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Ana Chelidze

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ETHNO-NATIONALISTIC AND RELIGIOUS-NATIONALISTIC COMPONENTS OF IDENTITY IN POST-SOVIET GEORGIA

By Ana Chelidze

Ana Chelidze is a PhD Candidate. Department of Arts and Sciences, Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia. She is a graduate of the Georgian State University Faculty of Philosophy and Sociology, specialty of Sociology. (B.A., 2003; M.A., 2005). Since 2002 year she participated in quantitative and qualitative sociological and cross-disciplinary researches which were carried out in Georgia and Germany. She was scholar and grant receiver in different local and international organizations: Institute of Social Studies and Analyses, Heinrich Boll Foundation, Rustaveli Foundation for Georgian Studies, Humanities and Social Sciences, German Agency for Technical Organization, The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, Georgia's National Science Foundation, The Academic Swiss Caucasus Net, Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation. The scope of her interests include researching the development of local administration, government and decentralization in Georgia, religious, national and civil identity; more generally, the theory and practice of civil society.

Abstract

Deep economic and democratic changes in Georgian society in last 20 years have conditioned the transformation of social environment in such a way that people had to change their views on society and their place in the new social environment. Changing attitudes on social reality affected and transformed the whole system of social identity. Transformation processes were characterized with reduced trust and tolerance among people and different social groups and with increase or weakening of different aspects of basic identities. Difficulties emerging from the process of formation of the identity system hinder the development of integration processes in the society. For a society in transition in the conditions of normative uncertainty and devaluation of values actuality of such problems as are the lack of trust on every level of relationship and disorientation of people, is of high importance. Our starting issue is that nowadays in the framework of construction of social identity basic identity encompasses civil, national, confessional, ideological elements which determine the state of a person in the system of social coordinates. The subject of this sociological research was to study the role of religion and ethnicity in the modern configuration of identity in Georgian society.

The proposed scholarly article involves studying the process of formation of nationalistic and religious identities in the context of the transforming Georgian society. This subject of research is relevant because the process of identity formation is currently in progress in Georgia. Sociological research into Georgian features of identity is connected with the process of formation of democratic values in Georgia. The components of identity are connected with the degree of trust in and integration into the society of various social groups and social actors.

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It is essential to draw attention to the issues of inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations and social integration, as, despite the fact that there is a general opinion that inequality and discrimination discourses against ethnic and religious minorities are a problem, in reality these issues remain outside the sphere of public interest. The material used by foreign scholars for the description of the post-Soviet regions is mainly based on empirical quantitative research data; qualitative analysis of religious-nationalistic components of identity in Georgia is sparse. These circumstances created a need for research into the conditions of ethnic and religious minorities, which will help to better our understanding of the subject and find ways of overcoming the existing problems.

The objective of this sociological research was to study the role of religion and ethnicity in the modern configuration of identity in Georgian society, the ways of constructing social identity with the help of religion and ethnicity, and the discursive forms in which this identity is expressed. For an adequate understanding of the modern processes of formation of a civil society in post-Soviet countries it is very important: (1) to understand the base on which values—traditional (ethno-religious) or a civil society—is the process of identification with the state realized or tends to be realized; (2) to evaluate which specific configurations of civil and ethnic and religious dimensions of social identity can promote achievement of not only political stability but also the process of democratization in Georgia in modern conditions.

The research proposes a hypothesis that in Georgian society religious-nationalistic views and value orientations prevail over civil/liberal ones. Religious nationalism in post-Soviet Georgia is a complex topic fraught with sensitive questions. Here we will try to raise only some of them. Do traditional values contradict and hinder the establishment of a civil society, and do they prevail over civil values here? Are human rights in Georgia declared only formally? Does non-acceptance of people of different ethnic origin and religious convictions, i.e. xenophobia, exist? What is "the ideal type" of Georgian citizen? What is "the ideal model" of state organisation? Does the Orthodox Church try to dictate its own values to society, which mainly do not coincide with civil values? Are stereotypes, like “Georgia for Georgians,” for the Orthodox widespread among the Georgian Orthodox?

The sociological approach to the study of religious-nationalistic configurations of identity involved, first of all, their study in the context of a transforming state and society. In order to get comprehensive, objective information about the subject under study it was important to observe the principle of triangulation, which involved the logical use and
combination of various quantitative and qualitative research methods. These involved the analysis of social identity nationalism, religious nationalism, social capital, and civic consciousness. The information and data connected with the subject under study has been gathered according to the so-called Desk Research method; using the methodology and taking into consideration its relevance to the subject under study the press analysis was carried out, Georgian religious and secular press has been analyzed, as were in-depth interviews with experts in relevant fields and with representatives of various Orthodox and non-Orthodox churches to outline opinions about social identity and mechanisms of its construction in different social groups.

While analyzing discriminatory attitudes and phrases connected with religious and ethnic minorities in in-depth interviews and in the press, the main focus has been on the following inquires: Against which religious and ethnic minorities is the hostility expressed most frequently and harshly (Jehovah’s Witnesses, Catholics, Baptists, Armenians, Azeris, Kurds, etc.)? In what form and how strongly did different social groups express discriminatory attitudes towards religious and ethnic minorities such as the Orthodox congregation, clergy, journalists, society, and the state? Namely, how well did they realize the existence and acuteness of the problem of discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities in Georgia? Did they understand specifically which and what kinds of phrases are discriminatory and how much did they comment on them? How much is it encouraged to fight against expressions of intolerance and rejection of people of different religion and nationality? Does the leadership of the state refuse to comment on discriminatory incidents or phrases connected with religious and ethnic minorities, and if they do comment, how do they evaluate them? How does society as a whole and non-governmental organizations in particular react to this problem? And so forth.

Civil Values vs. Religious and Nationalistic Values

The idea of a civil society is connected with the spread of ideas of democracy, liberalism, and individualism in Western Europe. Development of democracy and accordingly of a civil society is closely connected with ideological pluralism, giving priority to the protection of human rights and liberties, acknowledging the supremacy of law and equality in its face, development of capitalism and appearance of private property. It becomes clear that the idea of a civil society was primarily created in Western countries and did not
exist for a long time in relatively large parts of the world, namely in such societies where a strict economic-ideological hierarchy determining even personal preferences existed. Civil society is a specific type of a Western society which protects a person not only from the tyrannical state policy but also frees it from subjugation by the society itself. Antithesis to it is a totalitarian society of the Soviet type. Georgia also used to be such a country. It is now trying to get rid of Soviet ideology and consciousness and become a democratic country, which implies creating a civil society and establishing civil values. However, in Georgia this process is still at the primary stage of development and it is still facing numerous problems.

New economic structure, division of labor and contract-based economic relations in modern Western society has weakened the role of religion, traditions, ethnic origin, and customs in human life. According to Ernest Gellner a person has become "modular". This implies that, like a piece of furniture or a toy meccano can consist of modules which can easily be combined into different combinations if desired, a modern person is also able to become a member of different associations, take part in functioning of different institutions, and leave them when they consider it necessary (Gellner 1995). Flexible, mobile, changeable and versatile relationships are formed between people. It is the existence of a modular person that guarantees the formation of a civil society.

Contrary to this, in post-Soviet countries (including Georgia) human existence is closely connected with the traditional environment. A person cannot easily change his/her entourage, profession, status, religion, etc. as this change can result in an exile from the community (village, commune, caste, clan) of which he/she is a member. Banishment from a community is a tragedy as he/she is not prepared to exist in a different community. In Georgian society the importance of historically formed myths, rituals, norms and ways of life is so influential that the state cannot substitute them and hence cannot fully subjugate a person. Therefore the transformation into a modern, liberal-democratic state is hampered. But in this kind of society a person is still not free, even though he/she is not subject to serious political pressure or succeeds in resisting it. Being suppressed by society itself, he/she is still not free.

In the modern state, in the society which is in the process of transformation, the important role belongs to inertial thinking and lack of new life experience for one part of Georgians. These kinds of positions and attitudes are less effective, as they are hindering formation of new social connections and slowing down or terminating the process of
adaptation. However, we must admit that not only transforming Georgian society, but all modern societies are permanently changing identity space.

Historical experience shows us that there are no empty, untaken spaces in the system of social identity. Following the loss or weakening of identity, which formerly used to satisfy the need for internal security and social integration, people are forced to search for alternatives. Often these alternatives are national and religious identities, which are considered symbols of stability and ties with tradition, which in turn makes them more robust. In this sense national and religious identities are important integrating constants, especially if other orientations are blurred or lost.

Deep economic and democratic changes in Georgian society over the last 20 years have conditioned the transformation of social environment in such a way that people had to change their views of society and their place in the new social environment. Changing attitudes regarding social reality influenced and transformed the whole system of social identity. Focusing on social identity lets us identify not only the role of the person in the social environment, but also his/her possibilities for further motion within this environment. Transformation processes were characterized with reduced trust and tolerance among people and social groups, and with increase or weakening of different aspects of basic identities. Our starting point must be the fact that basic identity encompasses civil, national, confessional, and ideological elements which determine a person’s position in a system of social coordinates. Difficulties emerging from the formation of identity inhibit the development of integration. For a society in transition, the disorientation and lack of trust in all manner of relationships that result from conditions of normative uncertainty and a crisis in values are of high importance.

In the construct of group identity the principle of tolerance is important, which indicates permanent need of communication, readiness to receive different people just as they are and cooperate with them. Their readiness of understanding can be expressed in following: Admitting "others", "alien’s" individuality, freedom, moral values, equality and social justice; Respecting interests of "others", "aliens" and other groups; Restrain political, ideological and other kinds of extremism; Admitting stable relationships and compromises as the best way of solving social conflicts; Orientation on searching social agreement, etc. All this reduces hostile attitudes among different groups and increases trust and sense of unity with the social environment. Hence, tolerance significantly reduces distrust and marginalization of "others", etc.
"aliens". Acts of tolerance generally not only reduce mistrust, but also generate conditions for stable social environment and political order.

Following Robert Patnam, where people communicate and cooperate with each other, achievement of political and economic development of society becomes easier. His research confirms that functioning of democratic institutes depends largely on social capital – a phenomenon, which is closely tied with the notion of social trust. Communication and cooperation generally should be the result of rational calculation and not only the characteristic habit of a "good citizen". Rational understanding of the fact that cooperation generally has positive effects on society does not provoke such activity easily. The fact that different societies show different aptitudes for communication and cooperation indicates that, despite economic, intellectual, material and other preconditions that are necessary for the successful development of society, the need for one more social precondition is evident: its social capital – a high level of trust among members of society (Patnam 1993).

In the present research the term civil society is used in its wide sense, which was established in Western Europe. We deal with not only the process of expressing political will, making decisions and taking control, but also with a wide sense of forming society as a result of open collective activity on the opposite side of the state and market. This includes participation in the activity of political parties, non-governmental organizations, civil initiatives or social movements, as well as cooperation with other organizations beneficial for the society. The concept of a civil society is closely related to civil values and civil activity.

In a civil society citizens are people who take part in the creation and perfection of the society and state. In most Western societies such participation is realized through different associations, civil initiatives, non-governmental organizations, interest groups, etc. These associations represent the nucleus of a civil society, as a strong civil society requires a strong organization or self-organization. The great importance is given to the participation of citizens in the process of decision-making and government. Attention is paid not to the forms of organization of citizens but to the activeness of the citizens, that is to the motivation of citizens to create organizations and associations and participate in their work. A civil society is one which gives all its citizens a possibility to influence the life of the whole state and society in general through organizations and associations created on their initiative. In developed democratic countries such values are civil values as opposed to non-liberal values which first of all include religious and ethnic identification. In developed democratic
countries, civil values as opposed to non-liberal values make this kind of involved citizenship possible. First of all non-liberal values is the over-evaluation of religious and ethnic identification.

The American political scientist Ronald Inglehart (1997) was involved in composition and application of a questionnaire for Euro barometer. He and his colleagues conducted three research projects to identify and analyse world values -of materialistic and post-materialistic values in societies of the European Union and other countries. They surveyed more than seventy countries and the results of these surveys. Their results showed a tendency to move from materialistic to post-materialistic values in developed societies. The concept and method of Inglehart was used for the study of values of Georgian society conducted by foundation Open Society-Georgia in 2006. The study showed results that allowed researchers to conclude that Georgian society has a mix of traditional and modern values. According to Inglehart, post-materialistic values are such values as democratization, quality of life, humanization of society, greater emphasis on individual freedom and less on authority; Traditional values are those values that are oriented toward self-survival and stability more than self-realization and improvement of quality of life. Modern values are oriented toward more participation in the development of one’s country (Inglehart 1997). In Georgian society, liberal values such as tolerance, equality, citizens’ involvement in decision-making, justice, etc., are understood on very superficial and declarative levels or are suppressed by non-tolerant social groups’ stereotypes and prejudices. The research showed once more that the country is in a transitional period not only regarding economic and political developments, but also regarding understanding and establishing liberal values of democracy and understanding importance and priority of values of open civil society (Danelia 2007).

There are two characteristic features differentiating Georgian understanding of the concept of civil society: strict opposition between the state and civil society and an expressed institutional dependency. Civil society in Georgia is thought to represent "an opposition strategy". An individual’s option to not be a part of state institutions is a characteristic of civil society. Consequently, the structure of cooperation between public organizations and state institutions is not clearly defined. Despite this, the Georgian population greatly relies on the state. This paternalistic attitude is, in a sense, the opposite side of the principle of mutual non-interference. Its roots go back to the pre-Soviet tradition, involving the faith in 'the kind Tsar'. Great expectations connected with the state and specifically a hope for care by the state result
in many years of disappointment. Gradually, one begins to realize that the state will not take
care of each person any more, and that one has to take care of oneself.

Georgian civil society carries a burden of an institutional and organizational
character. It is always public organizations that are in the centre of attention, and the citizens
very rarely function as a subject of a civil society. Civil activity of citizens is supposed to be
on voluntary public basis and should be independent (at least initially) from the institutional
point of view. Contrary to this, institutional understanding, implying professional activity in
this sphere, prevails in Georgia.

Civil activities and the existence of civil values are directly connected with the degree
citizens identify with their state and with their faith in their role in the country. Georgian
citizens are alienated from their state. They do not consider it as the protector of their rights
and interests and regard it only as an instrument of violence. Consequently, the level of
identification with the state is low, and is mainly compensated for by the identification with
religious and ethnic identities. National and confessional self-identification in Georgia is
taken for granted. Ethnic identification and a sense of isolation developed a strong attitude of
“our own versus the alien”, which by now is very widespread.

Ethnic Nationalism and Religious Nationalism

"The national question" is constructed differently in different countries, depending not
only on the political situation but on the sense given to the concept of nation as well. The
20th century has become the first period in the history of humankind when a single political
position was established everywhere--the position of nationalism (Kohn 1967). Development
of ideas of nationalism causes activation of nations everywhere and creates an urge towards
reorganization of the society. The ideas of nationalism vary from country to country
depending on historical conditions and features of a social structure. Having become a
universal phenomenon, nationalism now becomes a dividing power unless it is suppressed by
liberalism, tolerance, and tendency to compromise. Accentuating national sovereignty and
cultural differences is not likely to strengthen cooperation between nations, which causes
concern as technical and economic development lead to a great dependence of the nations of
the world on one another.

The idea of nationalism has two main conceptual meanings: the first, liberal

nationalism, refers to the idea of nation in its civil-political meaning, and to the legal and rational concept of citizenship, which implies identification of a nation with the citizens of the state. This means that the state is being formed by "civic nations" that are free of ethnic and religious stereotypes. Analysing European history, Ernest Gellner wrote about this meaning of nationalism and came to the conclusion that the concept of "nation" in this sense is a product of urban industrial civilization. As a classic constructivist, Gellner puts forward the thesis that nations do not create states; the state creates the nation and formulates national interests (Gellner 1994). Every nation is an "imagined community" (Anderson 1983) not in the sense that it does not really exist, but that belonging to a nation is determined by each person's self-consciousness.

The second, ethnic nationalism, refers to the definition of nation in an ethnic context. Nationalism in Georgia should be understood with this second definition. This kind of nationalism is a perception of social relations in ethnic terms--it implies nationalism of an ethnic group, the main value of which is the sense of being part of a nation (in an ethnic sense). Hence ethnic nationalism in Georgia results in identification not with the state but with the ethnic community.

The problem of discrimination against ethnic and/or religious minorities mainly develops in societies where a nation (in its ethnic sense) and loyalty to it is recognised as the dominant value, and fighting for its interests is considered superior to all other values (such as state, nation--in its political sense, mankind, individual). A nation is defined as a unity of people sharing common ancestors and origin--"unity of blood" (Giddens 1993). Liah Greenfield in her book "Five Roads to Modernity" (1992) describes ethnic nationalism as determined genetically, entirely independent of the individual volition, and thus inherent. According to this kind of nationalism, no one can become part of a nation through adopting its language, culture and traditions if their blood and origin belongs to a different nation; that is, one has to be born a German, Pole, or Georgian. This means that a representative of a different ethnic and/or religious group may be a citizen but he/she can never become part of the nation. This results in emphasizing the importance and priority of one’s own nation over others, which sometimes reaches extreme forms.

Ethnic nationalism is often expressed through religious nationalism. According to American sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer, who has played a significant role in developing the term "religious nationalism"
In the contemporary political climate, therefore, religious and ethnic nationalism provides a solution to the problem of secular politics and global control in a multicultural world. As secular ties have begun to unravel in the post-Soviet and post-colonial era, local leaders have searched for new anchors to ground their social identities and political loyalties. Many have turned to ethnicity and religion. What is ideologically significant about these ethno-religious movements is their creativity. Although many of the framers of the new nationalisms have reached back in history for ancient images and concepts that will give them credibility, theirs are not simply efforts to resuscitate old ideas from the past. These are contemporary ideologies that meet present-day social and political needs. (Juergensmeyer 2003)

Religious nationalism has dual pillars: religious fundamentalism (with its emphasis on a chosen people dedicated to the realization of God’s will on Earth) and xenophobic nationalism. Xenophobic nationalism compliments religious fundamentalism and together they compose the ideological foundation for religious nationalism. Religious nationalism implies nationalism characterized by religious shades. It is a tendency to identify as a representative of a nation or ethnic group, with being part of a certain confession. In the concept of "religious nationalism" the word "nationalism" is dominant and it can be called religious only in the case when nationalism needs to be expressed in a certain form. Religion can serve as one of such forms. This is not just an emotionally neutral tendency; it involves a certain amount of aggression towards those who are not members of this confession or nation.

Ethnicity and nationalism have been characterized as basic sources and forms of social and cultural identification. As such, they are ways of identifying oneself and others, of construing sameness and difference, and of situating and placing oneself in relation to others. Understood as perspectives on the world rather than things in the world, they are ways of understanding and identifying oneself, making sense of one’s problems and predicaments, identifying one’s interests, and orienting one’s action (Brubaker 2004). Religion, too, can be understood in this manner. As a principle of vision and division of the social world, to use Bourdieu's phrase, religion too provides a way of identifying and naming fundamental social groups, a powerful framework for imagining community, and a set of schemas, templates, and metaphors for making sense of the social world. (Brubaker 2011)

Religion and/or ethnicity, being closely connected with identity, represents one of the possible answers to the question: "who are we?" but being part of a social group at the same time emphasizes "who we are not". Max Weber argued "Almost any kind of similarity or contrast of physical type and of habits, can induce the belief that affinity or dis-affinity exists between groups that attract or repel each other" (Weber 1978). This way of putting it...
underscores the fact that the discourse of ethnicity at once homogenizes and differentiates (Verdery 1993). The very artificially selected ethnic indicators that create "affinities" among insiders simultaneously create "dis-affinities" with outsiders (Little 1995). Consequently, our identity can have not only positive meaning, but also cause conflicts. Religion and/or ethnicity is integrally connected with other components of our identity. When use of these components has a negative character, religion and/or ethnicity often becomes part of the conflict and exacerbates it.

**Ethnic and Religious Diversity and Influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church**

The legitimacy of the Georgian political system—Georgia being a poly-ethnic, multi-confessional, cultural-pluralistic state—largely depends on the extent to which various ethnic and religious groups constituting civil society consider the present system of state organization to reflect their ethnic and religious identity. Issues of inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations and social integration are of strategic importance in Georgia. On the territory of the former Soviet Union, ethnic conflicts, which developed during the process of formation of states, were based on a prior conception of one privileged ethnic group, under which representatives of other nationalities often felt they were second class citizens.

For modern Georgia the acuteness of problems connected with inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations is a result of their development in the context of construction of the national state. The existence of a national state is based on an ethnic principle. Hence, existence of any ethnic minority in the state involves potential danger, especially in case of their compact settlement rather than settlement throughout the same areas as the dominant ethnic group. Indeed, if in a national state representatives of ethnic minorities are isolated from the dominant ethnic culture, if they have a different memory of history and do not regard the religion, history and culture of the dominant ethnic group as that of their own, if they do not have equal means and possibilities, they naturally cannot feel themselves full citizens. Such alienation from the state automatically creates separatist attitude and objective reasons for conflicts.

Along with other nations, Georgia is populated with concentrated settlements of Armenians and Azeris. It is very important for Georgian home policy to take into account the
interests and demands of these and others representative of different nationalities, their social and cultural adaptation and their integration into Georgian society, while retaining their national consciousness, language and cultural identity. There are three prominent ethnic groups in Georgia at present: Georgians (83.8% of population), Azeris (6.5%) and Armenians (5.7%). The remaining 4% include smaller groups, including Abkhazians, Ossetians, Russians, Ukrainians, Kurds/Yesids, Greeks, and other (Svanidze 2002).

The main problems connected with ethnic minorities lie in the area of civil and political participation and sense of full citizenship. It is a known fact in social psychology that mutual estrangement of different social groups, including ethnic groups, leads to the creation of attitudes and stereotypes with regards to their representatives, which, in its turn, can lead to conflict. Minorities often consider themselves as marginalized in the Georgian society and discriminated against. These factors are aggravated by economic hardship. One of the most important factors leading to conflict is lack of communication between the parties or distortion of information. Consequently, when trying to eliminate ethnic stereotypes and prejudices determining mutual rejection by different ethnic groups, dialogue between representatives of the groups should be based on topical issues common and understandable to all the participants.

Lack of language skills and the discomfort associated with it can create barriers to relocation and social interaction with different ethnic groups, even in regions native to the minorities. Communities normally have only one language—the numbers of ethnic minorities communicating with their neighbors and friends predominantly in Armenian (in "Samtskhe-Javakheti" region) and Azerbaijani (in "Kvemo Kartli" region) languages are roughly equal to their proportion in the regions. Ethnically 'closed' neighborhoods naturally restrict opportunities for integration and stimulate mistrust and suspicion. This considerably hinders their chances to participate in public life, communicate with state institutions, compete for jobs, and be informed about the situation in the country. In post-Soviet Georgia the main language of communication for ethnic minorities remained Russian. After the "Rose Revolution" in 2003 the changes in State policy effected, among other areas, the integration of ethnic minorities. There was migration from densely populated Russian regions, and then travel was restricted, which limited the use of Russian language. A precondition for integration of and intercultural communication between different nationalities along with respect of each other's cultural specificities and religion, is the existence of a common
The first nationwide (excluding Abkhazia and South Ossetia) statistical survey of the religious communities of Georgia was carried out in the spring 2002 at the request of the Liberty Institute: religious leaders were interviewed about the number of members in their communities. Different religious groups reside in Georgia. The Orthodox Christianity is the dominant religion, though there are also a wide variety of other faiths. The majority of ethnic Georgians are Orthodox Christians. So are most of the Ossetians, Russians, Greeks, Abkhaz, Assyrians and Udes, and a small part of Armenians. The overwhelming majority of the latter belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church. There are also small numbers of Roman Catholics or Protestants among the Georgians, as well as in other above-mentioned ethnic groups. The Catholic community is ethnically very diverse (Georgians, Armenians, Assyrians, Poles, Germans, Russians, etc.). The Muslim population of Georgia includes ethnic Georgians (part of Ajarians) and other ethnic groups (Azeri, Kists, Dagestanis, Abkhaz). Georgia’s Kurdish community is made up of Yazidis, Christian Kurds, and Muslim Kurds. Judaism is the religion of the Georgian Jews. Most of the Germans belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, while a small number of them are Roman Catholics (CIPDD 2009). The number of non-Orthodox residents of Georgia amounted to 823,100 – or 18.5% of the total population – in the spring 2002. The National Statistics Department of Georgia carried out the census of population by religion. The census results, which were published in 2004, revealed that the non-Orthodox population of Georgia, including atheists, nihilists, and agnostics, totals 705,302 residents, or 16.1% of the total population (source: Tolerance Centre, Ombudsman’s Office).

Religious intolerance is another problem related to civic integration. The Georgian constitution separates church and state and guarantees religious freedom. However, through the 2002 constitutional agreement between the church and the state, the Georgian Orthodox Church enjoys some privileges, including tax benefits and rights to participate in decision-making on cultural heritage and other issues.

The overview of national arrangements in terms of freedom of religion highlights two important aspects of the relation between state and religion: the way states organize relations with their majority religions and the way states deal with minorities. The latter aspect often tends to attract more attention from international institutions, as there are clear international requirements regarding the treatment of religious minorities. On the contrary, there is no common standard dictating how states should organize relations with the majority religion. (Papuashvili 2008)
Adoption of the Constitutional Agreement does not contribute to the elimination of the numerous problems that religious minorities are facing in Georgia. The opposite is true. Adoption of the Concordat has deepened the gap between the Orthodox Church and other denominations in many ways and has provoked religious intolerance.

Recent opinion polls demonstrate that the Georgian Church (and Patriarch in particular) is the most trusted entity in Georgia. One of the numerous examples is the Georgian National Study carried out in November 2012. According to its results, 94% of the respondents consider the Georgian Orthodox Church one of the most favorable for confidence of all suggested institutions (IRI 2013). The Church often acts as a mediator for neutralizing political and social tensions. Simultaneously, there is a demonstrated trend of radicalization of the Orthodox identity (alienation and phobias against non-Orthodox and non-Georgians). However, since the state policy took a firm position, especially since 2005, incidents of radicalism such as those taking place in the past (pogroms and verbal assault of Jehovah’s witnesses and other religious groups) have significantly declined. Meanwhile, there is an ongoing discussion regarding the issue of participation between the church, the state, and other religious groups. The rise of the civil and political role of the dominant church is accompanied by its increased influence over the society. For Georgian society undergoing the process of modernization, the issues of compatibility of religiousness and democratic values and tolerance, remains an acute topic. A research study on world values conducted in Georgia in 2006 and researches conducted by the Conrad Adenauer Foundation and the International Center of Conflict and Negotiations (ICCN) in years 2000-2002, 2005-2006, and 2008 in Georgia, revealed that attitudes towards aliens, levels of tolerance, and the religiousness in Georgia are variable. The values observed are typical to traditional and to industrialized societies (Open Society Georgia Foundation 2006). The number of citizens who consider themselves believers is very high. It can be concluded that in Georgia religion is one of the main dimensions of social identification (along with nationality), and being non-religious is not appreciated by the society.

Because the Orthodox Church has for centuries been—and still is—one of the most influential institutions of Georgian society, and because Orthodox Christianity as a system of ideology has defined fundamental features of Georgian ethnicity and culture, the analysis of relations between the Church and society is important. The Church is not only an important social institution, but also influential center of power. The Georgian Orthodox Church is an
independent force, which has its own interests and the main sources of power is its authority and social capital (trust). In post-Soviet Georgia, trust in the transforming social and state institutions has diminished. The Georgian Orthodox Church is an exception. Its influence and the growth in the number of its followers (the congregation) as we have mentioned before, have been proven by numerous sociological studies. Due to its authority and the trust placed in it, the Orthodox Church has significant resources for influencing the formation of social consciousness, and it is using them. Consequently, the views and value orientation of the clergy strongly affect society, especially the Orthodox congregation.

Societal attitude towards religion and the influence of the church on Georgia's policymaking are to a large extent determined by the historical legacy and the role of the Orthodox Christianity in the Georgians' self-identification as a nation. The identity crisis experienced on the eve and in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet break-up led to a revival of ethnic nationalism in Georgia, which also included a strong religious component and resulted in the adoption of policies hostile towards minorities. (Middel 2008)

Among Georgian Orthodox Clergy, Orthodoxy is mainly viewed as "national ideology" and "the national role" of the church for them is higher than its social role. Consequently other religious trends and ethnic groups are considered to be a menace to the Georgian state and national integrity, which provokes aggressive attitude towards other religious trends and ethnic groups. The ideal for the Georgian Orthodox Church and its clergy is "an Orthodox Georgian" and such discourses influence values and attitudes of a large part of Georgian society. A large part of the society strongly identifies with the Georgian Orthodox Church. Many Georgians consider belonging to the Orthodox Church a precondition for genuine belonging to the "true" (ethnic) Georgian nation. This puts religious minorities in Georgia at disadvantage. A problem arises where non-Georgian Orthodox or non-Orthodox Georgians are concerned; neither of these is fully integrated into society. And this is especially true for the non-Georgian non-Orthodox, causing infringement of their rights and contributing inequality and discrimination discourses against ethnic and religious minorities. Sometimes it even results in identity falsification practices (i.e. to declare false identity to society or group in order to avoid rejection and alienation, for example—not to be atheist or follow other religions in order to simulate the sympathy for the Orthodox unity, or to change the surname in order to simulate identity of ethnic Georgian and etc.)
The Dominant Religious Nationalistic Discourses

The values dominant in the state and in society are reflected/illustrated in the press, including reflecting and clearly outlining attitudes of society towards religious and ethnic minorities and the policy of the state in connection with this. The capability of the press is not limited to just reconstructing the environment; it also influences the formation of important social and political processes. Apart from this, mass media strongly influences the formation of public opinion. The "impulses" conveyed to the public are what matter.

Stimulating discriminatory attitudes towards religious and ethnic minorities using mass media is not a new phenomenon. It exists even in media meeting acclaimed journalistic standards, having high ratings and distribution and having serious and solid content. This problem is not characteristic exclusively of the Georgian media and press. In English-speaking countries it is referred to with the term hate speech. The term should not be understood literally as "the language of hatred", that is, causing hatred (because of national or religious identity); it implies a kind of insensitivity on the part of the press towards ethnic and religious minorities, something that is called "political incorrectness". The term hate speech implies a unity of texts (as well as headlines, photos and other elements) in mass media, which directly or indirectly assist the development of national or religious hostility and negative attitude. There is a strong tendency of prejudice against ethnic minorities who are often described as a disloyal part of the population. This prejudice is often expressed in the Georgian media.

Most claims relating to the protection of minorities in Georgia are based on ethnicity rather than religion. However in several cases, it is difficult to draw the line between claims relating to the exercise of religious rights and those relating to the exercise of the rights of ethnic minorities. (Middel 2008)

Study of Georgian Public Defender’s Annual Reports and US State Department’s International Religious Freedom Reports reveals improvements of freedom of religion and belief. Based on the analysis it is evident that the tendency of religious extremism was neutralized to some extent after reaching its peak in late 90s. In 1999-2003, there were frequent episodes of violence against religious minority groups, including physical violence, verbal harassment, and disruption of services and meetings. The new government was fairly successful at curbing this violence, but religious prejudice persists. Citizens generally do not interfere with traditional (Orthodox, Muslim, or Jewish) religious groups; however, there is
widespread suspicion of non-traditional ones. Government officials contribute to this
negative attitude by sometimes making derogatory statements about certain religious
minorities, especially Jehovah's Witnesses. Repeatedly, public opinion polls indicated that a
majority of citizens believe that non-traditional minority religious groups are detrimental to
the state and that the prohibition of some of these groups is desirable (International Religious

While the number of violent attacks towards religious minorities has decreased since
2002, the widespread culture of intolerance towards religious and ethnic minorities results in
everyday discrimination. Experts have singled out several characteristic features of Orthodox
nationalism in Georgia, the existence of which is basically proved by the analyses of
interviews as well as the reviews of press. The prevailing discriminatory attitude of Georgian
media greatly contributes to the problem.

Discrimination can be expressed in different forms—from extremely criminal (direct
violence and encouragement of national and religious discrimination) to extremely mild
(insensitive jokes on religious or national subjects or simply mentioning nationalities or
religions in a negative context). The following tendencies of discrimination have been
encountered in different analyzed material: identification of a Georgian with an Orthodox--
emphasizing that faith is determined genetically, independent of the individual volition or
choice; it is inherited. ("Georgian gene is Orthodox gene", "Georgia for Georgians, for the
Orthodox"); Claiming the superiority of the Georgian nation and Georgian Orthodox religion
over others; "National messianism" expressed in the idea of being "chosen people" ("God
loves Georgians more than other nations"; "Miracles happen only in Georgia", "Georgia is
the country which will save the rest of humankind"); Outlining the special qualities of the
Georgian language and alphabet; Negative attitude to religious or ethnic minorities which is
justified by the negative influence they are claimed to have on the Georgian people--accusing
certain religious and ethnic groups of negative influence on the public and state ("deprivation
of national identity", "They're fighting against Georgians, against the Orthodox", "They're
trying to take away our national identity" etc.); Creating a negative image of religious or
ethnic groups (which is expressed more with the tone of the text or conversation rather than
specific accusations); Justifying historic facts of violence and discrimination (phrases such
as: "After all that they've done to us..."); Publications and phrases questioning widely
accepted historical facts of violence and discrimination; Mentioning names of religious and
ethnic groups in humiliating context (often in conversation); Casting negative aspersions about certain religious and national groups (referring to their lack of culture, intellectual abilities, creative work, etc. Such ideas as: "Azeri only work in the markets" etc.); Emphasizing historical crimes of certain religious and ethnic groups ("Muslims tried to enforce their faith with sword and fire", "Armenians always used to betray Georgians", etc.); Trying to prove the criminal character of a certain religious or ethnic group (e.g. "Gypsies are thieves", etc.); Trying to prove moral defects of a certain religious or ethnic group ("Jews are mean", etc.); Emphasizing financial prosperity, disproportionate representation in government bodies and press, etc. of certain religious and ethnic groups ("They’ve taken over Georgia" etc.); Mentioning religious or ethnic groups or their representatives in an insulting, humiliating context (including emphasizing their religious and ethnic identity in news stories about crime); Incitement and attempts to prevent compact settlement of religious and ethnic minorities in the regions (e.g. "We have to expunge the Armenian infestation of Avlabari", etc.); Quoting xenophobic phrases and texts without comments; publishing obviously nationalistic propaganda in a newspaper without any comments on part the of the editors; Direct incitement to violence and discrimination (in connection with a specific situation, indicating the object of violence); Incitement of violence and discrimination in the form of general slogans (declaring violence as an acceptable means, including abstract incitement); Concealed incitement to violence and discrimination (promoting "positive", historical or modern examples of violence and discrimination, which is expressed in such phrases as: "It would be good for them if we did the following", "We should have long ago..." etc.); Stressing connections of the religious and ethnic groups with foreign forces and governments in order to discriminate against them ("Western spies", etc.); anti-globalization tendencies and denouncing liberal values; and there is more.

**Conclusion**

The readiness of various social groups or the whole society to support the ideas of nationalism or religious nationalism depends on the state of the society: including the level of economic development, political structure of the state, social-cultural factors, including the norms and values prevailing in the society, trust to the political institutions, sense of citizenship and mutual trust of the citizens, level of consciousness of unity of state, etc. In...
Western European countries, development of a civil society and existence of democracy are determined by a high level of development of all those factors, which results in a spread of relevant civil values in the society as a whole. In Georgia, all the above mentioned factors prevent the development of democracy and a civil society and assist in supporting ideas of nationalism and religious intolerance. Civil society is still in the process of development. So, traditional values, which contradict and hinder the establishment of a civil society, prevail over civil values here. Their influence is well reflected in the attitude of Georgian society to human rights, e.g. Georgia for Georgians, for the Orthodox; non-acceptance of people of different ethnic origin and religious convictions—xenophobia. Human rights in Georgia are declared formally but when people of different views and ways of life are concerned, our society is aggressive to them. This lack of tolerance, accompanied by lack of education, results in respect of any rumor and is not interested in reality. The society tries to preserve national values, which are mainly based on the above mentioned components.

References


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