

Georgia Overview

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Environment

The Republic of Georgia, formerly the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia until independence in 1991, is situated in the west-central part of the South Caucasus at the southern foothills of the Greater Caucasian mountain range. It borders on the North Caucasian republics of the Russian Federation to the north (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia), Azerbaijan to the south-east, Armenia to the south and Turkey to the south-west. It has a western coastline on the Black Sea.

Peoples

Main languages: Georgian, Mingrelian, Svan, Armenian, Azeri, Russian

Main religions: Georgian Orthodox Christianity, Armenian Monophysite Christianity, Islam
 According to the 2002 national census, main minority groups include Azeris 285,000 (6.5%), Armenians 249,000 (5.7%) and Russians 68,000 (1.5%). For information on the populations of the de facto (but largely unrecognized) states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, see the separate entries for each. According to the 2002 census, Ossetians within Georgia but outside South Ossetia numbered 38,000 (0.9%), down from 100,000 prior to the outbreak of conflict in 1989. Also according to the 2002 census, Abkhaz within Georgia but outside Abkhazia numbered 3,500 (.08%). The numbers of Ossetians and Abkhaz in undisputed Georgian territory certainly fell as a result of the August 2008 war, but the extent and duration of displacement remain difficult to determine.

In the Georgian language, based on the Kartli dialect spoken in eastern Georgia, Georgians refer to themselves as kartveli. The Kartvelian language family, to which Georgian belongs, also includes three vernaculars: Mingrelian, spoken in western Georgia, Svan, spoken in the north-central mountainous region of Svaneti, and Laz, spoken mainly along the north Black Sea coast of Turkey but also in small pockets of south-west Georgia. Mingrelian and Svan speakers use Georgian as their literary language and lingua franca. Although the existence of these separate languages is indicative of different identity

groups within the Georgian nation, they have not to date formed the basis for mobilization as distinct ethnic groups.

Following independence Georgia experienced significant depopulation, with the overall population in 2002 falling by 1 million compared with 1989. In absolute terms all ethnic groups declined; in proportional terms, however, decline was especially dramatic among minority groups (particularly Slavic minorities, Jews, Greeks and Armenians).

Another post-independence trend is the emergence of non-denominational religious groups as a result of the penetration of such Western evangelical groups as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists and others. However, no statistics are available for these groups.

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History

Due its geographical location, Georgia has historically formed a meeting point between regional empires, with correspondingly few periods of independent statehood. After periods of Roman, Pontic, Iranian and Arab domination, Georgia attained political unity under the Bagratid dynasty in the early Middle Ages. The Bagratid kingdom eventually succumbed to successive waves of Mongol invasions from the east in the mid-fifteenth century. Until incorporation into the Russian state in the nineteenth century, the kingdom remained fragmented under loose Ottoman suzerainty. Political loyalties were largely local and dynastic, juxtaposed with a more global cultural orientation based on the autocephalous Georgian Orthodox Church and its close link to Georgian as its liturgical language.

Beginning in the late eighteenth century the Russian empire incorporated the various kingdoms and principalities formerly making up the heartland of the Bagratid kingdom. By the late eighteenth century the threat posed by growing Persian expansionism led King Erekle II of the eastern Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti to seek protection from co-religionist Russia. In 1783 the Treaty of Georgievsk, establishing Kartli-Kakheti as a Russian protectorate, was concluded. However, in 1801 Russia annexed Kartli-Kakheti directly and over the course of the nineteenth century incorporated piecemeal the remaining kingdoms and principalities once forming part of the Bagratid kingdom.

In 1918 a short-lived independent Georgian state emerged from the collapsing Russian Empire, only to be reincorporated into the Soviet state by invading Bolshevik forces in 1921. Georgia then formed part of the Soviet Union until 1991. The absence of a tradition of indigenous statehood accounts for the high degree of multi-ethnicity in post-Soviet Georgia and the low degree of identification with the Georgian state among its various minorities. The Georgians remained one of the least russified of the Soviet Union's major nationalities, and enjoyed de facto domination of the republic's key political and economic posts. This was reflected in the progressive increase in the Georgian share of the republic's population at the expense of minorities. However, Soviet nationalities policy also created a number of autonomous regions in Georgia – autonomous republics for the Abkhaz minority in Abkhazia and the Georgian Muslim population in Ajaria, and an autonomous region in South Ossetia for the Ossetian minority.

Georgia's multi-ethnic composition became overtly politicized in the context of political reform in the Gorbachev era, when the Georgians' claims to entitlement clashed with minorities' fears of subordination in a Georgian-dominated state. The continued existence of autonomous republics remained a source of tension between majority and minorities. The existence of these autonomous units was a source of tension between majority and minorities already in the Soviet period, particularly in

Abkhazia. The politicization of ethnicity, general lawlessness accompanied by the rise of rival militias, and the absence of strong political institutions all contributed to the transformation of political conflict into civil strife and secessionist conflict. Armed conflict between Ossetian separatists and the Georgian National Guard followed the abolition of South Ossetia's autonomous status by the Georgian legislature in December 1990.

Georgia declared independence on 9 April 1991 following a referendum. By an overwhelming majority, former dissident and leader of the nationalist Round Table Coalition Zviad Gamsakhurdia was elected president in May 1991. President Gamsakhurdia's period in power saw a sharp deterioration in majority-minority relations, as policies in the fields of language, electoral laws and citizenship threatened to exclude minorities from political life. At the same time, Gamsakhurdia's authoritarianism alienated many of his former supporters, leading to low-level civil strife and eventually outright civil war in December 1991. Gamsakhurdia was ousted in a January 1992 coup and the putschists invited former head of the Georgian Communist Party and later Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, Eduard Shevardnadze, to lead the government. A cease-fire in South Ossetia was agreed following Shevardnadze's return, but in 1993 large-scale conflict broke out in Abkhazia in parallel to fighting between government forces and militias loyal to former president Gamsakhurdia. Shevardnadze allied with Russian forces to defeat his rival. But Georgian defeat in South Ossetia and Abkhazia resulted in the unrecognized secession of these territories. It also marked the onset of protracted and heavily internationalized peace processes. Shevardnadze agreed to Russian-led peacekeeping missions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but the presence of Russian soldiers would become increasingly contentious.

As post-Soviet Georgia underwent considerable political upheaval against a wider context of economic collapse and a breakdown of social order, increasing emigration from Georgia was disproportionately high among minority groups. Public surveys found that minorities cited ethnic discrimination as a background factor. They also cited unemployment, economic insecurity and the inability to pursue meaningful careers as pressing concerns. New opportunities for some minorities to obtain citizenship of ethnic homelands were also significant.

The November 2003 the 'Rose Revolution' (the first of the 'colour revolutions' in the former Soviet Union) saw a coalition of opposition leaders harness public revulsion at that month's flawed parliamentary elections and longstanding, rampant corruption. The opposition succeeded in ousting powerful and entrenched interests from government, including President Shevardnadze.

Although ethnic issues were peripheral to the Rose Revolution, political change injected them with a new dynamism. President Mikheil Saakashvili, elected in January 2004, placed a pledge to restore the country's territorial integrity at the core of his public statements. After taking power, his administration initially wavered between confrontational policies (such as the 'humanitarian storming' of South Ossetia in summer 2004, leading to a renewed if fleeting outbreak of violence) and more measured approaches promoting 'road maps' for resolution.

Dramatic political change in 2004 did not alleviate underlying structural tensions between majority and minorities in Georgia. Georgia's most significant minorities, the Azeris and Armenians, remained concentrated in outlying regions of the republic (Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti respectively), characterized by economic decline and isolation. These regions were poorly connected to the rest of Georgia and suffered from extreme poverty. In Javakheti, the continued presence of a Russian military base, which has provided the local Armenian population with its principal source of employment, has been a particular point of controversy in the region's relations with Tbilisi.

The Georgian government faced pressure to allow the repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks, a group of

mixed Turkic-Georgian ancestry deported by the Stalin regime to Central Asia in November 1944. Unlike other deported peoples rehabilitated in the 1950s and 1960s, the Meskhetian Turks had never been rehabilitated nor compensated for their loss of property. They also had not been allowed to return to their land of origin. After independence, the Georgian authorities were reluctant to facilitate their repatriation, for both material and ideological reasons. The Meskhetian Turks' original lands in Samtskhe-Javakheti were now largely populated by Armenians hostile to their return, and the Georgian state lacked the capacity to provide resources for the re-integration of this community. Nevertheless, in 1999, the Georgian government made a commitment to the Council of Europe that the Meskhetian Turks would be resettled by 2011. In 2005 the Georgian government undertook surveys on the social, economic and legal needs of potential returnees.

Tensions between Georgia and Russia, which was overtly sympathetic to Ossetian and Abkhaz separatists, sharply increased in 2006. Georgia's detention of Russian military officers on spying charges prompted Moscow to embargo trading with Georgia and suspend transportation links. Meanwhile, Moscow assiduously provided Ossetians and Abkhaz in the two territories with Russian passports. 'Protecting Russian citizens' became a leading justification for Russian actions in Georgia.

Geopolitical factors provided added incentives for conflict between Tbilisi and Moscow. In December 2006, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that if Kosovo were to gain independence from Serbia, then Abkhazia and South Ossetia should be free to become independent of Georgia. In February 2008, Kosovo declared independence and many countries, including the United States and most EU member states, recognized it over Moscow's strenuous objections. Russia was angered by American military support to Georgia and support for Saakashvili's ambitions for Georgian membership in NATO. Moscow also disliked the US-backed oil pipeline opened in July 2006 that traversed Georgia from Azerbaijan to Turkey, and which reduced Russian leverage over EU member states by making them less reliant on Russian energy supplies. As tensions between Georgia and Russia mounted in 2007 and 2008, conditions worsened for ethnic minorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Exclusion of minorities in these regions threatened to push the region into conflict.

Conflict escalated dramatically in August 2008 following skirmishes between Georgian forces and Ossetian militias. Hours after declaring a cease-fire, Saakashvili ordered a full military assault on the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali 'to restore constitutional order'. Claiming that South Ossetian militias had first shelled Georgian villages, Georgian forces bombed and shelled Ossetian targets for two days and entered the city, with disputed results. Large numbers of Russian forces (following sizeable reinforcements to 'peacekeeping' units in South Ossetia and Abkhazia over the preceding months) poured across the border within hours to stop what Moscow termed "genocide". Russian claims of 1,500-2,000 civilian deaths from the Georgian offensive on Tskhinvali were subsequently called into question. Although there were reports of Georgian abuses and likely war crimes, Human Rights Watch could only document about 100 civilian deaths, and Russian prosecutors only 133. Among Russians, Georgians, and Ossetians, military fatalities were thought to number in the hundreds.

Russian forces joined Ossetian irregulars in quickly driving the Georgian army from South Ossetia, but did not stop there. Russia also moved troops into Abkhazia and swathes of Georgia proper, where they forced Georgian forces to retreat and destroyed military and civilian infrastructure alike.

South Ossetian paramilitaries joined Russian forces in crossing into Georgia proper, particularly around the town of Gori. Widespread reports of war crimes and human rights abuses emerged from the conflict zones and ethnic Georgians fled and were driven from areas of Russian and Ossetian/Abkhaz control. Russia agreed to a French ceasefire proposal in mid-August, but was slow to withdraw its forces from Georgia proper. Before the month was out, Moscow recognized South Ossetian and Abkhaz independence and in September entered 'friendship treaties' with the two territories that included

pledges of military assistance and cooperation. Although western countries in particular continued to reject their independence, the longstanding de facto independence of the two territories appeared cemented, with displaced Georgian minorities in each facing long odds of ever returning home.

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Governance

The de facto secession of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia from Georgia prior to and shortly after independence, coupled with Russian involvement in these conflicts and support for secessionist minorities, established the context for subsequent policies towards national minorities. The new constitution adopted in 1995 envisaged a federal structure for Georgia, but left the precise terms vague pending the resolution of the conflicts.

Under the Georgian constitution, the president, elected to a five-year term, serves as head-of-cabinet and appoints the prime minister. A unicameral parliament, which under constitutional amendment in 2003 shrank from 235 to 150 seats in January 2008, is elected by proportional representation. Supreme and constitutional courts sit atop a weak judiciary.

Following the November 2003 Rose Revolution, presidential and repeat parliamentary elections in January and March 2004 confirmed the reformists' victory and popular desires for change. Since that time, however, enthusiasm for President Mikheil Saakashvili's reformist agenda has waned amid concerns regarding the new government's adherence to human rights standards, participation in the high-level corruption it had pledged to eliminate, and government interference in the judiciary.

Presidential Saakashvili's reformist credentials were tarnished in November 2007 when he called a state of emergency and dispatched riot police to violently break up opposition protests against his government. In the wake of the incident and resulting diplomatic pressure, he called early elections for the presidency and parliament. He easily won the presidential vote in January 2008 amidst opposition claims of voting irregularities that received the credence of international monitors. Parliamentary elections held in May 2008 resulted in a resounding victory for Saakashvili's party, which took 120 out of 150 seats in parliament. However, the opposition panned the vote as unfair and a large share of the opposition decided to boycott parliament. A monitoring mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe cited voter intimidation, pressure on polling observers, and irregularities during the vote count as key problems, but noted that the conduct of the parliamentary elections represented an improvement over that of the January presidential election.

Although President Saakashvili's administration has made efforts to devise new policies for the integration of minorities – a new law on self-governance was passed in 2005 and elections for new municipalities were held in October 2006 – progress has been marginal due to the lack of capacity to implement policies, insensitivity in their presentation and the failure to challenge informal practices of discrimination. On the other hand, many (if not all) spokesmen for minority groups continue to indiscriminately reject all initiatives advanced by the Georgian state. However, these difficulties in arriving at a mutually acceptable social contract between majority and minorities are more usefully seen as reflecting the crisis of statehood in Georgia, rather than necessarily antagonistic majority–minority relations.

Georgia strengthened its international commitment to minority rights in December 2005 by ratifying the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The government submitted its first report to the Council of Europe in July 2007. A similar domestic commitment has been harder to

achieve. Concrete legislation governing ethnic issues is sparse and scattered across a range of different legal acts. The constitution contains a number of provisions proclaiming the equality of Georgia's citizens; other laws allow for rights of association, cultural activities, native-language primary and secondary education, and stipulate language requirements for public office. While the constitution defines Georgian as the state language, it also grants this status to Abkhaz in Abkhazia. Although the non-discriminatory clauses of the Georgian Constitution and other legal acts broadly comply with international standards, some national minority representatives have criticized their vagueness, and have lobbied for the adoption of a specific law on national minorities. The adoption of such a law by 2001 was also envisaged in the terms of Georgia's membership of the Council of Europe. To date, however, the Georgian state has not adopted a law on national minorities, although a number of drafts have been put forward for public discussion. In its July 2007 report to the Council of Europe, the government stated that it 'required greater assistance from the Council of Europe experts in defining the term "national minorities"'. In a resolution passed on 24 January 2008, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe highlighted continuous concern over respect for minority and religious rights.

In central institutions, levels of minority political representation remain extremely low. In the 235-seat parliament that sat until 2008, the only minorities were five Armenians and three Azeris. After elections for the new 150-seat parliament in May 2008, only six minorities remained (three Armenians and three Azeris). This means that for a country whose population is roughly 16 per cent minority, only four per cent of its parliamentarians are from minority groups. The election outcome failed altogether to reflect a number of population groups, including ethnic Russians, Greeks, Abkhaz, and Ossetians. Minority representation in local government was also poor until reforms passed in 2006. Local governments now largely reflect the demographics of the regions they represent.

Under law, all federal government officials must speak Georgian and laws are only published in Georgian. The government has done little to provide Georgian language training, so minorities tend only to speak their native languages. This dynamic has been a prime cause of minority marginalization.

Progress has been achieved in both the use of minority languages in national media and in the translation of Georgian news programmes into minority languages. Supported by the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) funding, the translation of the state-funded Channel 1's moambe and the independent Rustavi-2's kurieri into Armenian and their transmission via local TV stations in Samtskhe-Javakheti began in late 2003, and Azeri-language transmissions in early 2006 in Kvemo Kartli. This offered the first opportunity for these minorities to access coverage of events in Georgia other than via Russian media sources, and has elicited positive response from local communities. Other recent initiatives include slots for Ossetian, Armenian and Azeri-language programming on Georgia's Channel-1, although as yet these lack regular character.

Generally, the Georgian government has been tolerant to well established minority religious groups, including Catholics, Muslims and Jews. However, after independence, public concern increased regarding the respective capacities of the Georgian Orthodox Church and such Western-funded religious groups as Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals and Seventh Day Adventists. Nationalists have portrayed the spread of such groups as a threat to Georgian Orthodoxy, and have campaigned for both the promotion of Georgian Orthodoxy and the curtailment of evangelical activities. In October 2002 the Shevardnadze administration bowed to popular pressure for a concordat, which fell short of defining Georgian Orthodoxy as the state religion but conferred legal status on a number of privileges and rights for the Georgian Orthodox Church and its personnel. A law passed in 2005 weakened the Church's influence on education under the 2002 concordat, and reports of harassment of newer minority religious groups have fallen.

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Current state of minorities and indigenous peoples

Ethnic minorities in Georgia suffered greatly during and following the August 2008 conflict with Russia. In addition to unknown levels of fatalities and reports of rape and torture, there were numerous reports of the warring parties targeting ethnic minorities in particular for displacement. Displacement was frequently accompanied by the looting and burning of houses in minority communities, with the specific intention of preventing minority returns. Including South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Georgia proper, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that at its height, the ten-day war displaced 128,000 people within Georgia, with another 30,000 people ([Ossetians](#)) fleeing to Russia. [For information on the current situations of minorities in the disputed Georgian regions of [South Ossetia](#) and [Abkhazia](#), please see separate entries.] The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) addressed the implications of the Georgia-Russia war in a resolution of 2 October 2009 and expressed concern over the disproportionate use of armed force by Georgian military on Tskhinvali.

Following active hostilities, Russia still maintained troops within seven-kilometre strips of Georgia proper in addition to those remaining in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This violated the French-brokered ceasefire agreement under which all forces were to have been withdrawn to pre-conflict positions. In late August, the UNHCR expressed concern about new rounds of displacement of ethnic Georgians from the Russian-controlled 'buffer zone' along the South Ossetian boundary line. Hundreds of displaced Georgians, fleeing marauding Ossetian militias, fled to the town of Gori. In September Georgia filed cases against Russia before the International Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights. Georgia claimed that in killing and displacing ethnic Georgians in areas of Russian occupation, Moscow was violating the UN Convention on Racial Discrimination, as well as articles 2 (right to life) and 3 (prohibition on inhuman and degrading treatment) of the European Convention on Human Rights. Russia contested the claims, saying that its troops had acted to save ethnic Russians and Ossetians.

In mid-September, OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities Knut Vollebaek was not only barred from visiting South Ossetia, but also from the buffer zone along its boundary that remained under Russian control. He expressed 'serious concern' about the situation of ethnic Georgians there. Under international pressure to comply with the terms of the ceasefire agreement, Russia eventually agreed to allow 200 EU observers into the buffer zones south of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and to withdraw its forces from Georgia proper by October 10. Ossetians living adjacent to South Ossetia in Georgia proper have long been vulnerable to knock-on effects from tensions between Tbilisi and separatists, and it is unclear what will happen to this population once Russian forces withdraw. Ethnic Abkhaz living outside of Abkhazia face the same predicament.

On 13 February 2009, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of the UN Observer Mission (UNOMIG) in Georgia until 15 June 2009. The UNOMIG was originally established in 1993 to verify compliance with the 27 July 1993 ceasefire agreement between the Government of Georgia and the Abkhaz authorities and is hosting the UN Office for the protection and promotion of human rights in Abkhazia (HROAG). The small UN mission is reported to have maintained an effective presence since Abkhazia established a de facto separatist state after the 1992-93 war. On 16 June 2009 however, Russia vetoed to extend the mandate of the UN observes, arguing that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are independent states.

Russia's veto has caused an international discontent. Two days after the veto (PACE) rapporteurs on the consequences of the war between Georgia and Russia jointly expressed great concern over Russia's move and stated that "Without a UN Mission, Abkhazia is in danger of slipping into a human rights black hole. (...) Without UNOMIG in Abkhazia there will be no independent human rights protection and monitoring, and an almost complete lack of any international presence. Those who will suffer are the people, and particularly those living in the Gali region." They referred to a real danger of renewed

displacement and refuge from the region: “No one wants a further exodus from the Gali region, but without human rights protection guarantees and monitoring, this exodus will become a real risk”. According to the UNHCR Global Appeal 2011 update on the country, there are some 355, 000 people in need of protection by the UN body, of whom 247, 000 are internally displaced persons (IDPs). The situation of those who have returned to Abkhazia, and South Ossetia as well as to other parts of Georgia, following earlier civil conflict, is described as precarious, with many living as long as 16 years without adequate shelter. In a 2010 submission to the OSCE, the Georgian government identified 131,169 IDPs and victims of ethnic cleansing after the 2008 conflict, many of whom are in the process of returning, but who are struggling to access adequate housing and employment. There are some 900 refugees from the Chechen Republic and the Russian Federation and 1,700 stateless people in the country. The UNHCR refers to the country’s lack of a strong asylum system (that would ensure the international legal principle of non-refoulement, namely that no person should be returned to a situation where her or his life or freedom is at serious risk) as a serious problem, as well as the fact that the country is neither a state party to the UN conventions of statelessness, nor to the European Convention on Nationality. Widespread gender-based and sexual violence and the lack of effective protection for IDP women have also been reported.

With the major exception of fallout from the tensions leading up to and resulting from the conflict with Russia, 2007 and 2008 saw some improvements in minority rights in Georgia. In July 2007, the parliament passed legislation on the repatriation of Meskhetian Turks, establishing a mechanism for receiving resettlement applications beginning in January 2008. In April 2008, the European Commission noted Georgian progress in implementing a civic integration programme, improving infrastructure in regions predominantly inhabited by minorities, and establishing a Public Administration Institute tasked with training minorities. Following parliamentary elections in May 2008, the government created a Department for Minority Issues and Human Rights within the Office of the State Minister for Reintegration Issues. Similarly, President Saakashvili gained a new Advisor to the President on Civic Integration and Minority Issues.

The situation of Jehovah’s Witnesses and other religious minorities has improved in recent years. Jehovah’s Witnesses have been allowed to register as a religious group and establish places of worship. In May 2006, the group won a case before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) stemming from the government’s failure in 1999 to protect them from violent attacks. Other challenges brought by Jehovah’s Witnesses against previous Georgian governments are pending before the ECHR. According to a report by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting in February 2009, „even though violence against religious minorities in Georgia was practically non-existent in 2008, believers struggle to realise their legal right to free worship. According to the report, bureaucrats are making life hard for everyone but the Orthodox Church. Although members of minority faiths are free to operate by law, they say they face bureaucratic discrimination. Georgian Muslims of the Council for Religious Tolerance say the difference in approach is particularly marked in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, home to many Muslims, as well as Armenians where they struggle to get official permission to build mosques.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) published its third report on Georgia in June 2010. ECRI’s Chair, Nils Muiznieks, identified positive initiatives in fighting discrimination on the grounds of nationality or national or ethnic origin, race, colour, language and religion. Key positive developments concern the work of the Georgian Ombudsman, who is setting up regional branches such as the Tolerance Centre, the Council of Ethnic Minorities and the Council of Religion in order to reach persons in need of protection. The report also notes the adoption of the National Strategy for Tolerance and Civil Integration which aims to preserve ethnic minorities’ culture and identity, promotion of equal opportunities and the effective participation of ethnic minorities in all fields of life. The report stipulates that when implemented, the strategy could help to make the majority population aware of the problems faced by minorities. At the same time, it has been identified that contacts between the majority

population and ethnic minorities are limited due to language barriers and infrastructure problems that contributes to the isolation of Armenians, Azerbaijanis and others in the south and south-east. According to the report, the Roma minority, as well as Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims are still facing widespread prejudice, harassment and violations and are not appropriately protected by the police.

The ECRI report highlights the particular situation of the Meskhetian Turks, a minority group deported in the 1940s by the Soviet authorities from the region of Meskheta (now known as Samtskhe-Javakheti). National legislation in Georgia does not use the term of Meskhetian Turks, as some of the persons concerned do not identify themselves as such. The law 'On forcefully deported persons from Georgia by the former USSR in the 1940s of the 20th century' in respect of the entire group was adopted in 2007, and the ECRI refers to the recommendations of the 2009 Opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) on easing administrative burdens of the repatriation process of formerly deported persons who would like to return.

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International Commitments

Note: Georgia has not acceded to the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.