

## **Efforts of the civil society in Georgia to counteract propaganda of hate in light of the Russian-Georgian conflict**

**(Agit Mirzoev, Public Movement “Multinational Georgia”)**

Georgia is the most multi-ethnic country in the South Caucasus and as such has had to face a more complex situation with regards to ethnic minorities on its territory. In Georgia, according to the 2002 census, minorities make up 16% of the population (as against one third in 1989). The main ethnic groups are: Azeris (284,000 today, compared with 308,000 in 1989); Armenians (249,000 today, compared with 437,000 in 1989); Russians (68,000, compared with 341,000 in 1989); Ukrainians (7,000, compared with 52,000 in 1989); Greeks (15,000, compared with 100,000 in 1989). Since 1997, however, ethnic group is no longer recorded on identity cards.

The main gaps with regard to the minority policy in Georgia bringing isolation and marginalization of the minority communities are:

- Absence of the comprehensive policy approach to the minority issue and consequently absence of adequate legal frameworks ensuring minority participation and civil integration;
- Solid lack of political representation of minorities on national and to some extent on local levels;
- Lack of the appropriate skills and capacities of those representatives of the ethnic minority groups who have been elected to the local self-government bodies necessary for the adequate fulfillment of their powers and representation of the ethnic minorities within local self-government authorities;
- Lack of culture of political participation and extremely low level of legal literacy among representatives of minority groups;
- Informational vacuum in the areas of the compact settlement and lack of attention to the problems of minorities leading to isolation of minority groups from the society;
- Previous one-sided language policies which contributed to the lack of knowledge of the official state language by ethnic minorities and thus to the isolation, employment problems and inadequate law enforcement.

Mentioned trends might become especially dangerous right after cease of the violent conflict, which caused feelings of confrontation and deep stress among citizens of Georgia of all ethnic origins.

### **b. Proliferation of the hate speech and actions**

Conflict situation gave birth to the wide proliferation of the hate speech, war propaganda and unbalanced coverage of the situation by both sides. Coverage was all the time accompanied by the underlining of the ethnicity, e.g. “Georgian fascists”, “Russian aggressors”, “Ossetian marauders”. According to the monitoring of the Public Movement “Multinational Georgia” the most unbalanced information has been produced by the following mass-media entities:

#### **Internet mass-media**

- [www.lenta.ru](http://www.lenta.ru) (RF)

- [www.nr2.ru](http://www.nr2.ru) (RF)
- [www.regnum.ru](http://www.regnum.ru) (RF)
- [www.interfax.ru](http://www.interfax.ru) (RF)
- [www.apsny.ge](http://www.apsny.ge) (Georgia)
- [www.newsgeorgia.ru](http://www.newsgeorgia.ru) (Georgia)
- [www.osinform.ru](http://www.osinform.ru) (South Ossetia)
- [www.rosbalt.ru](http://www.rosbalt.ru) (RF)

#### **Other print and electronic mass-media**

- ORT-TV Broadcaster (RF)
- TV Broadcaster “Vesti”(RF)
- Newspaper “Izvestia” (RF)
- Newspaper “Komsomolskaya Pravda” (RF)
- Newspaper “Asaval-dasavali” (Georgia)

Certain mass-media entities from time to time apply to the hate speech formulations, among which TV Channels “Rustavi-2” and Public Broadcaster of Georgia (Georgia), newspaper “Kommersant” (RF), newspaper “Podrobnosti” (RF), newspaper “24 hours” (Georgia) and “Alia” (Georgia), news agencies “RIA Novosti” (RF) and “Interpressnews” (Georgia).

In accordance with monitoring many politics and public figures were using hate speech and war propaganda in their speeches, including rude and offensive formulations. One of such cases is the statement of Irina Gagloeva, Ossetian Administration spokesperson, who accused Georgians in “ritual killings of Ossetians”. Both sides were inclined to such kind of statements.

In Georgia public campaign “Stop Russia” based on the intolerant phraseology and images has been launched and carried out, allegedly supported by the government. Please see campaign materials in the Annexes to this report.

One of the cases of concern is also demonstration of the offensive video clip “Russia-2008” at the Georgian TV Channel “Rustavi-2”. Given video was aimed at the criticism of the current Russian political regime, however contained formulation which might be perceived as offensive for all Russian people and caused immediate reaction of the Public Defender of Georgia and Public Movement “Multinational Georgia”, who called upon immediate stop of the video demonstration on TV.

Mutual accusation in the ethnic cleansings also contributed to the hate speech and actions proliferation

#### **c. Potential aggression towards certain ethnic groups**

After the conflict certain trends appear, showing that in the country there is a certain amount of the aggression and confrontation potential between different ethnic groups.

E.g. according to the data confirmed by the Ministry of Interior (**Ekaterina Zgudadze and Natia Gazava**) and according to the monitoring conducted by the Public Movement “Multinational Georgia” there are three cases of the violence on the basis of the interethnic hatred since 15<sup>th</sup> of August observed in Tbilisi, including one attack on the property, one beating and one word offence, all these actions allegedly have been accompanied by the mentioning of the “Russian ethnic origin” of the victim in offensive way. However these facts are now being checked by the MIA and NGOs.

According to **Naira Bepieva**, representative of the Ossetian Community of Georgia and journalist, there are also some cases of the threats and aggression towards Ossetians residing in Kakheti region are reported. According to **Eka Skhiladze**, resident of the city of Borjomi and

grass-root public activist, there are also permanent rumors in her view disseminated on purpose, according to which local Ossetians during the military confrontation helped to set on fire Borjomi National Park.

However these trends are not major yet and there is time for effective prevention and combating of the unfair propaganda describing that Russians and Ossetians, as well as other ethnic minorities are endangered in Georgia.

However this propaganda in line with the cases of the aggression towards persons of Georgian ethnic origin in Russia (case of the Movement Against Illegal Migration calling upon deportation and physical violence against Georgians; cases of violence towards Georgians in Moscow, Nizhniy Novgorod and St-Petersburg) might further promote interethnic confrontation.

#### **d. Regions with the compact settlement of the ethnic minorities**

In Georgia there regions with the compact settlements of the ethnic minorities, e.g. Samtskhe-Javakheti region with the compact settlement of the ethnic Armenians.

In relation to this region certain mass-media, such as Regnum and Georgia On-line on 19<sup>th</sup> of August 2008 published materials describing alleged separatist attempts conducted by the radical groups in the region. Only timely reaction of the civil society and community of the region helped to prevent informational provocation and possible outburst of the interethnic confrontation, which is easily promoted by the manipulations with information and public consciousness.

#### **Recommendations**

- To support strong informational campaigns both in Russian Federation and Georgia aimed at the elimination of the hate speech, war propaganda and enemy image and dissemination of the fair and balanced information about the conflict
- To promote creation in both Russian Federation and Georgia of the coordination bodies consisting of the both civil society based and government based stakeholders responsible for the monitoring and prevention of the hate crimes and hate speech
- To support contacts between civil societies of Russian Federation and Georgia as a potential resource for the peaceful resolution of the conflict.
- To support civil societies of the two countries in their work in the field of human rights protection, conflict resolution, protection of freedom of expression in order to ensure that peacemaking process and protection of the democratic values in the both countries will not be endangered more than it is at the moment and new threats to the lives and rights of the citizens of the both countries will not emerge, as well as threat of the proliferation of violence, war propaganda and non-democratic forms of the political system development.