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# Minority Language Policy in Georgia

## საქართველოს ენობრივი პოლიტიკა უმცირესობების მიმართ

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**Abstract.** There are four regions in Georgia where large groups of linguistic minorities reside: Abkhazians in Abkhazia, Ossetians in Shida Kartli, Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli, and Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti and the Tsalka district of Kvemo Kartli. The Abkhazians live in the northwestern part of Georgia, along the Black Sea coast. In addition to these major groups, it is also important to mention several smaller linguistic communities, primarily settled in the mountainous areas of Eastern Georgia. These include the Pankisi Kists, Batsbs, and Udians. The uniqueness of these groups lies in their numbers: their languages are included in UNESCO's list of endangered languages. During the Soviet era, language policy was marked by increasing Russification. After the collapse of the USSR, the national government of Georgia assumed responsibility for preserving and developing the native languages of minority groups. Current state policy governs the use of these languages in relation to the official language. Georgian legislation is liberal in this regard and promotes an integration-oriented language policy, in contrast to the assimilationist and Russification-driven policies of the Soviet period. In recent years, minority communities have shown growing interest in learning the official language. One of the key contributing factors has been the state's effective language policy aimed at supporting both the preservation and development of native languages. In this context, the State Language Department, the Ministry of Education and Science, and international organizations play a crucial role in facilitating the integration of minority groups. A variety of programs and local projects are being implemented to promote multilingual education, with one of the primary goals being the protection and preservation of native languages.

**აბსტრაქტი.** საქართველოში ოთხი რეგიონია, სადაც ენობრივი უმცირესობების დიდი ჯგუფები ცხოვრობენ: აფხაზები - აფხაზეთში, ოსები - შიდა ქართლში, აზერბაიჯანელები - ქვემო ქართლში და სომხები - სამცხე-ჯავახეთსა და ქვემო ქართლიდან - წალკის რაიონში. აფხაზები ცხოვრობენ საქართველოს ჩრდილო-დასავლეთ ნაწილში, შავი ზღვის სანაპიროზე. მნიშვნელოვანია ასევე რამდენიმე მცირე ენობრივი თემის ხსენება, რომლებიც ძირითადად აღმოსავლეთ საქართველოს მთიან რაიონებში არიან განსახლებულნი. მათ შორის არიან პანკისელი ქისტები, ბატსბები და უდიები. ამ ჯგუფების უნიკალურობა მათ რაოდენობაშია: მათი ენები შეტანილია იუნესკოს გადაშენების პირას მყოფი ენების სიაში. საბჭოთა ენობრივი პოლიტიკა მკვეთრად ასიმილაციონისტური იყო. სსრკ-ის დაშლის შემდეგ საქართველოს ეროვნულმა მთავრობამ აიღო პასუხისმგებლობა უმცირესობათა ჯგუფების მშობლიური ენების შენარჩუნებასა და განვითარებაზე. ამჟამინდელი სახელმწიფო პოლიტიკა არეგულირებს ამ ენათა გამოყენებას ოფიციალურ ენასთან მიმართებით. საქართველოს კანონმდებლობა ამ მხრივ ლიბერალურია, ხელს უწყობს ინტეგრაციაზე ორიენტირებულ ენობრივ პოლიტიკას, საბჭოთა პერიოდის ასიმილაციასა და რუსიფიკაციაზე ორიენტირებული პოლიტიკისგან განსხვავებით. ბოლო წლებში უმცირესობათა თემებმა სახელმწიფო ენის შესწავლისადმი მზარდი ინტერესი გამოხატეს. ერთ-ერთი მთავარი ხელშემწყობი ფაქტორი იყო სახელმწიფოს ეფექტური ენობრივი პოლიტიკა, რომელიც, სახელმწიფო ენის სწავლების ხელშეწყობასთან ერთად, მიზნად ისახავს მშობლიური ენების შენარჩუნებისა და განვითარების მხარდაჭერას.

**Keywords:** Sociolinguistics, language policy, state language, Minority languages, multilingual practices

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** სოციოლინგვისტიკა. ენობრივი პოლიტიკა, სახელმწიფო ენა, უმცირესობათა ენები, მრავალენოვნება

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to review the Contemporary language situation in Georgia, specifically in relation to the functioning of the state language. In our research, we rely on the results of field research conducted over the last 20 years, as well as on a sociological survey that we conducted in 2020. This was done in cooperation with the Carnegie Europe Foundation and it included sociolinguistic issues (CRRC, 2021), amongst other things. We processed reports of studies conducted by international or non-governmental organizations, as well as reports prepared by the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civil Equality (National Concept, 2015-2020), based on the analysis and generalization of which we came to important conclusions.

During the research, a theoretical framework was developed, which considers the following research issues:

1. What languages exist in Georgia, apart from the official language (Georgian)?
2. What is the sociolinguistic status of these languages?
3. What kind of language policy does Georgia have in relation to minority languages (in historical terms)?
4. To what extent and with what tools does the state protect the preservation/development of these languages?

## 2. The Languages of Georgia

According to the 2014 population census of Georgia (Census, 2014), groups of citizens living in Georgia were identified according to their mother tongue. The census data showed that the native language of 87.6% of the population of Georgia is Georgian. Other native languages according to the speakers were Azerbaijani (6.20%), Armenian (3.9%), and Russian (1.24%) Russian. All other languages together were the mother tongue of 1.1% of the population. The census data also showed that in some regions, the majority of the people did not have Georgian as their native tongue. About half of the inhabitants of the region of Samtskhe-Javakheti, which borders on Armenia, have Armenian as their native language. In two municipalities (Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda) of the region of Samtskhe-Javakheti, the Armenian-speaking minority constitutes more than 90% of the population (the so-called 'minority in the majority'; see Tabatadze, 2010, p.4). In the Kvemo Kartli region, which borders on Armenia and on Azerbaijan, 42% of the inhabitants speak Azerbaijanian as their native language. In this region, other minority language groups (Armenians, Greeks) constitute 6% of the region's population. The Kakheti region, which borders on Azerbaijan and Russia is also distinguished by its language diversity. There are settlements where the speakers of the Azerbaijani, Vainakh and Dagestani languages, as well as the Ossetian population are represented (Census, 2014).

In addition to the state language (Georgian) and its language variations, many languages are spoken in Georgia; Some of them are Indo-European (Greek, Ossetian, Russian, Armenian, Kurdish, Ukrainian), some are representatives of the Alatai-Turkish languages family (Azerbaijani), Hungarian-Finnish (Estonian), some are representatives of the Semitic family (Aramaic-Syriac). Finally, there are the Iberian-Caucasian languages (Gabunia, 2014), in which four groups are distinguished: Kartvelian, Abkhaz-Adyghe, Nakhi and Dagestani.

There are 4 regions in Georgia, where we have large groups of language minorities: Abkhazians (Abkhazia), Ossetians (Shida Kartli), Azerbaijanis (Kvemo Kartli) and Armenians (Samtskhe-Javakheti and from Kvemo Kartli – Tsalka district). Abkhazians live in the northwestern part of Georgia, along the Black Sea. According to the 1989 census, the number of speakers was 100,000 (Population Census of Georgia, 1989). Today their number is almost halved as a result of hostilities and migration (Population Census of Georgia, 2014).

## 3. Language Policy in Georgia

Many modern states have strict language policies, and the Soviet Union was one of them. In the 1920s, the Soviet Union developed a language policy that had no analogues in the world. There was a compulsory official language, called 'State language'. Each region chose the language(s) that corresponded to the composition of the population of that region. In addition, it was necessary to ensure complete equality of languages in all public and political institutions (Stalin, 1951, p.70). The so-called 'minor languages' were not deemed ready to fulfill the functions of an official language. Most of these languages did not even have a literary language, but until the 1930s, the Soviet Union continued following its course nevertheless. In general, such a policy is interpreted as linguistic

pluralism (Crisp S. 1990; Alpatov, 2013). Since the 1930s, the Russian language has gradually become stronger. Its rise in status was linked to its prestige (Saville-Troike, 2012).

### 3.1 Contemporary Policies

Since the 1960s, the leadership of the Soviet Union has officially changed its policy towards linguistic minorities. Active Russification of small nations began. Georgia was one of the republics that constitutionally ensured the status of Georgian as the state (official) language back in the Soviet period. Despite this status, Georgian never became a prestigious language for the minorities living in Georgia. Russian developed into a tool of communication between nationalities. Although representatives of minorities could receive education in their mother tongue, most of them studied in Russian-language schools. It should be noted that a large part of Georgian elite families sent their children to Russian schools because of the prestige of the Russian language and employment prospects (Sikharulidze, 2008, p.63). Knowledge of Georgian (the official language) was mandatory only for the autochthonous population – ethnic Georgians, and the teaching of the state language was highly formal for the minorities living in Georgia.

Due to such a language policy, a rather difficult linguistic situation was created in the republics of the USSR (including Georgia). Theoretically, the inhabitants of the ‘autonomies’ (Abkhazians, Ossetians) should become multilingual and speak their mother tongue, the official language (Georgian), and Russian (the state language). Emphasis was placed on Russian proficiency (Sikharulidze, 2008). This language policy led to the existence of different types of bilingualism in multinational Georgia: Russian-Abkhazian in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia SSR, Russian-Ossetian in the Autonomous District of South Ossetia, and Russian-Armenian in Samtskhe-Javakheti. Finally, there was Russian-Azerbaijani which was spoken in Kvemo Kartli.

Since the 1990s, Georgia has firmly stood on the path of integration with the European Union. Therefore, it was necessary to put maximum emphasis on teaching and promoting the English language. The implicit aim was to replace Russian with English. However, it could not be implemented in a short period of time. While the Russian language has now lost much of its function as a tool of communication between nationalities, mastery of English is still too low for it to function as a proper lingua franca. This has presented unforeseen problems (Hogan-Brun & Ramonlene, 2004). In the post-Soviet period, the newly created republics implemented different types of language policies. Georgia chose a liberal path: after the collapse of the USSR, everyone who lived in Georgia automatically received Georgian citizenship, minorities were not required to know the country's official language or history. But this policy did not lead to loyalty to the state on the part of national minorities. Since ethnic minorities were granted citizenship without their consent (in fact, they had no other choice), they can now be qualified as ‘involuntary minorities’ (Svanidze, 2002). Today, representatives of different nationalities in Georgia are gradually moving to communication in the state language. The Russian language, as a tool for relations with minorities, has already lost most of its functions. It seems that this is an irreversible process and a continuation of the political strategic line taken by the Georgian state in the long term.

According to Article 38 of the Constitution, every citizen of Georgia has the right, in accordance with the generally recognized principles and norms of international law, to freely develop their culture, without any discrimination or interference, and to use their native language in their personal life and publicly.

### 3.2 Language Policy in Education

The implementation of the language policy in the education system in relation to minorities is of special importance. The Law on General Education (Articles 7 and 9) provides access to general education: the state guarantees the right of every student to receive general education in the state or native language as close as possible to the place of residence. According to Article 7, “the school shall protect, on the basis of equality, the individual and collective right of members of minorities to freely use their mother tongue, to preserve and express their cultural identity” (Law on General Education, 2005); The first paragraph of Article 9 of the law ensures the right of all students to receive primary and basic education in their mother tongue.

National minorities can create educational institutions in the form of a private legal entity, for which they must obtain a general, higher, primary and (or) secondary license for educational activities in accordance with the legislation of Georgia.

Teaching in Georgian higher education institutions is allowed only in the state language. For years, minority students faced problems in obtaining higher education due to their lack of knowledge of the Georgian language. In order to correct this gap, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia started implementing a "preferential policy" for applicants from ethnic minorities, although the forms, methods and approaches of this policy in 2005-2010 were subject to continuous change (Tabatadze, Gorgadze, 2014).

In accordance with the amendments to the Law on Higher Education adopted on November 19, 2009, representatives of minorities take only the general skills exam in the Azerbaijani / Armenian / Ossetian / Abkhazian languages at the unified national exams, after which the student will undergo a 1-year preparation program in the Georgian language and then choose any bachelor's degree of their choice. The program. Of the total number of students of a specific higher education institution, 5% can benefit from the preferential policy for Armenian-speaking and Azerbaijani-speaking students, and 1% for Ossetian-Abkhaz speaking students (Law of Georgia, 2005, Article 52.51).

Currently, there are 208 non-Georgian public schools in Georgia. In addition, there are 89 non-Georgian sectors in schools, where teaching is conducted in Russian, Armenian or Azerbaijani languages. A total of 52,000 students study in non-Georgian language schools and sectors of the country.

In order to protect minority languages, as well as to properly teach the state language, the Ministry of Education and Science developed a reform of multilingual education, which replaced the monolingual education model. This model of multilingual education implies the integration of language and subject content in subjects such as mathematics, science and social studies. Serious work on bilingual reform is currently underway in higher education institutions to train bilingual teachers, which is expected to solve problems accumulated over decades.

## 4. Multilingual Practices in Peripheral Areas

### 4.1 Abkhazian

The Abkhazian language belongs to the Abkhazian-Adyghe group of the Iberian-Caucasian languages family. According to the Constitution of Georgia, the Abkhazian language has been given the status of the state language in the territory of Abkhazia. However, after the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict in the 1990s, Abkhazian has the status of the state language in the region only formally, and the Russian language, which also has the status of an official language in the self-proclaimed republic, almost completely took over the function of conducting official relations (Tabatadze, 2018, 144-148).

In addition to Abkhazia, the Abkhazian language is represented in Adjara, where Abkhazians live compactly in villages near Batumi: Adliya, Angisa and Feria. Abkhazians settled in Adjara at the end of the 19th century. Abkhazians living in Adjara have preserved their customs, surname and name. However, the Abkhazian language is gradually being lost: even the older generation does not speak Abkhazian in the family, while the younger generation prefers to communicate in Georgian or, in some cases, in Russian (Report, 2015-2020).

Even in Abkhazia itself, Abkhazians are no longer fluent in Abkhazian, and the percentage of Abkhazian-speaking people is small compared to the monolingual Russian-speaking population. It should be noted that the older generations have practically forgotten Abkhazian and, therefore, cannot teach the language to young Abkhazians; consequently, a large part of the young generation practically no longer knows their native language and cannot use it in their daily life. It is true that there are Abkhazian language schools in the region; however, their number is extremely small and teaching in Abkhazian is conducted only at the primary level; grades 1 to 4 (Clogg, 2008; Chirikba, 2009; Tabatadze, 2018).

Before the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, the main language of interethnic communication in Abkhazia was Russian for both Georgians and Abkhazians. Georgian was also spoken by those Abkhazians who lived in the Ochamchir and Gali regions (Department of Statistics of the de facto Republic of Abkhazia, 2016). This situation changed radically after the conflict provoked by Russia, later in the 1990s, when the Georgian population was forced to leave Abkhazia. Today, the territory of Abkhazia, which borders on Russia, is occupied by Russia and Georgia's jurisdiction does not apply.

Currently the language situation in Abkhazian can be characterized as bilingualism (Abkhazian-Russian), including a primacy of the Russian language. Often the knowledge of the Abkhazian language is limited only to oral speech, which is due to the fact that Abkhazians have mostly received a completely Russian education. In Abkhazian, they may only have basic reading and writing skills. It is a fact that the range of use of the Abkhazian language is significantly reduced; The Abkhazian language has been included in the UNESCO list of "Languages in Danger" (UNESCO, 2009).

### 4.2 Ossetian

Ossetians live compactly in Shida Kartli – the northern part Georgia, bordering on Russia – as well as in several villages in southern Georgia and Kakheti. Quite a large part is scattered throughout the territory of Georgia. According to the 1989 census, their number reached 165,000. Today, the number of Ossetian-speaking population

is somewhat reduced: after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, the situation between Ossetians and Georgians in Georgia became tense, which resulted in a conflict provoked by Russia. As a result of the conflict, a certain part of Ossetians moved to the territory of the Russian Federation. Today, Georgia's jurisdiction does not extend to the territory of South Ossetia: the territory is occupied by Russia. According to the results of the 2002 population census, their number was 38 thousand.

As in the case of the Abkhazian language, we are dealing with bilingualism (Ossetian-Russian), with Ossetians living in the self-recognized territory of Shida Kartli (South Ossetia). Despite the fact that the territory borders North Ossetia, it is impossible to strengthen Ossetian-language schools: Ossetian is taught as a subject, and Russian is taught from the first grade (Gabunia, 2021).

Some of the Ossetians settled in the jurisdiction of Georgia believe that their native language is Ossetian, and some consider their native language to be Georgian, because they were brought up and educated in this language. Some consider their mother tongue to be both Ossetian and Georgian (Ethnicities in Georgia, 2008). Families speak the Ossetian-Georgian language, the elderly speak mainly Ossetian. Both in the territory of former South Ossetia and outside it (for example, in the Ossetian-speaking villages of the Lagodekhi district). There used to be Ossetian-language schools, in which Ossetians could receive education in their native language. Formally, there are currently Ossetian-language schools in the Tskhinvali region, but actually Ossetian is taught there as a subject. The language of instruction in these schools is Russian (Final assessment of the implementation of the state strategy, 2015-2020).

In the territory under the jurisdiction of Georgia, in the villages compactly inhabited by Ossetians, there are currently only Georgian-language schools – the Ossetian population studies in Georgian schools and receives education in the Georgian language. From the Soviet period until the end of the 20th century, there were Ossetian-language primary schools, which, unfortunately, no longer function today. As a result, the majority of Ossetians cannot read and write in Ossetian (Final assessment of the implementation of the state strategy, 2015-2020; Ethnicities in Georgia, 2008).

The issue of Abkhazians and Ossetians is exceptional (taking into account the political situation) and today it is very difficult to obtain accurate data about the linguistic situation in these two regions.

### 4.3 Azerbaijanian

Two more large groups of minority languages in Georgia are distinguished. They are compactly settled in the territory of Georgia and, at the same time, outnumber other ethnic groups (including the Georgian-speaking population) in the given regions. The first one is the Azerbaijanian-speaking minority, which is settled in several regions of Georgia. Most of them live in Kvemo Kartli. Today, they make up 45% of the entire population of Kvemo Kartli, although in four districts (out of six) included in the Kvemo Kartli region, they are in an absolute or relative majority: the Marneuli district (98,245; 83.1%), the Dmanisi district (18,716; 66.7%), the Bolnisi district (49,026; 66%), and the Gardabani district (49,993; 43.7%) (Ethnicities in Georgia, 2008). Apart from Kvemo Kartli, there are also settlements of Azerbaijanis in Kakheti. A small number of Azerbaijanians are settled in other regions of Georgia.

The majority of the population of Kvemo Kartli does not know the Georgian language. Due to the gaps in the education system (outdated language teaching methods), the local population cannot learn Georgian at a proper level and only speak Azerbaijani. Since the 2000s, the issue of learning the Georgian language has been the main task of the integration policy, although the steps taken by the state were modest and ineffective so far (Gabunia, 2021). Georgian-language media is inaccessible to the population due to a lack of knowledge of the state language. Georgian Public Broadcasting and Georgian-language mass media is inaccessible to the population, also due to a lack of knowledge of the Georgian language. Azerbaijanis of Kvemo Kartli are more focused on foreign (mainly Azerbaijani, Turkish) media.

Azerbaijani language schools operating in Georgia play an important role in preserving the identity and culture of Azerbaijanis; According to the Georgian Education Management Information System, there are 117 Azerbaijani-language schools and sectors in Georgia. Of these, 80 are schools, and 37 are in the Azerbaijani language sector (Gorgadze and Tabatadze, 2019).

Today the sociolinguistic status of the Azerbaijani-speaking population (ethnically Azerbaijanians) can be characterized as unbalanced bilingualism (Baker, 2010); it tends towards monolingualism. It should be noted that in this regard, the difference between the generations is quite large: the population of the older generation is practically monolingual (only a small number speak Russian and almost cannot speak Georgian). The young generation does not speak Russian at all (with a few exceptions, those who are educated in Russian-language schools), although the share of Azerbaijani-Georgian bilinguals is gradually increasing.

## 4.4 Armenian

Armenians live in different numbers in the cities and regions of the country, especially in Tbilisi, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Adjara and the autonomous republics of Abkhazia. Knowledge of the state language by Armenians is different in these regions and cities (Ethnicities in Georgia, 2008). The majority of the population of Javakheti does not know the Georgian language. This is due to the Soviet legacy and ineffective language policy in the education system over the years. The local population knows some Russian, which is due to several reasons. Until 2005, Russian military bases were allocated in Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki. In addition, a large part of the population regularly goes to Russia for temporary work. Unlike the Azerbaijani-speaking population, the Russian language has maintained serious functionality to this day (Gabunia, 2014). Unlike Samtskhe-Javakheti Armenians, Armenians living in Tbilisi know the Georgian language well, which is due to the fact that Armenians in Tbilisi communicate with the Georgian-speaking population on a daily, social and professional level (Gabunia & Amirejibi, 2021).

Inadequate knowledge of the Georgian language by the Armenian population is one of the main factors causing emigration. Armenians are aware of the prospect of finding work in Russia (Gabunia, Amirejib, 2021). Armenian and Russian TV channels are the main source of information for the Armenian population in Samtskhe-Javakheti. Several regional TV companies operate in the region, and several Armenian, Russian and Georgian TV channels also actively broadcast. However, the majority of interviewees do not watch Georgian TV channels, cannot read the Georgian-language press, and express dissatisfaction with the improper teaching of the state language (Gabunia, Amirejib, 2021).

Armenian-language schools play an important role in maintaining the ethnic and linguistic identity of Armenians living in Georgia (131 schools in total). However, the process of teaching the Georgian language is still ineffective, which hinders the integration process (report, 2015-2020).

From a sociolinguistic point of view, Armenians in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region are trilingual (Armenian, Russian and Georgian), although the difference in language proficiency is noticeable. The Russian language traditionally enjoys a "prestige" status and is superior to the state language, Georgian (Kachkachishvili, 2019; Gabunia, Gochitashvili, 2019). It is worth noting here a trend that has been observed in the last few years: the level of knowledge of Georgian among young people has increased significantly. This is related to the current reform in the education system.

## 4.5 'Small languages' in Georgia

In addition to the large settlement groups described above, it is extremely interesting to discuss several linguistic groups that are settled in small groups, mainly in the mountains of Eastern Georgia; In particular, these are: Pankis Kists, Batsbs and Udians. The specificity of these languages is due to their number: these languages are included in the UNESCO list of endangered languages (UNESCO, 2009).

In Georgia, groups of Kists speakers appeared on the foothills of the Kakheti valley at the turn of the 18th-19th centuries. Today, the Kists live in the Kakheti region, in the Akhmeto district. Their number is equal to 5697 (Census, 2014). Together with the Kist language, all Kists know the Georgian language. They are bilingual. The majority of Kists consider Kist their native language. Both Kist and Georgian are used approximately equally in the family. Kists communicate with each other in Georgian, since they have received education in Georgian (that is, they have developed reading and writing skills in Georgian, and Kist's skills are limited to oral speech). There are no Russian schools in the Pankisi valley. Russian is taught as a second foreign language in Georgian schools of Kist villages. Consequently, language skills in Russian have been less developed by children (Gabunia, 2014).

Tsova-Tushs or Batsbs identify themselves with ethnic Georgians, although their language belongs to the Vainakh subgroup of the Iberian-Caucasian languages. These people are bilingual and fluent in both spoken languages: Georgian and Batsbian. The question is what is the balance between the quality of Georgian knowledge on the one hand and Batsbian on the other. In other words, do Tsova-Tushs speak both languages equally well or does one of them occupy a dominant position? Georgian is the dominant language among middle-aged and young Tsova-Tushs: when starting a conversation in their native language, the speakers easily switch to Georgian. Quite often the sentence starts in Georgian and end in Georgian (Gigashvili, 2014). The language community is characterized by balanced bilingualism, which Batsbian creates interesting material for research on the basis of language interference and convergence (Gabunia, 2014).

The Udians are one of the smallest aboriginal ethnic groups in the Caucasus. They live in Georgia, in the village of Zinobiani, in the Kvareli district (Clifton et al., 2005). The Udi language belongs to the Lezgian subgroup of the Dagestan group of Iberian-Caucasian languages (Ethnicities in Georgia, 2008). Some scholars consider the Udi language to be the successor of the language of the Caucasian Albanians (Dirr, 1903, Dumézil, 1975, Shanidze, 1938, Aleksidze, 2003). These scholars believe that the Udi language is the key to the ancient

Albanian alphabet (Aleksidze, 2003, p.202). Udi is an unwritten language. In the 20s of the 20th century, the Latin alphabet was introduced for the Udi language. The majority of Udi people speak the Georgian language well. This is facilitated by daily interaction with Georgians high school, where studies are conducted in Georgian. The Udis who settled in Zinobiani knew Azerbaijani as well, but today few still understand the Azerbaijani language. The Udis in Vartashen, as a result of living together with Armenians, also knew Armenian. In addition to Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani, the Russian language was widely spread among the Udis. Today, the Russian language has given up positions here as well (Clifton et al. 2005). The young generation of Udi people living in Georgia study in Georgian-language schools, and most of them do not know Udi. Middle-aged and older residents are bilingual and use Udi along with Georgian in certain areas of communication. Since 2015, with the change in the Law on General Education adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science, the curriculum of the Udi language was created, which is taught as an optional subject in the Zinobian school.

Greek is the mother tongue of Greeks and Cypriots and belongs to the Greek group of Indo-European languages. The Greek language was first attested 3,500 years ago and is mainly spoken in the Balkan Peninsula, surrounding islands and partly in Bulgaria, Albania and Turkey (Mallory, 1997). A large part of the Greeks living in Georgia migrated from the eastern provinces of Turkey. Their first settlements appeared in Georgia in the 18th century. Greek dialects were spoken in some villages of Dmanisi, Tetrtskaro, in the Borjomi region. Greeks are also living in Abkhazia and Adjara. The majority of the Greek population living in the Tsalki district are Urums (Turkish-speaking Greeks), who, although they do not speak Greek, still identify with the Greek ethnos. Russian and Turkish are the languages of communication for Tsalka Greeks. The Greeks living here cannot speak Georgian, because, starting from the Soviet Union, the standards and motivation for teaching Georgian were quite low.

## 5. Conclusion

There are 4 regions in Georgia, where we have large groups of language minorities: Abkhazians (Abkhazia), Ossetians (Shida Kartli), Azerbaijanis (Kvemo Kartli) and Armenians (Samtskhe-Javakheti and from Kvemo Kartli – Tsalka district). Abkhazians live in the northwestern part of Georgia, along the Black

In addition to the large settlement groups described above, it is extremely interesting to discuss several linguistic groups that are settled in small groups, mainly in the mountains of Eastern Georgia; In particular, these are: Pankis Kists, Batsbs and Udians. The specificity of these languages is due to their number: these languages are included in the UNESCO list of endangered languages.

The language policy of the Soviet Union was characterized by an increasing degree of Russification. After the collapse of the USSR, the national government of Georgia took responsibility for the preservation and development of the native languages of minorities.

State policy regulates the functioning of these languages in relation to the official language. The legislation of Georgia is liberal in this respect and implements not assimilation, but an integration language policy, in contrast to the Soviet period, when the policy of Russification of “minor languages” was underway.

Over the past decade, the interest of minorities in the official language has increased. One of the determining factors for this is the correct language policy created by the state in terms of the preservation and development of native languages. In this regard, a special role is assigned to the State Language Department, the Ministry of Education and Science, as well as international organizations that support the process of integration of minorities. A number of programs and local projects are being implemented to introduce multilingual education, one of the main tasks of which is the protection and preservation of native languages.

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