

**The Bumpy Road to Democracy: Success and Failure in the Integration  
Of Ethnic Armenians in the Republic of Georgia**

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**Abstract**

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After the chaos that ensued during the 1990s, Mikheil Saakashvili came to power in 2003 seeking to rebuild Georgia into a functioning, unified state. One of the ways he tried to do this was through the integration of national minorities into Georgian mainstream society. Significant research has been done on his integration efforts with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, but much less has been done about his efforts with the Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti. This paper begins by setting the stage for Saakashvili by looking at the actions of his predecessors and how they influenced the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia. The second section provides a brief examination of important Georgian laws that will provide the framework for what Georgia has sought to achieve since independence regarding its ethnic minorities. The third section of the paper explores what integrations means and examines specific actions that the Saakashvili Administration took in this region looking at education, language, civic participation, and infrastructure rehabilitation. The fourth assesses the impact of Saakashvili's actions – where he had success and where he had failure. The fifth and final section explores why the Saakashvili Administration got the results it did and what Saakashvili's legacy is today.

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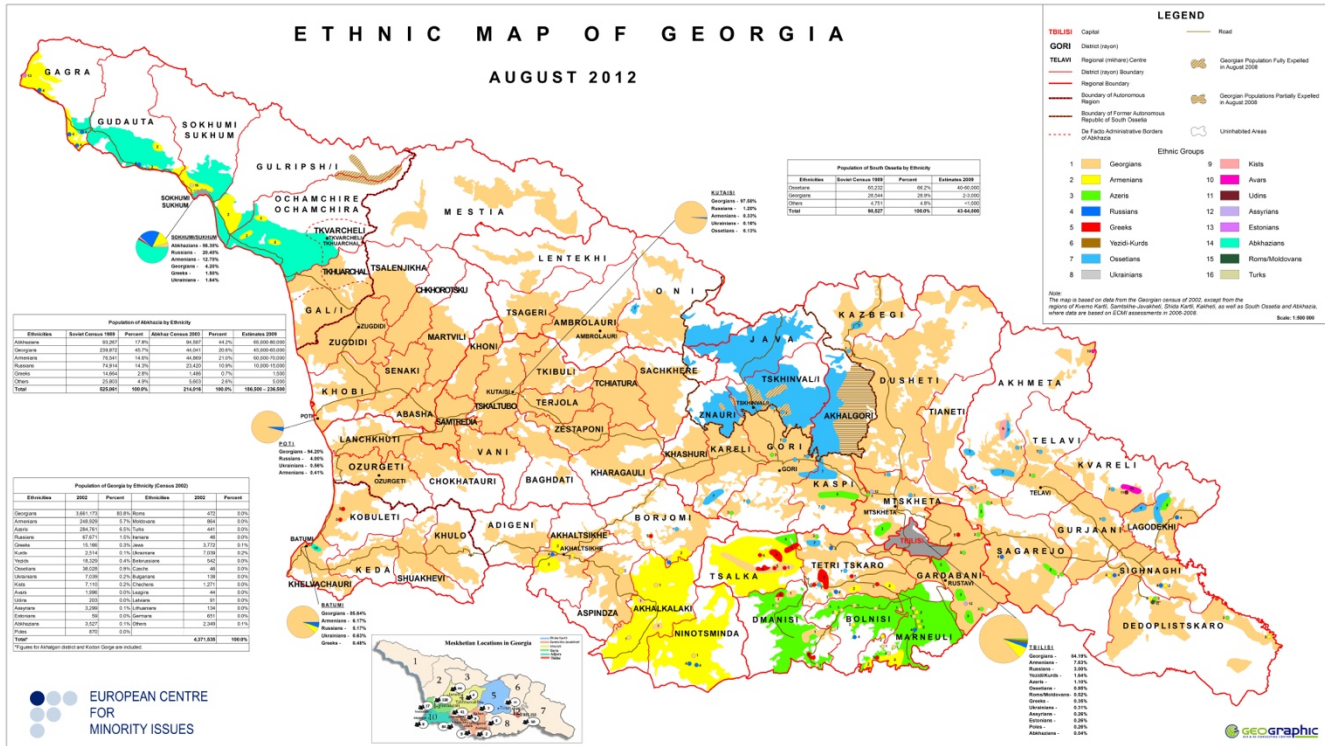
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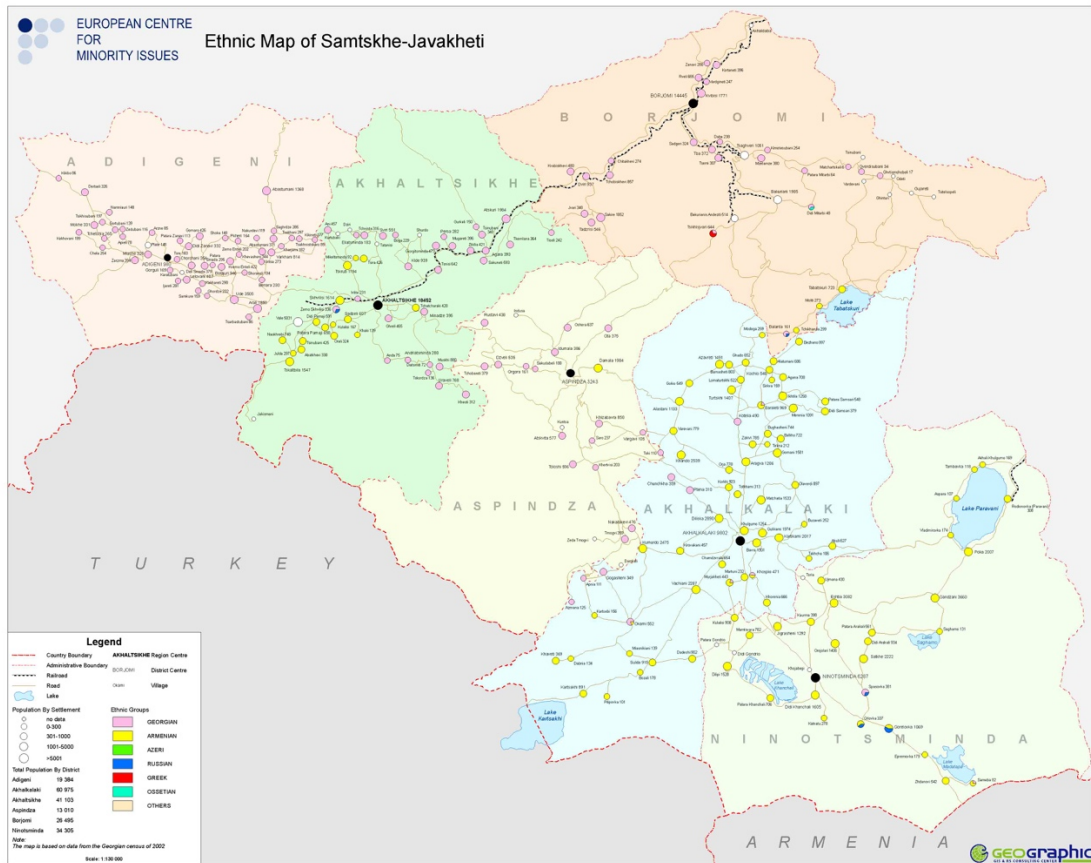
*INTRODUCTION*

When Georgia gained independence in 1991, there was hope that the country would become a unified democratic state. The hope was that Georgia would modernize and join the Western league of nations, who subscribed to the principles of human rights, equality, inclusivity, and multiculturalism. In order to accomplish this goal, however, Georgia would have to stitch together its geographic territory, which was fractured along ethnic and linguistic lines. This proved a serious hurdle. Violence erupted in the partially independent states of South Ossetia and Abkhazia; the province of Adjara continued to be a fiefdom completely outside of Tbilisi's control; and the provinces Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti remained virtually ignored throughout the 1990s. Mikheil Saakashvili came to power in 2003 vowing to unify the Georgian state and integrate its national minorities into mainstream society through initiatives addressing language, education, civic participation, and infrastructure rehabilitation.

This paper is an assessment of the rhetoric, policy, and actions undertaken during Saakashvili's presidency specifically regarding ethnic Armenians from Samtskhe-Javakheti, examining what worked, what did not, and why. The paper seeks to highlight the discrepancies between laws set forth and actions taken, starting in the 1990s and running through the Saakashvili period. It gives specific examples of what Saakashvili did to address minority integration and assesses how those efforts fared. It explores the underlying reasons for his

failures in certain areas, failures that resulted from competing definitions of what integration should be to deep-seated fears and mutual suspicion between ethnic Armenians and mainstream Georgians and ultimately, examines the reason for Saakashvili's successes, acknowledging failures of the past and sowing the seeds for a change in attitude.





*PART I*  
*SAMTSKHE-JAVAKHETI UNDER GAMSAKHURDIA AND SHEVARDNADZE*

Managing ethnic diversity in Georgia has been no easy task, and Georgia has confronted many problems when trying to deal with this issue. Prior to the Rose Revolution that swept Mikheil Saakashvili into power in 2003 and with him a new commitment to nation-building and democracy – the attempts to integrate the Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti into Georgian mainstream society were almost non-existent.

Between 1989 and 2002, the Armenian population of Georgia went from 437,211 to

248,289<sup>1</sup>, a 56 percent decline over a period of thirteen years. Presidents Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Eduard Shevardnadze, in power between 1990 and 2002, both dealt with a multitude of challenges during their tenures – violence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia chief among them – that consumed their time and energy. These conflicts, coupled with suffocating government corruption and lack of functioning institutions, left Georgia a very nearly failed state and the province of Samtskhe-Javakheti thoroughly neglected.

### ***1.1 Beginnings of Independence: Gamsakhurdia in Power***

After the Soviet Interior Ministry cracked down on Georgian demonstrators on 9 April 1989, Zviad Gamsakhurdia seized upon the fury many Georgians felt in order to push for full Georgian independence. Gamsakhurdia's views of what constituted a true nation fell very much in line with eighteenth and nineteenth century German romanticism, which embraced language as a primary indicator of belonging, identifying a single race inextricably bound to a distinct homeland that had existed since ancient times, having inalienable rights over the relevant territory. These views had a tremendous impact on the ethnic minorities who lived within the territory of the Georgian state.

Gamsakhurdia claimed that ethnic Georgians had a territorial priority over national minorities. He believed that any minority living in Georgia who did not have an indigenous claim to the land was merely a 'guest' in the country and an obstacle to the creation of an independent Georgian state. Tensions dramatically increased when Gamsakhurdia excluded all minorities from taking part in the 1990 election to secede from the Soviet Union. The biggest conflict Gamsakhurdia faced was with South Ossetia, which declared its own independence from

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<sup>1</sup> *Ethnic Groups of Georgia: Censuses 1926-2002*. European Center for Minority Issues

Georgia immediately after Georgia declared its independence from the Soviet Union. Gamsakhurdia quickly moved to annul South Ossetia's decision and stripped all of the province's autonomous rights away, leading to active warfare. The situation in Samtskhe-Javakheti, on the other hand, was far different.

While Samtskhe-Javakheti experienced neither active warfare nor active ethnic disputes, this region suffered the consequences of Gamsakhurdia's Georgian chauvinism by largely being cut off both educationally and economically from the rest of the country. When Gamsakhurdia was forced out of office in 1992, Georgia's capital of Tbilisi had little control over this region; Samtskhe-Javakheti was being led by an Armenian organization called *Javakhk*. This organization, which emerged in 1988, had as one of its stated goals "the preservation of Armenian cultural heritage in local schools, and in political terms, the achievement of autonomy for Javakheti or union with Armenia."<sup>2</sup> The group was instrumental in organizing the deployment of a unit of Javakheti Armenians to the conflict in South Caucasus region of Nagorno-Karabkh of the late 1980s - early 1990s. Because of Javakhk's influence in the conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh, it is estimated that a large number of weapons flooded the region, with some NGOs claiming that there were firearms in every house in Javakheti.<sup>3</sup> Javakhk also advocated for the creation of an Armenian autonomous region within Georgia, and organized protests against Gamsakhurdia's centrally proposed Prefects.

As Svante E. Cornell, a leading scholar on the South Caucasus mentions, Javakhk was "instrumental in organizing a 'Provisional Council of Representatives' to govern the region in the constitutional vacuum that emerged due to the stand-off with Tbilisi...in Javakheti, locals refused to accept the proposed Prefect. In Akhalkalaki, local Armenians staged demonstrations

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<sup>2</sup> Svante E. Cornell. "Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia." PhD diss., Uppsala University 2002, p. 201

<sup>3</sup> Voitsekh Guretski. "The question of Javakheti." *Caucasian Regional Studies*. Vol. 3 no. 1, 1998.

that physically prevented three consecutive centrally appointed Prefects from reaching their office buildings, because they were ethnic Georgian.”<sup>4</sup> Despite Gamsakhurdia’s meager attempts to control the various provinces of Georgia through centrally appointed Prefects, Samtskhe-Javakheti remained outside Tbilisi’s control for almost his entire tenure.

Gamsakhurdia, in other words, created a good deal more conflict than unity during his brief time in power. He brought with him a radical nationalism that sought to exalt past glories; equate the Georgian Orthodox Church with Georgian nationhood; and called the Georgian language a “Lazarus among languages,” advocating for its promotion in Georgian and non-Georgian areas alike.<sup>5</sup> His dismissal of minority interests caused him significant problems, as did his zero-sum attitude which would eventually lead to two brutal, but relatively brief civil wars where Georgians began fighting other Georgians in Tbilisi and in the western Georgian region of Samegrelo.

Though Gamsakhurdia sought a strong and unified Georgia, in reality, the state that came out of the Soviet Union faced unprecedented economic catastrophe “with neither the resources nor the expertise to create a functioning market economy.”<sup>6</sup> There was no currency and no means of controlling trade or migration on the country’s borders. Gamsakhurdia gave little thought to the actual implementation of policies and had no strategy nor did anyone else in authority during his presidency. He had used radical nationalistic rhetoric to try and unify the country, but instead he wrought further chaos when Samtskhe-Javakheti had more loyalty to its kin state of Armenia than it did Tbilisi.

## ***1.2 Shevardnadze tries to pick up the pieces***

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<sup>4</sup> Op. Cit. Cornell, p. 164

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Jones. *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence*. I.B. Tauris, 2013, p. 58

<sup>6</sup> Op. Cit. Jones, p. 53

Georgian independence, between 1990 and 1994, was a complete disaster. Two ethnic conflicts, two civil wars, the complete breakdown of law and order, and little governmental control over its various territories left the country decimated. After a coup d'état that forced Gamsakhurdia out of power on 6 January 1992, he first tried to flee to Azerbaijan, which denied him asylum due to their anger over his support of the Armenians in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. He then tried to seek refuge in Armenia but was also denied asylum, and eventually fled to Chechnya where he would die only a year later.

After the ousting of Gamsakhurdia, a military council made up of his opponents took over the government on an interim basis and appointed Eduard Shevardnadze as chairman in March 1992. Shevardnadze attempted to consolidate power, picking up the pieces of Gamsakhurdia's presidency, and worked to ratify a new constitution in 1995 that would put Georgia on the path toward democracy.

However, upon being appointed, Shevardnadze was almost immediately confronted with armed conflict in Abkhazia and was able to do little regarding the everyday affairs of Samtskhe-Javakheti. Meanwhile, the Georgian economy, while no longer in complete chaos, remained very weak, with most funds allocated toward Samtskhe-Javakheti lost to corruption. Infrastructure remained so poor in Samtskhe-Javakheti and indeed throughout Georgia that lack of maintenance created both physical and psychological barriers for integration and inclusion in Georgian society.

After the conflict with Abkhazia ended in 1994, the security situation in Georgia remained fragile, and would remain that way throughout Shevardnadze's term. There was a contentious atmosphere in Samtskhe-Javakheti; reports of minor skirmishes and tensions were

common throughout the mid- to late-1990s. Armenian diaspora in Russia and the United States “began raising the question of Javakheti’s status, although no overt support for the demand to grant it authority ha[d] been voiced by the Armenian government.”<sup>7</sup> This worried leaders in the Georgian government, who had acknowledged the potential for Samtskhe-Javakheti to erupt into active ethnic conflict just as South Ossetia and Abkhazia had done. In addition, *Javakhk* again demanded autonomy for Samtskhe-Javakheti in the mid-1990s, declaring that unless Georgia agreed, Javakheti Armenians would “divorce their Georgian brothers in a civilized way.”<sup>8</sup>

Despite this obvious threat, the group mostly fell apart. However, the Shevardnadze government did in fact appease Samtskhe-Javakheti by allowing local Armenians to control the lucrative taxation of traffic in the region.

Despite Shevardnadze’s attempts at bringing forth a more inclusive, democratic agenda, Georgia was marred by failing institutions and internal and external economic upheaval, keeping his hold on the country together by mere threads. The central government had little control outside of Tbilisi and the cities of Kutaisi and Rustavi. In an attempt to gain better control of Samtskhe-Javakheti, the Shevardnadze government had to engage in a careful dance with Russia and Armenia.

There were serious concerns in Tbilisi that the Russian military, with its base in Samtskhe-Javakheti, could be drawn into the conflict as it had in Abkhazia even though Moscow made no public show of supporting the rights of Javakheti Armenians as it had with the Abkhazians and South Ossetians. Still, in order to squelch such a possibility, the Shevardnadze government began negotiations to close down the various Russian bases on Georgian territory, including the one in Akhalkalaki.

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<sup>7</sup> Op. Cit. Cornell, p. 172

<sup>8</sup> Op. Cit. Cornell. p. 202

This created another host of problems: the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki was the main employer in Samtskhe-Javakheti, providing jobs for an estimated 200,000 Armenians, and was also the main provider of health care in the region. Other than the Russian military base, Samtskhe-Javakheti lacked any major resources and industries Armenians could turn to for suitable employment. Closing the Russian base would mean a substantial loss of livelihood and health care in a region already rated as one of the least developed in Georgia. Nevertheless, the Georgian government decided to close the base despite great cost to the local Armenians.

While Armenia was in no mood to open a two-front war by having active conflict erupt in Javakheti while also fighting a war over Nagorno-Karabakh with Azerbaijan, it watched Javakheti closely following the closing of the Russian base. In the early 1990s, Armenia sent an envoy to the Samtskhe-Javakheti city of Akhalkalaki to calm tensions there, and a few years later, Shevardnadze and Armenian president Ter-Petrosian met, resulting in the reluctant consent of the Georgian government to have Yerevan serve a guarantor role over the Armenians in Javakheti so as to maintain peace in the region. This agreement was the best that the Shevardnadze government could hope for amidst all the other problems it was facing.

### ***1.3 What did isolation mean?***

During the 1990s, there was little attempt to integrate Samtskhe-Javakheti into Georgian mainstream society. Gamsakhurdia had ignored it, and Shevardnadze's chief concern seemed to be only preventing it from descending into war. So what did this isolation mean, and what affect did it have on the Armenians living in Samtskhe-Javakheti?

Perhaps one of the biggest impediments encountered in this region was lack of

knowledge of the state language, Georgian. More than 95 percent of the Armenian population in Javakheti had little to no command of Georgian.<sup>9</sup> After independence, Georgian became the only official state language with the exception of Abkhaz in Abkhazia, meaning that all official commerce and civic participation in Georgia had to be conducted in Georgian.

The 1995 constitution sought to ensure that any area where the population did not have a command of the state language would receive language training and support, but that did not happen. The language barrier was further compounded by the fact that among younger generations, Russian began to lose its role as the language of inter-ethnic communication.<sup>10</sup> In general, the weak economy and a lack of functioning institutions made Tbilisi incapable of carrying out its education policy, which included programs to teach Georgian to ethnic minorities. Often, Javakheti Armenians would turn to Armenia or to Russia for help as those countries were able to provide better economic and educational opportunities than Georgia could. Adequate knowledge of Georgian was so poor among minorities that they seldom had any real idea of Georgian political life or their own rights under Georgian law. They were seldom even aware of Georgian legislation meant to help improve minorities' knowledge of the Georgian language nor other opportunities for better participation in Georgian society.

Not only could the state not carry out its education policy, but it was also unable to provide basic public goods, leading populations in rural and minority areas to find subsistence by living off the land. Because corruption was so endemic, Shevardnadze fell back on a system of goods, "whereby state goods and services were provided only to those who were part of a

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<sup>9</sup> "Troubled Georgian Region Gets Help for Development and Integration." *UNDP*, 31 January 2003, <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/0/2daf45f28751366dc1256cbf004e90c6>

<sup>10</sup> Jonathon Wheatley. "The Integration of National Minorities in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli Provinces of Georgia." *European Centre for Minority Issues*. (September 2009)

particular personalized network that linked them to an individual in a position of state power.”<sup>11</sup> Few minorities, due to linguistic barriers and a high level of suspicion and mistrust toward them from ethnic Georgians, were able to access these networks, which lead to feelings of isolation and neglect.

Javakheti Armenians felt closer culturally to Armenia than to Georgia, leading to property disputes over the status of Georgian and Armenian churches. The high rate of emigration of Javakheti Armenians seeking better economic and educational opportunities elsewhere, coupled with low reproduction rates among Georgia’s ethnic Armenians<sup>12</sup> contributed to the country’s 56 percent demographic decline between 1989 and 2002. By the end of Shevardnadze’s presidency, the region and indeed the entire country was in desperate need of active reform.

*PART II:  
INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW AND MINORITY POLICY IN INDEPENDENT  
GEORGIA 1991-2012*

After seventy years or so of Soviet rule, Georgia finally gained independence under the leadership of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and with the help of its many minority groups. Gamsakhurdia had visions of democracy, but his time in office was plagued by chaos. Between 1991 and 1992, Georgia used the 1977 Constitution of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic as the legal law of the land. From 1992 to 1995, Georgia would operate under the 1921 Constitution, which had initially been ratified during the country’s brief independence from 1918 to 1921. When Eduard Shevardnadze came to power in 1994, he deemed much of the 1921 Constitution unacceptable.

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<sup>11</sup> Jonathon Wheatley. “Managing Ethnic Diversity in Georgia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back.” *Central Asia Survey*. Centre for Democracy Aarau, University of Zurich. 9 July 2009. p124.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Evers, “Economic Issues and Ethnopolitical Tension: The Example of the Region of Samtskhe-Javakheti.” *European Yearbook of Minority Issues*, volume 3, 2003. (2005), p. 315

However, in the constitution that would be adopted into law in 1995, it made the declaration that it wants to enhance “the basic principles of the Constitution of Georgia of 1921.”<sup>13</sup> What is significant about this and indeed about the usage of the 1921 Constitution in 1995 is the concept of democracy centered on, among many tenets, human rights and minority rights.

The 1995 constitution of Georgia said many of the right things that nearly any modern democracy would say and agree to as a way of opening the doors to international cooperation and assistance and becoming a respected member of the Western community. A statement in Chapter II, Article 14 is of particular relevance to minority rights in the country: “everyone is free by birth and is equal before law regardless of race, colour, language, sex, religion, political and other opinions, national, ethnic and social belonging, origin, property and title, place of residence.” The constitution makes clear the rights all citizens would enjoy, being very specific about who was included and what would be tolerated.

Today, the government of Georgia’s *National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration*, issued by presidential decree in August 2005, proposes a legal basis for the building of democratic values and the consolidation of civil society based on universal values. It directly references the 1995 constitution and lists all the international organizations and treaties that Georgia has joined or intends to join based on the idea of human rights, including one of the most widely recognized and translated: 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As it is in the Georgian constitution, so it is in Georgia’s 2005 *National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration*, which specifically addresses its minority populations and the desire of the government for their integration into civic society. It seeks to observe the standards set up in the UDHR and similar decrees, and the language that appears in Georgia’s *National*

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13 *The Constitution of Georgia*. Adopted on 24 August 1995.

*Concept* really makes an effort to stand and work for creating an environment of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious tolerance of its minorities. The document goes into specific detail about how the Georgian government intends to treat the minorities that live within its borders. It details problems that minorities face in the country in the form of education and language, media and access to information, political integration and civic participation, social and regional integration, and preservation of cultural identity and explains how the country intends to fix these issues.

As noted previously, one of the biggest factors that Georgia has experienced regarding its ethnic disputes stemmed from problems regarding access to education and state language. The government acknowledged the fact that civic integration was difficult for minorities because they did not have an adequate knowledge of the state language, Georgian. This lack of fluency impeded minorities' ability to gain employment across many sectors of society and stymied participation in the political, economic, and social life of the country. The *National Concept* acknowledged that while knowledge of the primary, state language is good, it does not serve the government well to ignore minority languages. Several objectives are listed that the government intended to work on in this area: "support the study of the Georgian language by the Government; support the study of minority languages by the Government; ensure opportunities for minorities to receive education in their native language; promote minority languages as a value of the country; and ensure access of minorities to the higher and vocational education."<sup>14</sup>

The government hoped to carry out these measures by means of an action plan where both methodology and institutional support were outlined. Schools would be financed by the state, textbooks would be translated into minority languages, teachers' workbooks translated into Armenian and Azerbaijani, and Georgian as a second language to be promoted in non-Georgian schools. To promote access to higher education, the Ministry of Education was going to prepare

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14 "National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration." *Government of Georgia*. (8 May 2005)

the standardized general ability test in Russian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani. However, there is a great disconnect between these stated policies and their actual implementation.

Another area of disconnect in zones of both latent and overt conflict is that of political integration and civic participation. In order to raise the level of civic participation in regions traditionally inhabited by substantial numbers of ethnic minorities, the *National Concept* notes that while knowledge of the state language is key for active involvement in political and social life, election materials and bulletins should be published in minority languages. The *National Concept's* objectives are commendable: “ensure equal suffrage and equal representation of minorities in the elected state bodies; and improve minority participation in the decision-making process.”<sup>15</sup>

But unlike the language surrounding reforms to improve access for minorities, little is outlined regarding how the Georgian government intends to carry out these goals. The *National Concept* merely gives vague information about various ministries of the executive government or simply states that the government will draft amendments to legislation without elaborating on any specific plans.

This discrepancy at the policy level suggests that perhaps the executive government of Mikheil Saakashvili, by whose Presidential decree the *National Concept* was issued, believed that words would carry the action, that simply stating something would make it so, and that minorities would voluntarily lay out their issues unsolicited and come gladly into the arms of Tbilisi.

In writing, Georgia has displayed commitment and resolve in adopting democratic values and principles, describing reforms only in the realm of human rights but also other freedoms in keeping with Western democracy on such topics as criminal justice, freedom of the press, and

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15 “National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration.” *Government of Georgia*. (8 May 2005)

economic opportunity. These written objectives certainly caught the attention of the United States and Europe, both of whom have praised Georgia's efforts, giving Tbilisi a sense of legitimacy as a player on the world stage and bringing the Georgian government a sense of security out of the shadow of Russian hegemony.

This is perhaps what Tbilisi has wanted all along, but it has also been incredibly dissatisfied by the West's tepidness in pledging full support to Georgia's desires to join NATO and the European Union. Discrepancy between Georgia's written laws and the actual implementation of such laws could certainly offer a clue and nowhere is this discrepancy more evident than in Tbilisi's treatment of ethnic minorities. In the following chapters, I will assess specific measures taken by the Saakashvili administration regarding minority integration, where the implementation of this minority policy has failed, where it has succeeded, and why, paying particular attention to the ethnic Armenians living in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia.

*PART III:  
INTEGRATION EFFORTS IN THE SAAKASHVILI PERIOD*

In November 2003, Tbilisi erupted in protest, sparked by fraudulent parliamentary elections earlier in the month. In what would later become known as the Rose Revolution, Mikheil Saakashvili burst into the parliamentary chamber and drove President Eduard Shevardnadze out of the building mid-speech. Shevardnadze would resign two days later, two years before the end of his term. The arrival of Mikheil Saakashvili in 2003 saw dramatic transformation in Georgia, from failure to a partially functioning state in a short amount of time. One of the issues that was addressed in the *National Concept* of 2005 was the need for regional integration, something that Saakashvili took action on almost right away: rooting out corruption

in various government bodies and implementing large-scale infrastructure rehabilitation projects across the country, including in minority-dominated regions.

Post-revolution hopes were high among both Armenians and Azerbaijanis for the improvement of inter-ethnic relations. In this section I will first examine how Georgian officials grappled with the issue of integration. I will then explore specific integration efforts that were undertaken by the Saakashvili administration drawing from official rhetoric and initiatives in the realm of language, education, civic participation, and infrastructure rehabilitation. By examining these issues, they will frame the questions that I seek to address in my final two chapters: what worked, what did not, and why.

### *3.1 Defining Integration*

A year before Saakashvili took power, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Ambassador Rolf Ekéus addressed the OSCE HCNM-UNDP<sup>16</sup> Conference in Tbilisi about the importance of integration for regional development:

Integration is a powerful way not only to alleviate inter-ethnic tensions, but to create an attractive climate for investment. Thus, social integration leads to social development. A society that is integrated and at peace with itself is a society that will build common interests and resources (including its cultural and linguistic assets) and thereby becomes more prosperous...<sup>17</sup>

Integration, Ekéus argued, was an incentive for economic development. A fractured

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<sup>16</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe High Commissioner on National Minorities-United Nations Development Program

<sup>17</sup> Ambassador Rolf Ekéus, Speech. “Promoting Integration and Development in Samtskhe-Javakheti Region of Georgia”, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to the OSCE HCNM-UNDP Conference. Tbilisi. 19 November 2002, p. 3

country meant a fractured economy, one that was not working to its full potential. In the early 2000s, barriers in language, education, civic participation, and infrastructure prevented the Georgian economy from functioning properly. Corruption also significantly stymied any kind of development – by 2003, Georgia was ranked 124 out of 133 countries by Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index<sup>18</sup> – one of the most corrupt countries in the world.

Since gaining independence, Georgia had been beleaguered by economic and social woes, and hunger for stability and good governance was what drove Saakashvili to power in 2003. Saakashvili seemed to recognize that in order to achieve stability and good governance, the question of integration and inclusion of Georgia’s national minorities needed to be addressed. The rhetoric and actions he would take fit in with Ekéus’ further definition of integration:

Persons belonging to minorities should respect the sovereignty and territoriality of the State. On the other hand, the State, and the majority within the State, must demonstrate their willingness to accept and implement the basic principles regarding the treatment of persons belonging to national minorities, such as their full equality before the law and their right to freely express, preserve and develop their ethnic, linguistic and religious identity.<sup>19</sup>

This sentiment reflects perhaps the best strategy Georgian officials took in trying to understand integration. The Saakashvili administration in particular set out to rebuild the Georgian state by incorporating these ideas into various laws and initiatives. However, while at the same time passing the 2005 *National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration*, Saakashvili made moves that would counter his rhetoric for inclusion and equality and substantially increase the difficulty of carrying out the initiatives proposed in the *National*

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<sup>18</sup> “Corruption Perceptions Index 2003: Results.” In *Corruption Perceptions Index*. Transparency International, 2003. [http://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi\\_2003](http://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_2003)

<sup>19</sup> Op. Cit. Ekéus, p. 3

*Concept.*

One of the primary arguments for integration made by Georgian politicians was that it would strengthen Georgia's sovereignty over its own territory and reduce the risk for secession. While the Javakheti Armenians were never at serious risk for secessionist struggles like the South Ossetians and Abkhazians were, the Georgian government still worried about granting the region too much autonomy. While Javakheti Armenians' demand for regional autonomy has fluctuated over the years, Tbilisi was fearful that "granting territorial autonomy to a minority group would merely be the first step toward the eventual secession of the region...[and that] autonomy increases the risk of intervention by a foreign state affiliated with the specific minority population."<sup>20</sup>

The government, as Public Movement Multinational Georgia (PMMG)<sup>21</sup> head Arnold Stepanian explained, used security concerns as an excuse not to change policy toward minorities, fearing that giving minority groups more rights would enable separatism.<sup>22</sup> This fact suggests that many Georgian politicians considered integration as a territorial issue, rather than a social one. Such a view was shaped by a long history "characterized by difficulties in internal cohesion on the one hand, and a hostile international environment on the other" with repeated expansions into other territory – including parts of Armenia – and invasions into Georgian territory by outside forces over the centuries.<sup>23</sup>

This territorial definition of integration held strong undercurrents of Georgian nationalism, which continued to regard minorities as "guests" on Georgian land.<sup>24</sup> Georgian nationalists also tended to believe that if minorities wanted equality, they should go back to their

<sup>20</sup> Svante E. Cornell. "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict." *World Politics*, volume 54, No. 2 (January 2002). Cambridge University Press, p. 246-7

<sup>21</sup> Public Movement Multinational Georgia

<sup>22</sup> Arnold Stepanian. Interview. Public Movement Multinational Georgia (September 2015)

<sup>23</sup> Op. Cit. Cornell "Autonomy and Conflict," p. 142

<sup>24</sup> Ramaz Aptsiauri. Interview. United Nations Association of Georgia, September 2015

own countries instead of seeking it in Georgia.<sup>25</sup> Georgians tended to view their collective space as more important than individual spaces.<sup>26</sup> The priority of integration was “given to the assertion of the state’s unity over the protection of minorities”<sup>27</sup> with little effort directed at alleviating mutual suspicions between ethnic Georgians and Armenians.

Still today, while Georgia generally accepts that the country is a multicultural society, it struggles to define what that means to them.<sup>28</sup> There were many Georgian officials who did not think that integration should include minorities. Many minorities, Armenians included, were skeptical of the National Concept as they believed – not unjustifiably – that it was designed to force assimilation.<sup>29</sup> The Georgian government, quite often, did not perceive minorities as equals nor did they believe that it was the government’s responsibility to protect minority cultures.<sup>30</sup>

Saakashvili, while pursuing integration using rhetoric that called for inclusivity, equality, tolerance, and civic participation, took actions that conveyed something different.

In early 2004, mere weeks after his inauguration, Saakashvili pushed through a series of constitutional amendments that greatly expanded presidential power at the expense of parliament and the expense of regional governments. It could be argued that the executive government benefited from more centralized power by enabling it to push through rapid reform projects, but as Miriam Lansky notes in an article, “this [was] a negative development from the perspective of fostering political pluralism and developing a multiparty system.”<sup>31</sup> Saakashvili’s party, the United National Movement, and his centralization efforts seriously hampered the emergence of

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<sup>25</sup> Op. Cit. Aptsiauri

<sup>26</sup> Op. Cit. Stepanian

<sup>27</sup> Bert Middel, Reporter. “Minorities in the South Caucasus: Factor of Instability?” NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Sub-Committee on Democratic Governance, available at <http://natopa.ibicenter.net/default.asp?SHORTCUT=683>

<sup>28</sup> Giorgi Sordia. Interview. European Centre for Minority Issues, (September 2015)

<sup>29</sup> Op. Cit. Aptsiauri

<sup>30</sup> Op. Cit. Sordia

<sup>31</sup> Miriam Lansky and Giorgi Areshidze. “Georgia’s Year of Turmoil” *Journal of Democracy*, volume 19, No. 4, October 2008, p. 160

strong political parties and perpetuated his own party's virtual monopoly over government at all levels.

This centralization of power frames some of the fundamental challenges that Saakashvili faced regarding integration. His actions contradicted the social definition of integration he adopted in his rhetoric and better aligned with the territorial definition many Georgian politicians subscribed to. This reveals Saakashvili's misunderstanding of – or even a disregard for – the concept.

### ***3.2 Saakashvili's Official Rhetoric and Policies***

In the several years that followed the Rose Revolution, various reforms swept across Georgia that would bring the country back from the brink. Mikheil Saakashvili wanted to fulfill the promise of the 1995 constitution for ethnic Georgians and non-Georgians alike, saying:

While talking about our society we should take into consideration its ethnic diversity. We must try to see events that took place in Georgia over recent years from [the minority] viewpoint...we must also ensure that every Azerbaijani and Armenian can feel themselves to be part of this society...We have Armenians, hundreds of thousands of them, who are proud of Georgia...that is our asset, rather than weakness.<sup>32</sup>

In Saakashvili's first two years in office, he made the changes he deemed necessary for a more inclusive Georgia, creating a State Ministry for Reintegration<sup>33</sup> and appointing a special presidential advisor on the issue of civic integration. As a show of good faith, he also appointed two representatives of regional minorities to his government: an ethnic Ossetian became the

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<sup>32</sup> Mikheil Saakashvili. Speech at Ivane Javakhishvili State University, (16 February 2005)

<sup>33</sup> It is now known as the State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality.

State Minister for Civil Integration Issues and an ethnic Abkhaz became a government spokesperson in 2005. The administration in 2005 also brought together ministers, parliamentarians, NGOs, the public defender, and other senior policy makers through the creation of the National Council on Civic Integration and Tolerance. And finally, also in 2005, the Georgian Public Defender's Office oversaw the creation of the Council of National Minorities, which brought together 83 groups in the hope of fostering dialogue between national minorities and officials.<sup>34</sup> In order to reach out to the minorities and integrate them into Georgian society, the Saakashvili administration would need to take a specific yet broad approach that would address issues such as language, education, civic participation, and infrastructure rehabilitation.

Perhaps the biggest factor impacting the integration of ethnic Armenians into Georgian mainstream society was that of language. So enormous did this issue loom that the International Crisis Group effectively called it linguistic segregation. At the start of Saakashvili's tenure, some 95 percent of Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti could not speak the Georgian language. The Constitution of Georgia, ratified in 1995, designated Georgian as the state language of Georgia<sup>35</sup>, prior to 2005, the use of Georgian in official documents, proceedings, and other functions was not strictly enforced. Any official communication between Tbilisi and minority regions was usually conducted in Russian.

But that changed with the Rose Revolution when Saakashvili insisted on the use of Georgian in the public sphere. Ministries suddenly began to refuse any official communications that was not in Georgian,<sup>36</sup> and the government required that any administrative proceeding that was not conducted in Georgian must provide a notarized translation in order for it to be

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<sup>34</sup> Financed by the European Centre for Minority Issues.

<sup>35</sup> *1995 Constitution of Georgia*. Chapter 1, Article 8

<sup>36</sup> "Georgia's Armenian and Azeri Minorities." International Crisis Group, *Europe Report* (22 November 2006)

recognized.

In order to adequately enforce the use of the Georgian language in all sectors of government and society, education became the focus. As a legacy of the Soviet Union, Georgia had a well-established system of primary and secondary schools that were in minority languages, but quite often, those schools had minimal, if any programs to teach Georgian. So two laws were passed during the Saakashvili period that sought to bring about reform: The Law on Higher Education (2004) and the Law on General Education (2005) that would help standardize curriculum across the country. As the Law on General Education states:

Georgian citizens whose native language is not Georgian, have the right to receive full general education in their native languages, according to the national curriculum, as defined by the law. It is compulsory to teach Georgian, the state language, in such institutions.<sup>37</sup>

After more than a decade of poor funding, which caused deterioration in both teaching and infrastructure, minority schools finally began to benefit from new financing starting in 2005-2006. Georgian language programs were introduced, requiring three hours a week of class from 1<sup>st</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> grades. The Ministry of Education and Science, with money from the United Nations Development Programme, compiled the first Georgian-as-a-second-language book for non-Georgian schools and successfully distributed it to 456 schools for grades 7 through 11. The textbook, *Tavtavi*, “was distributed to pupils and teachers in non-Georgian language schools. It included a student exercise book and a teacher’s book,”<sup>38</sup> with plans to be published in five volumes to keep up with growing student and teacher knowledge. Furthermore, the 2005 Law on

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<sup>37</sup> 2005 *Law on General Education*. Article 4.3

<sup>38</sup> “Georgia’s Armenian and Azeri Minorities.” International Crisis Group, *Europe Report* (22 November 2006), p.

General Education stipulated that literature, history, and geography should be taught in Georgian by 2010-11 while mathematics, natural sciences, foreign languages, physical education, and fine arts could continue in the minority language.<sup>39</sup>

There were a number of efforts set forth by the Saakashvili administration in order to facilitate Georgian language learning. One of the problems was that there were few teachers in minority regions who knew enough Georgian to teach it. From 2004 to 2006, the Education Ministry sent thirteen teachers to Samtskhe-Javakheti as part of a program called “The Future Starts Today” that provided substantial financial incentives to Georgian teachers who would teach in minority regions. These teachers taught Georgian language, literature, and history while at the same time training the local teachers. As part of this program, “local teachers were introduced to new methods of teaching,”<sup>40</sup> which was seen as a key aspect of reform since teachers had been using methodology from the Soviet era and that had not been updated since. This teacher-training program included seven days of six-hour lessons per session, which teachers found extremely beneficial in improving their language skills. Furthermore, to facilitate integration, the Ministry of Education and Science also implemented other programs: the Civic Integration Program, the School Partnership Program, and Deer Leap.

Deer Leap sought to equip all schools in Georgia with computers and internet access; provide quality technical support, and train students and teachers in computer technology.<sup>41</sup> In 2005, the Ministry of Education and Science, with the help of Estonian partners, allocated USD 3.3 million<sup>42</sup> for the project.

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<sup>39</sup> 2005 Law on General Education. Articles 5.4, 5.8, and 5.3

<sup>40</sup> Salome Mekhuzla and Aideen Roche. “National Minorities and Educational Reform in Georgia.” *ECMI Working Paper #46* (September 2009), p. 13

<sup>41</sup> “Deer Leap Programme.” Researching Virtual Initiatives in Education. Last modified July 9, 2015.

[http://www.virtualschoolsandcolleges.eu/index.php/Deer\\_Leap\\_Programme](http://www.virtualschoolsandcolleges.eu/index.php/Deer_Leap_Programme)

<sup>42</sup> International Monetary Fund, comp. *Georgia: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Progress Report*. Washington, DC, 2005. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2005/cr05113.pdf>

To encourage integration, Tbilisi State University – Georgia’s premier institute of higher learning – opened a branch in Akhalkalaki in 2002. It was created to give ethnic Armenians a chance to master Georgian and bring ethnic Georgians to Akhalkalaki to study together with Armenians and foster inter-ethnic communication on tolerance, bilingualism, and integration.<sup>43</sup> Though the branch was deemed a success within its first couple of years of operation, higher learning access for Armenians and other minorities would later face significant obstacles that the government would struggle to address, the two most important of which were regarding language: Georgian was the language of instruction in the Akhalkalaki branch of TSU, and students had to pass entrance exams in Georgian in order to get into any institution of higher learning.

In 1999 the Ministry of Education started implementing the Georgian Education System Realignment and Strengthening Program, funded by the World Bank, to increase the quality and efficiency of education.<sup>44</sup> However, it was not until 2005 that the Georgian government, with the help of the new National Examinations Centre (created in 2002),<sup>45</sup> replaced the Soviet system of entrance exams with a system that was based on “fair, transparent, unified, meritocratic principles.”<sup>46</sup> The World Bank ended up contributing USD 23.73 million to the Georgian government’s efforts at education reform, with the United States committing USD 15 million.<sup>47</sup>

President Saakashvili promoted the Georgian language for use in the public sphere. One of his reforms was to create professional testing of civil servants with the aim of creating a merit-

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<sup>43</sup> Op. Cit. International Crisis Group

<sup>44</sup> "National Assessment and Examination Center." Last modified March 14, 2011. <http://www.naec.ge/about-us/history.html?lang=en-GB>

<sup>45</sup> Op. Cit. “National Assessment and Examination Center.”

<sup>46</sup> "Unified National Exams." National Assessment and Examination Center. Last modified October 1, 2015. <http://www.naec.ge/component/content/article/172-all-category/1169-unified-national-exams.html?lang=en-GB>

<sup>47</sup> "Education System Realignment & Strengthening Program (APL #2)." The World Bank. <http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P098217/education-system-realignment-strengthening-program-apl-2?lang=en&tab=overview>

based civil service with all members having a basic knowledge of Georgia and its laws, constitution, and language.<sup>48</sup> Prospective judges, attorneys, doctors, and other state employees had to pass qualifying exams in Georgian and in 2006, many licenses were revoked when minorities could not pass the exams. Arnold Stepanian, head of the Public Movement Multinational Georgia (PMMG) NGO argued that it was “unreasonable” to require local minorities to speak Georgian in civil service jobs due to the fact that in the prior fifteen years, the Georgian language had not been mandatory in ethnic Armenian areas.<sup>49</sup>

The Saakashvili Administration insisted that no one be fired for not knowing Georgian and that adequate accommodation be given for those who did not have a good command of the language, but International Crisis Group noted several reports of state employees losing their jobs for being unable to pass qualifying exams in Georgian.<sup>50</sup>

In order to rectify the problem of minorities being pushed out of civil service jobs due to language, the Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration was opened in January 2006<sup>51</sup> in the city of Kutaisi. Its primary aim was to improve minority representation in the civil service with a six-month curriculum, including three months of Georgian language training. In its first year, 64 students from different minority regions<sup>52</sup> attended the school and Saakashvili was present at the school’s first graduation where he promised that each student would find employment:

We put no separating line between you: Azerbaijanis, Armenians,  
Ossetians, Abkhazians, Jews, Russians, Ukrainians. All those  
people, who live in Georgia, who like Georgia and who are ready

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<sup>48</sup> Based on a 2006 amendment to the 1997 Law on Public Service. (ICG page 23)

<sup>49</sup> Op. Cit. Stepanian

<sup>50</sup> “Georgia’s Armenian and Azeri Minorities.” International Crisis Group, *Europe Report* (22 November 2006), p. 23

<sup>51</sup> Op. Cit. International Crisis Group, *Europe Report* (22 November 2006), p. 7

<sup>52</sup> Op. Cit. International Crisis Group, *Europe Report* (22 November 2006), p. 29

to fight for this country are especially valuable and important people for us...we will give equal opportunities to all people who live in Georgia. We will give them the opportunity to learn the Georgian language under conditions wherein they can also preserve their culture, their national, ethnic traditions.<sup>53</sup>

Participation in elections was another important aspect for minority integration. Since independence, when Javakheti Armenians voted, they typically voted for the ruling party, fearful of reprisals but otherwise not knowing party platforms or their own rights under Georgian law. The 5 October 2006 local elections were the first opportunity for the Saakashvili administration to demonstrate its commitment to bringing ethnic minorities into Georgian society. After being urged by the international community for several years, the Central Election Commission (CEC)<sup>54</sup> took steps to make the electoral process more accessible to minorities. First, in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, lists of candidates, parties, and voters, as well as ballots were written in Georgian, Russian, and Armenian. Prior to this change, all election material had been only in Georgian. Second, Precinct Election Commissions (PECs) were given electoral guides in Armenian. Third, minorities were well-represented in Samtskhe-Javakheti among polling station and district election commission staff.<sup>55</sup>

In these 2006 local elections, Armenians were running against Armenians, rather than Georgians, a change from years past where authority positions almost always went to ethnic Georgians despite local Armenian majorities. The results were a victory for Saakashvili's United National Movement Party,<sup>56</sup> as most local candidates who were affiliated with the party won,

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<sup>53</sup> "President Saakashvili Speaks of Equal Opportunities for Ethnic Minorities", *Civil Georgia*, (2 May 2006).

Available at <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12465>

<sup>54</sup> "Municipal Elections: OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report" OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 5 October 2006. Available at:

<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/georgia/57906>

<sup>55</sup> Op. Cit. International Crisis Group, *Europe Report* (22 November 2006), p. 13

<sup>56</sup> According to OSCE/ODIHR election monitoring, in a significant portion of races, only United National Movement appeared on the ballot. Many independent candidates and parties were unable to register to even

prevailing over a resurgent – yet fledgling – United Javakhk movement. This movement had tried to increase awareness in Armenian residents in Samtskhe-Javakheti by alerting them to the now strict enforcement of Georgian in the public sphere.<sup>57</sup> In the past, Javakhk had demanded greater autonomy, and use of Armenian civil service positions for those that did not know Georgian. Despite winning in the town of Akhalkalaki, Javakhk did not win in rural areas, thus preventing them from overall victory.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the October 2006 elections being a positive development for the civic participation of minorities, there were numerous problems, with many election materials still only in Georgian. International organizations who monitored these elections, which were the first real test for the Saakashvili administration, concluded that they “were conducted with general respect of fundamental freedoms”<sup>59</sup> but the organization still found the need for the improvement of minority participation.

OSCE/ODIHR noted in election observations<sup>60</sup> that while efforts were made to increase minority access and understanding, “crucial legal documents such as the Unified Electoral Code and CEC legal acts, as well as important forms such as the PEC result protocols, were not translated into minority languages.”<sup>61</sup> The inconsistent translation of election materials caused confusion in minority regions, a fact that OSCE/ODIHR argues may have impacted the rights of voters in these regions and thus the results of these elections.<sup>62</sup>

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appear on ballots due to lack of clear instructions.

<sup>57</sup> “Political Group Urges Armenia to Act Amid Tension in Southern Georgia,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union* (15 March 2006)

<sup>58</sup> “Georgia’s Armenian and Azeri Minorities.” International Crisis Group, *Europe Report* (22 November 2006), p. 13

<sup>59</sup> “Fundamental Freedoms Generally Respected during Georgian Municipal Elections but Insufficient Distinction between State and Governing Party.” News release. October 6, 2006 OSCE/ODIHR and Council of Europe Congress, Tbilisi. <http://www.osce.org/odihr/47722>

<sup>60</sup> Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

<sup>61</sup> Op. Cit. “Municipal Elections,” p. 11

<sup>62</sup> Op. Cit. “Municipal Elections,” p. 11

Another aspect of President Saakashvili's reforms for integration included economic opportunity. The region of Samtskhe-Javakheti was like an island, isolated physically and linguistically from the rest of the country – so much so that it could feel like a different country. One of the reasons for this isolation was the poor state of the roads. In the spring of 2006, Saakashvili pledged to allocate USD 219 million “to be spent over the course of the next few years” on rehabilitating and constructing roads in Samtskhe-Javakheti to “put an end to the isolation of this region.”<sup>63</sup> As it stood, it was easier for Javakheti Armenians to trade with Yerevan than it was with Tbilisi, and while Tbilisi was only 166 km from Akhalkalaki, traveling to it from Samtskhe-Javakheti took over six hours due to the state of the roads. Not only was this detrimental for the economic well being of Javakheti Armenians, but it inhibited Georgia's overall trade potential with Turkey.

Saakashvili's infrastructure rehabilitation projects included the construction of a highway running from the Turkish border to Georgia and passing through Samtskhe-Javakheti.<sup>64</sup> In addition, Tbilisi worked out a deal with Azerbaijan and Turkey to construct the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railroad that would run directly through Akhalkalaki.<sup>65</sup> The Georgian government promised that the railroad would help integrate Samtskhe-Javakheti with Georgia and end its isolation.<sup>66</sup>

These construction projects offered jobs to local Armenians who had lost their previous jobs at the Russian military base<sup>67</sup> when it finally closed in 2007. Most of the jobs offered to Javakheti Armenians in conjunction with these projects were menial, however, with better jobs

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<sup>63</sup> “Saakashvili: New Roads to Put an End to Javakheti's Isolation,” *Civil Georgia*, (19 April 2006). Available at <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12378>

<sup>64</sup> The project was funded by the US Millennium Challenge Account.

<sup>65</sup> Turkey agreed to contribute \$200 million to the cost of the Turkish-Georgian portion of the railroad.

<sup>66</sup> “Azeri, Georgian, Turkish Leaders Speak of ‘Historic’ Rail Link.” *Civil Georgia*, Tbilisi (21 November 2007)

<sup>67</sup> Zaal Anjaparidze. “Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan Launch New Strategic Railway Project,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* v. 2 no. 110 (7 June 2005)

being offered to contract workers from outside the region.<sup>68</sup> In 2007 Azerbaijan loaned Georgia USD 200 million (with a 1 percent per annum interest rate over 25 years) to finance construction.<sup>69</sup> But the project was marred with problems and delays, particularly in the Samtskhe-Javakheti segments due to the climate and the poor state of the roads, so in 2011 Azerbaijan loaned Georgia another USD 575 million (with a 5 percent per annum interest rate over 25 years)<sup>70</sup> to facilitate and speed up construction.

President Saakashvili, confronted with a fractured country upon his arrival to the national – and international – stage in 2003, sought many reforms to integrate Georgia’s national minorities into mainstream society. Through language, education, civic participation, and infrastructure rehabilitation, the Saakashvili Administration tried several different avenues to correct the problems ethnic Armenians and other minorities were facing.

#### *PART IV: THE IMPACT OF SAAKASHVILI’S INTEGRATION EFFORTS*

On paper, President Mikheil Saakashvili’s efforts to integrate national minorities into Georgian mainstream society seem laudable. Saakashvili came into power in 2003 with grand visions – Georgia would become a Western democracy with institutional backing and support, respected before the world. He was Ivy League educated and had made important connections with the United States and Europe that would fuel his efforts to reintegrate and stabilize a traumatized and fractured country. And although he did not ratify all documents, during his term, he recognized several international agreements related to human and minority rights – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Framework Convention for the Protection of National

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<sup>68</sup> Yana Israelyan. “Is the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway Worth the Fuss?” *Open Democracy* (2 November 2015)

<sup>69</sup> Op. Cit. “Azeri, Georgian, Turkish Leaders Speak of ‘Historic’ Rail Link.”

<sup>70</sup> Op. Cit. Yana Israelyan

Minorities, and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages chief among them. He incorporated the language from these documents and incorporated them into his own rhetoric and initiatives, chiefly the 2005 – and later the 2009 – *National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration* which outlined problems that the minority communities faced and how he would go about addressing those problems. In reality, however, Georgia's integration efforts were far more complex and not as straight forward.

#### ***4.1 What Worked and What did not Work***

The Saakashvili administration did take a more proactive approach when it came to the integration of national minorities into Georgian society than did his predecessors. He took direct action through various laws and policy initiatives targeting civic participation, education and language, and economic opportunity. Failure, however, seemed to far outweigh the successes of integration during the Saakashvili period. Efforts to improve language knowledge, education, civic participation, and infrastructure rehabilitation were often halfhearted and marred with problems. By looking at what actually happened on the ground – examining official rhetoric and funding of projects and extrapolating the attitudes of Armenians based on their trust toward various institutions and rate of emigration – we can determine which initiatives worked and which did not.

Acknowledgment and recognition are two crucial first steps needed to create change. Without acknowledgement or recognition of a problem, nothing positive can happen. Mikheil Saakashvili recognized the fractured nature of Georgia in almost every sense of the word – physically, psychologically, and linguistically – and that the only way to propel the country

forward was to acknowledge and address its problems, and he indeed did do both. The 2005 *National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration* is a testament to this, as is every subsequent plan that followed, both in 2009 and 2015. The *National Concept* is evidence that the Georgian government, at the very least, acknowledged the need for and the need to do it democratically. Evidence of the *National Concept's* positive influence can be seen in how integration and tolerance are beginning to be better understood the issues now and are more open to other religions,<sup>71</sup> where at one time they believed other religions to be a “threat” to their Orthodox traditions.<sup>72</sup>

A positive development in civic participation came with the 5 October 2006 local elections when Tbilisi translated election materials into Armenian in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, when Armenians competed against other Armenians for elected positions, and overall when election participation increased and more minority representatives were elected than ever before. While representation at the regional level remained weak, Armenians were able to develop stronger civil society organizations<sup>73</sup> that helped to transmit information, group cohesion, and common action to Tbilisi, something that local elites had all but lacked prior to the Rose Revolution.

But although ethnic Armenians made these gains, the overall effects were minimal. Armenians were still poorly represented in central levels of government and only marginally better in the regional ones. In 2006, the senior most official of Armenian origin was the deputy minister of the economy. Hardly any Armenians worked in the presidential administration, the prime minister's office, or in the military. Samtskhe-Javakheti had never had a governor of

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<sup>71</sup> Op. Cit. Aptsiauri

<sup>72</sup> Robinson, B.A. “Religious Intolerance in the Republic of Georgia.” *Religious Tolerance*. Last modified 2002. [http://www.religioustolerance.org/rt\\_georg.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/rt_georg.htm)

<sup>73</sup> Op. Cit. International Crisis Group, *Europe Report* (22 November 2006), p. 15

Armenian origin and in 2006, only three of the governor's 26 staff were Armenian.<sup>74</sup> Influential posts continued to be occupied almost exclusively by ethnic Georgians, leaving the prospect of an Armenian elite who could advocate for the local populations insufficiently and perennially undeveloped.<sup>75</sup>

Though this problem had existed since before Georgia's independence, Saakashvili's centralization efforts did not help matters: there were inadequate checks and balances, he favored a strong state with coercive capabilities over strong rights protections, there was insufficient independence in the judiciary and media, and there was little room for open dialogue or debate.<sup>76</sup> Progress towards democratization and pluralism was limited and Georgian minority issues became trapped in Saakashvili's nation-building efforts. The 2006 local elections were held in response to the 2005 self-governance law that had promised to decentralize power to the municipal level, but instead, powers were consolidated to the regional level. As a result, it became much more difficult, costlier, and more time consuming for Armenians to get issues resolved regarding taxes, property, and traffic disputes.<sup>77</sup>

Despite the progress made on paper, Armenians had little idea of their rights under Georgian law, nor were they truly aware of developments happening within the country. The Saakashvili administration made little effort to inform the population or local leaders of the government's efforts. Funding was so weak that it led to a lack of qualified staff and competency to deal with minority issues in all levels of government. Human resources were poor with only enough money available to pay salaries.<sup>78</sup> When local Armenians tried to air their grievances or when protests broke out, the Saakashvili administration often relied on Yerevan to calm them

<sup>74</sup> Op. Cit. International Crisis Group, *Europe Report* (22 November 2006), p. 9

<sup>75</sup> Op. Cit. International Crisis Group, *Europe Report* (22 November 2006), p. 15

<sup>76</sup> Magdalena Frichova. "Participation of Persons Belonging to National Minorities – Cases of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Gali." *International Journal on Minority Group Rights*, volume 16 (2009), p. 647

<sup>77</sup> Op. Cit. International Crisis Group, *Europe Report* (22 November 2006), p. 12

<sup>78</sup> Op. Cit. Sordia

down, which only further alienated Javakheti Armenians.<sup>79</sup> The Armenians felt lost and betrayed that the Georgian government did not really want to deal with them and that Armenia had sold them out.

In the years following the 2006 election, Armenian trust in the Georgian government remained largely neutral, with moderate trust toward the executive government peaking in 2011 at 41 percent of respondents before gradually decreasing in the years that followed. Armenians were also largely neutral towards the president, with most at least somewhat trusting of the president than distrusting (a number that is surprisingly higher than Georgians over the same time frame). Most Armenians have indicated that in the 2006 local elections and the 2008 and 2012 parliamentary elections were conducted at least to some extent fairly.<sup>80</sup> These numbers reflect a largely neutral or indifferent attitude Armenians had toward Saakashvili's government, which could perhaps be seen as a moderate victory for the Saakashvili administration – that is, Armenian groups that had advocated for the autonomy of Samtskhe-Javakheti had largely become ineffectual in the 2000s, a fact that speaks toward the administration's views on territoriality and sovereignty. However, these numbers could also suggest that many Armenians simply lacked complete awareness of what was happening in the government and, to a larger extent, the country. This assertion is supported by the analysis linguistic segregation, which would only modestly improved in the Saakashvili era.

Saakashvili's plans regarding education, as outlined in the 2005 National Concept, were probably the most detailed of his goals for integration. In his first few years in office, his goals regarding education – specifically teaching Georgian to ethnic Armenians – were concrete. He

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<sup>79</sup> “Georgia: The Javakheti Region's Integration Challenges.” International Crisis Group, (23 May 2011), p. 12

<sup>80</sup> The Caucasus Barometer is an online tool that collected empirical data between 2008-2013 about the South Caucasus published by Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC). I measured ethnic respondents by different variables. For more information, please visit: <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/about/>

created the Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration to help prepare minorities for life in the civil service and implemented the “Future Starts Today” program to incentivize Georgian teachers to teach in minority regions.<sup>81</sup> While the Akhalkalaki branch of Tbilisi State University (TSU) had opened in 2002 to facilitate integration at the social level between Georgians and Armenians, the fact that entrance exams were in Georgian significantly stymied Armenian participation in this branch as well as participation in higher education across Georgia. Only three Armenians passed the exam and were accepted into TSU Akhalkalaki.<sup>82</sup> In 2006, the Saakashvili administration, through the education ministry, corrected this by allowing students to opt into taking the entrance exam in Russian. The applicants would only need to score 16 out of a possible 1,000 points on the Georgian-language section and could compete in Russian with applicants from elsewhere in other subjects such as geography and history.<sup>83</sup> Armenian participation steadily increased in response – with the help of governmental scholarships – to these efforts. Between 2008 and 2013, the Caucasus Research and Resource Center Caucasus Barometer<sup>84</sup> noted a marginal increase in Armenians who had a higher than secondary education, from only 3 percent in 2008 to 25 percent in 2013. This suggests some success in the Saakashvili administration’s efforts to increase educational access for minorities; participation increased 20 percent in five years, no small feat when between 1989 and 2008 the number of Armenians who possessed a university education was nearly non-existent.

The Saakashvili administration recognized that language was a key instrument of participation in civic life. It acknowledged the scale of the language deficit faced by the Armenian community, where some 95 percent did not know Georgian and Russian was being

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<sup>81</sup> Op. Cit. Salome Mekhuzla, p. 13

<sup>82</sup> Op. Cit. International Crisis Group, *Europe Report* (22 November 2006), p. 28

<sup>83</sup> Op. Cit. International Crisis Group, *Europe Report* (22 November 2006), p. 29

<sup>84</sup> Caucasus Research and Resource Center: The Caucasus Barometer: available at <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/>

understood less and less as the language of inter-ethnic communication. While Saakashvili addressed this issue in the *National Concept* and instituted projects to incentivize the learning of Georgian, he countered these efforts with discriminatory policies disenfranchising those who did not know the language. According to the 2005 Self-Governance Law, Article 9 states that “Georgian is to be used for all government sessions...and parliamentarians must know it.” Saakashvili began to strictly enforce the national language laws through civil service tests, university entrance exams, and the dismissal of people from government who did not know Georgian. These actions only intensified the linguistic segregation felt by minorities, who, although they considered Georgia to be their homeland and wanted to be better integrated, were concerned that the language laws were designed to force assimilation<sup>85</sup> and thus, they felt even more isolated.

As Britta Korth observed in “Language Policy in Georgia with a Focus on Education Systems:”

Georgia faces a dilemma between enforcing its laws and guaranteeing full participation and equality for minorities. Putting non-Georgian speakers at a disadvantage violates their political rights. The language laws make minorities feel increasingly disenfranchised, resulting in strong resistance among some Armenians to study Georgian...Georgians meanwhile ‘easily interpret Armenians not speaking Georgian as a sign of disrespect and ill will.’<sup>86</sup>

While some meager improvements were made in the 2005-2006 academic year as noted earlier in the chapter, the situation deteriorated after the introduction of comprehensive university entrance and civic exams.

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<sup>85</sup> Op. Cit. International Crisis Group, *Europe Report* (22 November 2006), p. 21

<sup>86</sup> Britta Korth. “Language Policy in Georgia with a Focus on the Education System”, Cibera working paper (April 2005), p. 29-30, available at [http://www.cibera.org/en/projects/Policy\\_paper\\_FINAL.doc](http://www.cibera.org/en/projects/Policy_paper_FINAL.doc)

In 2005, the institution of these exams forced out education directors in minority areas after they could not pass the exams in Georgian. School districts were suddenly being run by ethnic Georgians<sup>87</sup> who had no knowledge of the local language, creating further barriers for Armenians who needed to interact with the state but were unable to do so. Many young people, resources permitting, left the country to study in either Armenia or Russia because the knowledge required to pass these exams in Georgian language and literature were often beyond their capabilities. Between 2008 and 2013, the number of those who wished to emigrate temporarily hovered around 50 to 60 percent, and roughly the same percentage indicated they did not want to permanently leave.<sup>88</sup> However, once these emigrants left, they rarely returned to enter the labor market, leaving Samtskhe-Javakethi and Georgia at large with a brain drain and a reduced labor force. Another problem was that education and language programs were inadequately funded. In that same time frame, with some moderate fluctuation, around 40 percent indicated they would likely to permanently emigrate. In fact, many schools in rural areas were short on chalk, a necessary teaching tool, and simply did not have the resources to institute new programs and methodologies.<sup>89</sup>

Saakashvili invested heavily in the rebuilding of the region's crumbling infrastructure. In November 2010, Georgia finally inaugurated a new road linking Tbilisi with Akhalkalaki that ran through Kvemo Kartli to the east, bypassing Georgia's main east-west highway, thus significantly reducing travel time between the two cities. Furthermore, this new road connected both cities to Armenian and Turkish border crossings, facilitating bilateral and internal trade. It became easier to bring Armenian produce to market in Tbilisi, and the road also made it easier for Armenians to air grievances and other requests to Tbilisi, both of which had nearly been

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<sup>87</sup> Op. Cit. International Crisis Group, *Europe Report* (22 November 2006), p. 24

<sup>88</sup> Op. Cit. Caucasus Barometer

<sup>89</sup> Op. Cit. Frichova, p. 646

impossible due to previous conditions of the roads. The United States invested \$209 million under the Millennium Challenge Account<sup>90</sup> into the two-year rehabilitation project, helping to build around 224 kilometers of road.<sup>91</sup> President Saakashvili argued that this road was of key significance to Georgia, as it represented the “unification” of Georgian regions.

Indeed, this project was arguably one of Saakashvili’s most successful efforts in integration. Most of Javakheti is situated on an elevated mountain plateau, and the roads prior to this project were only trafficable by four-wheel-drive vehicles in summer and were often washed away by torrential rains and landslides.<sup>92</sup> Roads had presented a significant physical barrier to integration for Samtskhe-Javakheti, and Saakashvili’s efforts to fix them helped bring the region out of isolation. While there were some complaints by Armenians that Saakashvili fixed the wrong roads,<sup>93</sup> the complaints were a minority of the overall feedback, and in the end, all parties benefited from this project.

#### *PART V: WHY DID INTEGRATION EFFORTS ACHIEVE THE RESULTS THEY DID?*

Language and identity, historical trauma, and definitional misunderstandings of integration and nationalism led to the mixed results of Saakashvili’s integration efforts. Looking at language and identity, we can examine how historical trauma has influenced decision-making regarding Georgia’s ethnic Armenian population and how these issues played a direct role in the successes and failures experienced during the Saakashvili period.

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<sup>90</sup> The Millennium Challenge Account, also known as the Millennium Challenge Corporation, is a bilateral United States foreign aid agency established in 2004 by the U.S. Congress. It is an independent agency, separate from the U.S. Department of State and USAID.

<sup>91</sup> “‘Historic’ Road Opens in Southern Georgia”, *Civil Georgia* (16 November 2010). Available at: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22850>

<sup>92</sup> Op. Cit. Svante E. Cornell. “Autonomy and Conflict”, p. 199

<sup>93</sup> *BBC Monitoring Central Asia*. “Ethnic Armenian Leader on ‘Grave’ Situation in Georgian Region.” July 4, 2006. <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/450869452?accountid=14784>.

One fundamental cause of failure was that the homogeneity of the minority population made integration challenging; Javakheti Armenians simply were not exposed to the Georgian language and culture in everyday life. Furthermore, a common feature of political culture in the Caucasus overall – among Georgians, Armenians, and other ethnic groups alike – was the presence of strong clan and patronage networks<sup>94</sup> that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, continued to be an important element of social organization. In Samtskhe-Javakheti, much of social, civic, and cultural life was based on loyalty, making it difficult to institute any kind of transparency or accountability. Throughout the 1990s, Javakheti Armenians enjoyed substantial cultural autonomy in the absence of political or territorial self-rule and little of that changed in the Saakashvili period. Most ethnic Armenians felt that it was unnecessary to learn Georgian;<sup>95</sup> and nearly all local business in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda municipalities was conducted in Armenian. In urban centers, where most interaction between Armenians and Georgians occurred, Armenians usually knew enough Georgian to get by or simply communicated in Russian. They felt that those who needed to learn Georgian would and that for many it just was not necessary.<sup>96</sup>

Georgia's national minorities tended to be concentrated around the country's borders, fueling mutual suspicion and deep-seated fears of conflict. The Saakashvili administration feared that autonomous arrangements for Samtskhe-Javakheti would lead to Georgia's further disintegration as the region would elect to join Armenia rather than remain in Georgia. Their fears were not without merit: "the trauma the Georgian polity suffered due to lost wars in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 1991-1992 and 1992-1993 has framed all inter-ethnic discourse in the country."<sup>97</sup> Despite these fears, the concern that active warfare would break out in Samtskhe-

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<sup>94</sup> Op. Cit. Frichova, p. 647

<sup>95</sup> Op. Cit. Aptsiauri

<sup>96</sup> Op. Cit. Aptsiauri

<sup>97</sup> Op. Cit. Frichova, p. 644

Javakheti was minimal, and Saakashvili used Georgia's position as Armenia's only connection to the outside world to pressure Yerevan into diffusing tensions in Javakheti.<sup>98</sup> This strategy worked well, but as is discussed throughout this paper, little was done by Saakashvili and his predecessors to adequately address the problems ethnic Armenians and other minorities faced that fueled these tensions.

Despite having provisions in the 2005 *National Concept* to increase cultural awareness and tolerance between ethnic Georgians and other ethnic minorities, little was done by the government to fuel these efforts. In 2011, in an amendment to the Civil Code of Georgia, the government announced a joint commission with the Georgian Orthodox Church that would monitor property transfers and the determination of cultural monuments of religious significance in accordance with the Church's status in the Constitution.<sup>99</sup> This has led to active disputes between the Orthodox Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church over the ownership of certain churches in Samtskhe-Javakheti because no minorities were considered when determining ownership.<sup>100</sup>

In order for Armenians to ascend the ranks of Georgian government and sports, they still often have to "Georgianize" their last name (for example, from Nazaryan to Nazarshvili).<sup>101</sup> In 2010, Georgia created the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection to preserve and promote Georgia's cultural heritage – including in minority-dominated areas. While there have been several meetings between the Georgian Culture Minister and various Armenian government officials discussing Armenian cultural events and monuments in Georgia,<sup>102</sup> the ministry has

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<sup>98</sup> Op. Cit. International Crisis Group (23 May 2011), p. 12

<sup>99</sup> U.S. Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. *International Religious Freedom Report for 2011 (Georgia)*. 2011. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

<sup>100</sup> Op. Cit. Sordia

<sup>101</sup> Arsen Kharatyan. Interview. Aliq Media, September 2015

<sup>102</sup> *Armenia News*. "Armenia's Ambassador and Georgia's Culture Minister Discuss Armenian Monuments." November 23, 2012. <http://news.am/eng/news/129712.html>

neither maintained nor financed the preservation of minority cultural monuments. The ministry did not believe it is its responsibility to protect minority cultural monuments.<sup>103</sup> What this demonstrates is that while government rhetoric and policy about cultural integration has been positive, as with so many of its other integration programs, the rhetoric struggles to translate into real change on the ground.

As the International Crisis Group noted in their 2006 report, Tbilisi officials rarely traveled to Samtskhe-Javakheti and therefore had a weak understanding of the region's needs. When the 2005 National Concept was first drafted, Giorgi Sordia, former president of the European Centre for Minority Issues Caucasus Branch, characterized the effort as spontaneous and written by only two people with little vision toward or understanding of national minorities. Four years later, when the National Concept was renewed, again it only involved two people with zero consultation from minority groups.<sup>104</sup> He explained that in order for the government to have better success in integrating Armenians into Georgian society, the government needs to have some sort of official assessment to analyze where things currently stand and where they hope they will be in the future. Furthermore, the government has lacked coordination on how to implement the various policies outlined – every agency has had its own agenda and has been uninformed about what the others are doing.

Today the situation remains largely the same as it did in 2005 when the first *National Concept* was published. Ramaz Aptsiauri, president of the United Nations Association of Georgia, summarizes that the reason why there has been little success is that beyond writing policy, the government did not put forward money, time, or energy for promotion and

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<sup>103</sup> Op. Cit. Sordia

<sup>104</sup> Op. Cit. Sordia.

implementation.<sup>105</sup> The government has not taken the time to analyze the results of the policies put forth during the Saakashvili era nor has the government done a good job in enforcing these policies.

Giorgi Sordia, former president of the European Center for Minority Issues Caucasus Branch, believes that more time is needed to change hearts and minds.<sup>106</sup> Many Georgians continue to view minorities who cannot speak Georgian with suspicion. In addition, civic participation among Armenians at the regional and national level remains poor.<sup>107</sup>

The situation today is not all negative. The government continues to demonstrate an effort toward increasing minority access to higher education in the country and indeed seems to have realized that some of its previous strategies have not worked well. One such program that highlights the active and positive steps the government is taking is the One-Plus-Four Program, which allows minorities to take entrance exams in their native language and participate in a year-long Georgian language program before entering Tbilisi universities.<sup>108</sup> While the last dataset for minorities who have received some kind of higher education was for 2013 published by the Caucasus Research Resource Center, government sources suggest the numbers are continuing to improve.<sup>109</sup> While certainly a positive development, many Armenians who end up participating in the One-Plus-Four Program often do not return to Samtskhe-Javakheti once they graduate, electing to stay in Tbilisi instead.

Another fundamental problem preventing integration is the undercurrent of Georgian nationalism. President Saakashvili's talk of restoring Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty was accompanied by nationalist rhetoric; it started with the strict enforcement of

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<sup>105</sup> Op. Cit. Aptsiauri

<sup>106</sup> Op. Cit. Sordia

<sup>107</sup> Op. Cit. Stepanian

<sup>108</sup> Op. Cit. Kharatyan

<sup>109</sup> "Higher Education." *National Statistics Office of Georgia*, 2016.

[http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p\\_id=2105&lang=eng](http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=2105&lang=eng)

Georgian as the state language and crept along with his tacit support of the Georgian Orthodox Church.<sup>110</sup> While the 1995 Georgian constitution had guaranteed the freedom of religion, it also formally recognized the special status of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Many Georgians equated being Georgian with practicing Georgian Orthodoxy, and that those that do not practice – even ethnic Georgians – are not considered “truly” Georgian. Georgians typically perceive minorities as a potential threat and are “wary of encouraging other potential separatist movements.”<sup>111</sup>

At the same time Saakashvili put forth his integration efforts, Georgians did not fully understand what integration meant, preferring territorial integrity and sovereignty to pluralism and equality. And although Georgia contains substantial ethnic diversity – something even ethnic Georgians themselves realize – it is characterized by profound mistrust and ethnic nationalism that leaves little room for national minorities to be accepted as fully-fledged citizens of the country.<sup>112</sup> Minorities are still viewed as “guests” in Georgia despite laws, initiatives, and official rhetoric guaranteeing their equal rights and declaring the importance of their contributions to the success of the country.

Ethnic Armenians, as well as other minorities within Georgia, feared that Saakashvili was trying to assimilate, rather than integrate them into Georgian society. Language programs – whether in education or civic participation – were viewed with skepticism and apprehension. The Caucasus is a region where language and ethnicity are wrapped together and steeped in centuries of tradition and bitter conflict:

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<sup>110</sup> Op. Cit Middel

<sup>111</sup> Op. Cit. Middel

<sup>112</sup> Anna Matveeva. “Minorities in the South Caucasus”, paper submitted to the Working Group on Minorities at its 9<sup>th</sup> session in 2003, p.3, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/minorities/docs/WP3.doc>

For most minorities, language, as much as if not more than any other attribute of identity...serves as a means of unity of the group and source of self-identification of the individual. The enjoyment and preservation of the minority culture turns upon the freedom to transmit ideas, customs, and other indicia of culture in the original language of the minority.<sup>113</sup>

Herein lies the underlying struggle of integration during the Saakashvili period: The Armenians fear assimilation if they are forced to learn Georgian at the expense of Armenian while Georgia fears secession if it grants official status to Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti. Everything from education to economic opportunity, civic participation, and cultural rights has been framed by this struggle. It is why many officials in government view integration as a territorial concern rather than a social one. And it is why many Armenians have viewed much of the government's actions as being designed to force assimilation rather than integration. While Georgians have prided themselves on having a multicultural society, they have grappled with the meanings of tolerance and inclusivity. But this is hardly Georgia's burden alone; Armenians have also had to grapple with these questions.

The situation on the ground has hardly changed in the four years Saakashvili has left office, but there has been a positive shift in attitude, especially among the younger generation that wants to move forward together as a society that celebrates and cultivates diversity rather than fears it.

### *CONCLUSION*

Since independence, Georgia has struggled with integration. Its laws, particularly the 1995 constitution and 2005 *National Concept* reflect the best of Tbilisi's intentions and its strong

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<sup>113</sup> "Report on the Linguistic Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities in the OSCE Area", OSCE HCNM, available at <http://www.osce.org>

desire to democratize and match Western liberal world order. However, the confluence of Georgian nationalism and Georgia's lack of understanding of the meaning of tolerance, inclusivity, and integration itself have stymied any real meaningful change. Knowing this discrepancy is essential to understanding why certain actions worked and why certain actions did not, particularly in the Saakashvili period. But it begs the question: if Georgian officials really did not think that integration involved minorities in the first place, then what was the purpose of minority integration?

The main motivation for integration, as evidenced in this paper, was for sovereignty over territory and for solidifying borders. However, in order to gain legitimacy before the world, especially the United States and Europe, Georgia framed its integration efforts in the language of human rights, equality, and pluralism. Saakashvili, in particular, knew how to get the attention of the West; he knew how he could get the West to care about the plight of his small country. After the disastrous 1990s, he bounded into power with a grand vision of Georgia joining NATO and the European Union and immediately set off reforms that pulled Georgia out of economic and political chaos. But his efforts at minority integration, while certainly better than his predecessors, were still halfhearted at best with failure far outweighing success. Between 2002 and 2014, the size of the Armenian population of Georgia, especially in Samtskhe-Javakheti, saw another 22 percent<sup>114</sup> decline, indicating a lack of success in Saakashvili's integration efforts. Actions to improve Georgian language knowledge, education, civic participation, economic opportunity, and infrastructure rehabilitation did not go far enough.

Despite this, however, Saakashvili has sown the seeds for positive change. Younger Georgians are not nearly as nationalistic as their parents and grandparents and tend to view

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<sup>114</sup> National Statistics Office of Georgia, "Preliminary Results of 2014 General Population Census of Georgia." (2015).

multiculturalism, equality, and tolerance more favorably. Young Armenians are being encouraged by their parents to learn Georgian. In the most recent drafting of the *National Concept* (2015), minorities were finally consulted. These are positive developments, although they are not likely to translate into truly positive and committed action regarding minority integration unless the Georgian government changes how it approaches integration issues.<sup>115</sup>

But for now, the seeds have been planted and that is perhaps Saakashvili's biggest success, one that could mean better opportunities for ethnic Armenians in Georgia. It will take a true change of attitude, by all parties, to cultivate those seeds and watch them grow into a more hopeful and inclusive future.

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<sup>115</sup> Op. Cit. Aptsiauri

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