



Georgia

Submission for the second cycle of 23rd session of Universal Periodic Review

The rights of Armenian minority in Georgia

Submission prepared by: **Armenian Community of Georgia**

Armenian Community of Georgia (ACG) is the community based non-governmental organization that is the watchdog organization aiming to protect and promote the rights of Armenian minority in Georgia.

Contact information for the report:

Web-Site: Armenian-Community.ge

Email: info@Armenian-community.ge

Address: Griboedov 15, 0108, Tbilisi, Georgia

Tel: +995 32 2 922163

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Executive Summary

This submission to the Human Rights Council (HRC) on Georgia highlights human rights issues in the past 4 years and its failure to implement a number of accepted recommendations during the previous review.

As described below, issues of concern persist namely insufficient participation of Armenians in the decision making process, low level of political participation and preservation of Armenian identity and culture. Armenian Community of Georgia as a community organization respectfully requests the government of Georgia to:

- (1) Ensure political participation of Armenians on local as well as on central level, namely in representative bodies.
- (2) Promote Armenian language in the areas where they live compactly and protect Armenian schools for the better protection of their cultural identity.

I Introduction

IMPLEMENTATION OF ACCEPTED RECOMMENDATIONS

1. During Georgia's previous review in 2011, Georgia was commended for acceding to more than 140 human rights treaties, cooperating with human rights bodies, and including human rights principles in their Constitution and laws. The delegation also commended Georgia on efforts made to protect rights of minorities. However, the delegation also expressed concern that some legislative changes are still have to be made for the better integration of minorities namely in the field of political participation and preservation of cultural identity. The information above shows that further efforts are still needed to implement the following accepted recommendations.

- 105.77 Take measures to ensure the effective participation of minorities in the social, economic and cultural life of the country and that they are adequately represented in State institutions and public administration. (Pakistan)
- 105.78 Promote the inclusion and political participation of all ethnic minorities. (Bolivia)
- 105.79 Ensure that the policy of promoting the Georgian language is not pursued to the detriment of the linguistic rights of minorities. (Pakistan)

II Overview of the situation with the political participation and preservation of ethnic identity of Armenians in Georgia

(a) Political participation of Armenian minority

2. According to the last 2002 national census the number of Armenians in Georgia is 248,929, which is 5.7% of the population of Georgia¹. As a second largest ethnic minority Armenians are not proportionally represented or participate in political life of country. The number of Armenians in local and central representative bodies is not proportional to the whole number of Armenian population of country.

3. *Local level or Sakrebulo*: The situation is more or less better on the local level in the regions where Armenians are compactly populated for example Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda municipalities but the regions where they are dispersed the level is too low or even absent. ²

It should be mentioned that according to our survey since its independence there has not been any Armenians in the local representative bodies of Tbilisi and Batumi.

4. *Central Level or Parliament*: Before 2008 there were 250 members in Georgian national Parliament. Within the period of 1992-2008 at least 5 Armenians has been elected and represented in the states main representative body.

4.1 After 2008 changes that have been made in the electoral system number of parliament seats decreased up to 150. Thus, during the parliamentary elections in 2008 and 2012 only 3 Armenians were elected to the Parliament, two majorities from Javakheti (Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda) and one from the party list (from Tbilisi). This means that since the independence comparing to their number Armenians has always been underrepresented in the states main political institution.

4.2. It is noteworthy that in the densely populated areas level of knowledge of state language is poor or very low. In contrast to the cities or municipalities where Armenians lives dispersed Tbilisi, Rustavi, Batumi etc. And on the contrary in the cities like Tbilisi and Batumi the problem is not the knowledge of Georgian but mother tongue³. Despite the knowledge of state language the number of members of Sakrebulo is too few or absent at all.

4.3 Since the adoption of the Law on Self-Governmental bodies during the following three elections in 2006, 2010, 2014 Armenians from the dispersed populated territories were

¹ http://www.geostat.ge/cms/site_images/files/english/census/2002/03%20Ethnic%20Composition.pdf

² See the attached document, Annexed #1

³ United Nations Association Georgia, "National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia Assessment Survey Report", October 2008, 36, at <http://www.una.ge/eng/artdetail.php?id=74&group=documents>.

represented very few in the list of parties or absent at all⁴. Also we can assume that language barrier is not the main obstacle for the adequate political participation of Armenian minorities and it is a pretext that Georgian authorities bring in its reports. This fact gives the ground to suppose that Armenians suffer from the hidden or indirect discrimination from political elite of country.

Recommendations

- Hence we recommend Georgian government to work out effective legislative mechanisms to motivate political parties, and allocate quotas for political-representative positions in the representative bodies. This will increase the representations of ethnic Armenians in political parties as well as in the representative bodies itself.
- We recommend Georgian government to develop educational campaign (Advertisements, discussions etc) through public media to raise public awareness of the issue and importance of participation of minorities in the political life to combat the motives of discrimination.

(b) Promotion of the linguistic rights of Armenian minority

5. Despite taking obligation to the Council of Europe in 1999, Georgia has not yet adopted European Charter of the Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML). Thus, when we speak about linguistic rights of Armenian minority, the issue should be divided into two directions - one is the usage of language, as a second official after Georgian, in the areas where they are compactly populated. Two - the preservation of the language and identity by developing the level of education and preserving Armenian language schools in the areas where Armenians living among Georgians in the big cities.

5.1. *Schools*: The numbers of non-Georgian schools decrease through the last decade. During the 2008-2011 academic years, the number of Armenian language schools and sector decreased by 20% but the whole number of non-Georgian schools decreased from 408⁵ to 279⁶ or by 32% it mainly happens in the big cities or mixed areas where their cultural identity issue is more acute. For example in Tbilisi during the 2004-2014 years out of the 8 Armenian language schools/sectors in the 2014-2015 academic year left only 1 school with around 300 pupils and 2 weak sectors with few pupils in Georgian language schools⁷. It should be mentioned that state

⁴ Information is available on cesko.ge

⁵ Civic Integration and Tolerance Council, "National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration (2nd ed)", 1 November 2008, 9

⁶ UPR mid-term progress report of Georgia in 2011- measures undertaken to the recommendation 105.79

⁷ Monitoring result made by Armenian Community of Georgia in 2014

does not provide the subject of history of Armenian people, which is essential component for the preservation of ethnic identity.

5.2. Regional language issue: Since its membership to the council of Europe Georgia is obliged to adopt and implement the ECRML. Adoption of charter will help to raise the awareness of Armenian minority about ongoing process of country; will contribute to the preservation of Armenian language in the region. Will positively reflect to the state-minority relationships, contribute to the trust building process and increase the level of inclusion of Armenians in the socio-political processes of country.

Recommendations

- In the regions where Armenians have the problem of preservation of ethnic identity promote the policy of development of Armenian language school allocate additional funds to increase the salary of teachers of Armenian languages in Tbilisi.
- Develop special program or reopen the pedagogical faculty at the Tbilisi State University for the ethnic minority schools. To provide the ethnic minority school with bilingual professional teachers.
- Adopt and implement ECMRL to avoid the risk of losing ethnic identity in the future.

IV Conclusion

Armenian Community of Georgia as a community based organization express concern for the problems they have faced in exercising their rights. Armenians respectfully request the government of Georgia to take the necessary steps to insure efficient political participation and promote the preservation of ethnic identity.