

G E O R G I A

SECTION A

Capital

Tbilisi 1,268,000 (1990 est.)

Area

69,700 sq km (26,900 sq mi)

Form of government

Republic with unicameral legislature

GDP—per capita

Purchasing power parity—\$2,300 (1999 est.)

Population

5,066,499 (July 1999 est.)

Ethnic composition

Georgian	70.1%
Armenian	8.1%
Russian	6.3%
Azeri	5.7%
Ossetian	3%
Abkhaz	1.8%
Greeks	1.9%
Ukrainian	0.7%
Kurds	0.6%
Jews	0.5%
Other	0.3%

There are 94 nationalities in the country. Approximately 90% of Armenians live in the Javakheti region, which borders on Armenia. The Azerbaijanis live predominantly in Kvemo Kartli, with a population varying from 42% to 85% in different districts of the region, which borders with Azerbaijan. Ossetians occupy the former South Ossetian Autonomous region and they make up 66% of the population. Abkhazians live in the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic and Greeks in the Tsalka District. Chechen and Avarian minorities live near the border of Dagestan and Chechnia.

Other ethnic and linguistic minorities are dispersed and comprise small compact settlements in some regions. All minorities have their historical homeland with their own state system except for the Assyrians and in part the Kurds.

Note: data from 1989 census

Official language

The State Language of Georgia is Georgian; however, in Abkhazia the State Language is Abkhazian.

Minority languages

Russian, Armenian, Azeri, Abkhaz (official in Abkhazia), others

Legislation dealing with the use of languages

The Constitution, adopted on October 17, 1995

The Law on Culture (June 12, 1997) proclaims the right to equal participation in cultural activities for all citizens of Georgia, irrespective of their national, ethnic, religious and linguistic origin.

On June 27, 1997 *the Law on Education* was adopted. According to Article 4 of the law, the State, pursuant to the recommendations of local authorities, creates the necessary conditions to grant primary and secondary education in their respective native language to those citizens of Georgia for whom the Georgian language is not the native language.

The draft law on the State Language is being negotiated now. The law must solve many problems and also become a basis for language policy in Georgia. There is no special legislative base for the use of minority languages in official matters (in contact with authorities). Unfortunately the Law on Self-government (1997) did not pay proper attention to these issues.

Background notes

Beset by ethnic and civil strife since independence from the Soviet Union in December 1991, Georgia began to stabilize in 1994. Political settlements for separatist conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia remain elusive. The

conflict in South Ossetia has been dormant since spring 1994, but sporadic violence continues between Abkhaz forces and Georgian partisans in western Georgia. Russian peacekeepers are deployed in both regions and a UN Observer Mission is operating in Abkhazia. As a result of these conflicts, Georgia still has about 250,000 internally displaced people.

In 1995, Georgia adopted a new Constitution and conducted generally free and fair nationwide presidential and parliamentary elections. In 1996, the government focused its attention on implementing an ambitious economic reform program and instilling some professionalism to its parliament. Violence and organized crime were sharply curtailed in 1995 and 1996, but corruption remains rife.

Georgia has taken some steps to reduce its dependence on Russia, acquiring coastal patrol boats in 1997 to replace Russian border units along the Black Sea coast. In 1998, Georgia assumed control of its Black Sea coast and about half of its land border with Turkey in line with a June 1998 agreement with Russia. Since 1997, Georgia's parliament has sharpened its rhetoric against Russia's continued military presence on Georgian territory.

In February 1998 supporters of the late former president Zviad Gamsakhurdia made an assassination attempt against President Shevardnadze. In October 1998, a disaffected military officer led a failed mutiny in western Georgia; the armed forces continue to feel the ripple effect of the uprising. After two years of robust growth, the economy, hurt by the financial crisis in Russia, slowed in 1998.

Independence: April 9, 1991 (from Soviet Union)

SECTION B

Where does one observe language to be a problem in the country?

Serious conflicts caused by language issues have not been observed. The Russian language is still in use among a number of dispersed minorities, whilst their native languages are used in locations where they live densely. Correspondence between some regions and the central authorities continues to be in Russian. It remains a priority in the country to reinforce the position of Georgian as the State language.

There is a problem with minority integration into social life because the minorities are afraid to lose their self-identity and their native language in the country. At the same time many representatives of the minority groups do not know the official state language. Some of them construe a request for knowledge of the language as a forcible assimilation attempt. The very notion of assimilation is considered to be negative by minorities.

Almost every minority has a historic homeland and roots to allow it to solve problems independently. In Georgia, however, neither the Assyrian nor Kurd minorities have an extant motherland. Thus they find themselves in a less favorable situation than other minorities.

The number of Parliament members representing national minorities does not properly reflect their real share in the population of the country. Until recently, even quite densely populated minority areas could not command representation in legislative bodies. The same applies to the representation of minorities in executive and judicial bodies.

In Georgia, state schools lack sufficient specialist teaching. The educational process is further complicated by the lack of textbooks, which have to be imported.

Ethnic conflicts still persist in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

As for emigration processes from Georgia, drastic changes have recently taken place there. Since 1989 approximately 14 % of the population of the country has departed. Sociological surveys reveal that the main cause is the poor economic condition of the country, not discrimination. Georgia has managed to stabilize the economic and political processes, but most of the population still lives in poor conditions.

To what extent are minority groups in this country disadvantaged by their language?

The Germans and Meskhetians exemplify minorities being affected by repression. They are also subject to the very important question of rehabilitation.

On June 30, 1992, the government of the country passed Resolution 648 "On the Restoration of the Nationality of Persons of German Descent Living in Georgia", designed for Germans who had to keep their nationality secret because of repression during the Second World War and post-war period.

The use of language in everyday life e.g. education, broadcasting and other

Minorities can participate in political (representatives in Parliament) and cultural life (theatres, cultural associations, etc.). They have pre-school institutions and schools, and some minority language radio and TV broadcasting exists as well as some newspapers.

Russian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Jewish, Ossetian and Abkhazian (only in Abkhazia) are taught in all levels of education (primary, secondary, vocational, teacher training, university). Georgian is the mandatory language in the educational system but there are schools with instruction in Russian, Armenian, Azerbaijani language. There are also Russian-Armenian, Russian-Azerbaijani, Russian-Ossetian, Russian-Abkhazian,

Georgian-Russian, Georgian-Armenian, Georgian-Azerbaijani, Georgian-Russian-Ossetian, Russian-Armenian- Azerbaijani and Russian - Jewish schools.

ARMENIANS

Language: Armenian

There are 183 Armenian schools in Georgia. A Department of Armenian Language and Literature exists at the Pedagogical University and Tbilisi State University.

Newspapers: "Vrastan", "Faros" (in Ahalkalaki) and "Arshaluis" (Ninotsminda).

Radio: Over an hour's broadcast a day

The Armenian Dramatic Theatre named after Petros Adamian operates in Tbilisi. Children's folklore ensembles "Haik" and "Tsiatsan" exist under the auspices of the Armenian Cultural Charity Society. There is an Association of Armenian writers at the Union of Writers of Georgia and a Union of Armenian Writers of Georgia "Vernatunts".

Armenians participate in the political and economic life of the State. Three MP's of the Parliament of Georgia are Armenians.

Societies: The Armenian Cultural Charity Society; the Charity Association "Charles Aznavur" (Ahaltsikhe); the Society "Veratsenunts" (Batumi), the Society "Sayat Nova", etc.

ASSYRIANS

The International Assyrian Congress in Georgia was registered by the Ministry of Justice of Georgia in April 1992 and is considered to be a representative body of the Assyrian community. Its main purpose is the preservation and development of the Assyrian language, culture, traditions and maintenance of contacts with its compatriots abroad. The Assyrian cultural center "Bet Nakhrain" operates in the city of Gardabani. The language of speech is new Aramaic. A newspaper, "Aviuta", is also published.

AZERBAIJANIS

Language: Azerbaijani belongs to Ogoz group of Turkic languages.

There are 159 Azerbaijani schools in Georgia. There are Azerbaijani kindergartens in almost every region where Azeris live.

There is a Faculty of Azerbaijani Language and Literature at the Pedagogical State University.

The Azerbaijani language is taught at the Department of Oriental Studies of Tbilisi State University.

Press: "Gurjistan", "Samgori" (Georgian - Azerbaijani newspaper), "Akhali Marneuli" (published in Marneuli a Georgian- Azerbaijani newspaper), "Heirat" (Marneuli), "Region" (Rustavi), "Chanlibel" (private).

Radio broadcasting: Daily 30-minute news and a music program exist.

Television broadcasting: Irregular

There is an Azerbaijani Cultural Center in Tbilisi.

Local government: At places with a concentrated population, Azerbaijanis participate actively in the activities organized by the local authorities.

They participate in political life, and take an active part in the country's economic life. Four MPs are Azerbaijanis.

Charity cultural associations: "Daiagi", "Birlick", "Umid", "Ozan", "Geirat", International society "Sazi" for friendship and cooperation between Georgian and Azerbaijani people.

GERMANS

Language: Mainly Russian, partially Georgian

German is taught as a foreign language in schools of Georgia. There is a German profile school and also Department of German language and literature at the State University and also at the Institute of Foreign Languages.

Newspapers: "Kaukasishe Post", "Kaukasishe Zeitung" (German-Georgian)

A Child folklore ensemble exists in Rustavi. Society "Ainung" periodically organizes exhibitions in Tbilisi for artists of German origin.

GREEKS

There are two different Greek groups: Eliphons ("Romeos", "Elinos"), who speak the Greek language, and Urum who speak Turkish.

The Federation of Greek communities consists of 23 communities from all regions of Georgia. In principle, the Federation represents the interests of all Greek citizens of Georgia.

Through the initiative of the Federation the following was done :

The Center of the Greek Culture including an Art School was established in Tbilisi. The newspaper "Elinika Diaspora" is regularly published.

Furthermore, the Greek community of Batumi issues the newspaper "Batumi"

The Greek language is taught in schools and places of their concentrated settlement as well as in groups existing within the communities.

Assistance is provided to invalids, orphans and families living in poverty through public organizations, charitable societies and the churches of Greece and Cyprus.

Regular contacts are maintained with the Greek Diaspora in various countries of the world, governmental and public organizations, the churches of Georgia and Cyprus, and the Universal (Ecumenical) Patriarchy in Constantinople.

Georgia was the first among former Soviet republics, where after a long break Greeks received an opportunity to study their native language.

JEWS

Language: for Georgian Jews – Georgian, for Russian Jews – Russian, Yiddish for a minority

Newspapers: "Menorah" (in Georgian), "Shalom" (in Russian)

Culture: Jewish Cultural Center that was established by the AJJDC, Jewish Museum, Association of Georgian-Israel Cultural Connections of the Georgian Academy of Science.

Education: Jewish Sunday School; Day School; Open Jewish University established by AJJDC; Ulpan, established by Sokhnut and the Youth Educational Center, established at the Jewish Day School. There are courses of Hebrew at the latter.

Jews actively participate in the country's political and economic life. Three MPs are of Jewish origin.

KISTS

Language: Kist dialect of the Chechen-Ingushetian language as well as the Georgian language.

Command of Native Language: Almost everybody speaks in the Kist dialect within the family unit.

Education: They receive education in Georgian.

KURDS

Language: Kurmanji (dialect of Kurdish)

In some of the Tbilisi schools, the optional teaching of the Kurdish language begins in the 5th grade. Literature in the Kurdish language is available.

Radio: 15-minute Kurdish programs are broadcast once a week.

There are 2 Kurdish folklore ensembles. The Theatre "Kurmanji" operates in Tbilisi, which is the only Kurdish public theatre in the entire world and a vocal-instrumental band.

One MP of Georgia is a Kurd.

Societies: The charity fund "Iakti", The Union of Yezidis of Georgia (a Society of Kurdish citizens of Georgia), The International Kurdish Informational Center as well as women, youth and religious organizations.

The societies maintain relationships with the Kurdish cultural centers in Bonn, Dusseldorf and Brussels, as well as with other Kurdish societies operating in Paris, Istanbul, Diyarbakir, Aleppo and Stockholm.

LEKS

Language: Khundzur

Education: At Russian schools.

Societies: None, but they participate in the Association of the People of Northern Caucasus Living in Georgia.

POLES

It is impossible to present exact statistical data concerning the number of Poles in Georgia due to the fact that there is no information from the last census and, because of well-known political reasons, many Poles adopted other nationalities in their passports during the Stalinist era. There are currently an estimated 2,000 ethnic Poles in Georgia. Tbilisi is still the center of residence for Poles in Georgia. A considerable number of Poles live in Kutaisi, Batumi, Rustavi and Ahaltsikhe.

At present the Union "Polonia" numbers about 800, not including young people under 18. The Union includes persons from the third, fourth and sometimes fifth generation of Poles who are mostly assimilated with the Georgian population.

RUSSIANS

Language: Russian

There are about 150 Russian schools. There are also Russian departments in schools; kindergartens, Russian language and literature departments at high schools, Russian departments in various universities in Tbilisi,

Kutaisi, Batumi, Sukhumi, Tskhinvali etc. There are several Russian churches.

Mass Media Press: "Svobodnaia Gruzia", "Rech", "Vecherni Tbilisi" and "Zakavkazskie Vedomosti" (Russian army newspaper), "Zaria Vostoka", "Batumi" etc. Magazines - "Literaturnaia Gruzia", the literary almanac "Mtatsminda", etc.

Broadcasting: There are daily programs that last several hours.

Television broadcasting: Program "Vestnik" and two Russian Federation channels.

There are three professional theaters, and a section of Russian writers at the Union of the Writers of Georgia and Russian Cultural Center.

There are 3 Russian MPs in the Parliament of Georgia.

Associations: There are about 10 associations of Russians. The biggest is the Russian Cultural and Educational Association of Georgia, which have 9 branches and 16,000 members.

Did the country ratify any international treaty dealing with the protection of minorities?

Georgia is a State Party to the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It recognizes its obligation to protect the rights of minorities contained in Article 27 of the Covenant.

Georgia is also a State Party to the UN International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities was signed on January 21, 2000.

Conclusion

It is a characteristic view in Georgia that a tolerant attitude towards minorities is traditional from ancient times. But the difficulty is that the minorities living in Georgia significantly differ from one another in terms of number, residence pattern (compact or dispersed) and degree of integration into the social life of the country. Even internally these groups are not homogeneous. For example, the Greek Diaspora consists of two groups: one speaking Turkish and the other Modern Greek. Azeris living in Kvemo Kartli and Shida Kartli also differ from each other. The fact that they receive secondary education in different languages (in Georgian in Shida Kartli and in Azerbaijani in Kvemo Kartli) plays a big role. What path is Georgia going to follow in the future?

SECTION C

Legislation dealing with the use of languages

Updated (June 2002)

Despite the fact that the Georgian government has been working on the language bill since 1997, on May 17, 2002 the Parliament decided to stop the debate on its final approval for an indefinite period. Two amendments lately introduced have caused that deputies from the "Georgia first of all" group requested the suspension of the parliamentary debate. They considered those amendments to be against Georgian interests as well as unconstitutional.

The Organization for the Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) also criticized the part of the bill with the requirement for government offices to use the Georgian language in their documentation. This is especially sensitive issue mainly in two regions where other languages are predominantly spoken (Armenian and Azerbaijani, apart from Russian).

Source: Mercator, <http://www.troc.es/ciemen/mercator/index-gb.htm>, June 2002

To what extent are minority groups in this country disadvantaged by their language?

Updated (October 2002)

GEORGIAN AZERIS LOCKED OUT BY LANGUAGE

Controversial new language legislation may further isolate 300,000 Azerbaijanis in Georgia living mostly in villages in the southern region of Kvemo Kartli, not far from the capital Tbilisi, and near the borders with Armenia and Azerbaijan.

If President Shevardnadze steps down, the Azerbaijanis who live in Georgia will be seriously worried about their security. Most of the current opposition to the head of state seems to be either pro-Armenian or Georgian nationalists.

Another disadvantage for this ethnic group is that its members do not speak Georgian and have few opportunities to learn it. The linguistic isolation of such a large group could become a serious problem, especially if a new draft Law on the Georgian Language is voted through parliament later this year.

One reason for the region's strong local identity is that it is largely economically self-sufficient. The hard-working Azerbaijanis dominate in Georgia's agricultural markets. Despite their proximity to the Georgian

capital, a lack of basic language skills has placed the Azerbaijanis in a complete information vacuum.

Ramin Bairamov, a chairman of the society "Inter-cultural friendship" in the Kvemo Kartli region, said a story how local Azerbaijanis looked for the name of Heidar Aliev, the president of Azerbaijan, on voting ballots, because they did not realize that Georgia was another state.

"Why should we expect something else?" Bairamov said. "The majority of local people watch Azerbaijani television channels, read Azerbaijani newspapers and take no part in the socio-political life of Georgia."

Although office work in the whole country should be done in Georgian, the local authorities, schools, clinics and other state offices write all their documents in Russian, as they used to in Soviet times.

Efforts to encourage people in the Gardaban region to speak Georgian have been ineffectual. The State Language Chamber, a government body that has been in charge of the task, organized free language courses for state employees in the region but in two years just 120 people attended the classes.

A separate presidential program for extra financing of the Georgian language teaching in non-Georgian schools offered teachers bonuses of 50 Lari (around \$22) a month, a sum almost equivalent to their average salary, but even this did not attract the required number of teachers to the region.

A few years ago one of the Azerbaijani schools in Nazarlo opened a Georgian department and the overwhelming majority of parents sent their first-grade children there. But four years later, when the children had finished primary education, they found that there was no one who could teach them history, biology or mathematics in Georgian.

"It's a big problem," said Kazanfar Gulamov, a headmaster of the school in Kesalo. "To work successfully, a teacher should speak Azeri as well, and in reality many of the Georgian language teachers don't have any special education."

This fragile situation could be further undermined this autumn if, as anticipated, the Georgian parliament passes a new language law. If a current draft under discussion is passed, knowledge of Georgian will be compulsory for anyone working in a state institution.

Source: Minelres Archive, <http://lists.delfi.lv/pipermail/minelres/>, by Zaza Baazov, a freelance journalist based in Tbilisi, March 2002

APPENDIX A

MAP OF GEORGIA



APPENDIX B

GEORGIA - CONSTITUTION

(Adopted on August 24, 1995)

Article 8

The state language of Georgia is Georgian; in Abkhazia, Abkhazian is also the state language.

Article 14

Everyone is born free and is equal before the law, regardless of race, skin, colour, language, sex, religion, political and other beliefs, national, ethnic and social origin, property and title of nobility or place of residence.

Article 38

1. Citizens of Georgia are equal in social, economic, cultural and political life regardless of national, ethnic, religious or language origin. According to universally recognized principles and norms of international law all have the right to develop their culture freely without any discrimination and interference. They may use their language in private and public life.

Article 85

2. Jurisdiction is exercised in the state language. Persons not having command of the legal language of the court are provided with interpreters. In the regions where the population does not have a command of the state language, the state provides teaching in the state language and explanations of matters pertaining to its jurisdiction.

Note: The complete text of the Constitution is provided by the Parliament of Georgia.

THE CONSTITUTION OF ABKHAZIA

(ratified in the city of Shukum on November 26, 1994)

The Basics of the Constitutional Order

Article 6

The official language of the Republic of Abkhazia shall be the Abkhazian language. The Russian language, equally with the Abkhazian language, shall be recognized as a language of State and other institutions. The State shall guarantee the right to freely use the mother language for all the ethnic groups residing in Abkhazia.

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