



## **Conflicting Threat Perceptions and Securitization of Minority Issue: The Case of Javakheti, Georgia**

Author: Eka Metreveli  
*President, Georgian Foundation Strategic and International Studies*

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## ***Abstract***

The purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between the Georgian state and its ethnic Armenian minority community of Samtskhe-Javakheti. Specifically, the article considers Georgian State's approach to the national question involving challenges of the state building efforts in the context of ethnic diversity and democratization, current issues and challenges hampering socio-political cohesion on the background of existing preconditions and legacies of 90s and 2000s. It examines conflicting threat perceptions from majority and minority leading to considering minority question through the prism of national security rather than human rights from one side and from another viewing a State as a source of threat vs. provider of security. In addition the article discusses regional dynamics in the South Caucasus, divergent integrative projects of the region translated into different foreign policy priorities and domestic reform processes of the three South Caucasian States and how these diversities influence minority communities. Role of a formal imperial master and soft power it exercises on the post-soviet space on the background of the changing international environment is also touched upon having influence on existing conflicting threat perception of the remote province of Javakheti and hindering nation-and hence state building process

## **I. Introduction**

Since Georgia's independence Javakheti was considered as a possible hot spot by international organizations and political scientists. But the region has never experienced serious conflict or major human-rights abuses, though the ongoing tensions and resentments have existed. The province was even out of control of Tbilisi in early 90s controlled by local paramilitary groups. But despite existence of certain factors that led other regions of Georgia to a conflict, peace was maintained and state managed to extend control over the province. A significant contributor to that was the regional dynamics that prompted Armenian state to keep on constructive stance towards Javakheti and maintain good neighborly relations with Georgia not supporting Javakheti irredentist sentiments.

Javakheti province lies in a wider Samtskhe-Javakheti administrative region of Georgia, with the administrative capital Akhaltsikhe and consists of two districts (Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki). The population of Javakheti is overwhelmingly ethnic Armenian. Armenians account for approximately six percent of the population of Georgia, with significant majority residing in Javakheti. Javakheti is bordering with the Republic of Armenia and Turkey on a volcanic valley (1600-2000). Its geographic isolation, falling under the 78 km closed border zone with the #62 military base during the Soviet Union, strong cultural ties with Armenia, and a legacy of Soviet nationality policies have resulted in the region's isolation. Javakheti's economy is primarily agricultural. Province's border function has defined limited civilian infrastructure, resulting in Russian military base to be the principal cash employer before 2007 when it was handed over to Georgia. Currently many Armenians travel for seasonal works to Russia sending back remittances to the region. Few Armenians speak Georgian well, limiting their opportunities for full participation in the Georgian state.

Since 2004 Tbilisi has sought to redress this isolation through investment in infrastructure, education, and social services, legislation guaranteeing rights to national minorities and other efforts to promote the multi-ethnic character of the Georgian state. The efforts have yielded results and serious steps towards integration of Javakheti have been observed. Significant contributing factor was the withdrawal of Russian base and decreasing means of Russian influence.

Ethnic minorities in general and in Javakheti specifically are vulnerable to external, as well as internal developments. Though policies of Saaakshvili government directed at the consolidation and modernization of the state achieved tangible results, the ongoing resentments, external agitation, change of the international environment in the post-

soviet space, European Union (EU) and Russia competing in the South Caucasus for the divergent regional integrative projects on the background of Russia's aggressive foreign and security policy poses threats for instability in this remote province, strengthening the existing conflicting threat perceptions among majority and minority populations hindering nation- and hence state building process in Georgia.

## II. Regional Dynamics and “Imperial Power”

The South Caucasus is not a well-defined region and all three regional countries seek different development schemes and integrative projects, translated in different foreign policy priorities and domestic reform process. Armenia is a part of a Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), while Georgia aspires to join North Atlantic treaty Organization (NATO). Armenia has joined Customs Union (CU), while Georgia has signed Association Agreement (AA) with the EU. Azerbaijan so far has not engaged into any legally binding economic integrative projects.<sup>1</sup>

Georgia has friendly relations with all of its southern neighbors, generally better with Turkey and Azerbaijan, its strategic partners, than with Armenia. While forming those relations, all three countries take into consideration their relations with Russia. Georgian-Russian relations are particularly affecting Armenia, due to Armenia-Russia strategic partnership. Armenia is landlocked, and because of Nagorno-Karabakh its borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan are closed, so transit and trade routes through Georgia are crucial for Armenia's access to Russia.<sup>2</sup>

Armenia closely monitors Georgia's cooperation with its neighbors and is concerned by strengthening of the cooperation between Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey, both at bilateral level as well as within the trilateral format.<sup>3</sup> Deepening the transportation and communication systems of the three countries, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi Erzurum gas pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad, Southern Gas Corridor<sup>4</sup> are perceived as an attempt to isolate Armenia from all regional projects.<sup>5</sup> From its side, Armenia needs reopening of the railway through Abkhazia to make full use of its economic integration with Russia. Currently the land communication to Russia goes through Georgia Military road that is vulnerable to natural disasters, closes in winter and limits cargo transit capacity. The issue was revisited during the June 18-19, 2014 visit of Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan to Tbilisi, who emphasized the “vital importance” of the opening of the railway for Armenia.<sup>6</sup> The reopening of Abkhaz railway is a political rather than economic issue for Georgia and crossing this red line is not feasible at this stage. Reopening of the Abkhaz railway will also be against Azerbaijan's interest, which Georgia also has to take into consideration. Although there is recognition on the part of both Yerevan and Tbilisi that the future relations between two countries should deepen, the participation in divergent integrative projects still creates uncertainties, though at the same time Georgia's adherence to EU path as manifested by signing AA and Armenia joining CU has not so far influenced Georgia-Armenia trade relations as anticipated earlier.<sup>7</sup> Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) does not challenge existing bilateral free trade agreements of Georgia. The CU member countries, on the contrary, use joint tariffs and set of regulations in relations to “third countries”. Exception is

<sup>1</sup> Jos Boonstra and Laure Delcour, A broken region; evaluating EU policies in the South Caucasus. Policy Brief 193, January 2015, Cascade FRIDE. <http://fride.org/publication/1246/a-broken-region-evaluating-eu-policies-in-the-south-caucasus>

<sup>2</sup> Eka Metreveli and Jonathan Kulick, Social Relations and Governance in Javakheti, Georgia. PDCI, 2009, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Sergey Minasyan, Armenia and Georgia: A New Pivotal Relationship in the South Caucasus? PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No.292, September 2013, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> The ceremony of founding the Trans-Anatolia Pipeline (TANAP) has been held in the Turkish city of Kars on March 17, 2015. It is the key element of the Southern Gas Corridor to supply Europe with Caspian gas. Source: TANAP founded in Kars. Vestnik Kavkaza, 17 March 2015 - 7:50pm. <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/news/politics/68009.html>

<sup>5</sup> Armenian-Georgian Relations: Challenges and Opportunities for the Bilateral Cooperation, Political Science Association of Armenia, Center for Social Sciences, Yerevan, 2014, p.16.

<sup>6</sup> Giorgi Lomsadze, Armenian Train through Georgia? EurasiaNet.org. June 20, 2014 – 10:24 am. [www.eurasianet.org/node/68711](http://www.eurasianet.org/node/68711)

<sup>7</sup> Vladimir Papava, *Georgia's Choice: The European Union or the Eurasian Economic Union*, Expert Opinion, Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, # 57, 2016. <http://gfsis.org/library/view-opinion-paper/57>

possible if CU member countries agree not to change status quo and retain existing free trade agreements with Georgia.<sup>8</sup> Since then, at the high level meetings of the Georgian and Armenian leadership, it was stated that the different foreign policy preferences is not a dividing factor, but encompasses new opportunities for increasing trade and investment and that Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration choice does not pose an immediate threat to Armenia's national security.<sup>9</sup> That is a possibility, but the final word in the Russia led integration process would be up to Moscow. Whatever is the future of Georgia-Armenia economic relations, Armenia joining CU has more political impact on Georgia rather than economic. With this action, Eurasian Union is approaching too close to Georgia.<sup>10</sup> For normal functioning of the CU one of the aims is to ensure better land communication between Russia and Armenia. Consequently there is a high probability that Russia will pressure Georgia to attain its strategic goals in the region. Despite divergent views on geopolitical integration, Georgia-Armenian relations can be assessed as pragmatic due to national and political interests of both countries. Neither country is interested in weakening each other's sovereignty, as the 20 years of independence has shown that the common threat for both countries is exactly maintaining sovereignty, which will be hard without balanced relations with the neighbors. Multiethnic Georgia is not interested in another crisis, from its side Armenia needs Georgia as a transit to open up its economy.<sup>11</sup> The rationality that is a precondition for cooperation has always dominated Georgia-Armenian relations.<sup>12</sup>

That has been visible throughout years especially on the governmental level. Developments in the region in the 1990s and early 2000s demonstrated that Armenia and Georgia seek to safeguard bilateral relations. Authorities in Armenia have always been reserved and careful in their approach towards Javakheti and have not made any irredentist claims even in the early 1990s. During 2008 August war, Armenia also maintained position of non-interference, neither did it change position on Abkhazia and South Ossetia<sup>13</sup> and Javakheti remained calm, even despite excessive Russian propaganda. Official Yerevan has frequently been criticized by Armenian organizations for its inactivity and ignoring issues of concern to ethnic Armenians in Javakheti. Public opinion, and especially that of Javakheti émigrés, is sensitive towards the developments in Javakheti. The statements made by Armenian organizations, or articles by Armenian political scientists often becoming inflame Georgian public opinion,<sup>14</sup> and are mistakenly perceived as being initiated from

<sup>8</sup> Kakha Gogolashvili, Natia Daghelishvili, Nino Elizbarashvili, Oleg Shatberashvili, *Eastern Partnership and Convergence with EU Policies in Georgia*. Tbilisi, 2014, pp. 13 – 18.

<sup>9</sup> Armenian President positive about Georgia signing Association Agreement, *Agenda.ge*, 18 JUN 2014 - 18:50:00. <http://agenda.ge/news/16276/eng>; Гарибашвили: Армения и Грузия не поссорятся из-за ЕС и ЕАЭС. *Вестник Кавказа*, 12 Дек в 10:24, 2014; President Serzh Sargsyan met in Bagratashen with the Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Kvirikashvili. 4 November, 2016 <http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2016/11/04/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-meeting-with-the-Prime-Minister-of-Georgia-in-Bagratashen/>

<sup>10</sup> Nino Evgenidze, *Eurasian Customs Union Crawling Closer to Georgia*. Democracy and Freedom Watch, 2 April 2015. <http://dfwatch.net/eurasian-customs-union-crawling-closer-to-georgia-70512-32883>

<sup>11</sup> *Armenian-Georgian Relations: Challenges and Opportunities for the Bilateral Cooperation*, Political Science Association of Armenia, Center for Social Sciences, Yerevan, 2014, pp. 68-79.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, p. 85.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, pp.14-15.

<sup>14</sup> Eka Metreveli and Jonathan Kulick, *Social Relations and Governance in Javakheti, Georgia*, PDCI. 2009, p. 25.

Javakheti. In most cases, the perspective from Armenia on the issues is more extreme than it is in Javakheti itself.<sup>15</sup>

Armenia's strategic partnership with Russia is a decisive factor in forming the position of Javakheti Armenians towards Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. While Armenia's decision to join Russia-led CU was criticized in Armenia and some in Yerevan considered it as surrender of state sovereignty, caused due to Russia's pressure on Armenia<sup>16</sup>, general attitude towards Armenia's decision was mildly say neutral, if not positive in Javakheti.

If Armenian State plays positive role in maintaining stability in Javakheti, the same is not true of Russia. Javakheti Armenians have special relations with Russia starting back from 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman-Russian rivalry, continued later during the Soviet period. The Russian # 62 military base in Akhalkalaki on the border of a NATO member Turkey shaped affairs in the province until the final withdrawal of Russian troops in 2007. It was the principal source of paid labour in the region, and contributed to close economic ties with Russia ensuring dependency of local ethnic Armenian population, among them through giving Russian citizenship. The base was one of the major factors impeding the Government's effort to integrate Javakheti into Georgia, and was used as a means of political pressure in support of radical elements active in Javakheti in their separatist demands.<sup>17</sup>

After the withdrawal (which Russia was obligated to complete by the CFE Treaty) Russia's role in the region has decreased, although has not disappeared. Many locals have been seasonal migrant workers in the Russian Federation. Due to worsening Georgian-Russian relations—in particular Russia's closure of the border with Georgia and restrictions on visa issues—travel to Russia became complicated. But through acquiring Russian and Armenian passports the number of Javakheti Armenians travelling to Russia for seasonal works have increased and remittances send back to Javakheti from Russia is still a major source of income for locals. According to Crisis Group report, around 60 percent of families from Javakheti have relatives in Russia, what creates economic, but not political dependence on Russia.<sup>18</sup> But economy and politics are closely interlinked as many seasonal workers have Russian or Armenian citizenship which can be used as a means of pressure on Georgia. The problem became obvious since fall of 2014 when the Georgian authorities started to strengthen migration management and enforcement of a law on citizenship. The discontent within the region due to stripping Georgian citizenship of ethnic Armenians holding

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<sup>15</sup> Author's interviews in Javakheti.

<sup>16</sup> Armen Grigoryan. Armenia Chooses Customs Union over EU Association Agreement. CACI Analyst. 18 September 2013. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12817-armenia-chooses-customs-union-over-eu-association-agreement.html>. See also: Focus on Armenia: Eurasian Customs Union Crawling Closer to Georgia, Economic Policy Research Center, Tbilisi, 2014. [http://www.eprc.ge/admin/editor/uploads/files/Armenia\\_A5\\_ENG\\_WEB\\_3.pdf](http://www.eprc.ge/admin/editor/uploads/files/Armenia_A5_ENG_WEB_3.pdf); Richard Giragosian, Regional Implications of the Georgia-EU Association Agreement. Investor.ge, Issue 4, 2014. [http://investor.ge/article\\_2014\\_4.php?art=3](http://investor.ge/article_2014_4.php?art=3)

<sup>17</sup> "International Fact-finding Mission: Ethnic Minorities in Georgia," FIDH, Paris, 2005, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> *Georgia: The Javakheti Region's Integration challenges*, International Crisis Group, Europe Briefing 63, Tbilisi/Yerevan/Brussels, May 23, 2011, p. 6. [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/caucasus/georgia/B63%20Georgia%20--%20The%20Javakheti%20Regions%20Integration%20Challenges.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/europe/caucasus/georgia/B63%20Georgia%20--%20The%20Javakheti%20Regions%20Integration%20Challenges.pdf)

passports of other countries might be manipulated by Russia to weaken Georgian State even without necessarily consent from the Armenian community.

Contributing to this concern is the role Russia plays on the post soviet space. It effectively seeks to leverage ethnic minority groups against titular nations thereby hampering state- and nation-building processes.<sup>19</sup> Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine confirms the emergence of a clearly formulated foreign and security policy doctrine in connection to the post-Soviet space.<sup>20</sup> Russia has expanded its role of a kin to a wider Russian-speaking population through provision of Russian passports to the citizens of the neighboring states.<sup>21</sup> In this case Russia exceeds the claims of a kin-state acting as a regional power determined to pressure Georgia and change regional dynamics.<sup>22</sup> This approach is not new, but recently it has been articulated more clearly and in radical terms, especially after invasion of South Ossetia and aggression in Ukraine and determination to reconstruct Russian influence in its "civilizational borders" encompassing post-soviet space.<sup>23</sup>

Russia is concerned in the post soviet space not only about NATO, but AA as well. Though AA is portrayed as more technical, it is in reality a compromise at this moment, extremely significant for Georgia keeping country out of Russia's orbit. Ukraine became a "reality check" that AA is an issue of concern for Russia, linking Georgia's fate with Ukraine.<sup>24</sup> Russian propaganda and soft power is directed at undermining Georgia's efforts not only to join NATO, but its EU approximation process as well. As Russia has become unpredictable and no longer pursues rational policies, in the wake of its continued violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and threats to its statehood, the likelihood of a resurgent Russian attempt to undermine Georgia by playing on vulnerability of its ethnic minority population might become a greater and more realistic concern

## **I. Preconditions and Challenges to Building a Political Community**

The 1990 Law on Citizenship granted citizenship to all those who were "permanent residents" on the territory of Georgia by the time of dissolution of the Soviet Union, however, building a Georgian civic identity and unified political community has remained a challenge. The Soviet legacy of identifying the nation with the ethnos continued and both majority and minority communities defined themselves exclusively in ethnocentric terms making the creation of shared polity a real challenge.<sup>25</sup> This problem was evident in the discourse preceding the removal of

<sup>19</sup> Ekaterine Metreveli, "The Georgian State and Minority Relations." *Caucasus Analytical Digest: Interethnic Relations in Georgia*. No 64, July 2014, p. 7. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Series/Detail/?lng=en&id=94386>

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Rondeli, "The Russian-Georgian War and its Implications for Georgia's State-building." *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918-2012. The First Georgian Republic and its Successors*. Edited by Stephen F. Jones, Routledge, 2014, p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> Lyudmila Alexandrova, "Russia Keeps Pressing for Reunification of the 'Russian World,'" April 2, <http://en.itar-tass.com/opinions/1723>.

<sup>22</sup> Natalie Sabanadze, "Georgia's Ethnic Diversity. A Challenge to State-building." *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918-2012. The First Georgian Republic and its Successors*. Edited by Stephen F. Jones, Routledge, 2014, p. 131.

<sup>23</sup> For more about "civilization borders" of Russia see: Александр Сергеев. Цивилизационные границы России. 09.03.2015. [www.regnum.ru](http://www.regnum.ru)

<sup>24</sup> Gia Nodia speaking at the Georgian-Polish Expert Roundtable Discussion on "Georgia after Signature of the AA with the EU: Reforms and Security Challenges' Assessment", GFSIS, 25.03.2015.

<sup>25</sup> Natalie Sabanadze, "Georgia's Ethnic Diversity. A Challenge to State-building." *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918-2012. The First Georgian Republic and its Successors*. Edited by Stephen F. Jones, Routledge, 2014, p. 122.

ethnicity from state-issued identity documents later in 1999<sup>26</sup>. Ethnocentric approach and inability to create a common national project for Georgia's majority minority population resulted in two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In addition to instable political situation, poor socio-economic conditions and attractiveness of the historic homeland prompted minorities to leave the country decreasing Georgia's minority community from 29.9 to 16.3 percent. Georgia's historical profile of a multiethnic country has disappeared with its two main ethnic minority community comprising of ethnic Armenians and Azeris settled compactly respectively in Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli bordering their kin states.<sup>27</sup> Though problems pertinent for all minority communities in Georgia were mostly the same translated in low level of socio-economic, political and cultural integration ethnic Armenian community of Javakheti has always had more unsettled relations with the center than for example ethnic Azeris since early 90s.

The ethnic and religious composition of Javakheti has been determined mostly by politically motivated forced migration of various ethnic and religious groups over the past two centuries. The migration patterns were intertwined with the history of the region after being under the Ottoman rule since 16<sup>th</sup> century till 1829 Ottoman – Russian war. Under Ottomans the main changes in the region followed more religious pattern, which resulted in the islamization of the local population. The main demographic changes took place after Andrianopol Treaty between Turkey and Russia in 1829, when Russian favored Christian Armenians from the Eastern parts of Turkey (Erzurum) were encouraged to move to this remote part of the Empire. Ethnic Muslim Georgians who were not considered as loyal to Russians left the region. The Armenians settled into the region in two main waves in early 1830s and 1870s. Russia has also forcefully relocated the ethnic Russians, religious minority group, Dukhobors who rejected authority of a Church and the State in late 19<sup>th</sup> century to Javakheti.<sup>28</sup>

Next serious demographic changes to the Samtskhe-Javakheti region occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1944 approximately 120 thousand of so called Meskhetian Turks were exiled from the region to Fergana, Central Asia, though from Javakheti province itself, only 40 families were expelled.

For today, Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts are two out of the six regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti that are predominantly homogenous, with Armenian population in Akhalkalaki 94,3% and in Ninotsminda – 95,8%.<sup>29</sup> Geographically those districts are unified under a Javakheti province.

Since the mid1990s the center exercised almost no control over Javakheti, which was run by a local paramilitary group, Javakh. Many from Javakheti fought in a Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, but no open irredentist demands were expressed among the ethnic

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<sup>26</sup> Gia Nodia, "Georgia: Dimensions of Insecurity," in *Statehood and Security: Georgia after the Rose Revolution*, Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, eds., Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Ekaterine Metreveli, "The Georgian State and Minority Relations." *Caucasus Analytical Digest: Interethnic Relations in Georgia*. No 64, July 2014.p. 6 <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Series/Detail/?lng=en&id=94386>

<sup>28</sup> See Hedvig Lohm, "Dukhobors in Georgia: A Study of the Issue of Land Ownership and Inter-Ethnic Relations in Ninotsminda Rayon (Samtskhe-Javakheti)," Tbilisi: ECMI, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Major Findings of First General National Population Census of Georgia in 2002. State Department for Statistics of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2004.

Armenian community at that time. President Shevardnadze, with his mastery of a personal network of patron-client relations, managed to establish control over the region by balancing local power holders against one other and offering them lucrative governmental positions within the region or parliamentary mandates in Tbilisi. The local authorities, mostly ethnic Armenians, had been turned into political and economic elites who provided their extensive family networks and friends with social and economic benefits.<sup>30</sup> Relying on this type of governance was a result of Shaverdnadze government policy considering minority issue through the national security prism and following the approach of “let sleeping dogs lie”,<sup>31</sup> meaning taking out minority-majority discourse from the public sphere and closing it for the outside interference, including political party activism.<sup>32</sup>

This strategy of relying to govern the region through local power brokers resulted in “positive” developments such as maintaining stability and establishing State’s control over the region in turbulent 90s. On the other hand, it excluded rule of law and did not establish channels of democratic communication between majority and minority groups and did not contribute to creating a common political community with the common view of the Georgian State.<sup>33</sup>

The serious impediment factor to creating a unified political community was the ignorance of the Georgian language in Javakheti and related to it informational vacuum. The legacy of the Soviet nationality policies and imposition of Russian as a language of social mobility discouraged minorities from studying the language of titular republics and drove wedges between majority and minority groups.<sup>34</sup> This problem was not addressed after the independence, even more, the responsibility over education of minority communities was totally transferred to kin states, in many instances resulting in Armenia supplying textbooks for ethnic minority schools of Javakheti.

On this background coming to power of Saakashvili government with the ardent reforms and pronounced ethnic minority policy was a drastic change. Saakashvili directly appealed to minority communities of Georgia, often in their own languages, travelled to minority regions, made references to the loyalty of minorities towards the Georgian state and to the importance of viewing all ethnic groups as principal parts of the Georgian state reflecting the understanding of the government about the importance of unifying the country through civic nationalism.<sup>35</sup> This was part of National Movement’s ambitious state building efforts together with law enforcement, fighting corruption, educational system, etc. Georgia also started to fulfill obligations

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<sup>30</sup> Eka Metreveli and Jonathan Kulick, *Social Relations and Governance in Javakheti, Georgia*, PDCI, April, 2009, p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> Ghia Nodia, “The poli-ethnicity of Georgia; Fact, attitude towards the fact and a Political Strategy”, *One Society, many Ethnicities: ethnic Diversity and Civic Integration in Georgia*, Caucasus Institute for Peace, democracy and Development, Tbilisi, 2003, (in Georgian), p. 72.

<sup>32</sup> Ekaterine Metreveli, “The Georgian State and Minority Relations.” *Caucasus Analytical Digest: Interethnic Relations in Georgia*. No 64, July 2014, p. 6 <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?lng=en&id=94386>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid p.7

<sup>34</sup> Ekaterine Metreveli, *Overview of Key Trends in Javakheti*. GFSIS Opinion Paper. 2013, pp. 4-5.

<sup>35</sup> Niklas Nilsson, *Obstacles to Building a Civic Nation: Georgia’s Armenian Minority and Conflicting Threat Perceptions*. *Ethnopolitics: Formerly Global Review of Ethnopolitics*. 8:2, 135 – 153. Uppsala University/Södertörn University College, Sweden. 1 May 2009. Routledge, p 139.



that the country took while acceding to Council of Europe in 1999 under the framework of international human- and minority-rights standards. Georgia has finally ratified the Framework Convention for National Minorities (FCNM) in 2006 and published subsequent reports, though it has yet to sign and ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), which does not seem feasible in the closest future, as the Charter is controversial in Georgia. Some argue that recognition of minority languages might impede their integration<sup>36</sup> and hence the state building.

As a part of a new approach, coordination and development of minority policy was assigned to then the State Ministry for Reintegration, now Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality. The Strategy and Action Plan for Tolerance and Civic Integration was elaborated and adopted for implementation in 2009 for the next five years. As Georgia does not have a law on national minorities, this was a serious step forward as the National Strategy and Action Plan provided clear commitment and guidelines for minority integration in the spheres, such as rule of law, education and state language, media and access to information, political integration and civic participation, social and regional integration and culture and preservation of identity.<sup>37</sup> In addition, significant steps have been taken to increase Georgian language knowledge among Ethnic Armenian population of Javakheti. Government has picked up and continued OSCE led initiatives of promoting Georgian language and established Zurab Zhvania school of Public Administration in Kutaisi to increase number of minorities in the public service. The most significant endeavor for supporting integration efforts was the introduction of initiative aimed at increasing number of ethnic minority representatives in the higher educational institutions. Through the quota system 1+4 introduced in 2010 ethnic minorities can get state funding through passing only one, general aptitude test in their native language at a minimum score. Afterwards they can study intensive Georgian for the first year and then continue studies in any Georgian University. The data show that, since initiation of the mentioned system the number of ethnic Armenian students in the Georgian language higher educational institutions has increased.

Year	General Aptitude Test in Armenian Language	
	# of students that took the test	# of students that passed the test successfully
2008	105	54
2009	2	1
2010	188	128
2011	238	185
2012	262	200
2013	248	186
2014	307	218

### Nationwide Exams 2008-2014<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Johanna Popjanevski, "Minorities and the State in the South Caucasus: Assessing the Protection of National Minorities in Georgia and Azerbaijan," Uppsala: Silk Road Studies Program, 2006.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.smr.gov.ge/index.php?opt=69>

<sup>38</sup> National Assessment and Examinations Center (NAEC).

Government's ambitious anti-corruption activities and reforms of law-enforcement agencies limited discrimination against minorities. In addition it has also invested in infrastructural projects considered to be a major impeding factor to isolation of Javakheti, as well as initiated and promoted regional projects, such as Kars – Akhalkalaki – Baku railway aimed at economic integration and the development of the ethnic Armenian minority enclave.<sup>39</sup>

The reforms were a dramatic change from the previous approach to minority policy and have yielded significant outcomes. But despite the serious steps aimed at decreasing the gap between majority and ethnic Armenian community of Javakheti, the results were not straightforward. However, Javakheti community has come both physically and psychologically closer to the Georgian state. For its part, the majority also acknowledged that ignoring minority issues was hampering the country's development into a viable, modern, democratic nation. But the timeframe and resources allocated for integration strategies have not been sufficient to overcome the practices entrenched since Soviet times and solidified throughout the 90s. The policies also lacked coherent and thorough approach.<sup>40</sup> During the political and economic transition as states strive to define priorities for using their limited resources and capacity, the rule of law and economic development come prior to minority concerns. In most cases, states in transition do not possess enough resources to accommodate minority demands and provide them with the means to safeguard their identities creating "threatening uncertainties."<sup>41</sup>

## II. Current Issues and Conflicting Threat Perceptions

As a result of state building efforts majority-minority relations became stable and peaceful, demands for regional or language autonomy have not been an issue any more and in general decrease of political activism in Javakheti has been observed. Contributing to this in addition to above mentioned reform process was also limited Russian influence due to withdrawal of Russian military base, and allegedly strict security control exercised in the region through then the Minister of Interior Merabishvili and his deputy, both from Samtskhe-Javakheti.<sup>42</sup> But despite those relatively stable relations, the mutual mistrust in minority-majority relations have been coming up, depending on changing circumstances. Those circumstances have encompassed certain state building and rule of law establishment efforts, such as anti-corruption activities on the Georgian-Armenian border in Ninotsminda (2005), as well as closing of enterprises in Javakheti accused of tax evasion.<sup>43</sup> Actions that were widely

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<sup>39</sup> Ekaterine Metreveli, "The Georgian State and Minority Relations." *Caucasus Analytical Digest: Interethnic Relations in Georgia*. No 64, July 2014. p. 7 <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Series/Detail/?lng=en&id=94386>

<sup>40</sup> Ekaterine Metreveli, "The Georgian State and Minority Relations." *Caucasus Analytical Digest: Interethnic Relations in Georgia*. No 64, July 2014, p. 7 <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Series/Detail/?lng=en&id=94386>

<sup>41</sup> Will Kymlicka, "Justice and Security in the Accommodation of Minority Nationalism," *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Minority Rights*. Edited by Stephen May, Tariq Modood and Judith Squires. Cambridge, 2004, pp. 150-151.

<sup>42</sup> *Georgia: The Javakheti Region's Integration challenges*, International Crisis Group, Europe Briefing 63, Tbilisi/Yerevan/Brussels, May 23, 2011, p.4. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/caucasus/georgia/B63%20Georgia%20--%20The%20Javakheti%20Regions%20Integration%20Challenges.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> For more, see *Georgia's Armenian and Azeri minorities*. International Crisis Group. Europe Report 178, Tbilisi, 2006.

publicized and aimed at asserting the state's power instigated contentious debate in the province.

As minority groups are vulnerable to changes both within the country and on the international arena, Turkey-Georgia strategic partnership and Russia's resurgence as a regional power has also effected developments in Javakheti. At current stage major concerns of local community is evolved and generated due to activities of Russia and Turkey in one or another way influencing developments in the region. Perceptions of ethnic Armenians of their opportunities and threats are shaped by the international context. State and minority have failed to share enemy and strategic partners' images what has contributed to conflicting threat perceptions among both majority and minority communities.<sup>44</sup>

Image of Turkey as an enemy and Russia as a defender has still been shaping perceptions among Javakheti community which is translated in their attitudes both towards domestic as well as foreign policy decisions of the State.

The increased sense of insecurity is generated among locals due to construction of Kars - Akhalkalaki - Baku railway and subsequent influx into the region of Turkish and Azeri personnel associated with the construction and security of the railway. The commission of the railway that was initially planned for the late 2015 has been postponed and as stated by the Turkish Transport Minister in July of 2016, 87% of railway was completed and tests runs are schedule to start in December of 2016.<sup>45</sup> The railway will link the railway systems of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey.<sup>46</sup> It is projected that cargo turnover during the first year will be 2-3 million tons, gradually increasing this amount up to 8 million tones.<sup>47</sup> The railway operation and connected with it infrastructure will definitely increase Georgia's transit function and contribute to economic development of the province.<sup>48</sup> But the locals fear that the economic benefits associated with the railway will be limited for ethnic Armenians basing their assumptions on their exclusion from benefiting the project during the construction phase.

In general any activity which is carried out through the Turkish investment is perceived negatively in Javakheti. In addition to the Kars – Akhalkalaki –Baku railway, the criticism is expressed towards the Paravani Hydroelectric Power Plant also built through the Turkish investment. The plant was opened officially in October of 2014 and

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<sup>44</sup> For more on enemy image see: Niklas Nilsson. Obstacles to Building a Civic Nation: Georgia's Armenian Minority and Conflicting threat Perceptions. *Ethnopolitics*: Formerly Global Review of Ethnopolitics. 8:2, 135 – 153. Uppsala University/Södertörn University College, Sweden. 1 May 2009. Routledge.

<sup>45</sup> <https://railturkey.org/2016/08/09/baku-tbilisi-kars-railway-project/>

<sup>46</sup> Строительство железнодорожной магистрали Азербайджан-Грузия-Турция близится к концу. Вестник Кавказа, 31 Янв. 2015. <http://www.vestikavkaza.ru/analytics/Stroitelstvo-zheleznodorozhnoy-magistrali-Azerbaydzhan-Gruziya-Turtsiya-blizitsya-k-kontsu.html>

<sup>47</sup> Владимир Папава, Железная дорога Карс-Ахалкалаки-Тбилиси-Баку и развитие Джавахети. Джавахети: Вызовы и Перспективы. Тбилиси, 2013, р. 17.

<sup>48</sup> Премьер министр Грузии посетил Самцхе-Джавакх, Hetq, 26 мая, 2014. <http://hetq.am/rus/news/54814/premer-ministr-gruzii-posetil-samckhe-dzhavakhk.html>

will be used to supply Turkey with energy for nine months, while remainder of the year will cover demands from Georgia<sup>49</sup> contributing to Georgia's energy security.

Minority community of Javakheti perceives steps taken by Georgian State associated with the increased Turkish engagement in the region as a threatening to its security. Turkey is also associated with the NATO. The Javakheti civil society representatives express negative position towards Georgia's aspiration to join the alliance. Turkey is the only NATO member state bordering Georgia and they are worried of the possibility of Turkish troops stationing in Georgia in case of membership.<sup>50</sup> Some also argue that NATO-Turkish troops will be directed against Russian military base in Guimri, Armenia. To sum up, the strengthened Russian propaganda overall in Georgia and specifically in Javakheti is skillfully using anti-Turkish sentiments for elevating Russia's role of a heir of Byzantine Empire as a savor of Christian values thus opposing itself to the West and in this case to Turkey.

From its side State and majority also link minority question to National Security. Georgia's experience as a part of a Russian empire and later the USSR constitute background to the State's assessment of current Russian actions.<sup>51</sup> In more recent history aggression in the South Ossetia, strategic "agreements" with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, annexation of Crimea and assault on Ukraine's sovereignty make Russia the major external threat to Georgia who can use various leverages to undermine Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and keep it in its sphere of interest. As Giragosyan argues, Russia might use minorities to exercise pressure on Georgia.<sup>52</sup> While kin-state Armenia has always been a stabilizing factor in State-Javakheti relations, Russia who also can be considered as a kin might not act the same way. Technically speaking Russia is not a kin-state to any minority residing on Georgia's territory, however, it has traditionally acted as a supporter of Russian speaking minorities and where kinship is absent, Russia has created it through passportization, a mass distribution of citizenship.<sup>53</sup> This was the case with Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Crimea used by Russia later to "defend" its compatriots on those territories.

Ethnic Armenian minority of Javakheti, is perceived to favor, as Alexander Rondeli puts it, the former "colonial master",<sup>54</sup> and supports foreign and security policy priorities that differ from those supported by ethnic Georgians. In many Eastern European countries and in the post-Soviet space as well, minorities have been considered as allies to major powers historically oppressing the majority group. This

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<sup>49</sup>Energy trade between Turkey and Georgia boosted with new hydro-plant. BGN News13 October 2014. <http://business.bgnnews.com/energy-trade-between-turkey-and-georgia-boosted-haberi/733>

<sup>50</sup>Armenian-Georgian Relations: Challenges and Opportunities for the Bilateral Cooperation, Yerevan 2014, Political Science Association of Armenia, Center for Social Sciences, Yerevan, 2014, p.18-19.

<sup>51</sup>Niklas Nilsson. Obstacles to Building a Civic Nation: Georgia's Armenian Minority and Conflicting threat Perceptions. *Ethnopolitics: Formerly Global Review of Ethnopolitics*. 8:2, 135 – 153. Uppsala University/Södertörn University College, Sweden. 1 May 2009. Routledge, pp. 147-48.

<sup>52</sup>Richard Giragosian, Georgia's EU alignment: Regional repercussions. ALJAZEERA, 30 June 2014, p.3.

<sup>53</sup>Natalie Sabanadze, "Georgia's Ethnic Diversity. A Challenge to State-building," *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918-2012. The First Georgian Republic and its Successors*. Edited by Stephen F. Jones, Routledge, 2014, p.131.

<sup>54</sup>Alexander Rondeli, "The Russian-Georgian War and its Implications for Georgia's State-building," *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918-2012. The First Georgian Republic and its Successors*. Edited by Stephen F. Jones, Routledge, 2014, p. 35.

phenomenon, known as “minoritized majorities,”<sup>55</sup> defines the threats and the perceptions of majority groups towards the minorities and transfers the minority-majority debate from the human rights and justice perspective to a national security one.

Against this background, with the significant Russian propaganda in the region, the existence of other states’ passports among the Javakheti community and the discontent of local population due to the strengthened migration control of the State in the absence of democratic channels of communication poses new challenges to State-Javakheti relations and building a common vision for the Georgian State.<sup>56</sup>

Provision of Russian passports to the ethnic Armenians of Javakheti, initially associated with the Russian military base, is not a new process. The debate has been coming up from time to time in the local media. The process was also confirmed during the author’s interviews in Javakheti over the past years but no exact numbers were ever reported. Later on in April of 2014 Georgian media speculated about lines of people waiting to obtain Russian passports. The rising demand was triggered by the amended law on citizenship that came into force in Russia envisaging fast-track procedures for granting Russian citizenship to foreign citizens or persons, residing within the borders of the former Soviet Union, and speaking fluent Russian.<sup>57</sup> Though Georgian MFA in the official statement evaluated the reports about distribution of passports overstated, the interviews from the minority region supported the above said. Richard Giragosian, Armenian political analyst, sees in Russia providing Russian passports to ethnic Armenians of Javakheti a “concerted Moscow led campaign.”<sup>58</sup>

In addition, new opportunity for local Armenians to get possibility to travel for the seasonal works to Russia was opened after Armenian citizenship law of 2007 simplified the citizenship regime for those with Armenian descent. As a result, significant number of Armenians from Javakheti got Armenian passports that gave them possibility to travel to Russia without visa. But on the other hand Georgia did not allow for dual citizenship, unless specifically granted by the president, what is very much unlikely to be done en masse for the population of the whole region. Thus holders of Armenian or Russian passports have automatically lost Georgian citizenship, either without knowing it, or ignoring the law. The Georgian or foreign media sources speculated about the exact number of Javakheti ethnic Armenians

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<sup>55</sup> For more about “minoritized majorities” see Will Kymlicka, “Justice and Security in the Accommodation of Minority Nationalism.” *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Minority Rights*. Edited by Stephen May, Tariq Modood and Judith Squires. Cambridge, 2004, p. 155.

<sup>56</sup> Ekaterine Metreveli, “The Georgian State and Minority Relations.” *Caucasus Analytical Digest: Interethnic Relations in Georgia*. No 64, July 2014. p. 8 <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Series/Detail/?lng=en&id=94386>

<sup>57</sup> Eka Janashia. Moscow Distributes Passports in Georgia. *The Central Asia Caucasus Analyst*. 7 May, 2014. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/field-reports/item/12966-moscow-distributes-passports-in-georgia.html>

<sup>58</sup> Georgia’s EU alignment: Regional repercussions. Richard Giragosian. *AJAZEERA*, 30 June 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/06/georgia-eu-alignment-regional--2014629123238966304.html>

having citizenship of the country other than Georgia.<sup>59</sup> Illegal holding of dual citizenship by Armenians of Javakheti was also reported by ICG in May 2011.<sup>60</sup>

The issue of dual citizenship generated public debate after Georgian government initiated legislation regulating migration, citizenship and visa policies in summer and later on amendments in November of 2014.<sup>61</sup> Until the new law was enacted the issue has never been raised up, neither has the illegal dual citizenship been tracked by the law enforcement agencies.<sup>62</sup> The situation turned problematic, when following the EU-Georgia ongoing visa dialogue, as emphasized by the representatives of the Georgian government<sup>63</sup>, Georgia had to “provide conditions for well managed and secure mobility” and enacted new regulations. As a result ethnic Armenians from Javakheti were left without a Georgian citizenship, thus hampering their free movement from Russia or Armenia to Javakheti. But the law provides that those individuals, who were Georgian citizens and lost it because of obtaining citizenship of another country – “compatriots”, are eligible to obtain a long-term Georgian resident permits. Ethnic Armenians from Javakheti who are no longer Georgian citizens fall under this category and they can obtain residence permits at Public Service Development agency. The process has not been going smoothly. Minister of Justice Thea Tsulukiani had to travel to Javakheti to calm down local ethnic Armenian community.<sup>64</sup> Armenian as well as other news sources have been very sensitive towards these developments. The numbers of individuals allegedly stripped of Georgian citizenship or denied access to the country have been varied in the reports.<sup>65</sup>

According to the Justice Minister Thea Tsulukiani speaking on nationwide TV channel in February, already up to 1500 ethnic Armenians were given residence permits, while 100 – citizenship in 2015.<sup>66</sup> The authorities have realized the seriousness of the discontent and started to streamline the process, but

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<sup>59</sup> See: Rutavi 2, P.S. February 8, 2015; Армян в Самцхе-Джавахети лишают гражданства и депортируют. ИА REGNUM. 02.02.2015 11:26 <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1890605>; 5 thousand People in Javakheti Secretly become Citizens of Armenia, Dec 31 2014, 21:40. Vestnik Kavkaza. <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/news/society/66080.html>

<sup>60</sup> *Georgia: The Javakheti Region's Integration challenges*, International Crisis Group, Europe Briefing 63, Tbilisi/Yerevan/Brussels, May 23, 2011, p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> According the new bill Georgia keeps visa-free regime with 104 countries, while citizens of those countries can stay in Georgia no more than 90 days starting from September 1, 2014 instead of previous 360 days. In addition under the new rules a long-term visa can only be obtained at Georgia's diplomatic missions abroad, not in Georgia itself. Long term visa is also a precondition for obtaining residence permit. As a follow up to the critics and discontent towards the new regulations, the law was amended in November of 2014. According to the new amendments a foreign citizen who is already in Georgia on a legal basis, can apply for a long-term immigration visa to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Georgia, while a foreign citizen, whose residence permit has already expired or who has entered Georgia after March 17, 2014, can apply to the Public Service Development Agency for residence permit. (Source: Bill Amends New Visa and Migration regulations, *Civil Georgia*, Tbilisi, 13 November, 2014, 01:13. <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27814>)

<sup>62</sup> According the interviews conducted in the region, ethnic Armenians were leaving Georgia with the Georgian passports then using Armenian passports to enter Russia.

<sup>63</sup> Bill Amends New Visa and Migration Regulations, *Civil Georgia*, Tbilisi 13 November, 01:13. <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27814>

<sup>64</sup> Визит Цулукиани в Ахалкалаки. JNEWS.ge 19.02.2015. <http://jnews.ge/?+1742>

<sup>65</sup> 50 долларов и 5000 лари: сколько будет стоить для джавакхцев приезд домой? Hetqat 12:47, 10 декабря, 2014. <http://hetq.am/rus/news/57733/50-dollarov-i-5000-lari-skolko-budet-stoit-dlya-dzhavakhkcev-priezd-domoiy.html>; Джавахкцев, имеющих гражданство РА, начали “выдворять” из страны, 5 декабря, 2014, <http://hetq.am/rus/news/57666/dzhavakhkce> Крстине Агаларянв-imeyushchikh-grazhdanstvo-ra-nachali-viydvoryat-iz-straniy.html

<sup>66</sup> Rustavi 2, P.S. February 8, 2015.

nationalistically oriented groups within Javakheti and outside got a serious card to play with on ethnic discontent.<sup>67</sup>

Feeding the conflicting threat perceptions among majority and minority is the informational vacuum ethnic minorities of Georgia in general and in this case, Javakheti community is experiencing. The informational vacuum that is the obvious by product of the limited knowledge of the Georgian language by minority population, is also a result of absence of a coherent state policy to include minority communities into the common informational space and provide broadcasting and information flow in the language understandable for them. The Javakheti population was totally under the Russian propaganda during the 2008 war, as the Georgian government did not provide information in Russian or in Armenian languages. Basically Georgia lost informational war for its non-Georgian speaking population, leaving its citizens with open questions regarding the August developments and the role of Russia. Later on Georgian government as a part of the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GDB) has sponsored a Russian language TV Channel PIK targeted not only at Georgia's minorities, but the North Caucasus as well, naturally not being favored by official Moscow. After coming to power the Georgian Dream coalition determined not to irritate Russia, the PIK channel was closed down. Unfortunately the translation of the GDB's evening news into Armenian language is not sufficient to make up for the deficiency. Due to the lack of news from Tbilisi in the language comprehensible for local population ethnic Armenians mainly depend on Russian and neighboring State's news sources, increasing informational gap between the center and minority region strengthening existing weak socio-economic, political and cultural linkages. The issue is further aggravated by the increased Russian soft power directed towards discrediting European values and the West in general.

Addressing information gap and countering Russian soft power is of paramount importance for decreasing conflicting threat perceptions and creating common understanding for the future of the Georgian state between its citizenry especially in light of Russia's new security and foreign policy. Russia views the South Caucasus as being in its natural sphere of influence and Georgia remains long desired prize. Russian influence is emerging in the region through different means. It effectively combines coercion, integrative projects and the soft power disseminating the narrative of a new ideology, promoting the concept of a Russian world, and of Russia as a defender of Russian speaking population all over the post soviet space vis-à-vis weakened west.<sup>68</sup>

Russia is disseminating this narrative through financing pro-Russian NGOs<sup>69</sup>, TV and radio stations, organizing Study Tours to the Russia's capital, providing fellowships for Georgian youth. The message entails not the Soviet nostalgia, but rather Eurasianism and common civilizational space. It appeals to Georgia's economic

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<sup>67</sup> Melik Raisian speaking about forceful expulsion of Armenians from the region. Rustavi 2, P.S. February 8, 2015.

<sup>68</sup> For more, see Alexander Rondeli, Moscow's Information Campaign and Georgia. GFSIS Opinion Paper 29, 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Cecire, The Kremlin Pulls on Georgia. It's time for the West to stop taking Tbilisi for granted. March 9, 2015. Foreign Policy. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/09/the-kremlin-pulls-on-georgia>

vulnerability and weakness of the West, winning supporters within population increasingly impatient with the Western promises.<sup>70</sup> The special target of Russia is Georgia's Russian speaking population, and specifically Javakheti, where the population cannot get alternative to Russian position, countering to portraying Euro-Atlantic integration as useless for Georgia, its economy and culture.<sup>71</sup> The propaganda is yielding results in Javakheti. According the survey carried out by Caucasian House in 2014 the trust towards the West in general and EU among them has declined since developments in Ukraine. NATO is also regarded as a negative path for Georgia as from one side it is associated with Turkey and from another – becoming NATO member will further deteriorate Georgia-Russian relations.<sup>72</sup> The current Georgian government should not downplay a growing Russian soft power and take adequate counter measures.

Another issue contributing to conflicting threat perceptions and diverse views of the future of the Georgian State, is the limited participation of minority community in decision-making and weak channels of democratic communication. The good governance is still a problem in Javakheti. The governance patterns Saakashvili government relied on continued practice established by his predecessor and implied overreliance on local power holders, thus ignoring and not promoting minority participation in decision-making. National movement continued to take local power structures and their interests into consideration in exchange of State expansion in the region. MPs from the 1999–2004 Parliament belonging to the Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG), made a swift transition after the Rose Revolution to the National Movement list and later on to Georgian Dream. Though minority MPs keep a low profile in Parliament, they have significant authority and power within the region. In addition to MPs local power structures in Javakheti have been and remain organized around other influential individuals, such as Gamgebeli, and chiefs of police. They are main providers of jobs, resources, and social-economic security to their relatives and friends. In province as poor as Javakheti, it is relatively easy to earn loyalty by providing basic goods or minor employment opportunities. Overreliance on this governance practices poses a threat to stability in the long run as only few individuals in the region have a real power and might become interested in altering the status quo in case their interests are threatened.<sup>73</sup>

### III. Conclusion

The legacies of nationality policies in Georgia have influenced the State-Javakheti relations and encouraged mutual distrust among the majority and minority communities, contributing to the securitization of the issue which is becoming

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<sup>70</sup> ibid

<sup>71</sup> Richard Giragosian, Georgia's EU alignment: Regional repercussions. *ALJAZEERA*, 30 June 2014.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/06/georgia-eu-alignment-regional--2014629123238966304.html>

<sup>72</sup> Ana Dvali, Edita Badasyan, Problems of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti and Foreign Policy Preferences of the Local Population. Research Report, Caucasian House, 2014.

<sup>73</sup> *Georgia: The Javakheti Region's Integration challenges*, International Crisis Group, Europe Briefing 63, Tbilisi/Yerevan/Brussels, May 23, 2011, p.5

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/caucasus/georgia/B63%20Georgia%20--%20The%20Javakheti%20Regions%20Integration%20Challenges.pdf>



especially acute due to the changing regional dynamics and Russia's aggressive foreign and security policy in the post-Soviet space.

In order to decrease the vulnerability of Georgia's ethnic minorities to outside interference, it is important to introduce mechanisms for the inclusion of minority interests into the realm of domestic politics and push forward policies aimed at national unity. In this context in line with taking specific aggressive steps to counter the Russian soft power in the ethnic enclaves creating alternative to it informational flow Georgian State should push forward democratization process. It is argued that in the countries like Georgia, democratization might contain threats to stability and contain emergence of nationalistic sentiments, which is supported by Georgia's experience in early 90s.<sup>74</sup> But the only way Georgia to succeed is to build a modern, viable, democratic state, with democratized relations with its minorities giving them a stake in decision-making among them at central level. State consolidation process cannot be successful, unless conflicting threat perceptions are neutralized and Georgia's minorities feel they have a stake in the Georgian State. This is not an easy task and the State needs to balance carefully between the mutual mistrust, conflicting threat perceptions and democratization of the state-minority relations. But due to the current international context in Georgia's neighborhood, achieving de-securitization of the minority question would be difficult.

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<sup>74</sup>Natalie Sabanadze, "Georgia's Ethnic Diversity. A Challenge to State-building," *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918-2012. The First Georgian Republic and its Successors*. Edited by Stephen F. Jones, Routledge, 2014, p. 133.