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Identity Formation and Language Policy. A Study of Ethnic Minorities in Soviet and Post-Soviet Georgia

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Identity Formation and Language Policy. A Study of Ethnic Minorities in Soviet and Post-Soviet Georgia იდენტობის ფორმირება და ენის პოლიტიკა. ეთნიკური უმცირესობების კვლევა საბჭოთა და პოსტსაბჭოთა საქართველოში

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Abstract. This study investigates the formation of civic identity among ethnic minorities in multi-ethnic Georgia, emphasizing the critical role of language policy in the post-Soviet era. Drawing on theories of nationalism and identity, it explores shifts from ethnic to hybrid and civic identities, particularly among densely settled minority communities. The research highlights language proficiency as key to accessing state services and participating in political, economic, and cultural life—thereby facilitating civic integration. It examines four historical periods (Soviet era, post-Soviet transition, early 2000s, and the past decade), revealing how Soviet ethnolinguistic policies complicated integration. However, effective modern language policies, including bilingual education and state-supported programs, have promoted minority inclusion and strengthened civic attachment to Georgia. The findings suggest that civic identity has evolved significantly, with minorities increasingly viewing Georgia as their homeland. This shift, supported by non-assimilationist state policies and sustained educational reforms, underscores the importance of inclusive language planning in fostering state unity.

აბსტრაქტი. ნაშრომში შესწავლილია საქართველოში მცხოვრები ეროვნული უმცირესობების სამოქალაქო იდენტობის ფორმირების პროცესი და გაანალიზებულია ენობრივი პოლიტიკის მნიშვნელობა პოსტსაბჭოთა პერიოდში. კვლევა ეფუძნება ნაციონალიზმისა და იდენტობის თეორიებს, რის საფუძველზეც მოცემულია, თუ როგორ განვითარდა საქართველოში მცხოვრები სომეხი და აზერბაიჯანელი მოსახლეობის ჰიბრიდული და სამოქალაქო იდენტობა, განსაკუთრებით მჭიდროდ დასახლებულ უმცირესობათა თემებში. ნაშრომში საუბარია იმასე, რომ სახელმწიფო ენის ცოდნა საფუძველია საჯარო სერვისებზე წვდომისა და ქვეყნის პოლიტიკური, ეკონომიკური და კულტურული ცხოვრებაში სრული მონაწილეობისათვის, რაც, თავის მხრივ, ქმნის სამოქალაქო ინტეგრაციის საფუძველს. კვლევა მოიცავს ოთხ ისტორიულ პერიოდს (საბჭოთა ხანა, პოსტსაბჭოთა გარდამავალი პერიოდი, 2000-იანი წლების დასაწყისი და ბოლო ათწლეული) და აჩვენებს, როგორ უშლიდა ხელს საბჭოთა ეთნოლინგვისტური პოლიტიკა უმცირესობების ინტეგრაციას. ამასთან, თანამედროვე ენობრივი პოლიტიკა, მათ შორის ბილინგვური განათლება და სახელმწიფო პროგრამები, ხელს უწყობს უმცირესობების ჩართვას და სამოქალაქო კავშირის გაღრმავებას საქართველოსთან. მონაცემები ცხადყოფს, რომ სამოქალაქო იდენტობა მნიშვნელოვანად შეიცვალა — უმცირესობები სულ უფრო მეტად აღიქვამენ საქართველოს როგორც საკუთარ სამშობლოს. ეს გარდატეხა, რომელსაც ხელს უწყობს არასასიმბოლური სახელმწიფო პოლიტიკა და განათლების რეფორმები, კიდევ ერთხელ ადასტურებს ინკლუზიური ენობრივი დაგეგმარების მნიშვნელობას სახელმწიფოებრივი ერთიანობის გასამდიერებლად.

Keywords: Civil identity, ethnic identity, language policy, hybrid identity

საკვანძო სიტყვები: სამოქალაქო იდენტობა, ეთნიკური იდენტობა, ენობრივი პოლიტიკა, ჰიბრიდული იდენტობა

1. Introduction

1.1 Post-Soviet National Identity Formation

In examining the formation of civic identity among ethnic minorities in multi-ethnic societies and their integration into the titular culture, several crucial factors warrant consideration. Foremost among these is the level of proficiency in the official language(s) and the efficacy of measures and programs implemented at both state and non-governmental levels. This necessitates not only a synchronic analysis but also a diachronic examination to trace changes over time and assess progress and remaining challenges.

Language proficiency is intrinsically linked to access to state services and full participation in political, economic, and cultural spheres. Moreover, it plays a pivotal role in shaping the civic identity of minorities, a crucial task for multi-ethnic states.

Post-Soviet countries present an intriguing and diverse landscape regarding language policy. Soviet era witnessed policies aimed at both Russification and the propagation of a unified Soviet identity declining the importance of the local languages, resulting in an intricate interplay between national and civic identities. As a result, Post-Soviet states encountered a myriad of challenges in the maintenance of language policies and the effective integration of ethnic minorities into the titular society.

Georgia, as a former Soviet state with a multi-ethnic composition, grapples with various complexities in promoting language proficiency among its ethnic minorities. The country's demographic landscape reflects this diversity. According to the 2014 census, ethnic Georgians constitute the majority at approximately 87% of the population, with the remaining 13 percent comprised of various ethnic groups. Among these groups, Azerbaijanis and Armenians stand out, representing 6.3% and 4.5% of the population, respectively. Additionally, approximately 80 smaller ethnic groups are accounting for about 3 percent of the population (Census Results, 2014).

These ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities are concentrated in specific regions across Georgia. For instance, Kvemo Kartli is predominantly inhabited by Azerbaijanis, comprising 6 percent of Georgia's population, while Javakheti in the southern part of the country is home to a significant Armenian population. In some municipalities, Armenians constitute the majority at the district level (Tabatadze, 2011).

The presence of large dense settlements of ethnic minorities, particularly Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli and Armenians in Javakheti, underscores the diverse linguistic and cultural tapestry of Georgia. However, the enduring legacy of Soviet-era ethnolinguistic policies poses challenges to the full integration of minorities into a Georgian state and society. Moreover, the lack of proficiency in the Georgian language, the official language of the country, exacerbates these challenges and impacts the development of above mentioned national identity.

1.2 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretical framework of the given paper delves into the multifaceted nature of national identity formation in multicultural settings, with a specific focus on ethnic minorities in Georgia. It encompasses concepts of nationalism, national identity, types of national identities, and the pivotal role of language policy.

Nationalism is presented as an ideology emphasizing allegiance to a distinct sovereign nation, distinguishing between civic and ethnic variants. National identity is defined as the reproduction and reinterpretation of values, symbols, and traditions that define a unique heritage, shaped by language, territory, religion, and history.

Four types of national identities are elucidated: ethnic, atomic, hybrid, and civic. Ethnic identity prioritizes group identity and can foster intolerance, while atomic identity exhibits negativity towards both in-groups and out-groups. Hybrid identity balances inclusive attitudes with strong in-group attachment, while civic identity lacks strong ethnic ties and promotes tolerance within the state.

The significance of language policy in shaping national identity is underscored, particularly in post-Soviet contexts like Georgia. Language policies influence education, public institutions, and language rights, profoundly impacting identity formation. Thoughtful language policies can harmonize ethnic identities and foster tolerance in multicultural societies.

The evolving theoretical landscape moves beyond dichotomous models, incorporating civic dimensions alongside ethnic considerations. Emerging paradigms seek to balance titular and minority groups, promoting inclusive civic identities while respecting ethnic diversity.

In the Georgian context, the correlation between language policy and national identity formation among ethnic minorities poses complex challenges, influenced by Soviet legacies and contemporary transformations. Consideration of Soviet language policies, strategies to address post-Soviet challenges, and the efficacy of

governmental and non-governmental initiatives are crucial in understanding the evolution of national identity among ethnic minorities. Proficiency in the official language emerges as a key indicator of linguistic integration and societal cohesion.

1.3 Research Questions

The research aims to investigate and compare the formation of national identity among the above mentioned ethnic minorities which are densely populated in Georgia. The term "densely populated" will be employed as a key concept throughout the study. The following research questions will be answered:

1. To what extent did national minorities in Soviet Georgia demonstrate a sense of national identity?
2. What is the current level of national identity among densely settled ethnic minorities in contemporary Georgia?
3. How has language policy influenced the formation and evolution of national identity among ethnic minorities?

2. Methodology

The research methodology adopted for this study involved a combination of (1) desk research, (2) theoretical framework development, and (3) analysis of existing research outcomes. Desk research was conducted to gather relevant literature and academic resources on the topic of civic identity formation among ethnic minorities, particularly in the context of multi-ethnic societies. The outcomes of various research studies on similar topics were analyzed to identify common patterns, trends, and gaps in the literature. This comparative analysis provided valuable insights into the factors contributing to the formation of civic identity among ethnic minorities and informed the selection of research methods and data collection strategies for the present study. Overall, the research methodology was designed to integrate theoretical insights with empirical evidence to advance the understanding of civic identity dynamics in Georgia's multi-ethnic context.

3. National Identity

3.1 Defining National Identity

Nationalism prioritizes allegiance to a sovereign nation, influenced by societal and historical experiences. Civic nationalism, grounded in loyalty to political institutions, contrasts with ethnic nationalism, rooted in shared origins and culture. Challenges in fostering a unified civic nation in multi-ethnic states highlight complexities in diverse political landscapes (Wendt & Behnken, 2013; Sharipova, Burkhanov, et al., 2017; Anderson, 2014). National identity involves associations based on specific markers, enduring throughout individuals' lives. Linked with nationalism, it encompasses values, symbols, and traditions defining a unique heritage. Key markers like language, territory, and history shape national identity, influenced by factors such as belonging to ethnic groups and attitudes towards external groups (Sidorov & Azarova, 2022; Smith, 2008; Hansen & Hesli, 2009; Christiansen & Hedetoft, 2004).

3.2 Types of National Identities

The literature describes four categories of national identity: ethnic, atomic, hybrid, and civic.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic nationalism gives particular importance to history, culture, and the promotion of one's own group identity (Ignatieff 1993). Thus, representatives of this group may exhibit an intolerant attitude toward other groups (Hansen & Hesli, 2009, p. 3). Ethnicity can function at both the macro-community and social identity levels: ethnic identity can be both a catalyst and guiding symbol for group/community action, and thus it can also function as a collective identity (Bremmer, 1994). Another characteristic of ethnic identity is the following: the more

remote and peripherally settled an ethnic group is, the less likely its representatives are to integrate into the dominant society. As a result, their ethnic identity is strong (Bremmer, 1994).

Atomic Identity

Individuals with an atomic identity have negative attitudes toward both their ethnic groups and others as well. Such groups are more common in the post-Soviet space (Hansen & Hesli, 2009).

Hybrid Identity

Citizens with a hybrid identity exhibit inclusivity toward out-groups while maintaining strong attachment to their inner groups, demonstrating acceptance of societal heterogeneity and a commitment to protecting minority rights (Hansen & Hesli, 2009).

Individuals may be influenced by both national and supranational cultural affiliations, a phenomenon described as 'transculturalism'. This concept underscores the interplay of ethnic, racial, and national cultures, giving rise to diverse forms of national identity that transcend boundaries. Transculturalism encompasses shared cultural interests, values, and beliefs that bridge cultural and national divides, uniting people across nations and hemispheres (Christiansen & Hedetoft, 2004).

Hybrid national identity refers to individuals' interconnected belongings and their transnational and transcultural dimensions, shaping their understanding of national attachment. This term acknowledges the multiplicity of identity definitions and emphasizes the role of subaltern voices in challenging dominant narratives of nationalism (Christiansen & Hedetoft, 2004).

Civic Identity

Civic identity, characterized by inclusivity and lacking strong ethnic ties, fosters tolerance among diverse ethnic groups within a state (Shulman, 2002). It entails personal and moral values linked to a specific community, emphasizing responsibility (Viola, 2020). Individuals with civic identity see themselves as active contributors to society, reflecting citizenship attributes (Hart, Richardson, & Wilkenfeld, 2011). While crucial for state institutions, complete alignment with ethnic identities is rare (Shulman, 2002).

Different from national identity, civic identity stresses participation in the public sphere, encompassing membership, participation, and concern for rights (Hart, Richardson, & Wilkenfeld, 2011). It forms at institutional, community, and individual levels, shaping the citizen-state relationship and promoting civic solidarity (Petrovska, 2020).

Debates exist regarding the relationship between civic identity and social integration, with some viewing it as a precursor to engagement and others suggesting participation contributes to its formation (Dahlgren & Olsson, 2007). Understanding civic identity is crucial for fostering active citizenship and societal participation (Knepelkamp, 2008; Nasir & Hand, 2008).

In multicultural societies, theoretical frameworks for identity formation may not be straightforward. Models are evolving to incorporate both ethnic minority and civic dimensions, reflecting parallel approaches addressing various groups (Venttsel, 2016).

4. Language Policy

4.1 Formation of National Identity

In understanding the formation of national identity, various determinants such as individual, social, and cultural factors play significant roles (Shweder & Bourne, 1984; Youniss, McLellan, and Yates, 1997). However, an essential aspect influencing this process is a well-balanced language policy (Sidorov & Avzalova, 2022).

Language policy encompasses multiple facets influencing language use, status, and promotion within specific contexts. These include language education, which shapes curriculum development and teacher training, and language use in public institutions, ensuring access to services in diverse languages. Additionally, language rights address individuals' and communities' rights to use and preserve their languages, including provisions for bilingual education and minority language rights.

The study of language policy remains pertinent in diverse societies due to recurrent challenges in language use and the status of ethnic minorities, often leading to political tensions (Sidorov & Azarova, 2022). Language

holds significant importance in ethnonational groups' existence, profoundly shaping identity policies (Brubaker, 2011).

Post-Soviet spaces face sensitive language issues contributing to nationalization processes distinct from Western civic arrangements (Brubaker, 2011). The learning and teaching of official languages are crucial in national and civic identity formation, influencing group status and individual identities. Language policies play a vital role in fostering tolerance and shaping identity establishment, requiring consideration of political, economic, and social factors (Venttsel, 2016).

In multicultural nations, the adoption of official languages in public life symbolizes civic identity, closely tied to citizenship. Governmental policies and legislative measures significantly shape minority ethnic identities and perceptions of the majority populace, especially when harmonized with social initiatives (Venttsel, 2016). Emerging paradigms in identity formation combine elements targeting both titular and minority groups, integrating civic dimensions with ethnic considerations (Venttsel, 2016).

4.2 USSR Language Policy and Georgia

The language policy in the USSR can be delineated into two distinct stages; Language Equality Policy and Aggressive Russification. These are discussed below.

Language Equality Policy

During the initial years of the Soviet Union's existence, specifically until the 1930s, there was a deliberate avoidance of assimilationist policies. This approach entailed several key elements: firstly, the absence of any mandatory state language, whether in legal matters or educational institutions. Instead, each region was granted the autonomy to select the language(s) that aligned with the demographic composition of its population. Furthermore, it was imperative to safeguard the principle of full linguistic equality across all public and political institutions (Stalin, 1951, p. 70).

Aggressive Russification

Following the early period characterized by linguistic pluralism (Aplatov, 2013, pp. 22-23), the Soviet government shifted its language policy after 1930, leading to the gradual dominance of the Russian language as an unofficial state language. This transformation was primarily motivated by considerations of its perceived 'prestige' (Saville-Troike, 2012). The shift stemmed from the underdeveloped state of 'minority languages'.

This shift was not officially codified, but constituent republics progressively transitioned to Russian within state institutions and educational systems, with Russian-language schools gaining popularity (Aplatov, 2013). From the 1960s, the Soviet Union shifted towards aggressive Russification, witnessed in educational reforms granting parents the ability to choose the language of instruction (Aplatov, 2013). This contributed to the decline of national schools and the widespread adoption of Russian as the de facto official language, despite not being explicitly enshrined in the constitution. Ethnic groups within the USSR widely adopted Russian as their primary means of communication (ibid).

4.3 Soviet Language Policy and Identity of Smaller Nations

The language factor had a detrimental impact on the identity of smaller nations, leading to the erosion of ethnicity and the emergence of hybrid and atomized identities, particularly among ethnic groups in the Russian Federation (Aplatov, 2013).

Impact of Soviet Language Policy in Georgia

Although Georgia used national languages to safeguard and assert their cultural identities, Russian, which was promoted extensively by the Kremlin through education and media (Sikharulidze, 2008), affected the prestige and usage of Georgian as an official language. This led to minorities in multi-ethnic Georgia largely disregarding the official language, impacting their self-perception as Georgian citizens, exemplified by the phrase "My address is the Soviet Union!" (Sikharulidze, 2008). The dominant language of communication for densely populated ethnic minorities shifted to Russian, alongside Azerbaijani or Armenian languages. The presence and prestige of Russian schools further facilitated this process. Consequently, there was little necessity for ethnic minorities to learn and utilize Georgian within the state, including official governmental institutions. Consequently, these communities remained closed and less integrated within the titular society of Georgia.

4.4 Language Policy in Post-Soviet Georgia

Language policy in post-soviet Georgia can be divided into three periods:

Transitional Period

In 1991, Georgia regained its independence, marking a significant turning point for both the country and the minorities residing within its borders. This momentous event heralded the formation of a new, post-Soviet identity for these minority communities. The issue of minorities has become a problem for those post-Soviet countries, which, as a result of the long-term policy of the Kremlin, created a 'fifth column' in the form of minorities.

Different post-Soviet countries adopted varying approaches to address this significant issue. In the case of Georgia, a liberal path was chosen. Following the dissolution of the USSR and the immediate declaration of independence, Georgian citizenship was automatically granted to all residents in the country. To provide a comparative perspective, in the Baltic countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, obtaining citizenship still necessitates proficiency in the state language and passing an examination on the nation's history. However, this 'zero policy' approach alone proved insufficient in fostering loyalty to the state among ethnic minorities. Since ethnic minorities acquired citizenship without their explicit consent and had no alternative, they can be categorized as "inadvertent minorities" (Svanidze, 2002).

The Early 2000s

Starting from the early 2000s, there was a notable improvement in the situation. The country underwent a period of stabilization, with state institutions gradually returning to normalcy. This transformation gained significant momentum, particularly after 2003, when the newly established 'National Movement' government introduced a series of comprehensive reforms. As a result, minorities began to show increasing interest in actively participating in the social, political, cultural, and economic life of the country. The Ministry of Education of Georgia launched a few projects to support raising the official language proficiency of ethnic minorities, including the development of textbooks and different trainings (Gabunia, Gochitashvili & Shabashvili, 2022). Experimental bilingual programs were launched as well (Tabatadze, Gorgadze & Gabunia, 2020; Grigule, 2009).

Language Policy in the Past Decade

Alongside bilingual initiatives, regions where Georgian is not the primary language, particularly in Kvemo Kartli, saw the establishment of Georgian-language sectors. These sectors operated under a submersion education model, albeit one characterized by limitations (Tabatadze, 2010).

Moreover, The Ministry of Education of Georgia initiated an internal multilingual program, initially encompassing four schools and a preschool institution. Presently, the pilot project has expanded to include 25 schools. The Ministry is actively training Armenian and Azerbaijani language instructors, and competitive selection processes for teachers are underway. Additionally, teaching materials are being developed, with a primary focus on natural sciences for primary school students. Plans for the second phase involve the development of resources for social sciences, including history, geography, and civic education (Tabatadze, Gorgadze & Gabunia, 2020; Gabunia, Gochitashvili & Shabashvili, 2022). Moreover, there exists a dedicated government initiative known as the 1+4 program, operating within Georgian universities, designed to provide rigorous training in the Georgian language for prospective students of a specific university (Gabunia, Gochitashvili & Shabashvili, 2022).

The section below addresses the topic of national identity among ethnic minorities in Georgia across various historical periods starting from the soviet era.

5. Types of National Identity of Ethnic Minorities in Georgia

Four periods relevant to the formation of national identities of ethnic minorities in Georgia are discussed next: the Soviet Period, a transitional period after the Soviet period, the early 2000s, and the past decade.

5.1 Soviet Period

The factors outlined during the Soviet governance in Georgia significantly influenced the tendency of minorities in multi-ethnic Georgia to overlook the official language. This, in turn, adversely affected their self-perception as Georgian citizens. Official language proficiency among ethnic minorities was generally low, and in some cases, they lacked proficiency entirely. Consequently, they did not perceive themselves as integral parts of Georgian society. This indicates a strong ethnic identity among these minority groups, contrasting with the situation of small nations in Russian republics, which are experiencing a loss of their ethnic identities under the strong process of Russification.

5.2 Transitional Period

Studies conducted during the 1990s to explore the civic identity of national minorities revealed that in regions densely populated by minorities, such as Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli and Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti, these groups predominantly identified themselves with their historical homelands (Komakhia, 2008). It is noteworthy that during the 1990s, a significant portion of the Armenian-speaking population in Javakheti, in contrast to the Azerbaijani-speaking population, held both a Georgian and an Armenian passport concurrently (Amirejibi, Gabunia, 2021).

It must be mentioned that the concentrated settlements of these ethnic communities extended to the territories bordering their respective historical homelands. Kvemo Kartli, for instance, where the ethnic Azerbaijani population is predominant, shares its border with Azerbaijan. Similarly, Samtskhe-Javakheti, which is densely inhabited by Armenian-speaking residents directly borders Armenia. During the Soviet era, when formal borders existed between the USSR republics, and cross-border travel between neighboring states occurred without hindrance, many individuals in these regions considered themselves citizens of Azerbaijan or Armenia accordingly. During the transitional period, ethnic minorities still had poor proficiency in the official language, and their engagement in the country's social, political, and economic processes remained low due to a lack of access to proper information (Amirejibi, Gabunia, 2021). Accordingly, it might be concluded the target group of the study still represented strong ethnic identity during the given period.

5.3 The Early 2000s

84% of Azerbaijanis and 87% of Armenians responded "To live in one's homeland" when asked about the meaning of being a citizen of Georgia in a 2008 survey (Komakhia, 2008). However, when questioned about their active involvement in the country's public and political life, not a single Azerbaijani respondent gave a positive answer. While there was relatively higher involvement among the Armenian-speaking population, it was still considered insufficient. In a 2014 survey, 85% of Azerbaijanis and 93% of Armenians expressed strong pride in their ethnicity (CRRC, 2014). As evident from the analysis, during this timeframe, ethnic identity remains robust, yet there is a notable emergence of a sense of affiliation with Georgia as a country, fostering the development of civic identity. Consequently, this state of affairs can be interpreted as an initial phase of hybrid identity formation.

5.4 Past Decade

Between 2020 and 2021, a collaborative research effort took place between the CRRC and the Carnegie Endowment for Europe, focusing on minority identity and civic integration. This research holds multifaceted interest, as it delves into the perspectives of minorities regarding the nation in which they reside and for which they hold citizenship. Simultaneously, it examines the perspective of the majority population towards these minority groups (CRRC, 2021).

According to the CRRC research (2021), 67% of ethnic minorities in Georgia affirmed the greater importance of Georgian citizenship. An additional 15% accorded equal importance to both identities. Merely 16% of respondents indicated that their ethnic identity held more significance than their Georgian citizenship.

The results illuminate a nuanced outlook among ethnic minorities concerning their affiliation and citizenship within the nation. While a majority of respondents express a preference for their Georgian citizenship, a noteworthy segment also recognizes the significance of their ethnic identity. Consequently, a discernible shift from purely ethnic identity towards civic identity emerges. Despite the enduring strength of ethnic ties, it is evident that ethnic minorities in Georgia embody a strong hybrid identity, characterized by a sense of pride in their Georgian citizenship alongside allegiance to their nationality. This underscores the intricate interplay between ethnic and civic identities within the framework of civic integration.

6. Discussion

Based on the above mentioned it can be highlighted that the evolving perceptions of ethnic minorities in Georgia, who increasingly view the country as their homeland and express a sense of belonging to the idea of Georgian statehood. However, it is essential to note that despite this positive development, the engagement of minorities in public and political life remains limited.

The historical evolution of language policy in both the USSR and post-Soviet Georgia reflects complex socio-political dynamics and their impact on ethnic minorities. In the Soviet Union, initial language equality policies gave way to aggressive Russification, leading to the dominance of the Russian language and the erosion of ethnic identities. In contrast, in Georgia, the promotion of the Russian language influenced the usage and status of Georgian, affecting minority integration and identity. However, despite this linguistic shift, ethnic minorities in Georgia retained their strong ethnic identities, yet they tended to overlook their connection to Georgian statehood.

In contemporary Georgia, efforts to foster inclusion and integration, particularly through educational reforms and bilingual programs, have shown promise. Recent initiatives, such as multilingual programs and the establishment of Georgian-language sectors, demonstrate an ongoing commitment to addressing language barriers and promoting social cohesion.

The perceptions and attitudes of ethnic minorities, specifically Armenians and Azerbaijanis, have undergone significant changes over time. During the Soviet era, these groups displayed a strong sense of ethnic identity while maintaining a limited connection to Georgia as a state. However, in contemporary Georgia, there is a noticeable increase in civic awareness among ethnic minorities, leading to a hybrid national identity that combines ethnic pride with a sense of Georgian citizenship.

The transition from ethnic identity to civic identity is particularly evident in the membership and participation of ethnic minorities in Georgian society. The majority of Armenians and Azerbaijanis now identify as fully-fledged Georgian citizens (CRRC, 2021) marking a significant shift from previous attitudes. This shift underscores the multifaceted nature of national identity in post-Soviet countries and highlights the importance of ongoing efforts to promote social integration.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the research sheds light on the intricate interplay between language policy, national identity formation, and civic integration among ethnic minorities in Georgia. The findings reveal a notable transition from strict ethnic identity towards a more hybrid identity, characterized by a simultaneous sense of ethnic belonging and civic attachment to Georgia. As it was mentioned in soviet period ethnic minorities living in Georgia demonstrated strong ethnic identity, they considered as a homeland their ethnic country, which restricted them to identify Georgia as their country.

Despite historical challenges, including aggressive Russification during the Soviet era and the promotion of the Russian language, ethnic minorities have maintained their ethnic identities while gradually embracing a sense of civic belonging. According to the investigations and data discussed in the paper it is visible the transition of the ethnic minorities' identity, nowadays, they acknowledge Georgia as their homeland which helps them to be involved in the country's political, social and cultural life. The shift is strongly supported by the effective state language policy.

The existence of diverse state educational programs underscores the importance of language proficiency in fostering civic integration. Efforts to enhance language skills, coupled with educational reforms and bilingual programs, have shown promise in promoting social cohesion and inclusivity. Furthermore, the evolving perceptions and attitudes of ethnic minorities toward Georgia as their homeland and the recognition of Georgian citizenship as fundamental principles reflect positive developments in civic identity formation.

Following the transition period, the rigorous implementation of the new language policy commenced, thereby fostering interest and motivation among national minorities to acquire proficiency in the state language. Consequently, they gained the ability to access state services exclusively provided in the state language and are actively involved in governmental and civic affairs. It is plausible to posit a direct correlation between the adaptation of language policy to accommodate minorities and the evolution and enhancement of their civic identity. On the other hand, their acceptance and openness was likely facilitated by the Georgian state's non-assimilationist policy, which actively promoted the preservation of their linguistic and cultural heritage. This aspect signifies a commendable attribute of the Georgian state's approach towards the identity of ethnic minorities.

Moving forward, it is imperative to continue addressing language barriers and promoting cultural acceptance among ethnic minorities. Sustainable measures, including specialized language programs, economic support initiatives, and intercultural projects, should be pursued to ensure the long-term viability of civic integration efforts. By fostering an inclusive environment and providing opportunities for active civic participation, Georgia can further strengthen its social fabric and promote unity among its diverse population.

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