



CARIM EAST – CONSORTIUM FOR APPLIED RESEARCH ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Co-financed by the European Union

Relationship Policy with Diaspora: Georgia

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CARIM-East Explanatory Note 13/108

Socio-Political Module

September, 2013



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Introduction

Over 200 Georgian Diaspora organizations are operating abroad today. The majority of them take part in public and political life of the recipient country. At the same time, they are actively engaged in promoting and developing the Georgian culture, including the establishment of centers of culture, organization of Georgian language courses and creative associations, etc. Following the establishment of the Governmental Commission for migration issues¹ in the fall of 2010, the institutional competencies of the state bodies in the area of migration have broadened. The improvement of the legislative base and the elaboration of relevant policy have followed. The national strategy for migration drafted by the Commission was approved in March 2013. Maintaining the relationship with the Diaspora has become an essential part of the Georgian migration policy.

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Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgians were not characterized by a high level of migration mobility. According to the 1989 General Census, 95% of Georgians resided permanently in Georgia². Over the last 20 years, some 1-1, 2 mln Georgian nationals have emigrated to the post-Soviet and Western countries.³ The countries with the highest concentration of the number of Georgian Diaspora organizations are: the United States (100,000 persons), the United Kingdom (15,000), Italy (7,000), Greece (400,000, including 100,000 ethnic Greeks), Spain (30,000), Russia (800,000), Turkey (60,000; moreover, the number of historically formed Georgians Diaspora is estimated around 2 mln)⁴, Israel (approximately 7,000-9,000), Ukraine (between 50,000-150,000), Austria (10,000)⁵ and Iran (approximately 35,000-60,000, including the members of historically formed Diaspora⁶). At present, over 200 Georgian Diaspora organizations are taking active part in the development of socio-cultural activities abroad, including the organization of 81 dancing and vocal ensembles, 56 Sunday schools, 12 Georgian-language schools, 4 schools with Georgian ethnic-cultural components, 74 parochial schools, and several theater groups⁷.

¹ Resolution of the Government of Georgia #314, 13.10.2010 on the Establishment of the Governmental Commission for Migration Issues and the Adoption of its Charter.

² Gachechiladze R. *Population migration in Georgia and its socio-economic consequences*. UNDP. Tbilisi.1997.

³ Meladze G. *Dynamics of the natural movement of population in the South Caucasus countries*. Caucasus Geographical Journal. №3, 2003.

⁴ *Georgian Diasporas Study*. GIZ. 2012. (Eng) p.41.

⁵ According to 2011 data provided by the Office of the State Ministry for Diaspora Issues.

⁶ Among them there are no historically formed ethnic Georgians; instead, these 35,000-60,000 Georgians are the so-called Fereydan Georgians (Fereydan- a region in Iran), which had been moved there during the period of Shah Abbas I of Persia. The number of Georgians emigrants during the last century is insignificant. The same is true about some 2 mln. Georgians residing in Turkey. 100,000 ethnic Greeks refers to the so-called Pontic Greeks who resided in Abkhazia, Poti and Samtskhe-Javakheti region (Georgia), but moved out of Georgia.

⁷ According to 2013 data provided by the Office of the State Ministry for Diaspora Issues. Draft strategy document for Diaspora. P.4.

Table N1⁸ . Diaspora, remittances and investments according to the main countries

Country	Community size	FDI received in 2011 (in thousand USD)	Remittances received (thousand USD) 2011	International Trade thousand USD (Export) 2011	International Trade thousand USD (Import) 2011
Turkey	60,000 (up to 2 million historic Diaspora)	77,393.70	27,643	227,583.80	1,272,426.80
USA	100,000	29,000.80	75,379	143,466.20	245,796.70
UK	15,000	37,224.20	14,852	13,842.60	88,481.50
Italy	7,000	-5,664.20	109,188	75,501.40	184,834.90
Greece	400,000 (among them- 100,000 ethnic Greeks)	906.10	144,644	6,186.00	61,905.60
Spain	30,000	-1,621.00	30,957	23,693.00	82,175.00
Russia	up to 800,000	52,329.30	655,217	36,610.40	389,711.60

Despite the extensive migration from Georgia that is taking place over the past 20 years, and the multi-ethnic composition of the population, the authorities of the country showed little initiative in cooperating with the Georgian Diaspora. The situation has changed in the past 5 years. In 2008, the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Diaspora Issues was set up. The same year, the Parliamentary Committee of Diaspora and Caucasus Issues has started to pay attention to the issues of compatriots residing overseas. The combined efforts of these two entities resulted in 2011 in the adoption of the Law of Georgia on Compatriots Residing Abroad and Diaspora Organizations (#5301-II, 24.11.2011.).

Strengthening the cooperation with the Georgian Diaspora has been identified as one of the key priorities in the foreign policy strategy of the country⁹, as well as the national strategy for migration (Resolution of the Government of Georgia, #59, 15.03.2013.) and the Mobility Partnership Agreement.

The National Security Concept of Georgia has defined the main directions of the national security policy, including the policy for maintaining the relationship with the Diaspora. The policy focuses on preservation of the national identity of the compatriots residing overseas. Towards this goal, the national state authorities promote the creation of Georgian Sunday schools and Georgian-language based public schools, folk groups and artistic societies abroad, as well as the conduction of the Georgian language courses, preservation and development of cultural heritage; strengthening of the ties amongst the various Georgian Diaspora organizations in different countries, etc¹⁰.

⁸ *Georgian Diasporas Study*. GIZ. 2012. (Eng) p.41. Sources: Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Diaspora Issues, www.geostat.ge, National Bank of Georgia www.nbg.gov.ge

⁹ Foreign policy strategy of Georgia for 2009-2012. Available http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=562 date of access July, 2013

¹⁰ Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia on the Adoption of the National Security Concept of Georgia. N5589, 23.12.2011. Available http://mfa.gov.ge/?sec_id=12&lang_id=GEO date of access July, 2013

The Office of the State Minister for Diaspora Issues has elaborated a document on the national strategy¹¹ for maintaining relationships with the Diaspora to be discussed at the 2013 fall session of the Parliament. The strategy prioritizes the following: promotion of return to Georgia; assistance to migrants residing abroad; support of the historically formed Diaspora. The strategy, respectively, combines the activities to be carried out in all areas listed above:

- Strengthening Diaspora organizations and promoting their activities;
- Encouraging the compatriots' activities in the social network;
- Introducing compatriots' certificates;
- Promoting the attraction of investments with the help of the Diaspora organizations;
- Assisting in finding employment for the compatriots;
- Transferring the Diaspora's intellectual resources to Georgia;
- Maintaining relationships with international and non-governmental organizations;
- Electing a Georgian Diaspora's majority deputy;¹²
- Using a system of public diplomacy;
- Encouraging Georgian Diaspora organizations by rewarding some of its prominent members;
- Conducting research and monitoring Diaspora organizations.

The Basic Data and Directions Document for 2014-2017 has reflected priority activities for the Office of the State Minister for Diaspora Issues of Georgia. Supported financially by the international organizations, several projects are being implemented in order to promote these priorities, which, inter alia, include:

1. Project "Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals (TRQN III), Enhancing Government and Institutional Capacity by Linking Diaspora to Development"¹³ funded by the Dutch government and carried out by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) with close cooperation with the Office of the State Minister for Diaspora Issues of Georgia. The project aims to promote the implementation of the national development strategy in the area of enhancing the capacities of the entities operating in public and private sectors by engaging qualified Georgian nationals residing abroad. Within this 3-year program, it is planned to arrange business trips for up to 45 qualified personnel from both Georgia and the Netherlands;

¹¹ The Office of the State Ministry for Diaspora Issues has drafted the Migration Code as well. Its major portion regards the policy of relationships with Diaspora. The Code is being revised at present.

¹² Prior to 2012 Parliamentary elections, the Office of the State Minister for Diaspora Issues drafted and submitted for discussion to the Parliament a draft law of Georgia on the Establishment of the Assembly General of the Compatriots Residing Abroad that aimed at promoting the engagement of representatives of the compatriots living overseas into Georgia's public, political and cultural life. Based on the draft law, members of the assembly general should have been elected from the majoritarian precinct, they resided in, which had at least 300 Diaspora representatives holding the status of compatriots residing abroad. The assembly general of the compatriots was intended to be an advisory body for the state minister for Diaspora issues. The term of office for the assembly general that was to meet once in a year in the format of a 5-day session during the holiday period of the Parliament of Georgia was defined as 4 years. However, the package of the draft laws has remained not discussed after the parliamentary elections. According to the new strategy document, at the initial stage it would be reasonable to elect only four representatives of Georgian Diaspora to the Parliament of Georgia by taking into consideration the following geographical characteristics: a) European Diaspora; b) American Diaspora; c) African and Asian Diaspora (including the Diaspora residing in Australia); d) The Diaspora residing in former Soviet republics. In order to provide for the introduction of these changes, respective draft legislative acts need to be elaborated.

¹³ Available http://migration.commission.ge/files/trqn_iii_infosheet_geo.pdf date of access July, 2013. Governmental Commission on Migration Issues. Project "Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals (TRQN III), Enhancing Government and Institutional Capacity by Linking Diaspora to Development". (IOM The Netherlands)

2. Project “Enhancing the Role of Georgian Emigrants at Home” (ERGEM)¹⁴ aims to contribute to the strengthening of communication between the Georgians residing overseas and Georgian institutions, and to enhance the role of the Georgian Diaspora in the national economic development. The 18-month project financed by the European Union’s thematic project and co-financed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the project partners, has been carried out since April 2013 under the guidance of the DRC and in close cooperation with the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and other state agencies. The project focuses on the following specific tasks: the collection and analysis of reliable statistical data on the Georgian Diaspora; the analysis of the business sector priorities, monetary assistance and investment needs; the identification of experienced businessmen representing the Diaspora and sharing their experience; the elaboration of an investment model for the Diaspora and its introduction into Georgia; the award of 20 grants for migrants returned to Georgia in the area of small- and medium-size businesses.
3. Project “Georgia - Personalized Assistance for Migrants (G-PAM, 2013-2015)”¹⁵ carried out by the Civil Development Agency (CiDA) with the financial support of the European Union. The project is scheduled to be implemented in five regions in Georgia as well as in the two so-called recipient countries - Turkey and Greece. Within the project, a network of civil organizations will be set up. The network will provide the protection of the rights of individuals intending to go to Turkey and Greece as well as of return migrants. The project will also keep those individuals informed about the legal migration procedures and provide relevant consultation. An electronic system for promoting the exchange of qualified personnel will be created. In order to ensure the inflow of investments and to optimize positive effects of migration for the overall development of Georgia, small and medium businesses operating in five regions will be studied and diagnosed. Georgian migrants residing abroad will be informed about the research outcomes.
4. Another important project is “Enhancing Migratory Potential by Circular Migration and Diaspora Mobilization”, the program for the professional personnel who returned to Georgia. The project was initiated by the International Center for Migration and Development (GIZ/CIM). Professional personnel who obtained education and gained working experience in Germany will be provided with employment opportunities as well as with financial and technical support. To these ends, the professional personnel will be awarded scholarships for a two-year period and provided with the necessary technical equipment required for performing their activities.¹⁶
5. Project “Promoting Well Managed Migration between EU and Georgia (2013-2015)” funded by the European Union (GYLA/CIPDD/EU) is carried out by the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association and the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development. The project covers the entire country and focuses on four major objectives. One of the directions entitled “Migration and development – transforming the brain drain into the brain return” considers implementing the following main activities: establishing contacts with Diaspora members in approximately 10 EU countries; arranging visits of Diaspora members to

¹⁴ Available http://www.migration.commission.ge/files/ergem_pis_0613_-_geo_kg.pdf date of access July, 2013. Governmental Commission for Migration Issues. Project “Enhancing the Role of Georgian Emigrants at Home”. (DRC-ICMPD).

¹⁵ Available <http://www.cida.ge/site/index.php/Eng/projects/item/418-georgia-personalized-assistance-for-migrants-g-pam> date of access July, 2013. NGO CiDA, project “Georgia - Personalized Assistance for Migrants (G-PAM)

¹⁶ Available http://www.Diaspora.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=124&info_id=2919 date of access July, 2013.

Georgia; conducting training courses for the professionals amongst the members of the Georgian Diaspora in various fields (including tourism, service delivery, education, etc.)¹⁷.

6. In 2013, a one-year project “Migration and Development (CE) - Technical Cooperation on Migration Management and Capacity Building (TC)“, a mutual initiative of the IOM and the Office of the State Minister for Diaspora Issues has been launched. The project to be implemented on the territory of Georgia, the EU and its neighbouring countries will focus mainly on the following activities: organization of workshops with representatives of those countries that have an extensive experience in dealing with Diaspora; organization of conferences and forums in order to exchange experience and share business interests; establishment of an information portal for the Diaspora; introduction of a social network; conduction of an information campaign, which includes production of video clips, booklets and brochures and involvement of interested organizations in the process.¹⁸

The involvement of the Georgian Diaspora into the country’s development has been a new concept in the policy pursued by the state. A close cooperation amongst various state agencies, Diaspora and international organizations is underway in order to promote the implementation of this new policy.

On the one hand, maintaining relationships with the Georgian Diaspora organizations has been an integral part of the migration policy. On the other hand, maintaining relationships with representatives of various ethnic minorities residing in multi-national and multi-confessional Georgia¹⁹ in an isolated way, which takes no account of the existing system for migration management, seems to be less efficient²⁰. No activities for promoting the civil integration of ethnic minorities residing in Georgia have been outlined within the Charter of the Office of the State Minister for Diaspora Issues of Georgia²¹. No such specific activities are carried out by the Office either. This notwithstanding, local legislation and a number of international conventions ratified by Georgia provide a legal base for the protection of rights of all the citizens living in the country, including representatives of national minorities and their Diaspora as well as for their civil integration and equal participation in the country’s public and political life. This policy has been reflected within the National Concept and Action Plan for Tolerance and Civil Integration²², the Basic Data and Directions Document²³ and the

¹⁷ Available http://gyla.ge/eng/raising_awareness/migration_project#sthash.VCA9n8wt.dpuf date of access July, 2013. Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association, Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development. Project “Promoting well managed migration between EU and Georgia (2013-2015)”.

¹⁸ An interview with Mikheil Skhiereli, representative of the Office of the State Minister of Georgia on Diaspora Issues in the office in July 2013.

¹⁹ Available http://www.geostat.ge/?action=wnews_archive1&qy=1&qy1=16&lang=geo date of access July, 2013. National Statistics office of Georgia. Statistical Yearbook of Georgia. Population by Ethnic Origin (Population census data). See table 2.

²⁰ If the relationship with the Georgian Diaspora is an essential part of the migration policy, it will be inefficient to consider relationships with various ethnic groups living in multi-national and multi-confessional country independently from migration management system. The management of the immigration processes involving the Chinese, the Indians and the Iranians over the last few years, the return of ethnic Greeks from Georgia, the domestic (internal) migration processes involving Azeri, Armenians and Yezidis (the latter have rather powerful Diaspora organizations in Georgia) have been totally ignored and not considered within the system of the management of migration processes in Georgia.

²¹ Resolution of the Government of Georgia #18, 08.02.2008 on the Establishment of the Office of the State Minister for Diaspora Issues of Georgia and the Adoption of Its Charter.

²² Available <http://www.tolerantoba.ge/index.php?id=1317206664> date of access July, 2013. Tolerance Centre under the Auspices of the Public Defender. „National Concept and Action Plan for Tolerance and Civil Integration“. Resolution of the Government of Georgia #348, 08.05.2009.

²³ Available <http://www.mof.gov.ge/BDD> date of access July, 2013. Ministry of Finance of Georgia. Governmental program of the government of Georgia „Basic Data and Directions for 2014-2017“.

National Security Concept of Georgia²⁴. As already mentioned above, the latter document identifies main directions of the national security policy, including the policy of civil integration of ethnic minorities and repatriates in Georgia.

The governmental program entitled “The Basic Data and Directions Document” outlines a number of activities that are being carried out successfully by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. These activities, inter alia, include teaching the state language in the regions of the country densely populated by ethnic minority representatives. This measure will promote the growth of respect for their civil rights and freedoms. In addition, the Office of the Public Defender of Georgia is making efforts in order to protect the rights of ethnic and religious minority representatives and to ensure progress of the civil integration process.

Table 2. Population by Ethnic Origin (Population census data)thousands in total population, per cent

	1979 (thousand)	1989 (thousand)	2002 (thousand)	1979 (%)	1989 (%)	2002 (%)
total population	4993.2	5400.8	4371.5	100	100	100
Georgian	3433	3787.4	3661.2	68.8	70.1	83.3
Abkhaz	85.3	95.9	3.5	1.7	1.8	0.1
Ossetian	160.5	164.1	38.0	3.2	3.0	0.9
Russian	371.6	341.2	67.7	7.4	6.3	1.5
Ukrainian	45.0	52.4	7.0	0.9	1.0	0.2
Azerbaijani	255.7	307.6	284.8	5.1	5.7	6.5
Armenian	448	437.2	248.9	9	8.1	5.7
Jewish	28.3	24.8	3.8	0.6	0.5	0.1
Greek	95.1	100.3	15.2	1.9	1.9	0.3
Kurd	25.7	33.3	20.8	0.5	0.6	0.5

²⁴ Available <http://www.nsc.gov.ge/geo/PolicyDocuments.php> date of access July, 2013. National Security Council of Georgia. Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia on the Adoption of the National Security Concept of Georgia (23.12.2011. N5589)

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<http://migration.commission.ge> Governmental Commission on Migration Issues

www.Diaspora.gov.ge Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Diaspora Issues

www.eu-nato.gov.ge Office of the State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration

www.smr.gov.ge Office of the State Minister for Reintegration

www.mfa.gov.ge Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia

www.mra.gov.ge Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia

<http://www.nsc.gov.ge> National Security Council of Georgia.