

National minorities and educational reform in Georgia

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**National Minorities and Educational Reform
In Georgia**

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I. Introduction

Following the change of government in Georgia with the ‘Rose Revolution’ of 2003, substantial developments have been made regarding the reform of the education system and the improvement of the quality of education. These reforms, particularly the new language and education policies, have undoubtedly had implications for persons belonging to national minorities..

Language and education policies in Georgia have two principal aspects: enhancing knowledge of the official state language for the purposes of increased integration of national minority groups on the one hand, while protecting minority languages and the right to receive education in one’s mother tongue on the other. Although Georgian legislation provides for equal access to education and protects the right to receive education in minority languages, conflicting legislation concerning the promotion and use of the state language has somewhat impeded the ability of minorities to realize this right in practice. Most notable is the negative effect of the reform education policy on the access of national minorities to higher education due in large part to Georgian language proficiency requirements. This requirement has, in turn, had an impact on other aspects of the education sector, such as teacher training and the provision of textbooks in secondary education. Notwithstanding, the advancement of the knowledge of the Georgian language is indeed a crucial component of education reform and it has been identified as the priority issue for ensuring the full and effective civil integration of persons belonging to minority groups, especially for those living in substantial numbers in specific regions.

Georgia is a multilingual and multiethnic country, with an estimated thirteen percent of the population speaking a language other than Georgian as their mother tongue.¹ Specifically, the regions Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli are densely inhabited by ethnic Armenians and Azeris respectively, the majority of whom have a very poor command of the Georgian language. This impedes the general integration of these minority groups into Georgian society and is also the most problematic issue with regard to education.

¹ Carine Bachmann (ed.), *Language Policies and Education in Multiethnic Societies* (CIMERA Publications, Geneva, 2006), 7.

Fig. 1: Ethno-national Composition of Georgia²

Ethnicity	1979 Census		1989 Census		2002 Census	
	%	Population	%	Population	%	Population
Georgian	68.8%	3,465,447	70.1%	3,815,787	83.8%	3,661,173
Azerbaijani	5.1%	256,886	5.7%	310,271	6.5%	284,761
Armenian	9.0%	453,329	8.1%	440,912	5.7%	248,929
Russian	7.4%	372,737	6.3%	342,932	1.5%	67,671
Kurd/ Yezid	0.5%	25,185	0.6%	32,661	0.4%	18,329
Ossetian	3.2%	161,184	3.0%	163,300	0.9%	38,028
Greek	1.9%	95,703	1.9%	103,424	0.3%	15,166
Ukrainian	0.9%	45,333	1.0%	54,433	0.2%	7,039
Abkhaz	1.7%	85,629	1.8%	97,980	0.1%	3,527
Kist	N/A	N/A	0.1%	5,443	0.2%	7,110
Jew	0.6%	30,222	0.5%	27,216	0.1%	4,372
Other	0.9%	45,332	0.9%	48,990	0.3%	15,430
Total	100%	5,036,987	100%	5,443,349	100%	4,371,535

In the Soviet era, Russian was the sole official administrative language and the *lingua franca* in Georgia as in the Soviet Union as a whole, while persons belonging to national minorities were also encouraged through educational institutions to use and maintain their native languages; at least this was the case for most ethnicities from the 1950s onwards. In the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic knowledge of the Georgian language was not a priority for the national minorities as Russian served as the unifying tongue in majority-minority relations. General primary and secondary education was available in minority languages and, while higher education was available in Georgian, which was also the official state language in the republic at that time, numerous Russian-language sectors functioned at all higher education institutions of the Georgian SSR. Therefore, the vast majority of persons belonging to national minorities had a poor command of the Georgian language, if any, at the time of the break-up of the Soviet Union, but

² Data shown has been taken from the official Soviet census of 1979 and 1989, and the 2002 Georgian census, at http://www.hist.umn.edu/~rmccaa/ipums-europe/enumeration_forms.shtml.htm.

While the provision of access to primary and secondary education in one's mother tongue positively encouraged linguistic and cultural preservation and development, it also served to segregate communities based on ethnic and linguistic terms. This is particularly true for a country such as Georgia, which has experienced many waves of ethnic tension in the past. The newly independent state of Georgia saw leaders Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze largely ignore the plight of national minorities. Gamsakhurdia even adopted an ethnocentric leadership approach, resulting in unfavourable and directly discriminatory policies towards minority groups. Although such policies came to an end during Shevardnadze's time in power, little was done to address the problem of the integration of national minorities and the associated language issue. There was no strategy or comprehensive policy for the area implemented throughout this period while the only attempt to legislate minority rights was the draft Law on National and Ethnic Minorities, prepared in 1996, which was never actually adopted.³ As a result, national minorities remained to a large extent marginalized from Georgian society and knowledge of the Georgian language was not actively pursued. Today, the low level of knowledge of the state language still constitutes the main impediment for the full participation of national minorities in the political, social and cultural life of the state.

Fig. 2: Command of Georgian Language by National Minorities⁴

National Minority	Tbilisi	Samtskhe-Javakheti	Kvemo Kartli
Armenian	96.4%	24.6%	N/A
Azeri	95.6%	N/A	16.9%

In Samtskhe-Javakheti, Armenians constitute 94% of the population of Akhalkalaki district and 95% of Ninotsminda, in addition to 34% of Akhaltsikhe.⁵ Kvemo Kartli has an equally large

³ Lowell W Barrington (ed.), *After Independence: Making and Protecting the nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States* (University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 2006), 259.

⁴ 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>.

⁵ Jonathan Wheatley, "Obstacles Impeding the Regional Development of the Javakheti Region in Georgia", ECMI Working Paper 22, 2004, 5.

population of ethnic Azeris, who make up 83% of Marneuli district, 66% of Bolnisi and 67% of Dmanisi district.⁶ Both regions share similar problems such as poor infrastructure, low levels of economic opportunity and rather limited access to the major national media sources. The first two factors are common to most rural areas in the country, but the latter is largely a result of a lack of knowledge of the Georgian language. Therefore, ethnic Armenians and Azeris rely heavily on their kin-states for media or on Russian TV channels, further disassociating them from Georgian society. Although all rural communities experience a certain amount of isolation, the issue is most pertinent in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts due to the language factor, the high population density of the groups and the strong relationships with the kin state of the region's ethnic Armenians.

Recognizing the importance of language policies in the education system as a tool for the civil integration of minority groups, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia has in recent years (after the regime change in 2003/2004), implemented a series of legal and policy reforms and has continued to develop and amend these reforms based on ongoing analysis of their successes and failures. Most recently, the Georgian government has developed the National Concept on Tolerance and Civil Integration, adopted in May 2009. The Concept outlines the following six main target areas to be improved with regard to education of national minorities: better access to pre-school education for persons belonging to ethnic minorities; access to general education for persons belonging to ethnic minorities; access to higher education for persons belonging to ethnic minorities; improve command of the state language among persons belonging to ethnic minorities; protection of minority languages; and access to vocational training programmes and adult education for persons belonging to ethnic minorities. This paper aims to look at and assess the educational reforms carried out thus far, with particular emphasis on their practical implications for persons belonging to national minorities, as well as to provide recommendations for future policies concerning minority education. Due to the sizeable Armenian and Azeri population in Georgia, and the high concentration of these groups in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, this research is largely focused on these communities and regions.

⁶ Jonathan Wheatley, "Obstacles Impeding the Regional Development of the Kvemo Kartli Region in Georgia", ECMI Working Paper 23, 2005, 6.

The working paper is divided into two major parts dealing with general and higher education respectively. Within these two sections, a number of important issues are discussed including the problems arising from recently introduced legislation that aims to improve the teaching of Georgian in non-Georgian language schools, looking specifically at teacher training initiatives and the provision of textbooks. Issues pertaining to the management of schools, including financial administration and the qualification examinations for school directors and teachers, are discussed with relation to the potential impact on national minorities. The introduction and subsequent development of the university entrance examination (UNE) and how this—particularly the Georgian language component—has impacted on the access of national minorities to higher education is discussed at length in the second section of this paper, where the positive and negative effects are explored. Lastly, a review of the higher education institutions of particular importance to minority education is presented. The ongoing efforts of the Ministry of Education and Science, including the legal and policy framework adopted, are assessed in each section, and recommendations for alternative approaches and future actions are proposed, such as bilingual and multilingual education models in pre-school and secondary education, and policies of affirmative action and simplified language examinations for entrance to higher education institutions.

II. General Education

1. Access to General Education

According to the Law of Georgia on General Education, the language of communication in all educational institutions in Georgia is Georgian.⁷ However, national minorities have the right to receive general primary and secondary education in their native language.⁸ According to the figures for 2008, pupils in non-Georgian language public schools constitute 8.79% of the total

⁷ Article 4 (1) of the Law of Georgia on General Education, as of 8 April 2005, at http://www.reform.edu.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=200&info_id=73.

⁸ Articles 4 (3), 7 and 9, Law on General Education.

number of pupils in public schools in Georgia.⁹

There are numerous non-Georgian language schools and non-Georgian language sectors in Georgian schools (mixed schools), but in recent years the numbers have diminished. In 2006, there were 456 functioning non-Georgian language schools including mixed schools, while according to the latest figures received from the Ministry of Education and Science District Resource Centres the number has now decreased to 408 (see table below), 234 of which are monolingual.

Fig. 3: Non-Georgian language schools¹⁰

Schools by Language of Instruction	Mixed Schools	Monolingual
Azeri	124	97
Armenian	140	121
Russian	141	15
Ukrainian	0	1
Ossetian	3	0
Total	408	234

However, it must be noted that the decrease in the number of public schools in Georgia also applies to Georgian-language schools under the optimization process, according to which schools with a low-rate of enrolled pupils have been amalgamated with others.¹¹

1.1 School Conditions and Resources

Minority language schools share similar problems with other rural and mountainous regions in

⁹ Shalva Tabatadze & Natia Natsvlishvili (2008), *Intercultural Education*, Teachers Professional Development Centre, 13.

¹⁰ Civic Integration and Tolerance Council, “National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration (2nd ed)”, 1 November 2008, 9. Data for Ossetian school sectors are based on ECMI assessments.

¹¹ Resolution 596 of the Minister of the Education and Science of Georgia, “On the Creation of the Commission on the Issues of Optimization of General Education Institutions Legal Entities of Public Law”, as of 2 November 2005. The following criteria are taken into consideration while deciding on the optimization of schools: the number of pupils; location of more than one school in one building, garden, or neighbourhood; conditions of the school buildings (the amount of necessary repair works, etc.); capacity of the school buildings. The criteria mitigating against the optimization of schools include: geographical and climate conditions; distance between the two school to be merged (the distance should be optimal, possible to reach by foot); the number of pupils should not be too high as a result of merging schools (which might cause problems in terms of management); in the case of a sponsoring organization or other permanent sources of financing (such as, local self-governance body, international donors, etc.) for a school with small number of pupils; if schools present reasonable arguments illustrating their unreadiness to merge; merging

that the general conditions of the school buildings are often far from satisfactory. In addition, facilities and resources such as teaching materials and computers are scarce in comparison to schools in urban areas.

The Ministry of Education and Science, under the 'Deer Leap' Programme, have begun equipping public schools in Georgia with computers, aiming to achieve a ratio of 22 pupils to every PC. This project is intended to encourage and ensure the use and knowledge of modern information technology, with a particular emphasis on schools.¹² As from May 2009, one computer per 20 pupils has now been provided for schools in the Akhalkalaki district in Samtskhe-Javakheti and these schools will reportedly have Internet access by the end of 2009. In total, during the period 2005-2008, 140 Armenian-language schools were provided with computers, while 120 Azeri-language schools received between them 1,299 computers.¹³ However, many teachers have reported that the computers are not used very often, as teachers do not know how to use them and they are largely considered to be too precious for pupils to use on a regular basis. Therefore, there is a great need for ICT training of teachers in the regions in order to realise the full benefit of these resources.

In addition, proper heating facilities in schools have begun to be installed. In Akhalkalaki district, for instance, nine of the region's 67 schools have thus far benefited from these works. Furthermore, five schools in Akhalkalaki district have recently been thoroughly renovated and an additional fourteen schools are planned for renovation over the course of 2009. In total, during the period 2006-2008, 21 Azeri and 15 Armenian-language schools were rehabilitated.¹⁴

2. Teaching Georgian in Non-Georgian Language Schools

As stipulated by Articles 4.3 and 7.1 of the Law of Georgia on General Education, all citizens of Georgia have the right to receive general education in the state language or in their native tongue.

four or more schools; merging pilot schools.

¹² See http://www.mes.gov.ge/index.php?module=multi&page=detals&multi_id=34&id=1000.

¹³ Speech by the Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, Ms Irine Kurdadze at a conference on 'Civil Integration and National Minorities in Georgia' (Gudauri, 19-21 June, 2009).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

However, a further stipulation specifically requires non-Georgian language schools to teach Georgian language and literature and requires teaching the history and geography of Georgia and other social science subjects in the Georgian language, to be in effect fully by 2010.¹⁵

It is envisaged that all school children should have sufficient knowledge of Georgian upon completion of school. Proficiency in the Georgian language is particularly crucial for those school-leavers wishing to pursue higher education, since the language of instruction in all higher education institutions in Georgia is Georgian. However, non-Georgian language school graduates have a poor command of the Georgian language, especially those in the regions compactly settled by national minorities (particularly Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli). The command of the Georgian language varies between those living in towns and those in villages. For example, in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda towns in Javakheti, pupils in the ninth and tenth grades often have satisfactory knowledge of the language, even if they are not fully proficient. However, those residing in the villages of the region are largely monolingual in their minority languages and usually have a very limited command of Georgian. This is mainly due to the low standard of teaching, the generally poor level of Georgian language skills among teachers, as well as the absence of a so-called ‘Georgian environment’ in the regions densely populated by national minorities.

The absence of Georgian socio-cultural life in the regions further disassociates ethnic Armenians and Azeris from their fellow citizens. This could perhaps be remedied by introducing a cultural exchange programme, as part of the school curriculum. Cultural exchanges have been successful in Canada as a way of introducing the culture and language of the French speaking Québécois to their fellow English speaking Canadians, and vice versa. Such exchange programmes would significantly improve understanding and, by immersing pupils in both the language and culture of the minority or majority groups, accelerate the process of integration. President Saakashvili recently noted the importance and benefits of such programmes in his declaration on 22 December 2008, stating that he encourages authorities to facilitate exchange projects in the future.¹⁶ How

¹⁵ Article 5 (4), Law on General Education.

¹⁶ “Saakashvili on Integration of Ethnic Minorities”, Civil.ge, 22 December 2008, at

and when this will materialize is not yet apparent but this declaration is certainly a positive step.

2.1 Textbooks for Georgian as a Second Language

With the aim of improving the standard of teaching of the Georgian language in non-Georgian language public schools, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia compiled a new textbook of Georgian as a second Language called *Tavtavi* in 2005. The books in the *Tavtavi* series have been provided free of charge to pupils in the seventh, eighth and ninth grades since 2006 and two further levels for tenth and eleventh grades are planned for publication in 2009.¹⁷ However, as the *Tavtavi* series is not specifically designed for grades, but rather for levels of fluency, the three ‘levels’ are in use from the seventh to twelfth grades in most schools at present. Despite claims from the Ministry of Education and Science that these textbooks are in accordance with the Council of Europe guidelines, the *Tavtavi* series has received criticism of its monolingual approach, as opposed to the preferred multilingual method.¹⁸ Nevertheless, as the series is the first of its kind, it must be seen as an improvement and a welcome addition to schools’ resources, as well as an aid to both teachers from the Language Houses, where Georgian language classes are offered to civil servants, and university entrants in Javakheti. The Georgia representative of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities has heralded the success of its publication accordingly. Additionally, it must be noted that the Ministry has provided over 10,000 copies of the textbooks to schools in Akhalkalaki over the past two years, which unlike the provision of translated material discussed below, is entirely sufficient and reflects the number of pupils studying Georgian in the schools.

2.2. Training of Georgian Language Teachers

From 2004 to 2006, the ministry sent 27 Georgian language teachers to Kvemo Kartli and 13 teachers to Samtskhe-Javakheti, who were provided with substantial financial incentives within

<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=20170>.

¹⁷ UNESCO, “Report of Georgia on the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace” (2008), at <http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/26049/12041269863GEORGIE.pdf/GEORGIE.pdf>.

¹⁸ Transparency International Georgia, “Education’s Impact upon the Integration of National Minorities”, Georgia Today, 1 February 2008, at http://www.georgiatoday.ge/article_details.php?id=4344.

the framework of the programme ‘The Future Starts Today’. These teachers taught Georgian language, literature and history, whilst simultaneously training the local teachers. Local teachers were introduced to new methods of teaching, an important and much needed element of the initiative considering that approximately 90% of teachers in the minority regions have had no additional methodology training since the Soviet era.¹⁹

The teacher training programme was conducted in four phases to include seven days of six-hour lessons per session. Teachers have agreed that the intensive training was extremely beneficial and noted that their language skills improved greatly. However, according to the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities’ (HCNM) assessments of the training programme in Kvemo Kartli, at least 60-70 out of a total 420 teachers, predominantly ethnic Armenian and Azeri, had virtually no command of Georgian at that time and some were therefore unable to even participate.²⁰ This was unforeseen by the authorities and it is not surprising that the training programme was therefore insufficient for the required improvement of the quality of teaching. Although teachers undoubtedly furthered their Georgian skills, teachers surveyed by ECMI in the Akhalkalaki district had an intermediate command of the language at best.²¹

Adding to these problems is the scepticism felt by local teachers in the regions surrounding such a training programme. Teachers coming from the city to the rural schools were termed ‘missionaries’ by the locals, which is indicative of their feelings towards the new teachers. Reportedly, teachers were also somewhat hostile and reluctant to learn new methodologies and language skills at this stage in their careers.²² Additionally, one civil society representative in Javakheti claimed that some teachers believed that they would be able to combat their low level of participation throughout the training by bribing their way through the ensuing teachers

¹⁹ Interview with Nino Bolkvadze, the Tbilisi office of the OSCE Representative of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, 12 December 2008.

²⁰ OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, “Supporting Teaching of GSL in Minority Schools in Kvemo Kartli: Final Narrative Report”—an assessment of the 2004-2006 teacher training programme in Kvemo Kartli.

²¹ According to teachers interviewed by ECMI staff in Akhalkalaki district, January 2009.

²² Meeting of civil society representatives from Javakheti with members of the Advisory Committee of the Council of Europe on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Akhalkalaki, 10 December 2008.

qualification examinations, expected to take place in the coming years.²³ Again, this mode of thinking can be seen as a legacy from the Soviet past and is one of the elements of the education system that the present reforms are hoping to eliminate.

From the beginning of the 2007 academic year, these 40 teachers were replaced by locally trained staff. In 2007, 94 teachers from Azeri-language schools participated in training conducted under the joint project of the OSCE HCNM and the Ministry of Education and Sciences of Georgia, 'Supporting Teaching of Georgian as a Second Language in Non-Georgian Language Schools of Kvemo Kartli'. In addition, in the same year, 250 teachers benefited from similar training within the project 'Training of Teachers of Georgian language in Non-Georgian Language Schools'.²⁴ However, in spite of these efforts, the level of knowledge of the Georgian language among teachers in the regions has not significantly improved. In particular, according to the survey conducted by the Teacher's Professional Development Center (TPDC), 30% of teachers of Georgian language interviewed in Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions have no command of Georgian language, even at conversational level.²⁵ This is mainly due to the infrequency and inadequate duration of these programmes, as well as the fact that teachers in the regions compactly populated by national minorities have little opportunity to practice Georgian in their day-to-day lives.

Indeed, the overwhelming need for further teacher training was recognised by all those involved in the process. As a consequence, from 2009 trainings will resume under the programme 'Qualified Georgian Language Specialists in Schools of Regions Populated by Ethnic Minorities', implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science and the TPDC, for which GEL 326,689 have been allocated from the budget.²⁶ At present, the TPDC has already recruited teachers for participation in this programme. According to this initiative, the TPDC will hire teachers of

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Speech by the Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, Ms Irine Kurdadze at a conference on 'Civil Integration and National Minorities in Georgia' (Gudauri, 19-21 June, 2009).

²⁵ Information provided by the TPDC, July 2009.

²⁶ Speech by the Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, Ms Irine Kurdadze at a conference on 'Civil Integration and National Minorities in Georgia' (Gudauri, 19-21 June, 2009).

Georgian language for a one-year contract to teach in non-Georgian language schools of minority-populated regions. It should be emphasized that this competition was open to teachers of Georgian language from any region but successful candidates had to have a good command of the respective minority language and priority was given to those residing in minority regions. A majority of the teachers hired have a good command of the Azeri language (with the exception of two). In addition, the recruited teachers participated in trainings by ten trainers selected in advance under the sub-programme 'Learn and Teach Georgian', for which GEL 100,000 has been allocated. Furthermore, it should be noted that these teachers will also teach Georgian to the teachers of the participating schools, focusing particularly, but not exclusively, on Georgian language teachers.²⁷ Apart from this new initiative, teachers have had to rely on training from NGOs in the region and initiatives funded by the OSCE HCNM. In addition, as a result of the August 2008 war, the financial resources intended to cover the training costs of approximately 8,000 teachers have been significantly reduced. It is now planned to provide training for around 4,000 teachers in the coming year and to use the remaining budget funds for the rebuilding of schools affected by the war.²⁸ As training is a costly venture, requiring both financial and human resources, this poses a serious challenge for the ministry, which is seeking alternative ways to ensure effective training of staff: this is a significant shortcoming of the education reforms with regard to national minorities.

However, the ministry is currently preparing a programme whereby university graduates will be placed as teachers in remote regions, including regions densely populated by minority groups, for a period of two years in an attempt to increase the number of Georgian speaking teachers in these areas.²⁹ Students will be offered significant financial incentives to do so and will be encouraged financially to continue higher education, with a particular emphasis on teacher training. This project envisages approximately 50 students being involved at the initial stage, the estimated cost of which is €200,000.³⁰ The programme has reportedly been recommended by international experts in the field of education and this model has been used successfully in other countries.

²⁷ More information on this issue is available at <http://www.tpdg.ge/index.php?page=1-2-11&hl=ge>.

²⁸ Meeting with Anna Zhvania, former Deputy Minister for Education and Science, Tbilisi, 16 December 2008.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

However, the development of this project has not been finalized and will not be carried out until at least 2010. It is also somewhat dependent on funding from external donors. One potential disadvantage that this initiative might have is that local teachers in minority-populated regions may react negatively to the financial incentives offered to Georgian teachers, as occurred under the previous programme when local teachers of Georgian language were not granted equivalent benefits. Similar attitudes were expressed towards local teachers of Georgian history and geography who received slightly higher salaries than teachers of other courses although the difference was insignificant. Therefore, it is recommended as a next step in this programme to undertake an initiative to motivate school leavers of non-Georgian language schools to pursue their higher education in Georgian language and literature. As a consequence, these university graduates could be involved in a similar programme and receive some additional incentives for teaching Georgian in rural areas of minority regions. Such an initiative would likely be welcomed by the local population as it would demonstrate the government's effort to economically integrate persons belonging to national minorities, and it would provide further impetus for learning the Georgian language, as well as contributing to the decrease of migration of minority young people to their kin states for higher education and, in the long term, to a slowing down of the brain drain (see section III. 2 below).

Increased financial assistance is urgently required for non-Georgian language schools in order for teachers to effectively meet the requirements for the national curriculum, the unified national examinations (UNEs) and the future teaching qualification examinations, discussed further below. It is imperative not only that teacher training in Georgian language skills resume, but also that it be implemented on a more long-term basis and that this be taken into account in the budget assigned to these schools. In addition, students and teachers from the regions must be actively encouraged to enter into and continue their careers in education via awareness raising campaigns and financial incentives for higher education in the field. Failure to provide substantial and effective training for teachers in the Georgian language will not only result in the further violation of the right of national minorities to access secondary and higher education, but will also considerably undermine efforts to promote the civil integration of these groups into Georgian society at large.

2.3. Multilingual Education: An Alternative Approach?

The Law on General Education not only requires non-Georgian language schools to teach Georgian language and literature, but also to teach the history and geography of Georgia and other social science subjects in the Georgian language by 2010. The latter aspect of this provision has been heavily criticized by experts in the field for the enormous challenge it poses to teachers and pupils in non-Georgian language schools. There is no formal national curriculum for Armenian and Azeri languages as the primary language of instruction but plans to adopt a multilingual or bilingual approach have recently been discussed by the ministry. In order to fully protect the right to receive education in minority languages, particularly in densely populated minority regions, a multilingual national curriculum or a curriculum designed for Armenian and Azeri as a native language must be prepared. The above-mentioned provision concerning teaching in the Georgian language could be interpreted to allow for the introduction of a multilingual approach to general education in Georgia.

Multilingual education envisages using two or more languages of instruction in schools, hence enabling native language preservation and the simultaneous acquisition of the state language. This methodology has been tried and tested in many other multiethnic countries across the globe and has proven to be an effective means for managing diversity, both linguistic and cultural.

Specifically, Swiss organization CIMERA has previously introduced such a programme in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and in 2004 the organization began developing a similar policy initiative in Georgia, with the financial support of the OSCE HCNM.³¹ CIMERA implemented the project on Multilingual Education in Georgia from April 2006 to April 2008, under which they conducted training for twelve non-Georgian language public schools: eight in Samtskhe-Javakheti and four in Kvemo Kartli. Teachers of Georgian for the first and second grades were trained using a multilingual approach to education and were provided with consultations and the necessary teaching material for implementing an interactive methodology (using two or more of the

³¹ Carine Bachmann (ed.), *Language Policies and Education in Multilingual Societies*, 8.

following languages: Georgian, Armenian, Azeri or Russian).³² In total, 97 teachers were involved in the training and 560 pupils benefited from its implementation. The CIMERA project was a huge success, despite the initial scepticism of parents, pupils and teachers alike. The evaluation report of the project shows that pupils enrolled in the CIMERA project did develop linguistic skills faster and more effectively than those in a monolingual atmosphere.³³ In addition to encouraging the acquisition of the state language whilst preserving the minority language, this method has also been shown to produce generally more motivated pupils, with increased learning and social skills development.³⁴ Interestingly, schools following the trilingual method, using three languages of instruction, were found to have the same level of skills in the second language as those pupils using the bilingual method, with the additional benefit of knowledge of a third language.³⁵

Following the success of this pilot programme, ten out of the twelve schools chose to continue the multilingual or bilingual model of teaching and have independently raised sufficient funds to do so, further highlighting their eagerness to continue. Despite the significant achievements of the project, CIMERA noted some challenges during the programme implementation, mainly the teachers' lack of Georgian language skills and the lack of financial resources for teaching material and salaries. It must be emphasized however, that although the initial teacher training was relatively expensive, the multilingual teaching model is rather inexpensive to sustain and is dependent largely on teachers' remuneration requirements. Noting the recommendations from CIMERA and the OSCE HCNM to consider the bilingual or multilingual method as a possible future strategy for minority education, the Ministry of Education and Science has followed the CIMERA initiative and has now developed a Multilingual Education implementation strategy, to be implemented progressively over the coming years.³⁶ This programme will begin in September 2009, in forty schools, including in the regions densely inhabited by minority groups, and it is planned to provide training for a total of 400 teachers employed in the pilot schools. A significant

³² See http://www.cimera.org/en/projects/ind_projects.htm.

³³ Ligita Grigule and Aurelie Perrin, "Multilingual Education in Georgia: Executive Summary of the Evaluation Report", CIMERA 2008, 5 at <http://www.cimera.org>.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 10.

³⁶ Decree #185 of Ministry of Education and Science in Georgia, "Multilingual Instruction Support Programme", 31

budget of GEL 75,000 has been allocated to the ministry to carry out the programme and the implementation of this project in the 40 pilot schools will be closely monitored and evaluated by experts in the field in order to effectively assess the successes and failures of the programme.

The introduction of multilingual education into the Georgian education system is hugely significant and very promising. As highlighted by the implementation strategy document, this method of education should lead to stronger intercultural understanding and tolerance, in addition to the further integration of national minority groups throughout the country. Although this programme is undoubtedly a welcome addition, domestic legislation continues to require all schools in Georgia to teach subjects such as history, geography and the social sciences in the Georgian language by the year 2010.³⁷ The successful implementation and transition to multilingual education over the coming years will hopefully eventually render this stipulation irrelevant but it is still wholly impossible for this requirement to be fulfilled by minority schools following the implementation of a pilot project over the course of a single academic year.

The Georgian government should be encouraged to recognise this grave shortcoming and act quickly to develop a corresponding legal amendment to the Law on General Education, so that this multilingual education policy is duly reflected in domestic legislation and so that models of multilingual education are considered as the long term goal of the education sector in Georgia.

March 2009.

³⁷ Article 5.4 of the Law of Georgia on General Education, of 8 April 2005. ECMI has raised this issue along with the need for further teacher training during its meetings with the representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science, as well as at round table meetings devoted to educational issues; for instance, on 24 July 2007 ECMI together with the Public Defender of Georgia organized a round table meeting on the topic of the ‘Ongoing Reforms in the Educational Sphere and their effect on National Minorities’. In addition, it was included in the recommendations elaborated by the working groups of the Council of National Minorities (CNM), Javakheti Citizens’ Forum (JCF) and Tsalka Citizens’ Forum (TCF), presented in 2007 at ECMI conferences. As a consequence, the director of the National Curriculum and Assessment Centre declared at a meeting with ECMI representatives on 10 October 2007, that the Ministry of Education and Science would amend the Law of Georgia on General Education, in order to simplify its requirements in this regard. Such an amendment is now being prepared.

3. Textbooks and the National Curriculum

The Georgian national curriculum lists the following as the required subjects to be taught in all schools: Georgian language and literature; History and Geography of Georgia and other Social Science subjects; Mathematics; Natural Sciences; Foreign Languages; Physical, Labour and Aesthetic Education.³⁸ Although Armenian and Azeri languages are not included in the national curriculum, in practice, non-Georgian language schools in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli use respectively Armenian and Azeri as the primary language of instruction, as accommodated by the aforementioned Law on General Education. According to a decree adopted in 2006, these languages and other languages or minority related subjects, such as Armenian and Azeri history, can be included in the curriculum as extra-curricular subjects, discussed further below.³⁹

Until recently, textbooks for all subjects in minority-language schools were predominantly provided by their kin states. For the 2006-2007 academic year, the Armenian government provided 156 Armenian-language schools with textbooks, while the Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan sent 71,000 schoolbooks to Azeri-language schools.⁴⁰ However, these schoolbooks were obviously not compiled in accordance with the Georgian national curricula and as a result school-leavers of Armenian and Azeri ethnicity faced difficulties in meeting the requirements of the unified national examination. Therefore, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia attempted to substitute these resources by providing textbooks translated from Georgian into Armenian and Azeri (as well as Russian), an initiative adopted under the Civil Integration Programme in 2004—a policy intended to improve and strengthen democracy and civil society, as well as to support the inclusion of national minorities into the wider Georgian society.⁴¹ In 2008,

³⁸ Article 5 (3), Law on General Education.

³⁹ Decree 841 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia on National Curricula, as of 28 September 2006.

⁴⁰ International Crisis Group, “Georgia’s Armenian and Azeri Minorities”, Policy Report, November 2006, 27.

⁴¹ The list of the school books translated into Armenian, Azeri and Russian languages is specified in Decree #6 of the Director of the National Curricula & Assessment Centre, “On Granting the Status of Recommended Textbooks for the 2007-2008 Academic Year”, as of 1 June 2007. This initiative was implemented within the project ‘Ilia Chavchavadze’ of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, particularly, by the National Curricula and Assessment Centre. The project was financed by the Georgian Industrial Group and Bank Republic. See Press Release of the Ministry of Education and Science “Schoolbooks were translated for the Pupils of the Russian, Armenian and Azeri-language Schools”, 14 September 2007, at http://www.mes.gov.ge/upload/multi/geo/1193218885_1190191751_saxelmdzgvaneloebis%20prezentacia%2015%5B1%5D.09.pdf.

for the first time, Armenia delivered no school material to students in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, compared to 9,815 books provided the year before.⁴² Additionally, media reports claim that there was a decrease in the delivery of books from Azerbaijan this year, which allegedly dropped to just 21,000 textbooks.⁴³

Teaching with the new school material started in 2007 for use in three pilot grades (first, seventh and tenth grades), based on the new national curriculum introduced for the 2006-2007 academic year. For the year 2007-2008, schools in Akhalkalaki received 2,500 translated books for subjects covered by the curricula from the ministry for use in ten pilot classes. The textbooks for the first grade were provided free of charge, while pupils in the higher grades were required to purchase them at their own expense. However, lack of communication and coordination between the central authorities and the district education resource centres (an issue discussed further below) in the minority regions led to complications and the delivery and provision of textbooks was seriously delayed.⁴⁴ Reportedly, this was not an issue for the 2008-2009 academic year, although for this year very few textbooks were delivered to schools in the region. New textbooks were translated for all subjects for the second, eighth and eleventh grades in 2008 and textbooks for the second grade were also free to pupils. For the 2009-2010 academic year, the ministry has allocated funds to provide third-grade pupils in non-Georgian language schools with the textbooks for Georgian as a second language. The process of provision of translated textbooks will continue until all minority-language schools have switched to teaching all compulsory courses with the translated textbooks recommended by the Georgian Ministry of Education and Science. At present it is estimated that approximately 35% of all pupils in Javakheti are using the translated material from the Ministry of Education and Science.⁴⁵

⁴² Data obtained by ECMI staff from the district Education Resource Centre, Akhalkalaki, January 2009.

⁴³ J Babayev, "Azerbaijanis in Georgia Complain of Serious Problems Receiving Education in their Native Language", Trend News, 31 October 2008, at

<http://news.trend.az/index.shtml?show=news&newsid=1334322&lang=en>.

⁴⁴ Adequate information did not reach minority schools in rural areas of Georgia correctly in 2007. In order to purchase the manuals for seventh and tenth grades, schools were required to apply to the respective publishing houses, which in turn would provide the schools with the necessary books; meanwhile the absolute majority of minority schools in Samtskhe-Javakheti region expected the Ministry of Education and Science to provide them with the relevant manuals and continued to teach with old text books.

⁴⁵ Estimates based on ECMI survey conducted in the region, January 2009.

Nevertheless, the textbook issue is far from resolved. As the intention of the Ministry of Education is to eventually provide all grades in all non-Georgian schools with translated textbooks, pupils will also face an additional financial burden as they or their families will be required to buy these materials,⁴⁶ when previously all books were donated from their kin-states. Additionally, although the Ministry of Education and Science has made significant efforts to provide translated textbooks to the regions densely inhabited by minority groups, the schools are still in need of additional resources. This could perhaps be most clearly seen during the 2008-2009 academic year, as it marked a principal year of transition from the old to the new regime due to this change in textbooks from donated material to translations of approved Georgian books. Whether the gap in the decreased provision of textbooks from minority groups' kin-states will be effectively filled by the Georgian government remains to be seen. Civil society representatives in Javakheti recently highlighted the lack of textbooks as a principle concern for pupils in non-Georgian language schools in the region and asserted that approximately 30% of students in the region were without textbooks of any kind, either translated or donated.⁴⁷ This results in the inability of pupils to effectively prepare for lessons or do the required assignments after school hours.

There are additional considerations regarding history textbooks, particularly relevant for Armenian and Azeri minorities, who have traditionally studied history according to the textbooks compiled by their kin states. From 2007, translated versions of the Georgian textbooks were prepared and distributed to non-Georgian language schools and reportedly they convey, by some accounts, a rather biased approach to the history of Georgia. Needless to say, the interpretations of some historical events may differ significantly between the Georgian history textbooks and the books donated from Armenia and Azerbaijan, which may cause misunderstandings and mistrust towards the Georgian textbooks.⁴⁸ This issue is discussed further below.

⁴⁶ With the exception of students in first and second grades, as mentioned previously.

⁴⁷ Representatives of civil society organizations in Javakheti expressed these concerns during a meeting with the Advisory Council for the FCNM of the Council of Europe delegation at the JCF Resource Centre in Akhalkalaki, 10 December 2008.

⁴⁸ Vicken Cheterian, "One History for All", Transitions Online, 10 December 2008, at <http://www.tol.cz/look/TOL/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=299&NrSection=2&NrArticle=20>

The need for educational resources created and developed by the Georgian educational authorities must not be underestimated. Firstly, pupils using textbooks from Armenia and Azerbaijan may inadvertently be reinforced with a sense of belonging to these states and therefore further alienated from Georgian society, particularly via history, geography and civic education textbooks. Secondly, textbooks provided from abroad do not correlate with the new curriculum and are therefore insufficient for pupils wishing to enter higher education institutions in Georgia, as they must pass the Unified National Examination (see below). However, efforts to provide Georgian resources would be more efficient if the Ministry of Education and Science provided additional financial assistance for persons belonging to national minorities in obtaining the new textbooks, at least for a transition period of a few years. This would stimulate persons belonging to national minorities to see the positive outcome of learning with these textbooks and would make it possible for school leavers to pass the Unified National Examination with more success.

It remains a major problem that many parents cannot afford to purchase textbooks. As a result, in many schools in the minority regions, children sit the classes without the required learning materials. In other cases, teachers are inclined to continue the usage of textbooks provided by Armenia or Azerbaijan. Civil society representatives in Javakheti, the Javakheti Citizens' Forum, have suggested that the government provides the schools in the region with, say, five copies of each required textbook, to be kept in the school libraries, so that pupils can have access to the necessary material after regular school hours, in order to allow them to prepare for the following day. This could be a relatively inexpensive interim solution to the considerable lack of textbooks experienced in schools in the regions discussed.

The realities on the ground further highlight the gap between the ambitious and admirable legal education reforms made in recent years on the one hand, and the inadequate resources and sometimes inconsistent policies that have followed on the other. Although a transition period is unavoidable, providing proper resources to schools and pupils should be the priority in order to ensure that the reforms are effectively carried out.

4. Teaching Minority-Specific Subjects

The issue of teaching history is often extremely sensitive in multiethnic countries. This has been particularly obvious in the post Soviet space, where many countries have struggled with education reform.⁴⁹ Indeed, Georgia is no exception. Already in the late Soviet period, and most particularly since the late 1980s, Georgian perspectives on history presented rather ethnocentric views. Throughout the Soviet era, history was heavily politicized and was often used as a tool to support or debunk the claims of an ethnic group. This trend has somewhat continued to permeate Georgian historiography and is evidenced in the discourse of leaders on ethnic disputes in the country today. These two tendencies, ethnocentrism and the politicization of history, are also characteristic of current practices in Georgian history teaching.

Indeed, teaching the history of national minorities in minority-language schools is of great importance, as national minorities are by and large omitted or misrepresented in Georgian textbooks. Such courses are not included in the national curricula and they are taught only as elective courses in the minority-language schools. As a result, school budgets have limited resources to cover the salaries of the teachers of those courses, which has generated discontent among persons belonging to national minorities. ECMI has regularly raised this issue with the Ministry of Education of Science in Georgia. These concerns were also expressed in the recommendations elaborated by the working groups of the Council of National Minorities, Javakheti Citizens' Forum and Tsalka Citizens' Forum, presented in 2007 at ECMI conferences on 'Ongoing Reforms in the Educational Sphere and their Effect on National Minorities in Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli'. As a result of the debate, amendments were made to the national curricula granting more flexibility to public schools of Georgia with regard to including other courses in their curriculum.⁵⁰ In particular, the time restrictions on elective courses were abolished from 2007. In addition, the majority of non-Georgian language schools (especially those that are located in the two regions discussed) can cover the salaries of teachers, as the amendment #246 (as of 13 November 2007) to the Decree of the Government of Georgia #182 provides that

⁴⁹ CIMERA "History Teaching in Georgia", at http://www.cimera.org/pdf/History_Teaching_in_Georgia.pdf, 65.

⁵⁰ Decree 841 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia on National Curricula, as of 28 September 2006.

public schools in mountainous regions are entitled to larger finances from the state budget compared to those in urban areas.⁵¹ Moreover, from the year 2007 the Georgian Ministry of Education and Science launched a new programme with the aim of financially supporting projects that teach Armenian or Azeri history, or other relevant courses, to be taught at minority schools. However, increased flexibility and financial matters aside, some teachers have noted that due to the already large workload involved with the national curriculum and the intense teaching of the Georgian language, there is regrettably little time left for these additional courses.

As discussed above, minority groups traditionally studied history with books donated from their kin-states but following the Rose Revolution, and particularly since 2007, Georgian history has been taught from textbooks translated from Georgian into the minority languages. However, by and large the history of Armenian and Azeri ethnic groups in the regions rarely feature in the translated texts, when they do it was often with negative connotations, and schools therefore combine history teaching with the donated books from Armenia and Azerbaijan, in an attempt to find a way of teaching Armenian and Azeri history.⁵² This predicament could be aided by amending the curriculum of the teaching of history of Georgia in all schools, both Georgian and non-Georgian alike, to include an increased presence of minority groups. If Georgian history teaching encompassed a more inclusive approach, it would serve to inform both majority and minority groups of their fellow citizens' history and culture and would considerably aid the civil integration process.

Recognizing the necessity to take a more minority inclusive approach, the ministry began to work and consult with experts in the field of history education in multiethnic societies. CIMERA produced a report analyzing history teaching in Georgia and in conjunction with EuroClio, began

⁵¹ According to the Decree, public schools are divided into three categories: 1. Public schools located in urban areas of Georgia receive 300 GEL per pupils per year from the state budget; 2. Public schools in low-land rural areas receive 420 GEL per pupils per year from the state budget; 3. Public schools in high-mountainous regions of Georgia receive 510 GEL per pupils per year from the state budget; It should be emphasized that the amount of funding provided per pupil to public schools, has increased compared to the previous years. For instance, according to the previous amendment (of 22 December 2006) to the Government Decree, the amount of funding granted to the public schools were respectively: 1. First category schools 250 GEL per pupil; 2. Second category schools 350 GEL per pupil; 3. Third category schools 425 GEL per pupil.

to develop new strategies to rectify this issue. EuroClio is the European Association of History Educators, formed in 1993 in response to the change in political climate following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. EuroClio is primarily concerned with creating intercultural dialogue and capacity building via history education.⁵³ Several meetings and workshops have recently taken place in Georgia and the latest workshop, organized by EuroClio in April 2009, has affirmed the ministry's commitment to continue to reform history education methodology and textbooks for national minorities so as to adopt a more inclusive approach.

As regards the teaching of other minority-related courses, the teaching of the Udi language is particularly noteworthy.⁵⁴ Udis are compactly settled in the village of Oktomberi in Kvareli district. Children of Udi origin receive general education at Georgian-language public schools and are proficient in the Georgian language. Therefore, the Udi language is less used. In 2002, the community based organization 'Udi' obtained permission from the ministry of Education and Science to teach the Udi language in the local school as an elective course.⁵⁵ However, due to the lack of funding Udi language classes in Oktomberi ceased after one year. In spite of a strong interest in the language classes from children and parents, the local population did not manage to generate the necessary resources for the continuation of the native language teaching. Recently, however, the Ministry of Education and Science has offered provisions for Udi language classes and it is now taught from grades three to nine for one hour per week, with pupils numbering from five to ten per class.

⁵² CIMERA, "History Teaching in Georgia", 23.

⁵³ Further information is available at <http://www.euroclio.eu>.

⁵⁴ Udis are the descendants of an ancient Caucasus Albanian tribe. In Georgia, Udis live only in Oktomberi village in Kvareli district (Kakheti) (203 persons according to the 2002 census, and some 500 persons according to other estimates).

⁵⁵ The textbook for this course was prepared by a local teacher of Udi language based on the Georgian alphabet in order to make the language more easily accessible for children. This initiative was financed by a scholar from the United States.

5. Pre-School Education

Several successful projects on teaching Georgian language have also been implemented in pre-school facilities, using similar interactive methods to those implemented by CIMERA in multilingual education programmes as mentioned above. Copies of CIMERA's publication, *We are Learning by Playing. 111 Interactive Games for Multilingual Education*, used in the pilot programmes discussed above, were donated to the Education Resource Centres (ERCs) and were distributed among schools as well as kindergartens in the regions. Advocating the use of this material and employing the interactive methods encouraged in this publication, ECMI and JCF implemented projects for teaching Georgian language to children at Armenian-language kindergarten schools. From 2005-2007, four projects were implemented: two in Akhalkalaki and two in Ninotsminda districts. As a result, 373 children of Armenian origin participated in Georgian language courses. Initially, the children's parents were skeptical of teaching their children the Georgian language at such an early age. However, classes of Georgian language taught using interactive methods (with the slogan 'Play and Learn') attracted more children; while parents also realized that these classes benefited children as those who entered non-Georgian language public schools already had some elementary knowledge of Georgian. At the end of the last such project in October 2007, JCF applied to the representatives of the local self-governing bodies, which are responsible for financing the preschool education institutions, with an offer to continue financing similar courses. As a consequence, representatives of the local self-governing bodies also agreed that such courses should be permanent and expressed their willingness to consider funds for Georgian language teaching at Akhalkalaki kindergartens in the 2008 budget. For the last two years the municipal authorities (*gamgeoba*) of Akhalkalaki district have financed Georgian language classes in all kindergartens of Akhalkalaki.

Preschool multilingual education will reportedly be further developed by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2009, with the intention of this becoming the nationwide model of language policy in education. Additionally, according to the National Concept on Tolerance and Civic Integration the ministry has allocated GEL 84,690 for the implementation of the programme 'Teaching of Georgian Language at Preschool Education in Minority Regions'. Apart from the

resources that have been put aside, the ministry had hoped for additional funding from the OSCE for its implementation.⁵⁶ Due to the closure of the OSCE Mission in Georgia in 2009, gaining additional financial assistance for this project proposal may prove to be a difficult task. Nevertheless, as outlined above, the development of preschool education has been included as one of the key aims of education reform in the concept of civil integration. Under the aforementioned initiative, the ministry plans to design a special curriculum and textbooks for teachers of Georgian language at preschool education level, based on which the teachers concerned will be trained. In addition, six preschool centres for teaching the Georgian language will be opened at public schools in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions.

6. Management of Schools

The 2005 Law of Georgia on General Education, granted public schools the status of independent legal bodies of public law, in an attempt to redesign education delivery and support systems.⁵⁷ The General Education Decentralization and Accreditation project (GEDA), financially supported by USAID, was drafted to oversee the implementation of this provision. The principal themes characterizing the GEDA project were the promotion of transparency in education, finance, decision-making and quality control. The decentralization element of the project was envisaged through the creation and maintenance of 70 Education Resource Centre's (ERCs) throughout the country, each of which supervise approximately 35 schools and are intended to act as a midway point between local schools and the Ministry of Education and Science. The ERCs oversee the management and administration of the schools within their jurisdiction, as well as providing professional services and needs assessments.

As part of the decentralization element of the legislative reforms, directors and members of the boards of public schools are given more responsibilities and duties with relation to the financial management of the school's resources, in an attempt to encourage transparency of education funds. Until relatively recently, those in managerial positions in non-Georgian language schools

⁵⁶ Meeting with Anna Zhvania, Former Deputy Minister for Education and Science, Tbilisi, 16 December 2008.

⁵⁷ Article 31.1 of the Law of Georgia on General Education, as of 8 April 2005.

were largely unaware of these duties, and they had insufficient management skills to administer schools' financial resources. One of the principal reasons for this was a lack of knowledge of the relevant legislation, which is available in most cases only in Georgian. The Ministry of Education and Science launched a project under which training on the management of schools, on the rights and responsibilities of the members of the school boards and budgeting of schools were conducted for ERC staff, who were then required to conduct similar training for the directors and members of the boards of the public schools of the relevant districts. In addition, with the purpose of raising awareness among Javakheti public schools' directors and boards of trustees' members on the relevant legislation, ECMI conducted training for the members of the board at fifteen public schools in Javakheti (covering both Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts) in March 2007.

However, the resource centre employees planned to conduct such training only in those schools where directors had already been elected; while the majority of candidates for school directors' posts in Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli did not manage to pass the director tests held in January 2007. The boards of trustees were obliged to present their school budgets by the end of the fiscal year on 10 December 2007. In order to raise awareness among the members of boards of trustees in minority schools in the Javakheti region, Javakheti Citizens Forum (JCF), with the financial support of ECMI, launched a project offering training on financial management, with an emphasis on school budgeting, which was conducted in minority schools in Javakheti during December 2007 (initially in six schools). At a later stage JCF member NGO, Civil Education for Legal State (CELS), conducted similar trainings in thirty schools in the region. Moreover, after the recent school board elections, in response to requests from the newly elected board members, additional trainings were held in five schools and in the near future it is planned to conduct trainings on the same topic for the board members of the rest of the schools of the region. In addition, ECMI and JCF in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science (under the GEDA project) issued information brochures on the financial management of schools in April 2008, translated from Georgian into Russian, so that those working in the minority regions were able to avail themselves of information that was previously only available in Georgian. At a later stage, these brochures were distributed among the Kvemo Kartli non-Georgian language schools as well, in particular, in the Tsalka district by members of the NGO association, the Tsalka Citizens' Forum.

The decentralization of power from Tbilisi to the regions is an important step in educational reform in Georgia. The vast and significant reforms that have taken place thus far require interpretation and guidance if they are to be implemented on the ground by schools and the ERCs are therefore mandated to provide just that. However, the lack of communication regarding textbooks, discussed above, in addition to the example of budget management, illustrates that there is still significant work that must be done in order for the centres to work efficiently. The institutions themselves have been created but the success of the ERCs in terms of effectively disseminating information among schools has yet to be seen. The current operation of the ERCs is characterized by a distinct lack of outreach work, in addition to an absence of coordination and communication.

The accreditation component of the educational reforms was given institutional form with the creation of the National Accreditation Centre (NAC) in 2006. The accreditation of higher education institutions began in 2007 but the testing of general education facilities is planned for 2011. This will require the increased training of directors, teachers and all those on the board of trustees, in order to meet international education accreditation requirements. The implementation of these measures will meet more obstacles in the future as the GEDA project ended in February 2008 due to unexpected termination of funding by USAID. Therefore, at present there is no specific project under the Ministry of Education and Science that aims to raise the qualifications of staff of general education institutions, or to enhance their capacity of meeting the accreditation requirements introduced by the new legislation, except for the Teachers' Professional Development Centre, which mostly works on raising the qualifications of teachers and meeting the necessary professional standards to achieve that goal. Initiatives undertaken by civil society organizations are insufficient due to limited resources and an absence of direct counterparts in the state institutions with whom to cooperate.

An additional consequence of the creation of educational institutions as legal entities of public law by the Law on Education, is the change in the way schools finances are allocated and managed. The introduction of *per capita* funding, often termed the 'voucher system', whereby schools

receive funding in accordance with the number of pupils enrolled, has resulted in significant shortcomings with regard to financial resources for minority language schools.

Pupils in non-Georgian language schools need to study, in addition to the rest of the curriculum, Georgian as a foreign language, which, as highlighted, is very costly due to the need for further teacher training and supplementary education resources. However, the ‘voucher system’ does not sufficiently reflect the financial needs of these schools.⁵⁸ Rather, it is stipulated that should a pupil be unable to exercise his/her right to receive education in the native language, that pupil is allocated with increased vouchers.⁵⁹ This is a necessary provision for national minority children but in practice, only individual non-Georgian pupils in Georgian language schools benefit from this enhanced voucher provision, while non-Georgian schools remain under-financed. Schools teaching in a language other than Georgian, as well as those teaching Georgian as a foreign language, are not recognized in practice as requiring additional financial resources for the required extra language component under this voucher system.⁶⁰ Adding to this problem is the highly complex nature of the voucher system, which has reportedly been difficult for school directors to manage. Accordingly, there is an urgent need for further training of school directors in the effective management of this new financial system.

6.1. Qualification Exams for School Directors and Teachers

According to the Law of Georgia on General Education all directors and teachers (or candidates) of public schools in Georgia must pass qualification examinations by 2008 and 2010 respectively.⁶¹ The first stage of the exam for the position of public school director was held in January 2007. The exam is comprised of four sections: the first section tests the general skills of the candidates, the second section examines professional skills; the third tests functional letter writing skills; while the fourth section assesses the knowledge of relevant Georgian legislation.⁶²

⁵⁸ Shalva Tabatadze, Kakha Gabunia and Marika Odzeli, “Recommendations on Language Policy to Protect Linguistic Minorities” (Not yet Published), Tbilisi 11.

⁵⁹ Article 7, Law on General Education.

⁶⁰ Shalva Tabatadze, Kakha Gabunia and Marika Odzeli, “Recommendations on Language Policy to Protect Linguistic Minorities”, 25.

⁶¹ Article 42 of the Law of Georgia on General Education as of 8 April 2005.

⁶² Examination material used for the qualification tests held on 28 January 2007 are available at:

While three of these sections could be taken in the Russian language, section three concerning functional letter writing, such as a brief project proposal, had to be taken in Georgian.

According to the official results of the professional examinations provided by the Ministry of Education and Science, only eleven out of 175 candidates from Javakheti public schools managed to pass the test, eight of them being ethnic Georgians. In Kvemo Kartli, out of 659 candidates, 273 managed to pass the exam, but only eight of them were ethnic Azeris. In total, in Georgia there were 5,197 candidates for the school principal tests in 2007 with 3,427 candidates successfully passing the test. However, only 46 of these successful candidates were persons belonging to national minorities. Candidates of non-Georgian origin mostly failed the exams due to a poor command of the state language. The then Minister for Education and Science, Ghia Nodia, recognized the impossibility of passing the Georgian language component for school directors from the minority regions. As a result, he ordered the postponement of these qualification examinations and suggested that candidates would be offered another opportunity to sit the test in the future. Examinations were due to be scheduled for early 2009 but they have again been postponed. Recent reports have implied that the examinations will take place in December 2009, but this has yet to be confirmed. In addition, GEL 100,000 has been allocated in the ministry's budget for the year 2009 for the programme 'Preparing Candidates for the School Principles of the Non-Georgian Language Public Schools of Georgia', which envisages conducting intensive training courses for the candidates.⁶³

Training in Georgian and project management for school directors was not enough for them to pass the examinations, hardly surprising given the low level of knowledge of the language among candidates and the limited time given in order to rectify this predicament. The insufficient training of school directors in these two areas has negative implications for a school's ability to avail itself of increased grants and bursaries from the Ministry of Education and Science.

http://www.naec.ge/more.php?t=links.php&f=19&su=2007tests1&rig_no=11&id=82&lang=geo.

⁶³ Speech by the Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, Ms Irine Kurdadze at a conference on 'Civil Integration and National Minorities in Georgia' (Gudauri, 19-21 June, 2009).

A closer examination of one case will make clear these problems of communication. In January 2007, the ministry launched a sub-programme, ‘Support of Official Language Teaching for Adults’, envisaging Georgian language training for different national minority professional groups. Under this programme, courses were to be financed on the basis of the project proposals from teachers from minority-language schools in Georgia.⁶⁴ However, the majority of teachers and directors of Javakheti public schools were not initially informed about this programme.⁶⁵ As a result, only one project proposal was submitted to the ministry by the end of 2007 and that was by the head of the Ninotsminda district resource centre. Information reached public schools of Kvemo Kartli more effectively. Following further training and additional information campaigns, a total of 37 project proposals were submitted from the Javakheti region, a few of which were later financed. In total, GEL 80,000 was spent to fund the projects proposed by schools in both Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. Due to changes made in the programme of the ministry in 2008, this funding has now ceased.

Additional training in Georgian and project design is crucial for the increased and improved management of schools in the minority regions. The failure of school director candidates to pass the qualification examinations serves as another example of the restricted and unrealistic timeframe imposed on minority groups to achieve fluency in the official language of the country. Additionally, the above example of project proposal submission to the ministry exemplifies the frequent miscommunication among officials in the regions and Tbilisi.

Similarly, Article 59.8 of the Law on General Education stipulates that from 2010, only persons who have undergone tertiary education and have passed the qualification examination may be employed at accredited general education institutions.⁶⁶ There will be three levels of this professional examination, each level offering a higher salary to the previous. Consequently, teachers unable to effectively progress through the professional qualification framework, will be

⁶⁴ Detailed information on the aims and objectives of the Programme is available at http://www.mes.gov.ge/upload/multi/geo/1193228409_1191851345_zrdasrultatvis%20saxelmcifo%20enis.pdf.

⁶⁵ In order to address this problem, JCF, within the framework of ECMI’s annual small grants programme, launched a project under which approximately 90 candidates for the directors of public schools of Javakheti took courses in Georgian. This project ended in October 2007 but continued in November of that year with the financial support of the Open Society Foundation.

on a lower salary than those successfully passing the examinations. This provision has raised enormous fear among teachers in the regions, as they are certain that they will be unable to meet the requirements of the exam in such a short timeframe. As discussed previously, teachers have been given insufficient training to enhance their own language skills, let alone to be able to competently teach their students Georgian. Accordingly, teachers have identified this as a principal concern in regard to the recent education reforms. This problem is of major significance: according to the figures for the year 2008, there are 6,541 teachers in non-Georgian language public schools of Georgia, of whom 5,805 are employed in schools in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli.⁶⁷

According to the Teachers Professional Development Centre (TPDC — a legal body of public law established under the premises of the Ministry of Education and Science) — the process of teachers' qualification examinations will be launched in 2009. Teachers who are unable to pass the examination will have the right to continue teaching up until the year 2013, until which time they will be able to take the qualification examinations repeatedly. In addition, teachers will be obliged to pass similar examinations every eight years. With the purpose of supporting teachers in this process the TPDC issued several volumes in 2008 that will enhance the level of professionalism among teachers and assist them in preparing for the qualification examinations.⁶⁸ The TPDC has also developed standards for teachers. These standards consist of two parts. The first part encompasses general standards that are common for all subjects/courses. The second part contains standards for teachers according to subject. They were compiled in accordance with the teachers' examinations, tests for which are also in two parts—general and subject specific.

It is important to ensure that such publications are available in languages that teachers of non-Georgian language schools can understand as the information covered in the volumes are based on the general professional standards for teachers and the contents of the general professional

⁶⁶ Article 59.8 of the Law of Georgia on General Education, as of 8 April 2005.

⁶⁷ Shalva Tabatadze & Natia Natsvlshvili, *Intercultural Education*, Teachers Professional Development Centre, Tbilisi 2008, p. 15.

⁶⁸ Three publications have been issued so far; "Theories of Development and Learning", "Teaching and Assessment", and "Learning and Professional Environment", available at <http://www.tpdcenter.org/index.php?page=tpdc-publications&hl=ge>

abilities test which all teachers have to undertake in addition to subject-specific tests during the qualification examinations.⁶⁹ TPDC has translated these standards into Armenian, Azeri and Russian and each non-Georgian language school received two copies of them free of charge, while one copy was sent to the ERCs. Furthermore, since 2008 TPDC has been publishing a journal, *Teacher*, which contains articles on issues related to teachers. Last year it was published quarterly but since the start of 2009 the journal has been issued every two months and at least two copies of the magazine are sent to each school in Georgia free of charge. The journal has also been translated into Armenian and Azeri versions, the circulation of which currently amounts to 650 and 500 copies respectively. In addition, the National Curriculum and Assessment Centre is issuing a monthly newspaper, *Dialogue*, which is mostly comprised of questions asked by public school teachers and responses from the centre. The circulation of the Georgian version is 2,500 copies, while 200 copies of the newspaper translated into Azeri and Armenian have been distributed monthly in the relevant non-Georgian language schools since 2007. Armenian and Azeri versions of *Dialogue* also have a supplement called 'Multilingual Education'.

The TPDC have elaborated standards for the majority of subjects available in schools in Georgia,⁷⁰ excluding, however, standards for Armenian and Azeri language courses. This has been a cause of great concern among teachers of these languages, as it appears that they may be excluded from the qualification certification process. This issue remains high on the agenda for minority rights advocates in the regions and has the potential to cause considerable hardship for Armenian and Azeri language teachers in the future. Just as Armenian and Azeri languages are excluded from the national curriculum, the reality of minority language education is not reflected in the legal framework. Failure to adopt teaching standards for these languages could lead to the further deterioration of education in the regions as teachers will not receive professional development benefits, such as training and support, and could possibly impact on the quality of teaching of these courses to the point even of eventually jeopardising the preservation of minority languages. Although the latter is an unlikely eventuality, given the significant lack of suitably

⁶⁹ More information on teachers' qualification examinations is available at <http://www.tpdg.ge/index.php?page=archive&hl=ge>

⁷⁰ Thus far, standards have been elaborated for; Georgian language and literature; Mathematics; Natural Sciences; Social Sciences; Foreign Languages; Sports Education; Music; Arts and Crafts. Further details are available, at

qualified teachers in the region to substitute, efforts need to be made to ensure that these teachers are not neglected throughout this reform process. In addition, there are no higher education facilities at present that train students in teaching methodology for secondary education using Armenian and Azeri as the primary language of instruction, thus impeding future teachers' ability to meet these requirements. This aspect is discussed further below in section III.2.

III. Higher Education

1. Unified National Examinations (UNE)

Non-Georgian language school graduates have particularly low-levels of enrolment at higher education institutions in Georgia, especially following the introduction of national entrance examinations as part of the new educational reforms.

The Unified National Examinations (UNEs) became a compulsory element of the education system in Georgia with the adoption of the Law on Higher Education in 2004 (Article 89).⁷¹ These examinations were originally intended to put an end to corruption in university entrance procedures, a widespread occurrence in Georgia in the past. However, the UNEs proved in effect to be discriminatory towards minority students and there appeared to be unequal opportunities provided for university entrance, due to minority students' poor command of the Georgian language.

1.1 2005 UNE

The first entrance examination according to the new system was taken by students in 2005 and consisted of three main obligatory components: Georgian Language and Literature, General Abilities Test and Foreign Language skills, in addition to other optional subjects. Minority students were permitted to take an easier Georgian language and literature component than the one taken by their ethnic Georgian counterparts, which was accepted by Russian language sectors

<http://www.tpdg.ge/index.php?page=1-7-2&hl=ge>.

⁷¹ Full text available at http://www.mes.gov.ge/upload/text/geo/1196078343_legislation.pdf.

at accredited universities. However, those students wishing to study at institutions with no Russian language section, such as students wishing to study at the Akhalkalaki branch of Tbilisi State University, were obliged to sit the more challenging test.⁷² Additionally, students choosing the easier of the two Georgian language examinations were unable to opt for Russian in the foreign language component.

Needless to say, the results from the 2005 examinations were a source of great concern. In 2005, only seventeen out of 1,012 school graduates⁷³ from Azeri-language schools managed to pass the entrance exams from Marneuli district.⁷⁴ In Javakheti, just two students from Akhalkalaki district and one from Ninotsminda, out of approximately 80 students who sat the exam, passed that year. This is a significant obstacle for minority students' access to higher education in Georgia, constituting an obstacle to civil integration.

1.2 2006 UNE

Taking the poor results of minority students into consideration, the ministry continued to reform the curriculum for the examinations and notable changes were made for the following year. In 2006, students were also permitted to take the General Abilities Test, the foreign language component and all optional courses in the Russian language in an attempt to narrow the disparity of test results between Georgian and non-Georgian speakers.⁷⁵ Additionally, the Georgian language and literature element of the exam was redesigned so that all students, regardless of their

⁷² ICG, "Georgia's Armenian and Azeri Minorities", 28.

⁷³ This figure denotes the number of Azeri graduates from secondary school, and is not indicative of the number of applicants partaking in the UNEs that year.

⁷⁴ ICG, "Georgia's Armenian and Azeri Minorities", 28.

⁷⁵ According to Article 5.2 of Decree 127 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia 'On Establishing the Rules of Conducting General National Exams', 28 March 2005, 'In order to pursue education at higher education institutions under the program, accredited by the government (regardless of the language of instruction) all entrants should pass exams in the following subjects: Georgian language and literature, foreign language selected by the entrant (English, German, French, Russian) and general skills.' In addition, Article 5.3 of the present Decree stipulates that: 'Higher education institutions have the right to choose additional exam/exams for entrants of concrete faculties from the following subjects: literature, mathematics, history and social sciences, natural sciences (physics, chemistry, and biology).' Whereas Article 5.7 of the present Decree states that: 'In order to pursue education at higher education institutions under the program, accredited by the government (regardless of the language of instruction) all entrants have the right to take the exams in general skills, mathematics, history of Georgia and social sciences, and natural sciences (physics, chemistry, and biology) in Georgian or Russian languages, about what they should indicate in the examination application'.

native tongue, sat the same test, which was simplified to meet the needs of national minorities. This would enable students of non-Georgian ethnic origin to apply for all university places, as opposed to just places in the Russian language sectors of institutions.

The Ministry of Education and Science also launched a programme—established with the financial support of the OSCE HCNM that same year at the Language Houses in Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli—under which 100 school graduates of various ethnicities could participate in preparatory courses for the Unified National Examinations free of charge in various accredited higher education institutions situated in the capital.⁷⁶ As a result, 20 school graduates of Armenian ethnicity and 30 of Azeri ethnicity enrolled at the preparatory courses for the UNEs at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University; while eighteen Armenian school leavers and 32 Azeri enrolled at similar courses at Tbilisi Medical University. It should be noted that all participants in these programmes are exclusively from the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions.⁷⁷ Kakheti region is not represented at all, although the programme also provides for the right of pupils of non-Georgian ethnic origin from Kakheti region to apply for the preparatory courses.

After simplifying the requirements for the entrance exams and introducing preparatory courses and additional Georgian language training in the Georgian environment, the results improved relative to the previous year and in 2006, 25 Azeri students from Kvemo Kartli region passed the entrance exams, while 31 Armenian students from Javakheti were also successful. More specifically, only three students from the Javakheti region actually failed due to the Georgian language component that year. It must also be highlighted that although the reform of the UNEs in 2006 undoubtedly had an impact on the increased success rate, the preparatory courses for these exams must also take some credit for the improved performance. These Georgian language courses were offered to students for the first time in 2006 in response to the poor grades among

⁷⁶ The Programme provides enrollment in the preparatory courses for the general national exams free of charge) and a monthly stipend for potential university entrants who fall into one of eight different categories (initially there were only five categories. One of these categories included persons belonging to national minorities that have resided and studied in non-Georgian language public schools in the Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti regions of Georgia. The number of places allocated for this Programme annually was 200 in 2006 but has now increased to 300, 100 of which are specifically allocated for persons belonging to ethnic minorities from these three target regions.

⁷⁷ See Decree 1251 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, 10 December 2007, at http://www.mes.gov.ge/upload/multi/geo/1199879670_brzaneba%201251.PDF.

minority students in the 2005 UNEs. Candidates who managed to pass the Georgian language exam in 2006 had for the most part attended the preparatory courses at the Language Houses.

1.3 2007 UNE

No additional changes were made to the examination for 2007 but the results of minority students were far from satisfactory. In Kvemo Kartli, just seven Azeri students passed while just three of 36 applicants were successful from Javakheti.⁷⁸ It must be noted that not all of these students necessarily failed due to the Georgian language component, and a portion of students from both regions were unsuccessful in other sections of the examination. Additionally, the overall number of students applying to sit the examination was greatly reduced. This can perhaps be attributed to the termination of the Akhalkalaki and Marneuli branches of universities in the region as a result of the accreditation process (see below), which may have further discouraged students from applying. This could be particularly applicable to Armenian students in Javakheti, as the region is located some 300 km from Tbilisi and thus their choices are more limited in terms of proximity to higher education facilities.

In October 2007, the OSCE HCNM passed financial responsibility for the Language Houses in Javakheti to the Ministry of Education and Science. These language courses resumed in November 2007 under the ministry's responsibility as planned. However, it must be noted that despite the reduced funding now available to these Language Houses, which left the Akhalkalaki branch without premises from which to operate for a period of time, the classes are still functioning. In 2008, 682 persons took part in Georgian language courses at these Language Houses. In addition, under the sub-programme on 'Adult Education Centres in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions' in 2009 the ministry has allocated GEL 78,000 for opening pilot centres for teaching Georgian. It is also planned to continue the Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda Language Houses.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Information on the number of applicants from non-Georgian language schools of the region partaking in the UNEs that year was not available.

⁷⁹ Speech by the Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, Ms Irine Kurdadze at a conference on 'Civil Integration and National Minorities in Georgia' (Gudauri, 19-21 June, 2009).

1.4 2008 UNE

In an attempt to rectify the low level of achievement among national minorities in 2007, the National Assessment and Examinations Centre further amended the UNEs. For the first time, in 2008, and in response to advice given by psychologists to the Ministry of Education and Science, students were permitted to take the General Abilities component of the examination in the Armenian or Azeri language, a much welcomed addition.⁸⁰ It was hoped that this would benefit non-Georgian native speakers and aid their university applications. Although the results from the 2008 UNEs show an extremely high percentage of minority student entrants, this is indicative, not of their success, but of the lack of students from Georgian schools taking the exams, due to another reform introduced for 2008. This reform increased the length of Georgian secondary education from an eleven-year programme to a twelve-year programme; thus, there were practically no graduates from Georgian schools for the 2007-2008 academic year. As a result, students taking the UNEs in 2008 were largely from minority schools or else students who could not pass the examination the previous year. As minority schools will undergo this same transition in 2009, minority students will have an extra year to further their knowledge of the Georgian language before undertaking the entrance exams.

Despite the increased acceptance of minority students into university programmes in 2008, according to the results, no significant improvement in terms of ability has been documented in comparison to previous years. Reportedly, 26 ethnic Armenian students from Samtskhe-Javakheti successfully passed the UNEs and were accepted into higher education institutions for the 2008 academic year, all of whom attended Georgian language preparatory courses in Akhalkalaki prior to the examination.

Officials from the Ministry of Education and Science and the National Assessment and Examination Centre (NAEC) have speculated that perhaps the low grades from Azeri and

⁸⁰ According to Merab Tipuria, the head of the Unified National Examination logistics group, the general abilities component tests student's logic and analytical skills, which is best expressed in one's native language. See Nino Khelaia, "National Unified Examinations: ch ch ch ch ch ch changes", Georgia Today, 30 May 2008.

Armenian students are therefore more indicative of a generally lower level of education as well as a poor command of the Georgian language, discussed above, as opposed to unfavourable and discriminatory requirements for the UNEs. As one can see, the ministry and the NAEC have continuously amended the examination in order to ensure equal opportunities for national minorities, with the examination in 2008 aiming to satisfy the requirements of minority rights advocates. However, the lack of assistance and training given to teachers to help them adequately educate their students in the Georgian language prior to the examination still poses significant difficulties and still renders the UNE requirements unequal in practice.

Consequently, recent years have witnessed a significant increase in the number of Armenian and Azeri students choosing to study in their respective kin states, many of whom will not return to Georgia to seek employment upon their graduation from higher education.

The legal reforms have been put in place but the resources, both human and financial, have yet to be provided in order to ensure that minority students can satisfy the new legal requirements. There must be a realistic timeframe within which teachers and students can expect to achieve an adequate level of Georgian, an issue which clearly arises in all aspects of education reform in Georgia. In the interim, a system whereby minority students are permitted to take an easier version of the Georgian language component for the UNEs but are then required to attend Georgian language courses for the first year of university may be most appropriate. Upon successful completion of the Georgian language exams at the end of their first year at university, students may then proceed with their course as normal.

Another option as a way of ensuring minority representation in higher education institutions is the introduction of a 'quota system'. Such systems have long been advocated by experts in the field and affirmative action has proved to be an effective means of combating discrimination in education, most notably in India and South Africa.⁸¹ Although quota systems can lead to positive

⁸¹ Klaus Deiter Beiter, *The Protection of the Right to Education in International Law*, (Martinus Nijhoff, 2005), 408. See also the recommendations of the UN Economic and Social Council, "Comprehensive Examination of Thematic Issues Relating to Racial Discrimination: The Concept and Practice of Affirmative Action", E/CN.4/Sub.2/2000/11,

discrimination in certain cases, affirmative action is to cease once the desired goal of equality of access to education between majority and minority groups is attained. It may therefore help to narrow the gap throughout this transition period in Georgia.

In an attempt to narrow this gap between the opportunities available for ethnic Georgian and non-Georgian students, the ministry plans to establish two additional Language Houses in Kvemo Kartli in 2009⁸² and the NAEC is developing a preparatory programme whereby five Preparatory Centres will be established in regions densely populated by minorities in the near future.⁸³ Additionally, in Saakashvili's December 2008 speech on the issue of language and the civic integration of national minorities, he admitted that the UNEs have been a serious impediment to access to higher education for minority groups. Recognizing the near impossibility for minority students of passing these exams, as evidenced by the low success rate in recent years, Saakashvili has pledged to introduce 'special privileges' and 'special scholarships' for students from minority groups, in order to increase their representation in higher education institutions.⁸⁴ Although it has not been specified as of yet what this may entail, the open acknowledgment of the shortcomings of this particular aspect of education reform is encouraging.⁸⁵

In order for Georgia to become fully compliant with international standards on language and education policies such as the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities, the European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages and the OSCE Hague Recommendations on Education for National Minorities, higher education would have to be offered in the minority languages, and not just the entrance examination.⁸⁶ The Hague recommendations declare that should the need or numerical justification arise, minority groups should be given access to education in their mother tongue. These justifications, however, are

19 June 2000.

⁸² "Tolerance and Civil Integration State Policy", 2008, 14.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸⁴ "Saakashvili on the Integration of Ethnic Minorities", Civil.ge, 22 December 2008, at <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=20170>.

⁸⁵ An example of privileges offered to minority students in the past is that with the financial support of Georgia's Fund for Development and Reforms, seven minority students were sent to study on a BA programme on Business Administration in universities of Hungary and the US in 2007. Similarly, seven individuals were selected for the year 2008 as well.

⁸⁶ OSCE Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities, Article 17.

indeed difficult to prove and are often balanced against available financial resources and the risk that the eventuality of establishing such an institution be contrary to the principles of integration. The language of instruction at higher education institutions is Georgian.⁸⁷ The Law on Higher Education, however, does envisage the possibility of alternative languages of instruction but at present, the few existing institutions of this kind are in decline (see below).

2. Institutions of Higher Education

A significant attempt by the Georgian government to improve access of persons belonging to national minorities to higher education, and their representation in public structures in general, was made with the establishment of the Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration in Kutaisi. The school began operating in January 2006 and its six-month curriculum includes courses of Georgian language (during the first three months), as well as courses in public administration. According to the latest figures, 133 students of Azeri ethnicity and 124 students of Armenian background have graduated from the school⁸⁸ and in an attempt to increase national minority representation two additional branches are planned in Javakheti, although no obvious steps in this direction have yet been made.⁸⁹ However, despite promises by President Saakashvili, only a relatively small number of the school graduates have obtained employment in the public sector.⁹⁰ The latter fact diminishes the economic incentive for persons belonging to national minorities to study the Georgian language.

The six-month curriculum also once again highlights the unrealistic timeframe continuously offered by the ministry and central authorities. It would be virtually impossible for students to obtain both the necessary skills for public administration duties and Georgian language

⁸⁷ According to the Article 4 of the Law of Georgia on Higher Education, 'the language of instruction at a higher education institution is Georgian, and in Abkhazia – also Abkhazian (Instruction in other languages, except for individual study courses, is permitted provided that this is envisaged by international agreements or is agreed with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia)'.

⁸⁸ Speech by the Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, Ms Irine Kurdadze at a conference on 'Civil Integration and National Minorities in Georgia' (Gudauri, 19-21 June, 2009).

⁸⁹ Decree 680 of Minister of Education and Science of Georgia.

⁹⁰ See the welcome speech of the President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili on the opening of the Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration of 9 December 2005, at <http://www.president.gov.ge/?l=E&m=0&sm=3&st=90&id=1098>.

proficiency within this period. According to the *gamgebeli* of Akhalkalaki district, graduates that have been recruited for public administration employment in the district have, upon completion of the course, inadequate administration skills to carry out their duties to a satisfactory level, although their Georgian language skills were deemed to be sufficient.⁹¹ A minimum two years intensive language and administration training is necessary for the effective preparation of professional candidates in this sector. Undoubtedly, graduates of the Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration are not in a position to compete with persons with full higher education, although it does provide far better opportunities for further pursuing higher education afterwards. In addition, under the presidential programme on Rehabilitation of Professional Education Institutions, the professional education institutions in Kazreti and Akhaltsikhe were renovated. Under the same initiative it is planned to rehabilitate other professional education institutions in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions.⁹²

As part of the optimization process, which began after the reforms of the education system, a significant number of higher education institutions did not manage to pass accreditation, while all branches of the universities were either liquidated or transformed into independent higher education institutions.⁹³ It is estimated that the number of higher education institutions has been reduced by 50% in recent years.⁹⁴ However, as none of the higher education institutions in Marneuli district met the accreditation requirements, they were simply closed down. The Marneuli branch of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, the Marneuli branch of the Georgian Technical University and the Marneuli branch of Ilia Chavchavadze State University were all closed down. Similarly, the Akhalkalaki branch of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University also failed to meet accreditation requirements and was reestablished as an independent 'Higher

⁹¹ Interview with Nairi Iritsyan, *gamgebeli* of Akhalkalaki district, 19 May 2009.

⁹² Speech by the Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, Ms Irine Kurdadze at a conference on 'Civil Integration and National Minorities in Georgia' (Gudauri, 19-21 June, 2009).

⁹³ There were 117 accredited higher education institutions before the reforms in Georgia before the academic year 2007-2008. However, in 2006 only 64 higher education institutions applied for institutional accreditation out of which 32 received it for the subsequent 5 years, starting from the 2007-2008 academic year. A list of the newly accredited institutions is available at http://www.mes.gov.ge/index.php?module=multi&page=detals&multi_id=10&id=123. The list of higher education institutions accredited before 2006 is available at http://www.mes.gov.ge/index.php?module=multi&page=detals&multi_id=10&id=122.

⁹⁴ Estimate is according to Tempus Georgia. See website for further information, at <http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/tempus/countries/impact/georgia.pdf>.

Education Institution–College’, permitting it to provide degree and professional education programmes.⁹⁵ According to the OSCE HCNM, this process of accreditation was however an entirely necessary step. The standard at the institution was not equivalent to the national university standard and the new status of the faculty is more indicative of its facilities and instruction. Students are still less inclined to apply for courses at this college, however, due to the less prestigious nature of the resulting qualification. Reportedly, the institution’s intake is now almost entirely made up of ethnic Georgian students, who were unable to secure places elsewhere.⁹⁶ This has caused a serious setback for the government’s civic integration plans and the institution itself was established to encourage and foster tolerance and bilingualism among Armenian and Georgian students. The drop in the numbers of Armenian students at the institution after the inception of the UNEs can clearly be observed if we compare the graduating class and intake at the Akhalkalaki branch of the Tbilisi State University in 2006. That year, while 450 students graduated from the institution, approximately 60% of whom were Armenian, just three Armenian students were offered places at the college for the new academic term.⁹⁷

The closure of the branches of higher education institutions in Marneuli and Akhalkalaki in 2007 has been disconcerting for Azeri and Armenian school leavers and has discouraged them from applying to Georgian universities, as a large portion of these students cannot afford to study and live in other cities. As a result, fewer school graduates have applied to Georgian higher education facilities, which reduces the number of students passing the entrance exam. Therefore, the vast majority of school graduates of various ethnic backgrounds wishing to pursue higher education apply to higher education institutions in Russia, Armenia or Azerbaijan. Reportedly, this number has steadily increased since the inception of the UNEs and is continuing to rise. This trend is encouraged by financial incentives from the Armenia government offered to ethnic Armenian students from Javakheti for study in Armenia, awarding free tuition to 70 students in 2008. According to estimates, 80% of ethnic Armenian students studying at higher education institutions in Armenia choose not to return to Georgia following completion of their studies, which results in

⁹⁵ Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia “The Process of Transformation of the Branches of the State Higher education Institutions is over”, 6 December 2007, at http://www.mes.gov.ge/upload/multi/geo/1197625843_filialebi-release-6.12.07.pdf.

⁹⁶ Interview with Nino Bolkvadze, Office of the OSCE HCNM, Tbilisi, December 2008.

what is commonly termed a ‘brain-drain’ effect. Those who obtain higher education in foreign countries find it difficult to secure employment in Georgia upon graduating, again due to the poor command of the state language.

It should also be noted that before 2005 there were Russian language faculties in all state higher education institutions, which were therefore accessible to minority students. The decision to close the Russian-language faculties was taken by the higher education institutions due to an alleged lack of demand. Government officials attribute this to the decreased Russian influence in Georgia, and its decreased economic presence in the Georgian market. According to President Saakashvili, language-learning priorities changed following the Russian imposed trade embargo in 2006, as business determines these trends to a large extent. Additionally, the increased influence of Europe and the United States, both in trade ventures as well as in education policy reform, has motivated students to study English as a foreign language instead and hence, the Russian language sectors have depleted.⁹⁸ It is, however, difficult to ascertain to what extent we can say this reasoning reflects the true situation and professionals previously employed in Russian language sectors in Georgia have speculated that the decision to close such sectors may have been taken for reasons other than a lack of demand.⁹⁹

Perhaps the most significant gap in higher education provision as far as national minorities are concerned is the lack of a pedagogical institute training teachers in the subjects taught in the national curriculum in Armenian and Azeri languages. The Faculty of Foreign Languages at Ilia Chavchavadze State University has Azeri, Armenian and Russian language sections, where seventeen and nineteen students of respectively Azeri and Armenian origin were pursuing higher education, according to figures provided by the university.¹⁰⁰ The same faculty also has 53 students of various other ethnicities studying in the Russian language sector (72 students in total). This faculty offers teaching qualifications to students in these languages but importantly,

⁹⁷ ICG, “Georgia’s Armenian and Azeri Minorities”, 28.

⁹⁸ Anna Nemtsova, “Georgia Turns to the West for Ideas”, 54(42) *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2008).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ This faculty previously functioned under the auspices of the Sulkan-Saba Orbelliani State Pedagogical University, until 2006 upon the establishment of Ilia Chavchavadze State University, which incorporated this institute along with six other higher education facilities. More information at

graduates are only qualified to teach their chosen language. While there are no faculties in higher education institutions of Georgia providing courses in other subjects that are included in the national curriculum in any minority language. This is another serious cause for concern.

Teachers working in minority language schools, and hence using Armenian and Azeri as the sole language of instruction to teach a variety of subjects such as Mathematics and Science, are unable to obtain professional training in Georgia. Therefore, students from Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli choosing to enter into the teaching profession and to avail themselves of higher education in a language they can speak, namely Armenian or Azeri, are only taught the necessary skills for teaching that language, but graduate without the necessary qualification for teaching subjects other than the language, which itself is merely an elective subject and not part of the national curriculum. Essentially, teachers graduating from this faculty in Armenian or Azeri language studies are not qualified as general secondary school teachers, contrary to the role they assume in the minority language schools in practice. This has the corresponding effect of encouraging aspiring teachers to obtain higher education elsewhere, most notably in Armenia and Azerbaijan. As previously observed, this runs completely against the process of civil integration of national minorities that the government is committed to pursuing.

Firstly, failing to provide the provision of training for teachers in these languages indirectly violates a person's right to receive education in their native tongue. Secondly, the increased trend of pupils choosing to be educated in their kin states contributes significantly to the 'brain drain' of qualified national minorities and decreases the possibility of providing a better quality of education in secondary schools in the regions. Thirdly, those teachers qualified abroad who do choose to return to Georgia to teach in minority language schools, will have studied the national curriculum of the state in which they attended university. Therefore, the concepts and ideas that were being reinforced through textbooks, particularly concerning history books, donated from kin states (see above), a trend the Georgian government has worked hard to put an end to, will still be shared with minority pupils through these returning teachers. To address this problem it is strongly recommended that the Georgian government take the necessary steps to also provide

suitable tertiary training for aspiring teachers in Armenian and Azeri languages, in order to avoid undermining the efforts made thus far to ensure the civil integration of national minorities. This could be rectified, as advocated by Javakheti Citizens' Forum, by establishing a pedagogical institution situated in the region offering the necessary teacher training in relevant minority languages, but also, and equally importantly, providing Georgian language training. This would ensure the effective ability of teachers to carry out the requirements of the national curriculum and the Georgian language component, in addition to satisfying the right to receive education in one's native tongue. Indeed, the proposed institution could offer training for Georgian and minority language teachers alike, so that a culture of bilingualism could effectively develop between ethnic communities and thus, enhance the integration of majority and minority groups. Establishing such an institution would have the added benefit of reversing the trend of 'brain drain' and would increase employment in the region among the general population. Models for bilingual tertiary education could be explored based on examples in Macedonia and Romania as discussed in-depth in an earlier ECMI working paper.¹⁰¹

The Armenian government is actively involved in education issues concerning the Armenian diaspora in Georgia and in 2006 a proposal to financially assist with the provision of third level education in the region was reportedly offered, initially regarding the maintenance of the Akhalkalaki higher education institution, as the offer was made in advance of the decision to close the university branch.¹⁰² This proposal was then officially discussed by the Armenian and Georgian Ministries of Education in June 2008 when it was proposed to establish a joint Georgian-Armenian university.¹⁰³ The idea was put forward by the Armenian Ministry of Education, which already has had experience with the establishment of similar international universities, such as Armenian-American and Armenian-French institutions in Yerevan. However, this initiative was rejected by the Georgian ministry, on the grounds that such an international university is not permitted in Georgian legislation and would also cause difficulties regarding

¹⁰¹ See Denis Dafflon, "Managing Ethnic Diversity in Javakheti: Two European Models of Multilingual Tertiary Education", ECMI Working Paper #25, February 2006.

¹⁰² International Crisis Group, "Georgia's Armenian and Azeri Minorities", 29.

¹⁰³ Correspondence with Tamara Talinyan, Diaspora Department, Ministry of Education, Armenia, June 2009.

management. The matter has not been further discussed.¹⁰⁴ If reconsidered in the future, however, assistance from the Armenian government could contribute to the resolution of issues relating to lack of financial resources.

IV. Conclusion

Georgia has undergone a significant transformation in recent years and the educational sector is one of the many that has undergone considerable reforms. In an attempt to modernize the education system and to bring it more in line with European standards, the Georgian government adopted a national accreditation programme and began tackling corruption in the sector. The optimization and decentralization processes help to maximize efficiency and the use of resources, as does the initiative to improve the management of schools at the local level. The introduction of a new national curriculum, new textbooks and teaching methodologies at the primary and secondary level and national university entrance examinations at the tertiary level of education are also serious steps forward in improving and increasing the general standard of education in the country. As a whole, Georgia's education system has been positively transformed and continues to be so. Indeed, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia must be complimented for the notable achievements made thus far.

The education reform process is still in its early stages, but certain elements of the new system, have however negatively affected national minority groups. The decentralization process saw the establishment of district resource centres and with time they are likely to become successful. Unfortunately, at present they are characterized by lack of coordination and communication and outreach work, several examples of which have been outlined above. This has had notable repercussions in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. Lack of coordination and harmonization is also characteristic of the secondary and higher education sectors. Students were required to sit the difficult Georgian language component of the university entrance examination before sufficient teacher training had been conducted in secondary level non-Georgian language schools. In other words, the legal requirement to pass the UNEs presupposed the provision of the resources

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

and training necessary in order to ensure students' ability to successfully pass the exams. The new national curriculum had not been fully implemented and textbooks had not yet been distributed and, as a result, students caught in this transition period failed to obtain positions at higher education institutions. Adding to the lack of synchronization between legislation and policy as well as poor communication between central and regional authorities, are the constant reshuffles of ministers. There have been four Ministers of Education and Science since 2007, leaving the reform process entirely unstable. In November 2007, Maia Miminoshvili replaced Kakha Lomaia as Minister of Education and Science. Just two months later, she was replaced by Ghia Nodia, who then held the post until yet another reshuffle led to the appointment of Nika Gvaramia in December 2008.

The ministry's primary aim in relation to language policy in the education sector is to promote and encourage civil integration through acquisition of the Georgian language. While this is a necessary and fully justified goal, provided that it is envisaged as accompanying the preservation of minority languages, the repercussions of the language component of the education policies can be said to have had a harmful impact on minorities and their access to and success in the education system. This can be primarily attributed to the high standards of language fluency now required and the unrealistic timeframes imposed to attain them. Evidence of this can be found in the entirely insufficient teacher training programmes and the low success rates among minority groups in the newly introduced examinations, such as the UNEs and the exams for school directors discussed previously. The expectation that students, teachers and directors alike acquire Georgian language skills without the appropriate training is wholly unattainable. Training must be seen as the priority with relation to national minorities and education reform and efforts need to be substantially increased as soon as possible.

The ministry has, however, recognized the discriminatory effects and shortcomings of some of these reforms and policies and has attempted to rectify the situation on a continuous basis; examples of this are the near annual reform of the UNEs, the postponement of the director qualification examinations, the future planned teacher training initiatives and the planned introduction of multilingual education. Therefore, it can be said that the ministry is slowly but

surely beginning to mainstream minority issues so as to take into consideration the possible implications of policies on minority groups.

Among the planned future reforms, multilingual education is perhaps the most encouraging and has the most potential. The result of implementing such an initiative in the context of Georgia's multiethnic society would be the preservation of minority languages whilst simultaneously ensuring the effective civil integration of minority groups into wider Georgian society through the acquisition of the state language. Acquisition of the Georgian language would indirectly promote tolerance and knowledge of Georgian culture and allow students to avail themselves of educational and professional opportunities that were previously out of reach. It is therefore hoped that the government will continue to commit to this multilingual model of education.

In relation to higher education, the proposed initiative, advocated by the Javakheti Citizens Forum, to establish an Armenian and Georgian pedagogical training institution in the region is equally important. A similar institution could be established in the Azeri populated region, for instance, in Marneuli. Such facilities would help to resolve the issue of a lack of suitably qualified teachers in the region to provide teaching in the necessary Armenian and Georgian language components, as well as fostering a culture of tolerance and the civil integration of national minorities in Georgian society.

Those charged with successfully reforming the Georgian education system have a difficult task. It is a long and challenging process to not only modernize the sector, but also to ensure the effective participation of minority groups in the political, social and economic spheres of the country via the acquisition of the Georgian language. Language and education policies encompass some of the key issues in Georgian society today and it is therefore advisable that the Georgian authorities develop a clear strategy on the intended direction in this regard. One useful step would be the ratification of the European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages, one of Georgia's as yet unfulfilled commitments to the Council of Europe, to ensure the protection of minority languages. In addition, it is recommended to adopt corresponding domestic legislation and to establish a specific institution on language issues, to include a legal definition and to implement a policy on the use of the state language and protection of minority languages in the state. While the reform

efforts of the ministry and the Georgian government must be praised, there is still a long way to go before these goals can be achieved. At present it is estimated that a mere 7-20% of students in secondary education in the Javakheti region have a reasonable knowledge of the Georgian language,¹⁰⁵ which reflects both the shortcomings of the reforms to date but also highlights the fact that such reforms need time to succeed. Transition necessarily takes time, but government actors must continuously ensure that the legal reforms are attainable, realistic and do not impact negatively on minority groups.

¹⁰⁵ Estimate based on ECMI survey, January 2009, of non-Georgian language schools in Akhalkalaki.