



**THE ROLE OF CIVIC NATIONALISM
IN TRANSFORMATION OF THE
INTERNAL ETHNIC POLITICS OF
POST-SOVIET GEORGIA**

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THE ROLE OF CIVIC NATIONALISM IN TRANSFORMATION OF THE INTERNAL ETHNIC POLITICS OF POST-SOVIET GEORGIA

The paper deals with the transformation of ethnic politics of Georgia in the post-Soviet period and tries to find an answer to the following question: Did the transition of post-Soviet Georgian nationalism from the ethnic nationalism of Gamsakhurdia to the liberal nationalism of Shevardnadze ending with the civic one of Saakashvili lead to the advancement of the civic integration process in the country? The study analyzes the political statements of the four presidents of Georgia in light of the ethnic policy discourse through changes in the accents of the state nationalism versus transformation of state-church relations. The study demonstrates that a shift from ethnic to civic nationalism was exploited as a source of peaceful integration of ethnic minorities of Georgia. Language policy is taken as a case study for the research. It was hoped that civic policies and rhetoric would lead to peaceful integration of conflicting ethnic groups as well, although this has not been the case up to now. The paper explains the success and failure of civic integration policy vis-à-vis different ethnic minorities of the country drawing on the language aspect of the National Concept on Tolerance and Civil Integration policy document. And last, but not least, the transformation of state-church relations in the light of building the civic state of Georgia is also examined.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The paper analyzes the transformation process of ethnic politics in Georgia in the post-Soviet period. It reconstructs the course of the transition of the ethnic nationalism of the post-Soviet Georgia (early 1990s) to the liberal nationalism with civic elements during Shevardnadze's presidency, ending with the fully-fledged civic nationalism of the era of Saakashvili (since 2005). The post-Rose Revolutionary period (since 2003) was declared as a stage of civic integration of national minorities into the political and social life of the country. This paper will try to find answers to the following questions: *Did the transition of the post-Soviet Georgian nationalism from the ethnic nationalism of Gamsakhurdia to the liberal nationalism of Shevardnadze ending with the civic nationalism of Saakashvili lead to the appearance of civic integration tools in the country? And did it lead to an increase of the extent of integration of national minorities residing on the territory of Georgia?* Arguably, there is a clear difference in the outcomes of policy in respect with minorities in conflict with the center and those which have not experienced conflicting relations with the central authorities of Georgia. In order to answer these questions, the paper will refer to a content analysis of political statements of the four presidents of the country – Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Eduard Shevardnadze, Mikheil Saakashvili and Giorgi Margvelashvili – so as to reconstruct the gradual process of building of the inclusive

civic Georgian nation in the post-Soviet period. To this end, the paper will reconstruct transformation of the post-Soviet ethnic vs. civic policy discourse in Georgia in line with the change of national policies of the country towards ethnic minorities. It will also offer some explanations for success and failures of civic nationalism vis-à-vis different ethnic minorities on the example of language policy and explore the dynamics of state-Church relations in the course of formation of the civic conception of the Georgian nation.

II. TRANSFORMATION OF GEORGIAN NATIONAL POLITICS

This section explores the main elements of Georgian national politics of the post-Soviet period. For the proper understanding of the impact of nationalism on the (trans)formation of ethnic policy discourse of the country three aspects should be considered: *ongoing social changes* (or challenges), *pre-existing ethno-symbolic resources* and *new ideological movement* born out of the former two in the period of transition. Similarly, the success and failure of civic integration policy is heavily determined by the past legacy of majority-minority relations in Georgia, which is different for various ethnic groups and is influenced by the regional geopolitical context of a particular era. Generally, transition is the period of contestation of different elites and ideas/ideals, old and new, whereas, as Anthony Smith rightly mentions: “in this turmoil of powers and ideas, one familiar face



has reappeared: that of nationalism;¹ exactly nationalism, either ethnic or civic, has determined the mode of majority-minority relations in Georgia in the post-Soviet period. During the late 1980s and in the early 2000s, nationalism became the main ideology in Georgia and it led to national revival in the form of ethnic and civic nationalisms for each above-mentioned period respectively; this could be seen as “a function of social and geopolitical changes, their contents and intensities, determined by pre-existing ethno-symbolic resources,”² as Smith argues. According to Smith, nationalism – itself an ideology, symbolism and movement – became endemic and the potential for nationalist movements is always with us,³ what actually was proved in the case of Georgia. For a proper understanding of the majority-minority post-Soviet inter-ethnic relations in Georgia, the past ethnic resources, Soviet legacies and the post-Soviet aspirations should be adequately considered.

Considering Smith’s proposition, it is not surprising that nationalism became a source of legitimization of political discourse in the post-Soviet Georgia, both, for the majority, as well as minorities. Being coupled with ethnicity and politics, or with both simultaneously, the post-Soviet Georgian nationalism emerged as a powerful ideological movement, based on particular ideals and motifs of particular elites at a concrete time in office. These elites were promoting either ethnic or civic policy towards national minorities of the country. As argued by Snyder and Ballentine, national mythmaking is “...the attempt to use dubious arguments to mobilize support for nationalist doctrines or to

discredit opponents...” and it is “...the product of deliberate elite efforts to mobilize latent solidarities behind a particular political program...”⁴ It’s a matter of debate which national myths, political programs were successful and which failed in Georgia, but it is certain that national ideas have played an important role as advertisement(s) for political support in the post-Soviet political life of the country.

Interestingly, none of the above-mentioned periods were free from the influence of pre-existing ethno-symbolic resources, be it ethnic or civic nationalist mobilization. The Georgian reality in this respect nicely fits within Smith’s proposition that “... the ideal of self-renewal and the vision of collective destiny are built into the collective memory of a golden age and justify all the sacrifices that citizens may be asked to make.”⁵ These aspects of the past determine the nature of nationalism and any emerging nationalism becomes the foundation for the particular national-political discourse. Therefore, the architects of the national political project – politicians, intelligentsia, etc. – market the desired political course of the country with the help of nationalism and successfully “translate ethno-historical traditions, ethnic beliefs and territorial attachments into the language of modern nationalism [...] where general geo-political situation, including changing international attitudes to ethnic separatism and irredentism, and the regional location of the mooted nation”⁶ do have significant influence on its future political nature. The post-Soviet national-political projects of Georgia are the testimony of intimate links between the past



and present, where *the present* tries to legitimate itself on behalf of the past with the blessing of either nationalism or ethnicity.

The nature of the post-Soviet Georgian nationalism is quite fluctuating: it might change its direction, or attach new “social and economic programme and appeal to new strata of the population, but they remain firmly within the parameters of their ethno-historical traditions, drawing in the same shared memories, ethnic myths and territorial attachments, even if the language had become secular and political, and the symbolism reflected the needs of modern communities rather than those of their pre-modern ethno-religious forbears.”⁷ This kind of transformation of nationalism could be witnessed in the post-Soviet Georgia, which was influenced by political ideas of elites, by existing counter forces within the society and that of the ethnic past. As long as the old ideology of communism was discredited in post-Soviet Georgia, the new ideology – nationalism – became successfully exploited, whereas “cultural differences [were] available to be politicized as ethnonationalism.”⁸

A group of Georgian scientists does not see any contradiction between the implementation of the Georgian national project and peaceful integration of national minorities residing on the territory of country; “their involvement in the nation-building process is not a hard task, if Russia will stop its attempts to artificially exacerbate inter-ethnic relations between majority and minority,”⁹ Gia Nodia claims. But, I’d argue that the main problem in contemporary Georgia is the “segmented public opinion [which] is ripe for nationalist appeals;”¹⁰ at the

same time, it is heavily influenced by the existing objective reality of religious commonality (and not only) with Russia. The segmented public opinion of the early 1990s led to the conflict with some territorialized ethnic minorities, compactly residing on the territory of Georgia, which was the result of what is termed as *mirroring nationalism* by Svante E. Cornell. Therefore, the current developments and the success vs. failure of applied civic policy are heavily determined by the past scenarios of inter-ethnic relations. Evidently, those minorities which had conflict with the center in the early 1990s, have been refusing to join the civic national project, although those who have remained in a latent phase of the conflict have been successfully driven into the civic national project of the post-Civil War (the mid-1990s) Georgian state.

Referring to the analysis of presidential speeches, the second part of the paper reconstructs the transformation of national rhetoric in Georgia and the attitudes of different governments towards national minorities in the country. The research demonstrates the gradual transformation of state national politics from ethnic to civic nationalism in Georgia, which is recommended by Snyder and Ballentine as “a promotion of civic-territorial conceptions of national identity against the ethnically segmented markets.”¹¹ The promoted conceptions of civic nationalism and policies of minority integration into the mainstream social and political life of Georgia from the mid-1990s, after the horrors of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, could be legitimately seen as preconditions of Georgia’s civic integration.



The shift from ethnic to civic nationalism came with changed accents in the new national-political program of the country, with its roots in the mid-1990s and with some tangible results after the Rose Revolution of 2003.

III. FROM DEMONIZING TO INCLUSION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

The general picture of transformation of ethnic politics in Georgia could be reconstructed through analyzing the presidential speeches of four presidents of the post-Soviet independent Georgia. This section highlights the main differences in their accents, tone and future policy thinking. The inaugural presidential speeches of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Eduard Shevardnadze, Mikheil Saakashvili and Giorgi Margvelashvili do tell us much about the gradual emergence of the civic integration process in Georgia. Critical and comparative reading of their speeches are aimed at tracking the process of introduction and transformation of civil society building policies and Western promoting slogans, as well as elements of their national projects, in the period between 1993-2013 in order to highlight the main stages of evolution of civic integration policy of the country. The analysis follows chronologically and reflects on the main aspects of national-political projects in their speeches. There is not much to say in terms of civic integration for the period of Gamsakhurdia (1991-1992), as he in a way followed the policy of *isolationism* of Georgia as he saw enemies everywhere – in

the face of the West, in the US, in Russia, as well as internally, sometimes even among his close allies, and primarily among ethnic minorities, periodically blaming them for being the fifth column of the Kremlin. It could be argued that he was aware of a possible hidden hand of Moscow behind national minorities' political activism, although he was absolutely immoderate towards national minorities at some times. Due to some of his immoderate statements, like "*the local settlers should have priorities over other nationalities*"¹² and due to his short presidency, Georgia did not manage to formulate its national policy priorities towards ethnic minorities at that time. Paradoxically, his presidential speech was stressing the unity of ethnic Georgians and national minorities of Georgia at the time of declaration of independence and promised them the "constitutional guarantees of political autonomy of Abkhazia and protection of national rights of Abkhazians;"¹³ although the overt ethnically charged nationalism of Gamsakhurdia's period, and some of his immoderate statements, as quoted above, led to the exacerbation of situation in the autonomous provinces of the country, populated by national minorities. Nevertheless, as it was already mentioned, after becoming President of the Republic of Georgia, Gamsakhurdia became very cautious towards national minorities, and, evidently, some of his statements point towards assuming the possibility of the emergence of civic nationalism in Georgia if followed properly; just to quote some of them: "we should not forget that as we were facing the most decisive and extremely important



moment in our history, the great majority of the non-ethnic Georgian population were supporting us in the struggle for independence. The Georgian nation will not forget this. Each ethnic minority, residing on the Georgian territory, will have guarantees for development, promotion and advancement through ensuring the cultural space they need for self-sustained development. Georgia is ready to join all international agreements in the sphere of peaceful development of nations.”¹⁴ This is the testimony to the claim that Gamsakhurdia tried to build new bridges with national minorities in the future process of building the new independent Georgian state, notwithstanding his emotional ethnically charged rhetoric. Thus, I would propose that Gamsakhurdia could be termed either as “emotional nationalist” or the “nationalist of the mass rallies;” it seems that beyond populism he was quite rational in his future national minority policy; this is demonstrated in his speeches through his civic integration statements. Unfortunately, during his presidency these moderate statements and approaches did not get any institutional expressions and opportunity of implementation, whereas institutional build-up of ethnically framed nationalism among the ethnic minorities with territorial autonomies was remarkably successful.

Gamsakhurdia’s successor, the ex-communist high ranking official, Shevardnadze, decided to encourage civic elements in internal and external political life of the country. He went even further, and decided to bring the Western type political system of ethnic diversity management, which was to come in the form of federalism, as

Abkhazia would gain wider political autonomy within Georgia. Shevardnadze claimed that the new Georgian state could not be rebuilt without acknowledgment of the rights of minorities and it was necessary to “take measures against containment of extremist nationalism”¹⁵ in the process of building of the civic state and an open society in Georgia. In a way, the name of his new political party – “The Union of Citizens” – was a testimony of Georgia’s drive towards civic integration, which signaled the transformation of ethnic nationalism into a liberal-civic one for building the new inclusive Georgian state. During his second inauguration, he opted for civic-patriotic, rather than religious ritual and instead of Svetitskhoveli Church that he visited in the previous one, he visited the Holly Mount Mtsatsminda in Tbilisi; evidently, this visit had patriotic, rather than spiritual, significance. In his second inauguration speech, he pointed to the success of national reconciliation in Georgia after the Civil War of 1992¹⁶ and stressed the importance of planting the experience of “*The European Charter on the Local Self-Governance*” in the Georgian legislature.¹⁷ It was to serve as a basis for the formation of civil society in Georgia and would give a place to all confessions and national minorities residing on the territory of the country.¹⁸ All these measures were aimed at departing from the ethnic rhetoric in favor of civic nationalism.

The more policy-planned and symbolically charged ethnic policy was pursued during the presidency of Saakashvili. He was the first president of Georgia who officially declared Georgians as the oldest



European nation and claimed that Georgia occupied an important position in the European civilization. Therefore, with the European spirit of civic unity, any citizen of Georgia, irrespective of their ethnic origins – Russians, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Kurds, Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Jews, Greeks, Ukrainians – were considered as members of the Georgian nation and the sons of Georgia.¹⁹ This policy was strengthened by the adoption of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Council of Europe) in 2005, which was followed by the Conception for Tolerance and Civic Integration in 2009, both of them considered as an action plan for the civic integration of Georgia, implemented through legislation in educational and cultural spheres: provision of Georgian language classes at secondary education schools in the minority populated areas; supporting minority cultural life through various activities.²⁰ These normative and legislative changes were crucial for the cooperation with the EU structures, whereas as Clark mentions, these changes influenced “national politics, which took the form of civic nationalism under conditions of increased cooperation with the West.”²¹

The symbolization policy of Georgia’s links to European culture was also pursued. At the place of inauguration of Presidents, in front of the seat of Parliament, which has symbolic significance – the place where the independence driven demonstration was shot at by Russian soldiers on April 9, 1989 – the EU stars flag and the new flag of Georgia – the so called 5 crosses flag – are waving side by side, which is a demonstration of Georgia’s oldest Europeanness and its EU aspirations at

one and the same time. Thus, during the presidency of Saakashvili, not only the shift of rhetoric in favor of civic integration, but also the particular policy in this direction, planned and implemented by the state authorities – could be also witnessed.

In his inauguration speech Margvelashvili was also asserting the process of building the new European type of political culture in Georgia; according to him, this *Europeanization* process of political culture would not be a hard task as “Georgia is European in its individual consciousness and part of the Western civilization in its spirit, which would be institutionally strengthened during his presidency.”²² This drive to Europe would be accompanied with guaranteed political and cultural rights to all inhabitants of Georgia – first and foremost to “the citizens of Georgia residing in Abkhazia and South Ossetia – which would be included in the building process of democratic Georgia and the state would ensure their ethnic and cultural identity, as well as political rights.”²³ Thus, Georgia would gain its place as a bridge and medium between Europe and Asia. Considering the fact that the full membership in the EU structures is a long run project for Georgia, the undertaken civic policies have increased the civic integration of national minorities in the Georgian state, which became home for all its citizens, majority and minorities seen as equal members of the Georgian nation (as opposed to the early 1990s).

It is apparent that since the early 1990s, against the backdrop of the horrible experience of ethnic conflicts and bloodshed, Georgia gradually adhered to the principles of



civic integration, modeled on the European standards, which was in a way (consciously or unconsciously) a step ahead towards Europe/EU. If during the mid-1990s it was a more formal fulfillment of the civic integration policy tools, from the mid-2000s, more inclusive policies towards ethnic minorities, aimed at their incorporation through integration into the ordinary political-economic and socio-cultural life of the country, were pursued by the state. The primary target of this shift was aimed at avoiding further conflicts with other ethnic minorities of the state. This was the main shift in internal politics of the country, whereas externally EU-Atlantic integration became the primary aim of the mainstream political establishment, to which the first – civil society building process of the country, leading to the formation of the inclusive civic Georgian nation – was a step ahead.

IV. THE ROLE OF ORTHODOX CHURCH AND SECULARISM

The Christian Orthodox religion and the Georgian church played an important role in the post-Soviet independent Georgia. Thus, church-state relations in the civic nation promotion process, accompanied by a secularization policy of the country, should not be neglected. The Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia Ilia II has attended all presidential inaugural ceremonies since 1991 and his presence at these events has always had a symbolic significance. It is noteworthy that the presidential oath has always been made in front of the Parliament House and not in the main Cathedral of Georgia – Svetitskhoveli, as

according to the claim of Georgian constitutionalist, former head of the Constitutional Commission, Avtandil Demetrashvili, “if a person with Muslim origins would win the presidential elections, the presidential oath could not be delivered in the church.”²⁴ In this respect, evidently, a secular, civil consent promoting decision was taken, and this aspect was constitutionally guaranteed. Although, after delivering the presidential speech, either the Cathedral of Svetitskhoveli (Shevardnadze) or the medieval monastery Gelati (Saakashvili) was visited by the Presidents of Georgia. These both had more symbolic-patriotic significance for commemorations of heroes and glorious past of the country, rather than religious meaning. The speeches they delivered here do demonstrate the attempts to make a link between past and the present, for the sake of legitimization of the present political-cultural discourse.

In spite of multi-ethnicity and religious diversity of the country, all of the four presidents stressed the role of divinity in the future redemption of Georgia and its integrity. For example, Gamsakhurdia described the Georgian people as under the process of awakening of “religious ideology and national consciousness”²⁵ and pointed to the historical-traditional unity of church and state in Georgia which was expressed through the intimate links between “Georgian national movement and religious consciousness.”²⁶ In this way, he denoted the existing movement as national-religious one, which should serve as the basis for the social-political life of the new state, and even promised to declare the Orthodox religion as the state religion of



Georgia. Although, at the same time, he guaranteed the “freedom of practice of religion for all citizens of Georgia.”²⁷ Gamsakhurdia even did not decline to mention that Georgia was the Holy Land of Virgin Mary, which followed the way of Jesus Christ.

Shevardnadze was the first president to establish the ritual of visiting Svetitskhoveli after the inaugural speech and considered this as an important part of the inauguration of a president. He attached a kind of symbolic significance to this visit and termed it as “an approachment of president to God in a process of leading the nation.”²⁸ He even recalled some religious analogies, such as between Georgia and the Biblical Job. Alongside stressing the role of state in the formation of civil society in Georgia, Shevardnadze pointed to the joint efforts of state and church in formation of the civic state of Georgia. His second presidential inauguration, which, according to the Constitution of Georgia, was scheduled for April 30, 2000, coincided with Easter of that year, which attached symbolic and religious significance. Shevardnadze stressed that the past years of his presidency was the period of redemption for Georgians and Georgia, and argued that without the help of God Georgia could not become the crucial bridge between Europe and Asia; he mentioned that “it was most painful for the President and Catholicos-Patriarch that Georgian has not become united so far and the problems of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are not solved yet.”²⁹ On his second inauguration he did not visit Svetitskhoveli, although he thanked the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia Ilia II for conducting liturgy in

Svetitskhoveli, which was dedicated to his inauguration.³⁰ This became an important signal of the new type of church-state relations in Georgia and since then the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia has attended all inauguration ceremonies of all presidents. This could be considered as an important step towards building civic culture in multi-ethnic and multi-religious Georgia, as Catholicos-Patriarch joined the civic ceremony and not vice versa. The process of including civic-patriotic elements in the process of inauguration was followed by Saakashvili, who decided not to go to Svetitskhoveli Church, but visited the grave of the King David the Builder, which was the substitution of the spiritual part of inauguration with the patriotic element – the recollection of the dyadic past.

The current president Margvelashvili argued the necessity of preservation of the terms and conditions of the Constitutional guarantees mediated between state and the Church; although, at the same time, he stressed that the Constitutional rights of all inhabitants and their religious practices will be respected and protected in the country. Like Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze, he referred to God “to give power and wisdom to take the responsibility of presidency of Georgia, vested on him by the Georgian people”³¹ – a clearly religious tone; and similar to Saakashvili, he referred to the past in relation to the preservation of Georgian identity and quoted the famous Georgian poet and public figure of the 19th century, Ilia Chavchavadze, who was arguing at that time – “Georgians should create their own present, on the basis of past” and went on to recollect



the heroic activity of the Georgia soldier – Antsukhelidze – during the Russian-Georgian War of August 2008³² – a remarkably civic component.

The offered analyses of the four presidential speeches of Georgia since its independence (the early 1990s) demonstrate that the processes of building a civic society and a democratic state on the one hand, and the secularization policy, on the other, went parallel to each other and these moves were seen as a truly European transformation of the state in its internal political life, with the spirit of acknowledgement of the rights of national minorities. These changes were meant to create the foundations for a gradual emergence of the civic model of the multi-ethnic Georgian nation-state. Although the Christian religion has been symbolized in Georgian politics by all presidents of Georgia, and this proves the great influence of religion and Church as an institution in Georgian society,³³ the rights of religious minorities and denominations are constitutionally guaranteed. Meantime, it is also apparent, that the past plays an important role in the legitimization of the present political discourse, and undoubtedly, civic nationalism is the main driving force of state-building and national minority integration of contemporary Georgia. Nevertheless, language was picked up as the main tool of civic integration of national minorities in the post-Rose Revolution Georgia and the following paragraph will highlight the role of language policy in the national consolidation of the post-Soviet Georgian state.

V. SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF CIVIC INTEGRATION POLICY – THE CASE OF LANGUAGE

The language issue, i.e., teaching state language and the promotion of minority languages – became the main vehicle of civic integration policy. The National Concept on Tolerance and Civil Integration (mentioned above), defined the following six main target areas to be improved with regard to the education of national minorities: better access to pre-school education for persons belonging to ethnic minorities; access to general education for persons belonging to ethnic minorities; access to higher education for persons belonging to ethnic minorities; improved command of the state language among persons belonging to ethnic minorities; protection of minority languages; and access to vocational training programmes and adult education for persons belonging to ethnic minorities. In addition, national minorities were given the right to receive general primary and secondary education in their respective native languages and to run minority language schools. The multilingual education was considered as an alternative, accompanied with training of Georgian language teachers, upgrading and revising textbooks, as well as transforming the National Curriculum and including Georgian language textbooks as a second language.

Evidently, vis-à-vis Abkhazian and South Ossetian ethnic minorities the civic integration policy failed and they have not endorsed its main proposition – promotion of minority language education, in parallel to state language teaching programs. Azerbaijani and



Armenian minorities, compactly residing in Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti regions respectively, have become involved in the state language learning programs and most notably the young generation have either deepened their knowledge in the state language – Georgian, or have learned it from the elementary level; some of them later were promoted to local governing positions at state institutions. But this program did not work for Abkhazians and [South] Ossetians at least for the following reasons:

1. The delayed civic national policy did not reach them after the war of 1992-93 and they became hostages of the local minority ethnic rhetoric, which demonized the majority among local ethnic societies;

2. They had to live not only with the stigma of the oppressed people by the majority, but also found themselves isolated from the state by the local policies of Sukhumi/Tskhinvali and Moscow simultaneously;

3. The level of knowledge of their mother tongue decreased significantly, among the young generation in particular, and due to objective reasons they became accustomed to the Russian language, which was a lingua franca, being the main medium of communication for them during the Soviet times, and remained the same after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which became apparent after the change of the political circumstances since the early 1990s; Thus they lost interest towards the state language of the country – Georgian – especially due to subjective or practical reasons. The absence of political control over these regions from the side of Tbilisi

determined the weak influence of language policy over the Abkhazian and South Ossetian ethnic communities, thus the generated tools could not be deployed or instrumentalized locally among the Abkhazian and South Ossetian communities.

VI. CONCLUSION

It was demonstrated here that after the horror of ethnic nationalism of the early 1990s, civic nationalism was exploited as a source of peaceful consolidation, and for integration of national minorities of Georgia in the long term perspective. The period of presidency of Gamsakhurdia could be seen as an exception in this respect; although there could be found some moderate and civic policy oriented ideas in his statements, the first president is remembered for his immoderate nationalist slogans, which have alienated ethnic minorities from the center in the early 1990s. Whereas from the period of Shevardnadze onwards, the state planned national policy was promoted, with various tools of expression and implementation – mainly that of language – aimed at the peaceful integration of ethnic minorities residing on the territory of Georgia, with some notable success. This process was institutionally promoted since the Rose Revolution government came into office after 2004.

The study has also proved that despite different challenges at each period of the post-Soviet independent Georgia, God and the symbolic attachment to religion played an important role in Georgian society, therefore religion or religious aspects are quite often referred to by politicians. It could be argued



that the post-Soviet internal and external politics of Georgia is a mixture of symbolism, authority of religion and cultural values. This is testified through the recollections of past history by politicians, both Biblical as well as symbolic, for justification of their political actions. Although gradually, with the emergence of civil values in Georgia, the presidential speeches (mainly those of Saakashvili) became free of religious aspects. But none of them were free from ethnic elements and each of them declared the positive state policy towards national minorities. Meantime, language was found as

the most successful tool for the management of civic nationalism and for integration of national minorities into the mainstream Georgian civic nation. The promotion of the state language among national minorities of the country and the preservation of minority languages locally became the most effective force of civic integration policy, although the existing external political circumstances and “locked” past memory significantly constrain the success of integration policy towards ethnic minorities being in conflict with Tbilisi since the early 1990s.



Endnotes

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²³*Ibid*.

²⁴*Inauguration Speeches of the Presidents of Georgia* [ISPG] (1991-2004), *Op.cit.*note 13, 8.

²⁵*Ibid*, 18.

²⁶*Ibid*, 22.

²⁷*Ibid*, 23.

²⁸*Ibid*, 30.

²⁹*Ibid*, 55.

³⁰*Ibid*, 40.

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³²*Ibid*.

³³See: various public opinion surveys conducted by CRRC Georgia in 2008-2012. At: <<http://www.crrc.ge>>. (Assessed 21 February 2014).



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