

**Education as a precondition for the civil integration of the ethnic minorities in Georgia:
combating discrimination and intolerance in the educational sphere in line with
development of human rights education**

Alexandra Delemenchuk (Public Movement "Multinational Georgia")

Ethnic minorities in Georgia are residing both compactly and disseminated. There are 5 regions where ethnic minorities are concentrated and in some regions even compose majority within the boundaries of the certain districts and municipalities. These regions suffer from a shortage of teachers and the number of admissions in national schools has been in constant decline. Despite constitutional provisions, Georgian language dominates in many areas of society and therefore mastery of the official national language is often a pre-condition for political, economic and social integration. Access to media and information in minority languages is often difficult. Minorities also find it difficult to access the Georgian state, as federal laws are published solely in Georgian.

Because there is no effective state support for Georgian language training, the younger generations tend to speak no language other than their mother tongue. If this situation continues, minorities risk soon being unable to communicate with the rest of the population and suffering economic and social marginalization. Political representation is also an issue, both on national and to some extent on local levels.

Educational reforms carried out recently are very important and significant as commitment of the state to ensure integration of the minorities. In the meantime, as far as education appears to be the core problem in the scope of the difficulties faced by minorities and in the meantime as a corner stone of the successful civil integration, educational reform should be designed and implemented in a way corresponding to the needs of the minority communities.

In the meantime we should separately assess different actions within the state educational reform: those of general character and those directly aimed at civil integration, as far as their impact is almost divergent. On the one hand language policy was toughened by the new system of the enter exams to the high educational establishments and by the elimination of the Russian sector in the high educational establishments, on the other hand certain efforts have been made in order to provide for intensive learning of the state language in the regions with compact settlement of the ethnic minorities. However, dynamics of these two actions is not equal. As far as before no efforts on promotion of state language and its intensive learning have been allocated, reform of the enter exams directly affected in negative way today's graduates of the schools with ethnic minority background. They were not in a due course trained in state language and because of this were factually deprived of possibility to enter high educational establishments. All these causes new outburst of migration of young representatives of the ethnic minority communities and outflow of manpower from Georgia, as well as worsens situation in general, not allowing to develop potential and conditions of the ethnic minorities¹.

¹ There is no reliable statistical data on the number of migrating young people. This tendency was outlined during the focus groups of the school teachers carried out in Akhalkalaki, Marneuli, Telavi, Tbilisi and questioning of the minority representatives in Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo-Kartli, Kakhaeti, Shida-Kartli, and Tbilisi carried out by the PMMG in March, June and July 2007.

On the other hand positive and necessary commitment to provide intensive training in state language in the regions with compact settlements of the ethnic minorities was not based on the appropriate coordination between government-based and civil society-based stakeholders. Many educational programs conducted by different subjects are whether divergent or overlapping. What is more, given programs were designed without consultations with the minority representatives and profound assessment of their needs.

Accordingly to the article №11 of Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities: “The first years of education have great importance for a child’s development. According to investigations in the sphere of education the native language is the ideal means of education in the preschool period and while attending kindergarten”.

Government policy is leading to a gradual reduction of kindergartens using the languages of national minorities and the Georgian-speaking sectors are retrained. Now there are too few kindergartens left which use minority languages. It leads to the problem of choice allowed to parents to give their children the education in the preschool and school period which they want.

The Georgian government is planning by 2010 to convert most of the educational program in secondary schools to teaching in the official language. And the languages of national minorities remain in the status of foreign languages. Everybody, including minorities, agrees that the state language should be taught as a discipline on a permanent basis, preferably by bilingual teachers who understand the cultural and language characteristics of the children.

During this period of time the number of subjects which are taught in the state language should remain the same. But it is not so, and the number of subjects in secondary schools which are taught in the official language will be increasing, while the number of subjects in the languages of the minorities are dropping². Unfortunately, it happens spontaneously and quickly. This leaves a huge number of members of ethnic minorities without right to education in their native language, and to participation in the social-political life of the country. As a result it encourages both student emigration and generally, ethnic emigration.

Provision of primary and secondary level of education in the language of minorities and teaching it to a significant degree depends on the presence of teachers who have training in all subjects in the native language.

Because the state is obliged to provide suitable possibilities for education in language of minorities or the study of them, the state should provide suitable conditions for training of teachers and promote access to such training.

It is clear that in Georgia there is a reduction of teaching staff of national minorities and a gradual process of closure of faculties in all universities existing for training staff to teach in schools of national minorities³.

One more concern with regard to education is lack of multicultural approach, caused by gap in the professional training of teachers, who are not familiar with techniques of the multicultural education. The same refers to the school text-books (i.e. history and geography) which sometimes serve as a source of the inflammation of interethnic hatred and contain intolerant phraseology.

One of the recent cases of such kind is case of text-book “Rodina” (“Motherland”) approved by the Ministry and intended for 4th forms of non-Georgian language schools of Georgia (Part “Samtskhe-Javakhet”, p.97). Quotation:

² Now the national minorities are taught by literature, history, geography and other social sciences in native languages. The law of general education of 2005 bereaves of the national minorities this right and involves the studying of these disciplines in the Georgian language.

³ Interview of the NGO “Tolerance” with more that 30 directors of the secondary schools who are working now as well as who were removed.

“In 19th century settling of the district with strange tribes started on a mass scale. As a result alien speech was heard more often, than before. Fortunately, the natural disaster made many Adjarian families leave their homes lately and move to Samtskhe-Javakheti. Georgian speech is heard again in the houses. The land revived, appeared the hope on recovery of the national balance in the region”⁴.

The text-book “Motherland” confirms necessity of qualified and thorough monitoring of teaching manuals before issuing a license. It would be expedient to ensure involvement into the monitoring process of the civil society representatives, in particular those organizations representing ethnic minority interests. “Multinational Georgia” has conducted special press-conference in regards to abovementioned accident, as well as addressed Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, Mr.Kakha Lomaia with number of questions related to the text. The response received from the Center of National Plans and Assessment said that it is impossible to fully annul the text-book on the given stage, and certain measures were already undertaken for accompanying given text-book with special loose leaf indicating that information consisting in the abovementioned Part is incorrect and should not be used in education process.

Recommendations

- a) Amend the 2005 Law on General Education to emphasize bilingual education in minority areas and ensure that core social science subjects are taught in Azeri and Armenian (in parallel with Georgian). Support this commitment using mandate of the OSCE High Commissioner on national minorities.
- b) Strengthen Georgian as a second language (GSL) teacher training, development of GSL teaching materials and opportunities for minorities to learn GSL in primary and secondary schools. Strengthen instruction of teachers in intercultural education in line with introduction of the human rights education on regular basis or as a part of school curricula. Teaching tolerance should be part of this process. Intercultural learning should involve teachers, parents and children as partners. Support this process by involvement of the ODIHR/TND and ODIHR Human Rights Department.
- c) Improve access to higher education by amending rules to allow minority students to take national entrance examinations in Russian, Armenian or Azeri and provide intensive GSL study to students who do not pass Georgian language exams. Support this commitment using mandate of the OSCE High Commissioner on national minorities.
- e) To revise school textbooks regarding issues relating to racism and racial discrimination, using mandate and programs of the ODIHR/TND and involving local NGOs and educators.

⁴ text-book “Rodina” (“Motherland”) (p.97, Part “Samtskhe-Javakheti”)