

# Overview of the Language Situation in the Sphere of Education in Georgia (2005)

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Education is one of the most important factors in terms of solution of the whole spectrum of global, regional and local problems, and without education it is impossible to improve life standard of an individual and further development of humanity.

## **Statistical Data**

In Georgia there are: 141 Azerbaijani-speaking secondary schools and 8 independent Azerbaijani-speaking sectors attached to other schools, 133 Armenian-speaking schools and 20 independent sectors, 87 Russian-speaking schools and 152 independent sectors, 10 independent Ossetian sectors. Altogether, in Georgia there are 361 so called non-Georgian-speaking schools and 190 independent sectors where languages of instruction are languages of ethnic minorities (here and after statistical data on Abkhazia and South Ossetia are not included).

## **General Situation**

Today, we may argue that Georgia, which finds itself in such a difficult social-economic situation, pays attention to the issue of education on minority languages. On the one hand, the aforementioned special attitude to representatives of different ethnic minorities may be considered as certain manifestation of respect to and esteem of cultural and linguistic rights of citizens of Georgia belonging to different ethnic groups, if not the existence of specific difficulties that thwart all the efforts undertaken by the State in the sphere of education of ethnic minorities.

Against the background of the existing problems in the system of education, it is rather difficult to single out and emphasize the aforementioned problems, unless the existence of such types of problems that further aggravates the already unfavorable situation in the educational establishments of language minorities.

## **Problems of Textbooks**

Many secondary schools, where language of this or that ethnic minority is used as the language of instruction, tend to get textbooks from different countries-historic homelands of ethnic minorities, where programs of education do not coincide with the standards adopted in Georgia. We may also underline the poor typographic quality of textbooks published in Georgia, the lack of appropriate and proved educational programs for those establishments, where minority languages are applied as languages of instruction. In addition, there are no efficient structures that would be able to work out appropriate educational programs.

## ***History Textbooks***

The State educational agencies do not include in curriculum histories of people, part of who is represented as ethnic minorities in Georgia as mandatory discipline. In this case, the State and society face a dilemma: introduction to secondary schools of history of ethnic minorities by the State may lead to further aggravation of the inter-

ethnic tensions, since, more often than not in the aforementioned textbooks there is information that contradict to interpretation of historic facts provided by Georgian history textbooks. All that, can lead to politization of interpretation of history, not conducive to strengthening the principle of territorial integrity of country. On the other hand, further dropping of requirements of the part of population, belonging to ethnic minorities, to introduce the abovementioned discipline to secondary schools, may lead to the erosion of loyalty of ethnic minorities towards the State. However, it would be unfair to fail to underline that history of historic homelands of ethnic minorities are taught at secondary schools, though as optional disciplines, and do not encounter any serious opposition on the part of the State.

### **Secondary Schools**

The quality of education in those secondary schools where language of this or that ethnic minority is applied as the language of instruction, is more or less the same as in those schools where the language instruction is the State language of Georgia. That can be explained by a number of the aforementioned problems, including the problem of textbooks (the lack of textbooks, high prices and poor quality), deficit of qualified teachers, and factual absence of teachers of Georgian language. This deplorable fact can be attributed, at least in part, inability of the State to pay salary to teachers in the regions compactly populated by ethnic minorities. At the same time, the absence of special and proved educational programs and the lack of adequate number of state high education establishments, where language of instruction is a minority language, may further aggravate the situation and add to the feelings of despair.

### **Bi-/multilingual Education**

Currently, in Georgia there are bi-/multilingual classes in secondary schools, where a language of this or that minority group is used as a language of instruction, usage of which is only limited by teaching the Georgian language as a separate discipline and in rare cases by teaching history of Georgia. Today, a proposal to create experimental bilingual classes is gaining momentum in the society and, naturally enough, this idea has its supporters as well as opponents.

#### ***1.Supporters***

The aforementioned idea of bilingual classes is supported by those representatives of State structures and Georgian intelligentsia, who hope that as a result of such classes, it would be possible to start a real process of integration (or assimilation) of minorities into the social structures of the mainstream population. There are supports of this policy among the representatives of ethnic minorities as well. These people are mostly those who live in large towns with mixed population, as well as representatives of local ethnic minority elites.

#### ***2. Opponents:***

Opponents of the aforementioned idea of bilingual classes are mostly forces of nationalistic character, both representatives of ethnic minorities and the mainstream population, and there are opposed to this idea due to absolutely different reasons: if nationalists from the mainstream population are opposed to the introduction of bilingual schools in order to maintain the existing advantage over ethnic minorities based on the principle of ethnicity, which is sometimes the case in daily life, as well as trigger and encourage the process of immigration of ethnic minorities, then nationalists belonging to ethnic minorities are in opposition to the aforementioned

novelty out of being afraid to be assimilated (or integrated?). If we refrain from saying that the existence of the aforementioned category of people in the State structures and organs of self government may have serious impact on the future of bi-/multilingual schools, at least we can state with certainty that at the moment the State does not possess enough financial and human resources necessary for comprehensive implementation of this idea. At the same time, however strange it may seem, are those leaders of ethnic minorities who are afraid of losing their position and status in the society, because in those regions where overwhelming majority of population is a rural population (of ethnic minorities) and they tend to fail to comprehend the perspectives of the aforementioned strategy. Headmasters and teachers' staff of those secondary schools where language of this or that minority is used as the language of instruction, as well as aged teachers, unable to undergo re-qualification, and naturally enough afraid of losing their jobs, can be attributed to the aforementioned category.

### **Pre-school education**

In Georgia, there are no State-sponsored establishments in Georgia where children of ethnic minority parents would be able to be educated in their native languages, except for Russian. This situation can be attributed to the fact that there is sizable Russian-speaking population in Georgia, however, there is no bilingual education in the kindergartens, because, those children attending Most part of Russian-speaking kindergartens, at the moment of entering secondary schools, in fact, do not speak the Georgian language, and respectively, those children attending the Georgian-speaking kindergartens are not able to actively develop their knowledge in the languages of this or that ethnic minority, even if they do belong to those minority groups.

### **High Education**

The number of high education establishments in Georgia is absolutely inadequate to the number of secondary schools.

The problem is that today, representatives of ethnic minorities, while being educating in their native languages, are largely deprived of possibility to learn the State language in a proper manner, and not surprisingly, are unable to obtain higher education, and respectively, to make full-fledged usage of their knowledge and expertise obtained after graduation of educational establishment, for the benefit of the society. Therefore, due to reasons beyond their control, the level of their civil usefulness is considerably reduced, and that in turn, leads to further isolation from the rest of society. This paradoxical situation, understandably enough, do not serve the best interests either of the State or representatives of ethnic minorities.

One of the results of the aforementioned is the fact that alumni of secondary schools are deprived of possibility to continue education, are becoming uncompetitive on the labour market of qualified jobs, and as a result, the most talented and capable representatives of ethnic minority youth tend to immigrate to their historical (ethnic) homeland, other countries or are "lost" in the crowd without any trace. That is, what we have got is the existence of language filter, through which prestigious social jobs are unavailable for representatives of ethnic minorities.

### **Civil Education**

One of the major pre-condition for active participation of ethnic minorities in Georgia's State building is the existence of legal and civil education among them. Many difficulties prevailing in inter-ethnic sphere, delayed integration processes that

do not allow representatives of ethnic minorities to actively participate in the process of development of Georgian society and state are mainly due to very low quality of legal and civil education among the representatives of ethnic minorities. For example, many of them do not bother themselves to take commitments with regard to the state and these sad realities are largely due to the lack of knowledge of their own rights, and more often than not, distrust towards them. All the aforementioned, naturally enough tends to lead to self-discrimination, partial isolation and inadequate participation of the representatives of ethnic minorities in the social, political life of the country. At the same time, it is paradoxical that many of the most active representatives of ethnic minorities do not have information not only about the instruments of protection of human rights of minorities lay down in the normative legal acts of Georgia but sometimes are not aware of the existing of such legal acts at all.

### **The State System of Education, Non-governmental and International Organizations**

The failures to find solutions to the aforementioned problems very often are the results of:

- The non-existence of efficient state policy in the sphere of education of national minorities;
- The failure to take into account the real situation in the education system;
- Frequent incongruence between the goals and allocated means expected to achieve these goals, that leads to misunderstanding between high rank and rank-and-file officials working in the education sphere;
- Groundlessness of a number of decisions, since these decisions were made out of political considerations and failed to take into due account long term political consequences;
- Lack of rendered methodological and pedagogical assistance to parents and lack of information at parents' disposal;
- Non ear-marked allocation of financial means and credits, as well as the practice of corruption in almost all levels of education system, that led to non-implementation of such important tasks as improvement of the quality and expanding the scope of learning the State language are;
- The absence of cooperation with the non-governmental sector.

### **The Non-governmental Sector**

More often than not, representatives of non-governmental organizations do not have leverages necessary to influence the reform process in the system of education due to the policy of distancing themselves and real isolation from the non-governmental sector. Meanwhile, activities of non-governmental organizations of ethnic minorities in this sphere are absolutely minimal, and sometimes these activities entail support for secondary schools, where the language of this or that ethnic minority is used as a language of education, in terms of providing those schools with textbooks published in native languages of ethnic minorities.

### **International Community**

The international community, being aware of the problematical character of the current situation, is trying to contribute to the ongoing reforms through rendering financial assistance to the State central structures, and such a policy, unfortunate, has

not bring any substantial results up until now. Meanwhile, the NGO sector, very often, is left out and deprived adequate attention, thereby NGOs have no real leverages to exert influence on the process of reforms in the system of education.

### **Recommendations**

- To accelerate the process of reform of the education system in general, and in the sphere of education of ethnic minorities, in particular, support educational initiatives and novelties, create conditions necessary for survival and development of educational system, legal and economic protection of education and its subjects, make prognoses and take preventive measures.
  - To establish centers on civil and legal education, with simultaneous teaching of the State language.
  - The Central Authorities should secure conditions for representatives of ethnic minorities that would enable them to learn the State language in proper manner
  - To set up a group of NGOs to carry out monitoring on implementation of State programs in the sphere of education, including on the program of teaching the State language.
  - To consider the issue to what extent the Georgian Authorities are committed to the principle of equal level of education in all secondary schools, to put it otherwise, level of education in those State schools, where languages of ethnic minorities are used as languages of instruction, should be brought to the level of education of those schools, where the State language is used as the language of instruction.
  - To consider the possibility of usage of languages of ethnic minorities as a language of instruction in technical, professional and university establishments of higher education.
  - An educational plan, envisaging teaching of professional-technical disciplines on native languages of students should be elaborated in a manner, which would allow the students, after graduation, to work un accordance his/her profession using both minority and the State language.
  - Educational programs related to ethnic minorities, should be worked out through active participation of ethnic minority organizations.
  - To introduce bilingual education in kindergartens, increase consultative support and improve methodological training of teachers of kindergartens
  - To secure State-sponsored training of teachers of bi-/multilingual schools.
  - To create structures aimed at elaboration and assessment of educational programs for those establishments, where languages of minorities are used as languages of instruction.
  - To create new principles of organization of educational process, including bi-/multilingual education
1. The process of taking decisions in the sphere of educational policy should be carried out through participation all the interested parties, and all participants of the education system under reform should understand decisions related to the ongoing reforms.
  2. While making decision in the sphere of educational policy, it is essential to identify the amount of those resources, and to do so in an unambiguous

manner, that are necessary for implementation of the taken decisions: these resources are –scientific, financial, material and personnel.

Recommendations to the Ministry of Education:

- To work out instruments that would allow to assess effectiveness of the process of bi-/multilingual education and to carry out, on a permanent basis, monitoring of this process through active participation of the NGO sector.
- To carry out research work and discussions on major issues of bi-/multilingual education.
- To carry out analysis of the situation in the education sphere, through invitation of independent experts, interested groups and organizations.
- Together with mass media, to work out a system aimed at providing information on the most important decisions taken in the sphere of education to the society.
- To create within the system of education a Directorate of education of minorities. Head of this directorate, enjoying the status of deputy Minister of Education and recommended by the public consultative council, composed of representatives of school administrations, teachers, NGOs, parents and students, should be endorsed by the Minister of Education. The Directorate should work in accordance with rules of procedure, endorsed by the Ministry of Education with the consent of the Public consultative council.