities living in Tbilisi have. That’s why “we are trying to integrate minorities living in the regions in this structure”¹⁰⁸.

As previously mentioned, the Civic Integration Foundation is implementing a project named “Supporting ethnic minorities for democratic political participation” with the aim of strengthening the civic awareness of the minorities living in the regions (Armenian and Azeri). The outputs of the project are obtained through some key activities, besides the educational ones already mentioned, such as voter education of the local opinion multipliers,

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Tom Trier, Regional Representative for the Caucasus, European Centre for Minorities Issues (ECMI), Tbilisi, 24th November 2008.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

training of the political parties and the local electoral commissions members, local multipliers, local media involvement in civic education.

In the frame of the “National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia Program”, the United Nations Association of Georgia is working on the issue of the public participation of the minorities through, in particular, one of the five components of the program: the trainings. The interviewee called them “diversity management trainings”. The beneficiaries are regional NGOs, local government officers, media representatives. “We developed a special methodology in the form of a diversity management manual for those trainings which are implemented by our partner Partners-Georgia.”¹⁰⁹ Besides this, UNAG is supporting other NGOs which are conducting the trainings by themselves, with the sharing of methodology and some technical equipment. According to the interviewee’s opinion this component has been “pretty successful”¹¹⁰ and it is going to be ameliorated and implemented again.

We would like to insert a comment here about any civic or citizenship education component of the NITG. Reacting to a question of the interviewer, the interviewee explained that originally this program was based on those two issues but before starting it appeared that the priority should be given to other topics, such as the grant-making and the media components which will be mentioned afterwards.

During the interview with two Program Managers of the Open Society Georgian Foundation, it appeared that, in spite of the numerous programs run by the organization, the priority is given to the development of the minorities’ civil society and its integration in the public life of the country. The language issue falls at a second position in the scale of priorities.

“The main issue is the integration in the civil society and, through this integration, minorities will understand the benefits of studying and speaking the Georgian language. It is useless to speak the state language if you are not socially integrated in the state civil society. When the Azeri beneficiaries of the “Integration and Civil Education Program” can see the possibility of future developments on the Georgian side they are more motivated to study and speak Georgian. If not, if they are not convinced that they can be successfully integrated in the Georgian society, they are moving to Baku for education or business.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Ramaz Aptsiauri, National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia – Chief of Party, United Nations Association of Georgia, Tbilisi, 16th December 2008.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Interview with Mikheil Mirziashvili, Integration and Civil Education, Program Manager, Open Society Georgian Foundation, Tbilisi, 24th November 2008.

Two programs have been object of discussion during the interview because more related to the integration of the Azeri minority: the “Integration and Civil Education Program” (2008-2010) and the “Media and Civil Society Support Program” (2008-2009).

The first program is based on the assumption that the regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli are alienated from social and political life of other parts of Georgia. Therefore, the need of supporting those vulnerable groups of the society is strongly felt. “If you take into account that these groups constitute a sizable part of the society, which, because of social and economic problems, is not able to fully participate in the life of the country, you will realize that this is an impeding factor for the development of Georgian state and society.”¹¹² In this case, the concept of integration encompasses the issues of integrating ethnic minorities and socially vulnerable groups into Georgian society and Georgia’s regional and European integration, which should contribute to the consolidation of democracy in the country.

But let’s now proceed to illustrate the part of the program focusing the Azeri minority.

To popularize the idea of peaceful resolution of conflicts and mutual understanding the “South Caucasus Peace Film Festival” was initiated by the program. The format of the festival is closely related to the topic of regional integration. The idea of this event is to gather together people belonging to different ethnic groups and let them organize cultural happenings. “In 2007 we covered 25 locations in all South Caucasus, this year 27. In Kvemo-Kartli this festival had a big success, especially the 3-days movie marathon in Marneuli because the level of participation of the population was very high and the local organizers arranged also other interesting activities like performances and exhibitions.”¹¹³

The second program, albeit mainly focused on media development, includes also a civic society development direction. This part can be split in several components.

The first one is the “Support to the public involvement in decision-making and reform implementation processes”. Particular emphasis is made on NGO sector participation in the above mentioned process. Based on the grant competitions, relevant projects are funded in various regions of Georgia. Through funding partner organizations, implementing operational projects and conducting grant competitions, the program is encouraging non-governmental and community based organizations in activities aimed at informing public, strengthening civil control, advocating and supporting public participation in decision-making and reform implementation process.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

The second component is the “Support to the institutional development of NGO sector”. This project is organizing training courses for the young and regional NGOs on the institutional development and will later provide them with the financial support to strengthen their organizational capacity. Within the same direction the program funds the institutional development projects of the leading NGO coalitions through a grant competition.

The third component is the “Support to beginner NGOs and CBOs, including civil initiatives on grass-roots level”. The program is supporting the activities of young non-governmental and community based organizations through conducting relevant grant competitions. Particular emphasis is accorded to participation of organizations in decision-making and reform implementation process at the local government level, as well as to advocacy of public and community interests. “Funding of such projects is especially important in the areas such as city suburbs resided by poor and unemployed population, as well as regions, in particular those populated with ethnic minorities, like Kvemo-Kartli.”¹¹⁴

The last one is the “Support to the development of local funding sources for NGO sector”. In this case, the main aim is the development of a local donor market and the creation of special, transparent state budgetary mechanisms for the civil society support which are essential elements for sustainability and independence of NGO sector in Georgia. This is especially important for the minority civil society which is particularly weak in fund-raising.

The Liberty Institute’s main current programs are: “Rule of Law and Human Rights Program”, “Participation and Accountability Program” and “Citizenship and Diversity Program”. These programs are mainly focused on delivering of information to the ethnic minority groups about citizenship, human rights, diversity. “There is a big need to develop civil society in the region populated by minorities. The problematic point is that this development should not be imposed by external actors but it should grow spontaneously. Our role is to deliver the proper information to the population so that the community will be aware and capable to decide if to gather and create something or not.”¹¹⁵

As already mentioned, the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development is working on the integration of the Azeri minority via the project “Supporting ethnic minorities for democratic political participation”. This project has four components. Next to the

¹¹⁴ Interview with Lana Ghvinjilia, Media and Civil Society Support, Program Manager, Open Society Georgian Foundation, Tbilisi, 24th November 2008.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Giorgi Meladze, Rule of Law Program Director, Liberty Institute, 26th November 2008.

language component, there are two supplementary parts related to the participation. One is the civic education which includes organization of workshops on school accreditation and of activities to develop the civil society. Another one is dedicated to elections. This encompasses vote education and political awareness activities and trainings for local independent observers.

Concerning the participation activities of the Union of Azeri Women of Georgia, they are included in the events taking place at the Marneuli Community Centre. Besides the educational activities, the Centre organizes :

- trainings and educational seminars: for instance, civic education (human rights and citizenship education, ethnic minorities rights, courses on Georgian Constitutional Law)
- conferences and meetings: for example, open discussions about women domestic violence (in collaboration with the Georgian Police).

6.2.3 The media

It appears that out of nine actors interviewed, five are implementing activities promoting the mass media at the service of Azeri community in Kvemo-Kartli.

The High Commissioner on National Minorities is dealing with media development through a program focused on capacity building of local broadcaster.

Under the program and with the partnership of Internews Georgia¹¹⁶, some journalists (both Georgian and Azeri) have been recruited, technical equipment has been bought, constant trainings have been delivered to journalists, to management staff, to webmasters, to press agencies. Now they both produce every day local and national news in Azeri (in Bolnisi), in Georgian and Azeri (in Marneuli). “At present, even though Marneuli TV station performs better and the personnel is more motivated, both broadcasters are 100% financially and technically autonomous. Before the program started, there were only 2 TV stations in Marneuli and Bolnisi but they were not developed because a lack of capacity, they just owned the official licence but they were not active.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Internews Georgia is a Georgian NGO whose activity is exclusively focused on empowerment of local media.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Nino Bolkvadze, National Program Manager, High Commissioner on National Minorities – OSCE, Tbilisi, 9th December 2008.

The Civic Integration Foundation is currently implementing an important project on mass media called “Independent Media for Civil Integration” (2007-2008-2009) with the partnership of the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD) and of two foreign structures: the Committee of the Investigative Journalists Association (REGION, Armenia) and the Committee for Protection of Azerbaijani Journalists (RUH, Azerbaijan). The overall objective of the project is the development of independent media in South Caucasus through the elimination of technical obstacles, awareness-raising among journalist, improving media professionalism and unimpeded civil society access to all media, including the Internet. Moreover, the civil society in the ethnic minority-populated districts of southern Georgia is expected to gain voice through more viable local community media. The target groups of this project are journalists and media outlets in Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki, Gardabani and Marneuli districts of the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli regions. “I can easily state that our privileged beneficiaries are journalists belonging to minorities. We are organizing for them educational works, interviews, trainings on working style and ethics, various types of seminars and conferences.”¹¹⁸ The partnership with Yerevan and Baku is explainable in a regional cooperation perspective. In fact, the indirect beneficiaries of this project are media outlets and independent journalists of the trilateral Caucasus Journalists Network. “Our biggest challenge is how to develop media in order for them to be independent. Now they strongly depend on local authorities.”¹¹⁹

In the frame of the “National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia Program”, the United Nations Association of Georgia is working on the media issue through in particular one of the five components of the program: the media programming. To address media concerns, in February 2006 the Public Broadcaster began translating news programs into Azeri language in real time, through local TV companies. Similar live translations were done slightly earlier in Samtskhe-Javakheti. In May 2007 the Public Broadcaster launched a talk-show, supported by NITG Program, which aimed at promoting the civil integration of national and religious minorities. This talk-show was weekly broadcasted in Georgian language and along with the representatives of national minorities. “At a later stage, this issue was renewed and new programs will be transmitted from beginning of January. What we are doing is supporting,

¹¹⁸ Interview with Zaur Khalilov, Executive Director, Civic Integration Foundation (CIF) , Tbilisi, 26th November 2008.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Irakli Chedia, Assistant Executive Director, Project Assistant for “Independent Media for Civil Integration Program”, Civic Integration Foundation (CIF) , Tbilisi, 26th November 2008.

providing with founding and trainings.”¹²⁰ Under the umbrella of the media component of NITG, UNAG also supported the creation of documentary series, produced by the Georgian public television and broadcasted in 2007, called Multiethnic Georgia. The idea of this documentary was to promote tolerance and promote understanding through providing with information. Nine educational documentary movies explore the history and culture of ethnic minorities in Georgia (Armenians, Azeris, Jews, Greeks, Kists, Kurds, Udians, Ukrainians and Ossetians) and expose the benefits of cultural diversity.

During half-an-hour movie, those minorities are explored, from their origins to their current life in Georgia. “It’s about what these people are doing here, what is their culture, how they are linked and related with Georgians, who were the main famous personalities belonging to the minority who contributed to the development of Georgia.”¹²¹ This was supposed to be helping the Georgian ethnic group to learn more about the national minorities who are leaving in Georgia “because lot of people have no idea, for example, that we have lot of famous people from national minorities who contributed substantially to the life of this country.”¹²²

According to the interviewee the media issue is a problematic mean of integration and the UNAG is hardly working to develop an healthy media culture. Concerning future projects, UNAG is foreseeing to develop regional studios or to have at least one new program delivered in minorities’ languages, on the public television.

As mentioned earlier on, the Open Society Georgian Foundation is carrying out the “Media and Civil Society Support Program” (2008-2009). The program is based on the assumption that one of the major problems in Georgian media sector nowadays is the lack of professionalism of media representatives in general and poor qualification of journalists. “The problem, which is particularly grave for print media, reflects the quality of Georgian media products and serves as a basis for other problems in the sector.”¹²³ This concern is particularly true regarding the minorities which are victims of a perilous information vacuum.

The main goal of the “Media and Civil Society Support Program” (MCSS) is to ensure active public involvement in decision-making, public control over the reform processes taking place in Georgia and increasing the number of self-acting civil society organizations oriented on problem solution, with a special attention on the minorities. The above goal is achieved

¹²⁰ Interview with Ramaz Aptsiauri, National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia – Chief of Party, United Nations Association of Georgia, Tbilisi, 16th December 2008.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Interview with Lana Ghvinjilia, Media and Civil Society Support, Program Manager, Open Society Georgian Foundation, Tbilisi, 24th November 2008.

through the support to development of institutional capacity and professional potential of civil society and media, also through encouraging coalition building among NGOs and media outlets and supporting development of cooperation mechanisms.

The program also envisions building of civil society institutions, able of promoting responsible, free and active citizenship in Georgia.

On the other hand, the program is continuing supporting free media, which is one of the most important tools for promoting democracy and the rule of law, through mobilizing the societal energy and forming public opinion.

To come back to a more concrete aspect, the OSGF is currently implementing two projects in Kvemo-Kartli. The first aims to support the Marneuli local TV (2007-2009) which is producing talk-shows in Georgian language for the Azeri minority. The support of the Foundation is in equipping and training. The second one intends to support Marneuli newspaper (written in Georgian language). The newspapers is sold in the city of Rustavi and in Kvemo-Kartli. It appears that any media in the minority language is supported or developed: “we are not supporting any type of mass media in Azeri language”¹²⁴.

“Newspapers and media issues should be created by the initiative of the minority itself, because this shows its interest in its own development.”¹²⁵

And finally, the CIPDD is carrying out, in partnership with the CIF, the “Independent Media for Civil Integration Program” already illustrated some paragraphs earlier.

6.3 Some necessary additions: the role of the government, the legal activities and the grant-making component.

After this comprehensive illustration of the actions of the civil society in the integration of the Azeri community, some other additions should be denoted. The interviews have quite often been very rich: the interviewees enthusiastically added more details than required and expressed personal opinions. Hence, for the completeness of the research, we might add some complementary actions taken by the institution interviewed.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Interview with Mikheil Mirziashvili, Integration and Civil Education, Program Manager, Open Society Georgian Foundation, Tbilisi, 24th November 2008.

First of all, we would like to reshape the role of the government in our research, since we previously mentioned that we would not take into account governmental actions towards minorities. From the interviews it appears that several actors of the Georgian civil society are currently implementing programs or projects in cooperation with the government. Some of them are supporting the government in programs developed by state agencies, some are implementing in-house programs in partnership with the government, some are finally working in cooperation with the political power in the frame of common programs.

Hence, the role of the government is not negligible and it will outwardly grow in the future.

Secondly, some of the interviewees mentioned the implementation of legal activities at the service of the minority population, including legal education and trainings.

“The main problem in this field is that Georgian law is not translated in minorities languages. As for the governmental involvement, there is only one legal centre in Rustavi which provides information in Georgian because the city is mostly ethnically Georgian. Thus, the Azeri population is not covered.”¹²⁶

Out of nine actors interviewed, two are implementing this kind of activities.

The High Commissioner on National Minorities established a legal consultation centre in Marneuli.

The goal of the project is to provide legal consultancy to the local population, inform them on existing pressing issues and area-specific problems and find the ways for problem resolution.

The Centre is staffed by qualified lawyers who speak both Azeri and Georgian, thus facilitating communication with locals. Regular office hours are allocated for consultation services when interested individuals as well as organizations and private companies operating in the region can make enquires on their problems. A legal consultation service is offered on civic issues: in fact many people living in rural areas don't have passport or even ID card. “It's hard to believe but they still have Soviet ID card and documents and they don't know how and where to get them.”¹²⁷

Twice a week, a mobile team visits local villages to raise public awareness of ethnical minorities, identify specific concerns and issues addressed by the local residents that can become a topic for discussion at the roundtable meetings. These are organized in Marneuli

¹²⁶ Interview with Nino Bolkvadze, National Program Manager, High Commissioner on National Minorities – OSCE, Tbilisi, 9th December 2008.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

Consultative Centre on monthly bases, where local communities and governmental officials are brought together to discuss specific problems or issues and seek ways for resolution. This approach bridges the gap between the government and the people.

A free-of-charge mobile hotline is available for local communities to report any complaints, problems or violations and solicit feedback and advice. Flyers, the *Landowner Magazine*, the local TV and newspapers are widely used for information dissemination.

The project aims to facilitate further integration of ethnical minorities into local society as well as to raise awareness of Kvemo-Kartli Azeri population on available legal procedures for resolving their problems.

The Civic Integration Foundation implemented a program during 2007 named “Legal education as a way of successful integration of ethnic minorities”.

The overall goal of project is to assist the process of integration of ethnic minorities into the civic society of Georgia. The specific goal of the project is to improve skills and level of professionalism of local employees in Kvemo-Kartli and to create structures (groups of jurists and translators) which will be ready to grant jurisprudential service for the population of the region and to increase level of knowledge of representatives of ethnic minorities of the constitutional rules and obligations. The direct beneficiaries of the program have been jurists and translators among the Azeri population in Kvemo-Kartli.

Thirdly, many big or middle-size organizations are grant-givers. They confer little funding to local or small-size NGOs upon condition that they propose viable projects to be funded and implemented by themselves.

An important role of the OSCE’s Mission to Georgia is actually the donor. In fact, it proposes a small annual grant competition (to have an idea of the size, in 2008, 3.000 € have been totally granted) for local NGOs in Kvemo-Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. “This initiative has particular success in Tsalka and Bolnisi.”¹²⁸

The procedure is the following: an OSCE’s officer goes in the regions and informs the local organizations’ leaders about the tender; NGOs formulate proposals based on their needs and ideas and they apply for the grant. Besides that, some courses on capacity building are

¹²⁸ Interview with Lola Ansede, Democratization Officer, Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Tbilisi, 2nd December 2008.

offered: how to write projects or to formulate a project budget, how to redact reports and how to properly implement activities.

“Three years ago there wasn’t any local NGOs capable to apply for these grants because of lack of expertise. At present there are three NGOs which have developed and are now able to work quite autonomously.”¹²⁹

Projects financed vary greatly: a legal centre has been established (mostly consultation on property rights), courses on reproductive health have been delivered, a library has been set up.

The European Centre for Minority Issues is also implementing a grant-giving program. Between 5 and 10 mini grants are annually offered to local NGOs based in the Georgian regions mostly populated by minorities. Every grant is worth around 1.000 €. “Grants are small but they can still make the difference if they are well spent. We don’t want to give more because most of the NGOs are still starting. It can be dangerous to transfer them a lot of money since they will not be able to administrate it.”¹³⁰ To encourage cooperation among local NGOs, one of the principle of the competition for the grant is that at least two NGOs should work together, otherwise they will not get the grant. The ECMI is also conducting trainings in practical management and administration for those NGOs willing to bid in the grant competition.

The third actor interviewed who is playing the role of donor is the United Nations Association of Georgia through the “National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia Program”. As mentioned, this program is composed by five component. One of them is the grant-making.

“The main idea of this grant-making component is to support local NGOs to implement local projects oriented only on integration and tolerance of minorities issues.”¹³¹

At present (end 2008) two projects financed by this activity are running. The first is focused on students graduated from the Kutaisi Administration School. This project is giving grants to fund internships for those students. The aim of the second one is to strengthen capacities of School Boards in minorities regions, especially concerning the budgeting.

Being aware of the weakness of most of the local NGOs, the interviewee has been asked if all minorities are equally participating in this grant-giving program. “The truth is that minorities

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Interview with Tom Trier, Regional Representative for the Caucasus, European Centre for Minorities Issues (ECMI), Tbilisi, 24th November 2008.

¹³¹ Interview with Ramaz Aptsiauri, National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia – Chief of Party, United Nations Association of Georgia, Tbilisi, 16th December 2008.

leaving in Tbilisi are better performing rather than minorities in the regions. That's why, we are planning to readdress this component of the program taking more into consideration Armenian and Azeri communities. Thus, probably the orientation of the grant-making part will be specially devoted to Kvemo-Kartli and Samstkhe-Javakheti.”¹³²

Finally, the Open Society Georgian Foundation is currently managing grants competitions for regional NGOs. The procedure is the same as for the other grant-giver organizations mentioned. The aim of the competition is to develop feasible proposals corresponding to the real needs of the minority population. “An interesting example is a project in Kvemo-Kartli: a small local NGO is organizing and delivering some trainings for lawyers working in the region.”¹³³

We would prefer to consider here that those grant-giving activities are not strictly aimed to develop the local civil society and integrate it in the public life of the country. The grants are yielded to those strongest actors having the capacity to draft project proposals for viable and realistic activities. Most of the time, those actors are always the same because they managed to build a trustful relationship with the donors who do prefer concede the grants to known and reliable partners.

However, the grant-making allows to act from the grass roots level: the needs of the local population are respected and no external action is imposed. Moreover, the local projects can be greatly diversified and cover a quite large spectrum of fields which could, on the contrary, not be taken into consideration by actors at an upper level.

¹³² *Ibid.*

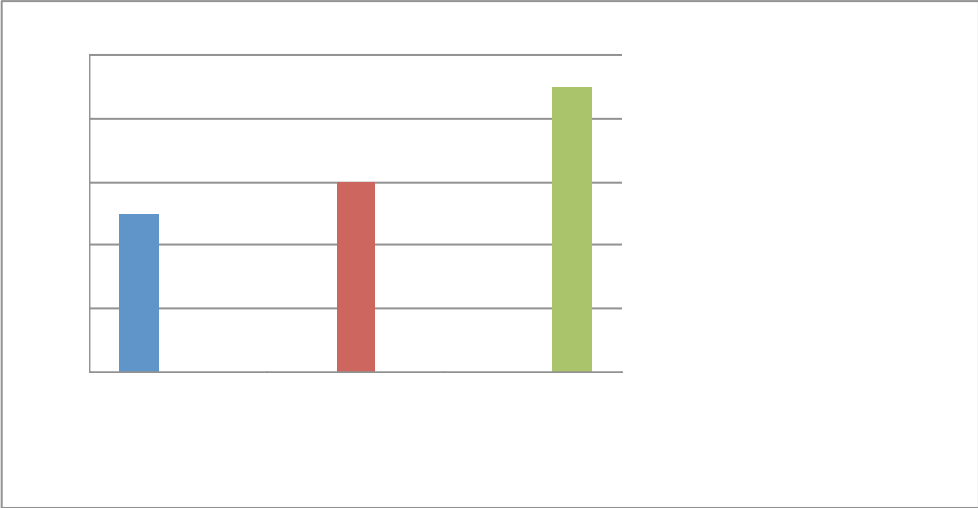
¹³³ Interview with Mikheil Mirziashvili, Integration and Civil Education, Program Manager, Open Society Georgian Foundation, Tbilisi, 24th November 2008.

CONCLUSION

Following the gaps resulting from the analysis of the different actions and the gaps denounced by the interviewees, we will try to figure out what are the needs in the integration of the Azeri minority that have not yet found an effective response.

Gaps showed by the analysis: local media support and language activities.

Graph 3. Composition of civil society’s activities focusing integration of Azeri minority of Kvemo-Kartli



As clearly demonstrated by the graph here above, it exists a big lack in the media sector related to the integration of the Azeri community of Kvemo-Kartli. This shortage is as well openly denounced by some actors interviewed.

Out of those five respondents, one, the United Nations Association of Georgia, is implementing media activities at a national level with the main aim to increase tolerance among the ethnically diverse population of Georgia. The creation of a talk-show and documentary series about ethnic minorities living in the country are clear examples. The UNAG is not working in the region to strengthen local media.

The other four actors, The High Commissioner, the CIF in partnership with the CIPDD and the Open Society Georgia Foundation, are carrying out activities on capacity building of local broadcasters through technical support, awareness-raising and trainings. All those activities are focused on local television. Only the OSGF is dealing with the improving of local newspapers (in Georgian language). Therefore, we can notice a lack of support of the local

printed information. This insufficiency can be explained by the fact that 70% of the Azeri population living in Kvemo-Kartli does not read newspapers.¹³⁴

A governmental involvement should here be mentioned. “The Georgian Ministry of Culture has financed the issuance of several newspapers, including Armenian-language *Vrastan*, Azeri-language *Gurjistan* and Russian-language *Svobodnaya Gruzia*.”¹³⁵

Educational and language activities are mainly focused, on one hand, on training of teachers of Georgian language in Azeri schools, and on the other hand, on the teaching of the state language to the minority population in general. Moreover, the OSCE’s High Commissioner on National Minorities is implementing, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science, a project on elaboration of teaching standards of Georgian language. It appears that those language activities are mostly delivered in some of the communal or local centres established in the region and that the majority of attendants is belonging to the young section of the population. Hence, it can be noticed that the adult part of the minority population is hardly taken into account concerning educational and language activities.

It is here pertinent to point out that educational activities are often implemented in coordination with the Georgian Ministry of Education and Science. In fact, the lack of technical capacity and of knowledgeable and experienced human resources of the Government has pushed the national civil society to temporarily substitute institutions. As stressed by several actors during the interviews, it is now time for the Government to take over those educational processes.

Even though all actors interviewed are implementing activities related to public participation, we can record a lack in implementation of activities on citizenship and human right education. As mentioned earlier in this work, the implementation of citizenship and human rights educational activities have been chosen as the main tools to promote and stimulate a public and civic participation of minorities. According to this view, we can mark that, among the actors implementing raising-participation activities, only two of them, the Union of Azeri Women of Georgia and the Liberty Institute, are delivering citizenship and human rights educational activities aiming the entirety of the Azeri community. The other interviewed involved in this topic, the CIPDD, the Civic Integration Foundation and the ECMI, are mainly

¹³⁴ *National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia. Assessment survey report 2007-2008*, United Nations Association of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2008, p. 62-63.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

delivering civic and civil education to actors working in the local civil society or to journalists (the CIF). We would like to present this last evidence as a critic because we think that this practice is not so effective as it looks. In fact, as previously mentioned, the level of participation in the local civil society is particularly low in Kvemo-Kartli region. Thus, that civic education aiming the local NGOs is not reaching the big part of the population which is not implicated in the public life. But it is indeed this part of the population that more needs information about their rights.

Gaps underlined by the interviewees: the strong need of citizenship and human right education.

As mentioned in the chapter dedicated to the methodology of the research, two questions asked during the interviews aimed to identify the main problems in the integration of the Azeri minority and the main gaps in terms of intervention in the same field.

The main problems and gaps denounced by the interviewees appear to be strongly related to the main activities of the institution they represent. Frequently they are related to the personal opinion of the interviewee and his/her assessment of the present situation and of the needs of the minority.

We will here present the results structured by subjects and by importance (assessed according to the number of interviewees who stressed the same need).

At the first place we find the lack of public participation culture in Kvemo-Kartli, stressed by four interviewees. According to the respondents, this insufficiency should be filled up via more activities on civic, citizenship and human rights education. At the Liberty Institute it has been told that among Azeri of Kvemo-Kartli “the civil society does not exist, there is no culture of participation and the youth is not active at all”¹³⁶. The same statement was done at the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD) where the interviewee identified as a priority “how to activate”¹³⁷ the civil society in the region.

¹³⁶ Interview with Giorgi Meladze, Rule of Law Program Director, Liberty Institute, 26th November 2008.

¹³⁷ Interview with David Losaberidze, Program Director, The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD), Tbilisi, 5th December 2008.

At the second place we may indicate three different topics that have been identified each by two actors.

One reflects the main gap marked in the graph 3: the media support. “The local media are quite underdeveloped. The challenge is how to develop them independently because they depend from local political authorities.”¹³⁸ The same lack of intervention in this field is stressed by the Union of Azeri Women of Georgia’s representative. “There is a big lack in the field of media. It constitutes a big problem for the Azeri community. There are no Georgian news translated in Azeri language and the local media and the Internet are not really developed. Can you imagine that young Azeri women used to bring satellites as dowry in order to watch Azerbaijani TV when married?”¹³⁹.

Another one is related to the local government. Both Open Society Georgia Foundation and the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development stressed a big problem in the field of participation and implication of Azeri minority representatives in the local governmental bodies. “The priority should be how to stimulate the participation in local government which is extremely and particularly low in Kvemo-Kartli.”¹⁴⁰

The last one is a problem that we did not mention before in this work because of his doubtful relation with the integration of the Azeri community in the Georgian society: the women’s dignity, as called by Mrs Leila Suleimanova of the UAWG, or the gender management, as called by Mr Ramaz Aptsiauri of the UNAG. At present, the feminine condition within the minority is pretty difficult, also, if not mostly, due to religious aspects. “Nowadays, young girl used to get married at 15 or 16 in rural areas of the region, at 19-20 in the cities. Most of them are still forced by their families, they are victims of the habit of arranged marriages. We should not forget that the practise of the kidnapping by the future husband is still existing. Moreover, many men leave their wives at home in Georgia to go to Azerbaijan or to Russia to find a job. Brides are therefore forced to live in their husbands’ families which are often unknown and which frequently treat them as the least deserving persons in the house.”¹⁴¹

The custom of early marriages causes a very low educational level among the Azeri women who are forbidden to keep studying while married. They very often do not work outside their home. It’s relevant to notice that the feminine participation in local governmental bodies or in

¹³⁸ Interview with Irakli Chedia, Assistant Executive Director, Project Assistant for “Independent Media for Civil Integration”, Civic Integration Foundation (CIF), Tbilisi, 26th November 2008.

¹³⁹ Interview with Leila Suleimanova, Director, Union of Azerbaijani Women of Georgia (UAWG), Marneuli, 2nd December 2008.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with David Losaberidze, Program Director, The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD), Tbilisi, 5th December 2008.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Leila Suleimanova, Director, Union of Azerbaijani Women of Georgia (UAWG), Marneuli, 2nd December 2008.

the civil society is incredibly low. “The gender management is a huge challenge for the civil society and at present there are not enough activities focusing the strengthening of women’s role in the Azeri community.”¹⁴²

Finally, we may point out two other needs identified by two actors.

First of all, the need to involve more the adult part of the Azeri population in the integration programs has been stressed by the United Nations Association of Georgia’s representative. “There should be more innovative initiatives focusing adults. Most of the activities concern children, at present. But, concerning language and education children have more tools at their disposal and hence possibilities of integration – also given by the daily contact with members of other minorities. Adults are more closed in the reality of the community and they strive to be more integrated.”¹⁴³

The other need has been identified by the High Commissioner on National Minorities’ representative and it can be defined as general and *super partes*. It concerns the involvement of the Government of Georgia in some activities started and/or implemented by civil society’s actors. “The Government – in particular the Ministry of Education, concerning the language and education issue – has not yet taken over all those activities started in collaboration with other actors. The integration of those activities in the state policy is highly necessary to become sustainable and effective.”¹⁴⁴

We may suggest that this last necessity could potentially concern all programs illustrated in this work because the active role of the state powers is the main need for a sustainable development. As underlined by several interviewees, the Azeri community in Kvemo-Kartli needs to feel that the central government is interested in its opinion and is willing to let it enter and participate in the public life of Georgia.

This omen could and has to be realized insofar as the role of the civil society is maintained and its neutral and grass roots character is preserved.

¹⁴² Interview with Ramaz Aptsiauri, National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia – Chief of Party, United Nations Association of Georgia, Tbilisi, 16th December 2008.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Nino Bolkvadze, National Program Manager, High Commissioner on National Minorities – OSCE, Tbilisi, 9th December 2008.

GLOSSARY

CBO	Community Based Organization
BTC	Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (Pipeline)
CE	Council of Europe
CIF	Civic Integration Foundation
CIPDD	Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
ECMI	European Centre for Minorities Issues
GUUAM	Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova
HCNM	High Commissioner on National Minorities
NITG	National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia Program
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSGF	Open Society Georgia Foundation
ToT	Trainings of Trainers
UAWG	Union of Azeri Women of Georgia
UNAG	United Nations Association of Georgia
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

**APPENDIX A:
MAP OF GEORGIA**



Source: *Georgia's Armenian and Azeri minorities*, International Crisis Group, Europe Report #178, November 2006.

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