

**RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN MULTIETHNIC ENIRONMENT (CASE OF SAMTSKHE-JAVAKHETI)****რელიგიური სიტუაცია მულტიეთნიკურ გარემოში (სამცხე-ჯავახეთის მაგალითი)****TEA TATENASHVILI**

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**Abstract**

The study describes the religious situation in Samtskhe-Javakheti. It specifies the challenges, problems and the relationship between the multi-ethnic groups and religious confessions in the region and tells the history of the region ethnic and religious situation, the causes and results of the existing perception of the religions in the region.

Nowadays the Orthodox Church, synagogue, mosque, Catholic Church, Armenian Apostolic Church coexist peacefully in Samtskhe-Javakheti. However, there was a time (2013-2019) when certain forces tried to provoke religious confrontations.

Study of the problem has a strategic importance for the country, as the study of co-existence experience of different ethnic and religious people for many centuries will support to adoption of human values and civic integration in the country considering the generally recognized right of religious freedom which helps to stability and development of state-oriented thinking.

It should be noted that the country faces the issue of religious tolerance, which occasionally appears. These problems are associated with a diverse environment. The Samtskhe-Javakheti region is one of the examples of such diversity.

The innovation is to provide information to the society that the trials of provoking religious confrontation fortunately was not turned into conflict, and it could be due to the historical and tolerance experience which is forgotten now and is considered as a stereotype.

Though the opposition did not turn into conflict with support of the state, Georgian Orthodox Church, as a dominant religious organization and the both parties of the confrontation, but it is not a final and long-term solution. It is necessary to evaluate all the recommendations and consideration the consequences of the mentioned developments.

For achievement the goals of the study, it was necessary to process available printed and electronic materials, study literature. Due to novelty and lack of literature, the information is available only in the newspaper articles, in the reports of public defender and the religious agency, or other non-governmental organizations.

**Keywords:** Samtskhe-Javakheti, religious situation, multiethnic environment, Orthodoxy, circumstance.

**თეა თათენაშვილი**

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**აბსტრაქტი**

კვლევა ეხება რელიგიური სიტუაციის აღწერას სამცხე-ჯავახეთში. ამ მიმართულებით რეგიონში არსებული გამოწვევების, პრობლემების იდენტიფიცირებას, მულტიეთნიკური ჯგუფებსა და რელიგიურ კონფესიებს შორის შექმნილი სურათის დაზუსტებას და პრობლემების გადაჭრის გზების ჩვენებას.

აღსანიშნავია, რომ დღეს სამცხე-ჯავახეთში ერთმანეთის გვერდიგვერდ მშვიდობიანად თანაარსებობს მართლმადიდებლური ეკლესია, სინაგოგა, მეჩეთი, კათოლიკური ტაძარი, სომხური სამოციქულო ეკლესია. თუმცა, იყო პერიოდი (2013-2019), როდესაც გარკვეული ძალების მიერ ხდებოდა რელიგიური დაპირისპირების პროვოცირება.

აღნიშნული საკითხის შესწავლა ქვეყნისათვის სტრატეგიულად მნიშვნელოვანია, ვინაიდან სხვადასხვა ეთნიკური და რელიგიური აღმსარებლობის მქონე ადამიანთა შორის თანაცხოვრების მრავალსაუკუნოვანი გამოცდილების კვლევა ხელს შეუწყობს ქვეყანაში ზოგადსაკაცობრიო ღირებულებების დანერგვასა, სახელმწიფოებრივი აზროვნების განვითარებას, სამოქალაქო ინტეგრაციას, რაც ქვეყნის სტაბილურობის გარანტი და დემოკრატიული განვითარებისათვის აუცილებელი პირობაა.

უნდა აღინიშნოს, რომ ქვეყანაში რელიგიური ტოლერანტობის საკითხი პერიოდულად იჩენს თავს. აღნიშნული პრობლემები მრავალფეროვანი გარემოს თანმდევი პროცესია. სწორედ, სამცხე-ჯავახეთის რეგიონი წარმოადგენს ამ მრავალფეროვნების ერთ-ერთ მაგალითს.

სიახლე გახლავთ ის, რომ საზოგადოებას მივაწოდოთ ინფორმაცია იმის შესახებ, რომ სტატიაში მოცემული რელიგიური დაპირისპირების მცდელობები საბედნიეროდ არ გადაიზარდა კონფლიქტში, რაშიც ალბათ სწორედ ის ისტორიული და ტოლერანტული გამოცდილების დამსახურებაა, რასაც ახლა მივიწყებულად და სტრეოტიპად ვთვლით. სახელმწიფოს, საქართველოს მართლმადიდებელი ეკლესიის, როგორც დომინანტი რელიგიური ორგანიზაციის, ასევე დაპირისპირების ორივე მხარეების ძალისხმევით, დაპირისპირება კონფლიქტად არ გადაიქცა. აუცილებელია ყველა რეკომენდაციის გონივრულად შეფასება და გათვალისწინება, რომლებიც აღნიშნულ მოვლენებს მოჰყვება.

კვლევის მიზნების მისაღწევად მნიშვნელოვანი იყო არსებული ბეჭდური და ელექტრონული მასალის დამუშავება, ლიტერატურის შესწავლა. საკითხის სიახლისა და ლიტერატურის სიმწირის გამო, ინფორმაცია მხოლოდ საგაზეთო სტატიებში, სახალხო დამცველისა და რელიგიის სააგენტოს, ან სხვა არასამთავრობო კვლევითი ორგანიზაციების ანგარიშებშია მოცემული.

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** სამცხე-ჯავახეთი, რელიგიური სიტუაცია, მულტიეთნიკური გარემო, მართლმადიდებლობა, გარემოება.

## Introduction

Probably there is no state on a world political map not being multiethnic and multireligious. Ethnic and religious diversity is one of the challenges of the modern world. The problem of the relationship between nations, as well as between confessions is faced by almost every country and as the historical experience confirms, that Georgia is not an exception, this is the country populated by 84% of Georgians, while the greatest portion of non-ethnic Georgians are Azeris, comprising 7%, Armenians being 6% of the state population and other ethnicities including Abkhazians, Russians, Kurds, Ossetians, Jewish, Greeks, Ukrainians, Assyrians, Kists, etc. “Ethnic and religious diversity is the wealth of our country. The historical past demonstrates that the representatives of different ethnicities were able to settle and live peacefully with Georgian local population“ (Ethnicities in Georgia, 2008:3)

Samtskhe-Javakheti is a multiethnic and multi-religious region where Orthodox, Muslim and Catholic Georgians, as well as Armenian Gregorian and Catholics, Jewish, Ukrainian, Russian Dukhobors, Belarusians and others live together. The situation is the result of the country’s historical past and geopolitical location.

Currently intercultural communication and the problem of tolerance are the global problems therefore the cultural, ethnic and religious factors often are the reason for the conflicts. Tolerance, accepting of different is the crucial issue for safety and public union?. Though, raising public awareness, modernizing education system and the role of media are very important to achieve it.

The scientific works referring to the latest problems and challenges of Samtskhe-Javakheti region due to the ethnic-religious diversity are very limited.

The issue is very important, but presentation of ethnic and religious diversity still experiences difficulties and requires caution in order to avoid turning of confession into the provoking instrument for violence and religious conflict.

In order to achieve research goals, it was important to process printing and online materials, study literature. Due to the novelty and lack of literature, the information is available only in the newspaper articles, the reports of Public Defender and Religious Agency, or other non-governmental research organizations. The paper is focused on analyses of the goals and process of appearance and establishment of different ethnic and religious groups in the region based on the works of Sh. Lomsadze, R. Topchishvili, and others.

## The Research Methods

The research is mainly based on modern history research methods: description of historical events, comparative-historical method, empirical analysis, causal-comparative analysis, quantitative and qualitative analysis. The article is based on primary sources - data from archive, media outlets (periodicals, television, Internet resources) and scientific literature on the subject. The method of case analysis is used in the coverage of specific events, the research and generalization of events that occurred at different times and space is based on the historical-comparative method, a critical understanding of specific material.

## Discussion

Samtskhe-Javakheti is one of the historical regions of the southern Georgia currently comprising of 6 administrative and territorial units, such as Adigeni, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki, Borjomi and Ninotsminda municipalities. It is one of the multi-ethnic regions. The current situation is the result of the country's historical past and geo-political location.

The territory of Georgia was within the intensive migration area from the ancient period. The representatives of Caucasus people, as well as the individual groups from the near east used to enter and establish here. Some groups of migrants mixed with the local population by the time, but other maintained their ethnic specifics till the end. Formation of Georgia's ethnic shape is mainly linked with the historical developments in the close East and in the south of current Russia. The ancient empires, movement of Huns, Cimmerians, Scythians, invasions of Mongols, the campaign of Tamerlane, Persian-Osman wars, strengthening of Russia and ethnopolitical and religious impulses derived as a result of its rivalry with the eastern countries (Turkey, Persia) (Ethnicities in Georgia, 2018:8).

We will present the ethnic and religious history of the region very briefly, in order to make clear further and current processes introduced in the article.

Two ethnic groups are dominated in Samtskhe-Javakheti, such as Georgians and Armenians. It makes the region specific. The mentioned groups are settled compactly in two parts of the region and there is only one district in the region, such as Akhaltsikhe, where the distribution of the ethnicities has certain proportion. The population of Adigeni, Aspindza and Borjomi is mainly Georgian, while in Akhaltsikhe the proportion of Georgian and Armenian population is 60/40. While population in Akhaltsikhe and Ninotsminda is mainly Armenian. There is Russian population in several villages of Ninotsminda municipality who represent the sect of Dukhobors.

The relationship of Georgian and Armenian people has the deep historical roots. The political and economic, as well as cultural life of those nationalities are closely linked with each other. Georgia became the mother land for many Armenian refugees.

In the 30-40s of the XIX century (referring to Adrianople treaty), the greater part of the Muslims residing in Samtskhe-Javakheti was exiled and Greek, Armenian and Russian population were settled instead. It was the clear indicator of the Tsarist colonial politics aiming to mix people, to suppress

national self-consciousness, increase the treasury land fund and implementation of the russification politics this way. (Lomsadze, 2011:528)

In 1829-30 Christian Armenians were resettled in Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki from Erzurum, Turkey. Their number was around 30-35 thousand people, consisting around 5,000 households (Утверждение...1980:265).

In Akhaltsikhe around 2, 000 artisans and traders were resettled in July, 1830 (Lomsadze, 2011:358-359)

As for Greek colonials in 1830 the greater group of the Greek refugees from Gumishkhane was settled on the Tsalka plain. At the same time around 50 families settled in Akhalkalaki and most of them were mixed with Armenians and became Armenians. Only few Greek families preserved their ethnicity in Akhalkalaki. At the same time in Samtskhe, about 100 Greek families were settled in the ruins of the villages in the Shavtskala gorge, most of them were concentrated in the village Tsikhisjvari and were settled compactly. There were many Georgian kin groups, who were mixed with the Greeks and were registered as Greek (Lomsadze, 2011:337)

As for settlement of Russian sectarians in Javakheti, there was no any Russian population in the south Caucasus till 1830. The first flow of Dukhobors entered to Georgia in June, 1841. In 1841-45 4,097 Russian sectarians were resettled around Tavparavani lake (Lomsadze, 2011:337-338).

Georgian historical literature links entrance of Jews to Georgia to the political developments in the ancient East. After capture of Jerusalem by the King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar (586 BC), the group of Jews expelled from Judas state entered to Georgia and took the land from the head of Mskheta by tax. The entrance of Jewish continued after it as a result of different political or economic factors (Etnosebi sakartveloshi, 2018:90).

The first notice about entrance of Jewish to Georgia was preserved in the Kartlis Tskhovreba (Life of Kartli), as for Samtskhe-Javakheti the earliest written notice about Jewish settlement in Samtskhe-Javakheti is given by Vakhushti Batonishvili "Description of Georgian Kingdom", who names Jewish as "Yids". "There are Armenian yids and Meskhetians in Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki, Abastumani, Khertvisi, Atskuri, Gokio and Baraleti" or 'Gokia is a small town residing by Meskhetians, Armenians and Yid traders", "there is Baraleti, a small town up to the junction of the river Mtkvari being populated by Meskhs, Armenians and Yid traders" (Meskhishvili, 1997: 5-15)

Many researchers paid attention to the migration of Ossetians in Georgia. An interesting research was conducted by Roland Topchishvili who considers the II half of XIX century as the time for appearance of Ossetians in Samtskhe-Javakheti region. There were 4 households living in Kvemo Mitarbi, in Gujareti gorge in 1860s, who were resettled from Ortevi. It was the time when Ossetians came to Zemo Mitarbi, Machartskali, Odeti and Linturi as well (Topchishvili, 1997:182).

As for religious diversity of Samtskhe-Javakheti: currently, there are three Orthodox eparchies in Samtskhe-Javakheti, they are Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti, Akhalkalaki and Kumurdo and Borjomi

and Bakuriani. There are the Rome Catholic Church and Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church, as well as Jewish Synagogue and Muslim Mosque operating in the region.

In the 1940s, Georgian families were moved from western Georgia - Imereti and Racha regions- and settled in the settlements of the local Muslim population who have been deported to Central Asia. The largest number of Turks were evicted from Adigeni, Aspindza and Akhaltsikhe districts, and the Kurds - from Aspindza, Akhalkalaki and Akhaltsikhe districts. Later, in the 70s, eco-migrant Muslim Georgians settled from Ajara region (Natmeladze, 2002: 41).

Catholicism in Georgia is represented by the Roman-catholic and Armenian Catholic church believers.

„In Samtskhe spread of the Catholicism from the ancient period is not surprising, as Samtskhe always was the road and gate for European travelers. When European missionaries used to come to Georgia, majority stopped in Samtskhe first. They met Georgians they were sent to convert them into Catholics in Samtskhe directly while entering to Georgia. Therefore, their mission would be aimless if they leave this first communities without attention and just go to the middle part of Georgia. This is the fact why Catholicism was spread in Samtskhe-Javakheti from ancient period (Tamarashvili, 1911:411).

In the second half of the XIX century when the Russification policy was strengthened against everything Georgian and National, the Georgian Catholics were also attacked. Due to that factor, Armenian language was appointed as a service language instead of Georgian in Georgian catholic churches (Kruashvili, 2005:6-7).

All mentioned caused a great dissatisfaction of Georgian Catholics. They started fighting to restore Georgian language during serving Kontakion. The fight was for Georgian, for national identity, against those who were called “Meskhetian educators”. The leader was “Some Meskhetian” by the pseudonym, a famous catholic priest and public figure, Ivane Gvaramadze. Later on, his student, Mikheil Tamarashvili carried on his work (Kruashvili, 2005:8-10).

There are certain peculiarities and opposition between religious groups, which should not be turned into conflict, or the reason for the conflict, but it should include respect and tolerance to each other.

Georgian history preserved the facts of peaceful cohabitation, as well as the conflict based on the religion; for instance, conflict between monophysites and dyophysites, Orthodox and Catholics, others. Recently, the trial to transform religious diversity into conflict had especially dramatic form which was noted in several areas since 2012, the situation between Muslim and Orthodox population was tensed for several times (Nigvziani, Tsintskaro, Samtatskaro, Chela, Kobuleti, Mokhe). Therefore, the fact requires attention and it is very important.

In the last period the conflict on the religious ground has been emerged in Adigeni district, where the ethnic Georgians lived peacefully for 30 years. In Chela, Mokhe and Adigeni village the

population is ethnic Georgian but according to their confession there are Orthodox Christian Rachvelians and Muslim Ajarians. Peaceful living terminated by the incident, which took place in 2013. In the village Chela, the Minaret of 24 meters of height was installed next to the Mosque what caused the protest of the Orthodox population. The part of the population considered this fact as an offense of religious feelings, on other hands it was assessed as violation of the Muslims' right. Finally, the confrontation was calmed down with support of the state entities, while Minaret was located on the neutral territory (Uchidze:2013).

In 2014 Adigeni was brought under the public attention for the second time. That time, Mokhe was the place of religious confrontation. The neighbors confronted each other for the building. The Muslims declared that the building located in the community center was Mosque, the Christians confirmed the fact, though they say that Muslims had constructed the Mosque by the stones of the Orthodox Church, which has never been functional and this is why the construction cannot be under the ownership of the Muslims.

The building, which was constructed by the local Muslims in the center of the village in 1927 became the subject of the dispute. In 1944 they were exiled to the Central Asia. During the Communist period there was the Community Council, later on a library and finally the House of Culture. The State Agency of Religion coped with the problem as follows: for the purpose of study and solution of the problem, the "Council" (so called "Mokhe commission") was established, consisted of the disputing religious community representatives, local governance, Cultural Monument Protection National and Religion Agencies. The work of the council completed by considering religious sensitivity and their interests ultimately. The construction was transferred to the National Agency of Cultural Monument Protection. And it was included in the list of the cultural heritage monuments, as a "disputable building". While village population was given an alternative land plot for constructing the Mosque (1,200 m<sup>2</sup>) (Narimanishvili, Uchidze: 2014).

In 2016 it was the third time when the village in Adigeni was split into two parties. After Chela and Mokhe, local Muslim and Orthodox communities opposed each other in the village Adigeni that time. The opposition was completed by the conclusion that the place for Muslim graveyard will be given next to Christian one. Both will have the separate entrances and the borderline will be made between them (Uchidze: 2016).

In connection with the confrontations between the Georgian Muslims and Orthodox Christians in the villages of Adigeni, we think that the best source was some ethnographic material, i.e the attitude of the locals, where they also talk about good neighborly relations. For example: "We visit each other quite often. Let them pray, who is interfering?! "Someone may say something, but nothing like serious confrontation ever happens in the village," said Revaz Gamkrelidze, a resident of the village of Chechla, adding that it would not matter if he had a minaret in a neighboring village. Some people may have expressed dissatisfaction, but that does not mean that there is controversy in the whole village. " Another interesting comment is from Izolda Lobjanidze, whose house was burnt down and she was sheltered by Muslim neighbors: "Nobody will oppose each other here because of the construction of the minaret."

Moreover, according to the Christian population, Muslims are currently assisting in the construction of an Orthodox church in Chela, and both sides say that so far, both Rachveli and Adjarians have never come to terms with each other on religious grounds. However, in the end, they express concern about what happened and say that: what happened will really affect their relationship: "There are some people that oppose it and this will affect our relationship over the time" – said 21-year-old Revaz Iremadze living in Chela (Tamuna Uchidze: 2013).

We hope that in the Adigeni district, there will be no more religious strife for the peaceful coexistence of ethnic Georgians. The Christian temple and the Muslim mosque as religious symbols will no longer be the cause of controversy between the two denominations, but of one ethnic group.

The next fact of religious intolerance referred to damage of the Catholic Church in Samtskhe-Javakheti. In 2018-2019 the local media spread the information. The newspaper "Samkhretis Karibche" reported that in "Akhalkalaki, near the villages Khulgumo and Bavra the icons and religion-related items were damaged twice in the praying places, it pahhened in April and November, 2019. The Praying place is the monument of cultural heritage and parish of Armenian Church serves here" (Samtskhe-Javakheti...2019).

Little bit earlier, in March, 2018 in the Christian temple near Vale, where Catholics and Orthodox Christians used to pray next to each other for many years, Catholic icons and prayers, were burnt. Locals assess the fact as a provocation. Around 600 families are Catholic in the village Vale, certain part of the population are Orthodox. In the temple, which according to local population, was constructed a century ago Orthodox and Catholic parishes used to go together, though as villagers say, this temple had never become the issue for conflict between neighbors" (Uchidze:2018).

In the village Kumurdo, Akhalkalaki district, in the yard of Dormition Church, the first incident took place between one group of the local population and law enforcement officers on September 30, 2017. It was caused by the trial of the group to install Armenian, traditional stone cross – Khachkar in the yard of the church. Since 2015 The Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia has been conducting the rehabilitation activities on the territory of the monument. During Archeological excavations, the graves and remains of people were found. The spread disinformation about origin of the church caused misunderstanding. Armenian Apostolic Eparchy confirms that they have no claim and it considers the church as Georgian. Respecting the graves of the ancestors is not disputable and it should be considered that for centuries both Georgians and Armenians, and the representatives of different nationalities and confessions were buried in the Yard of the Church and it is our task to respect all of them (Narimanishvili:2017).

In Samtskhe-Javakheti, in addition to above-mentioned facts, there are certain problems regarding to ownership of Christian churches. For instance, there are disputable issues related to ownership of some churches between Orthodox and Catholic Christians, as well as the problems between Armenian Apostolic Church and Georgian Orthodox Church.

In order to overcome such challenges, which took place in Georgia, to develop well-functioning religion state policy the special institute, the State Agency of Religion Issues was



established in 2014 and it became responsible for solution inter-religion issues and develops relevant recommendations in the field of religion.

The Center of Tolerance under the Public Defender's Office also works on the mentioned problems, which provided proper recommendations based on the analysis of the existing condition of the religion and ethnic minorities.

The assessments were made for the above-described developments from the state and non-governmental organizations.

The President of Georgia assessed the incident of Chela as follows: "Removal of Minaret from the Mosque is the same as removal of Cross from the Christian church".

The Prime Minister and the Parliament Speaker assessed the dismantling of the Minaret as the violation of Customs' regulations.

The Patriarchate of Georgia's feedback on the removal of the Minaret in the village Chela was to consider the fact as the trial to provoke conflict on the ground of the religion aiming to make confrontation between Christian and Muslim population, which will cause discreditation of the Church and State. It appealed to the Muslim spiritual leaders living in Georgia not to support but oppose to such provoking actions not only in Adigeni, but in any part of Georgia (sap'at'riarko sopel ch'elashi ganvitarebul movlenebs religiur niadagze shughlis gaghvivebis mtsdelobad miichnevs:2013).

A Public Defender assessed the mentioned conflict as illegal limitation of freedom of confession of the Muslim believers.

The assessment of the director of the Tolerance Center, which is included in the reports of the Public Defender; is stated: "The state policy became repressing and discriminating towards the minorities". According to the applied practice in Georgia, the impression is created that the religious and other minorities have the right of "existence", though they should not appear in the public places, which is explicitly considered as the "ownership" of the majority. „The narrative of our limitless tolerance opposes the reality. Of course, there is the myth that we are the most tolerant nation. We are focusing mainly on the visual effects. The tradition of tolerance, we have for sure, but this tradition was frozen in the far past (Bandzeladze: 2015).

Due to unsecular state policy, the relationship between Muslim and Christian communities are periodically tensed in Adigeni municipality, which is followed by the incident and in total, it creates the threat for religious conflict (Religiis tavisupleba... 2016: 115).

## Key Findings

According to the goal of the article, based on description of the situation and official assessment of the developments, certain findings are made. Georgia is historically known as one of the tolerant countries for different religions and ethnicities, though the best Georgian cultural monuments demonstrate it, Tbilisi is the city, where Mosque, Synagogue and Church are located side-by-side, Akhaltsikhe and particularly its historical district, Rabati, is also a good example of tolerance, where multi-ethnic and multi-religious life started several centuries ago is still going on, Rabati is the place, where Catholics, Jewish, Armenians, Orthodox Christians and Muslims have their own temples, which can give the example of tolerance to the whole world, though the religious diversity of Georgia is not considered as wealth of the state, but it is considered as a threat and the wicked instrument for wrong political intentions due to current situation.

The part of the population has not enough information regarding to other religions and confessions in Georgia, even about the Catholic Georgians' contribution to the past and present of the country. The Catholics are often called as "French" and among the some groups there is a dominant view that the Catholics serve to foreign interests. The Catholic population of Samtskhe-Javakheti used to defense themselves and explain, that they are not "French" but they are Georgians. There is the similar stereotype among the certain layer of the society related to Muslim Georgians, there is the consideration that they are "Tatars" and they are funded from Turkey. The certain part of the society sees the threat in it.

The important fact is that the hard historical reality should not be forgotten, causing religious and ethnic diversity of the region. Fortunately, religious confrontation trials described in the article was not transformed in the religious conflict, which probably was supported by the historical and tolerance experience, what is considered as forgotten and stereotyped now. Due to the activities of the state, the Georgian Orthodox Church, as a dominant religious organization, as well as both parties of the conflict it was possible to avoid transformation of the opposition into conflict. Though it is not solution and long-term prospective. It is necessary to evaluate all the recommendations followed to the developments reasonably and consider them. Nowadays, there are many well-known facts in the world when the religion became the reason for the conflict and violation. For instance, the situation in the North Ireland, when "March Season" caused the opposition between protestants and Catholics. Jews and Palestinians have the conflict due to the holy lands of Jerusalem even now, the example of Bosnia and Herzegovina related to the conflict between Muslims and Orthodox Serbians (here the religion became the marker of the ethnic identification) and many other examples. All mentioned examples and the reasons of the conflict are not identical, not always the reason of the religion wars and conflicts is the religious believe, the reason can be political, social or equal? use of economic power. The fact is that the religion should not become the instrument for achievement of political purposes.

Current intercultural communication, the problem of communication, tolerance is one of the global problems in the world and they are cultural, ethnic and religious factors which cause the conflict. There is no deficiency of cultural, religious and ethnic tolerance in Georgia. Tolerance, acceptance of different is important for public security and integrity. Though, awareness raising of the society, modernization of the education system and the role of the media is very important to solve the problem.

In the modern diversified world, informational and communication means, as well as growth of the migration makes peaceful relationship very important. Though in this relationship it is crucial from what perspective the world is evaluated, how our and others relationship and rights are assessed. Acceptance of different and in general issue of the identity is becoming important. „It requires attention to understand the importance of the difference, their impact and appliance as a resource, but not as a dangerous “enemy“ (st'udent'ebis ... 2017: 84).

There is one solution: Intercultural dialogue is a necessary precondition for peaceful cohabitation with the representatives of different cultures having regular contact. The problem of the intercultural dialogue is especially important for the multicultural, multi-confession and multi—ethnic regions, where contact with “other” and dialogue used to conduct intensively for centuries and became the factor defining the history. The necessary condition for the dialogue is to start it not based on the issues contrasting but by the one, which is common. The dialogue will be unsuccessful if it is started by offense and reminding the confrontation, in case the parties are looking for the future touching points (Chikovani:7).

One of the important conditions for development of democratic state is protection of ethnic and religious minorities, fighting against discrimination and xenophobia, development of tolerance and equality of cultures and supporting the civic integration, development of well-structured religious policy, which will not move beyond secularism, state should protect all the citizens regardless their religion, ethnicity, etc.

Pursuant to the Constitution, Georgian State recognizes the special role of the Orthodox Church in Georgian history, but also declares full freedom of the belief and confessions, the independence of the church from the state. In the constitutional treaty of 2002, so-called Concordat between the Georgian state and Georgian Apostolic Autocephalic Orthodox Church is the supreme normative act after Constitution.

In its turn, Georgian Orthodox Church gives the special importance to cooperation of the acting religious establishments in Georgia. Regular readiness for the dialogue with them is declared by it. Noteworthy, that the His Holiness and Beatitude, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, often hosts the leaders and representatives of the religious organisations acting in Georgia, whether this is the international day of tolerance, or other events.

For the last period, the State Agency of the Religion Issues together with Zurab Zhvania State Administration School<sup>1</sup> declared their initiative to teach the state language to the Catholic and Armenian clergy in Samtskhe-Javakheti

As a conclusion, in such multi-ethnic and multi-religious regions of Georgia, like Samtskhe-Javakheti, it is necessary to inform local population more about acting confessions. Due to existing

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<sup>1</sup> The main goal of the organization is to promote the integration of citizens living in densely populated regions of Georgia wit highland and national minorities into a single state space, to increase the level of state language proficiency and civic education.

situation, the focus shall be made not on the past conflicts based on the religious and ethnic belonging, but on the principles of co-residence, citizenship and state understanding, in order to develop properly oriented and healthily thinking civic society. Even on the example of the disputable mosque it is necessary to define the problem of the possession, historical and cultural status of the monument by the state, and not to assign the status of the “disputable construction”, as it belonged to the different religious group in different period. Solution of such problems should take place with participation of sciences, lawyers and other competent groups, what will become the important instrument for prevention of the future religious conflicts.

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