Policy Paper

Teaching European Values at the Schools of Georgia

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Dedicated to the memory of Dr. Giorgi Glonti, European University professor

and author of the research design for this policy paper

This policy paper was developed as part of the Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Project "Advancing European Values and Standards in Georgian Schools" (620893-EPP-1-2020-1-GE-EPPJMO-PROJECT) implemented by LLC European University.

European University, as the name itself suggests, is a private higher education institution that conducts the teaching and learning process based on European values, and in line with European standards.

Europeanization represents a cornerstone of European University internationalization and overall development strategy.

The purpose of this document is to encourage critical reflection among the education experts, school principals, representatives of the Ministry of Education and other relevant local or international actors about the challenges standing in the way of Europeanizing the Georgian secondary education system, and to call for policy changes based on the specific recommendations.

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Authors: Levan Makhashvili
          Nikoloz Parjanadze
          Nika Chitadze
          Giorgi Gobronidze

Abstract

This policy paper offers an overview of the teaching and learning of European values, in particular, democracy and tolerance, in Georgian public schools vis-a-vis the European Union member states that were selected for comparison. The findings of both desk and field research conducted for this study reveal considerable gaps between policy and practice (i.e., general policy aims and concrete implementing measures). Subsequently, this paper provides relevant recommendations for policy makers and implementers towards more effective and efficient teaching and learning models aimed at overcoming the obstacles that public schools face in the context of the Europeanization of general education policy in Georgia.

Keywords: Teaching Common Values (TCV), European Values, Democracy, Tolerance, Public Schools, General Education, Europeanization, Georgia.

Introduction

"Key importance in teaching is attached not to the product that a pupil produces as a concrete skill or knowledge with concrete content, but to the development of pupil's powers towards determined direction" –
DIMITRI UZNADZE*

Following its regained independence in 1991, Georgia was faced with the challenges of shedding its Soviet legacy, rebuilding dysfunctional institutions, and overcoming the lack of a strategic vision in its education system. Key features of the inherited Soviet education system, such as totalitarian rule, extreme centralisation, uniform ideological educational programmes, a weak evaluation system, inadequate management of financial and human resources, limited participation by the community, and an absence of the private sector (Sharvashidze, 2003, p. 37), shadowed the period of 1991-2003 and had a negative impact on the development of the education system of Georgia.

Helpfully, the democratic changes in 2003 provided an impetus to reinvigorating the system of primary and secondary education in line with European standards, norms and values. In parallel to Georgia's democratic development and progress towards European integration, new changes have been implemented in various forms and scales from the infrastructure to teaching methodology and curricula in order to Europeanize schools, implying the provision of access to inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of European values.

Nevertheless, Georgia's educational system has been lagging behind its European counterparts. OECD's report (2019) is a good reference point from which to proceed with the analysis. "Georgia has made remarkable progress in expanding education access and improving education quality. Nevertheless, the majority of children in Georgia leave school without mastering the ba-

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*   Dimitri Uznadze was a renowned Georgian phsychologist. His main fields of scientific activity were philosophy, history of philosophy, theory of upbringing, experimental pedagogics, etc. Dimitri Uznadze's 'Psychology of Set' is recognized as an important achievement of modern psychological science.

sic competencies for life and work", – reads the document (p. 1). It also suggests that despite certain successes, strategic and targeted reforms are needed in Georgia's education system for all children to learn and thrive.

The report may also be interpreted in a way to assume that although policy documents are up-to-date and well-harmonized with the best international and European standards, challenges remain in realizing these documents in practice (i.e., providing quality schooling in real life).

This gap cannot be tolerated. Indeed, European values contribute to the strengthening of the democratic foundation of the country that, in turn, facilitates the process of their acceptance and solidification in society. It is critical for the long-term sustainability and health of Georgian democracy to transpose and implement European values in schooling. Besides, teaching and learning European values helps school programs meet European standards in their quality and functioning. Thus, the authors of this study understand the societal relevance of this issue and focus on the teaching of common European values as the most critical component in the Europeanization process of the general education system in Georgia, with a strong democratization element to it.

This objective strongly resonates with Georgia which has actively been engaged in the Europeanization process for at least two decades (Chelidze, Kardava & Bragvadze, 2020). Problems standing in the way of Europeanizing the general education system in Georgia should be addressed properly, timely and efficiently in order for schools to meet European educational standards, and subsequently cultivate democratic, tolerant and responsible citizens of European Georgia. Correspondingly, this policy paper is aimed at identifying the loopholes in policy and practice of Europeanizing Schools of Georgia, and seeks improvement via recommendations and sharing best practices.

Scope of Research and Research Questions

In order to explore this issue, it is necessary to (1) understand what common European values are, and how they can be conceptualized and operationalized. It is also necessary to (2) review the existing relevant studies in the selected European Union member states to show how the development of pupils is stimulated by a whole school approach. We then move to (3) investigate if these European values and whole school approach are part of the education policies in Georgia, and (4) if they are properly implemented in practice.

In particular, this study answers the following research questions:

- *What are common (European) values? How are they defined?*
- *What is the importance of teaching common values (TCV) in primary schools?*
- *How are common (European) values taught in selected EU member states? Particularly, what is the practice of teaching common values in Estonia, Finland, Poland, Germany and Slovenia?* These countries were selected because they have one of the best education systems; Finland, Estonia and Germany are often referred as role models in terms of quality education; Estonia as a former Soviet country, Poland and Slovenia as former communist bloc countries, and all of them as current EU member states have gone through the transformation that can be relevant for Georgia.
- *What is the policy on teaching common (European) values in Georgia? How do official policy documents regulate this issue?*
- *What is the practice of teaching common (European) values in Georgia? What are the research findings in this regard?*
- *How can teaching common values be improved in Georgia? What are relevant recommendations for stakeholders?*

For the purpose of this study, we take advantage of the already existing research in the European Union. Notably, we use monumental studies of the European Parliament, Eurydice and ICCS of various years on teaching common values in Europe, citizenship education and civic knowledge, attitudes and engagement. They provide much needed conceptual, theoretical and methodological knowledge in this area.

Methodology

In order to determine to what extent the Georgian school programs teach European values and how European standards are ensured in public school education, the project research team, composed of educational experts and specialists in European Studies, utilized the following tools:

A. Desk research (e.g., content analysis of school textbooks, academic literature review, exploring relevant poll results and state educational strategies, action plans and other relevant policy documents, studying EU and other international obligations, policies and standards of educational system, distinguishing the best relevant European practices, etc.);

B. Requesting, if/when needed, publicly inaccessible data (including contact info, size, demographic categories) on Georgia's schools from public institutions;

C. Selecting students from European University and other universities in Georgia, and holding training for them by qualitative research methodology specialists to equip them with sufficient knowledge and skills in order to conduct focus groups, write transcripts and code the texts together with supervising researchers;

D. Conducting focus groups with the 10th, 11th and 12th grade school pupils in Tbilisi and in the regions of Georgia (excluding the occupied territories);

E. Conducting in-depth interviews with the selected public school directors and analysing them based on the NVIVO coding system

Structure of the Study

This study is structured as follows: the first chapter explains the problem, introduces the research questions, research scope, aim, and methodology. The second chapter conceptualizes common European values (particularly, democracy and tolerance) and provides their operationalization. The third chapter highlights the importance of teaching common European values and explores TCV in the selected European Union member states. The fourth chapter investigates TCV in Georgia on a policy level and analyses official policy documents in this regard. The fifth chapter provides research findings on TCV in Georgian schools (i.e., how they are taught in practice). The sixth chapter presents recommendations for stakeholders, while the seventh chapter concludes the research. The final part of the policy paper is dedicated to bibliography.

This study is done in the framework of the European Union Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Project "Europeanizing Schools of Georgia" (620893-EPP-1-2020-1-GE-EPPJMO-PROJECT), which aims to equip school pupils and teachers with European knowledge, promote active discussion between education experts, school directors, representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia, universities, relevant international actors and other stakeholders, and share experience of successful European practices. The Jean Monnet project also aims to support critical reflection on the existing challenges that hinders the Europeanization of schools and generally the entire educational system of Georgia, and to ensure visibility of international partners, especially the European Union, contributing to democratic development and advancement of the education system of Georgia.

The Jean Monnet project is designed to "cross-fertilize" which means to promote the advancement of the knowledge on the European Union, its processes and standards, and to support discussion and reflection on the European issues, mainly on European values, European education and Europeanization of the education system in Georgia in accordance with the EU-Georgia Association Agreement and other obligations that Georgia took on the path of its European integration. This research provides its shared contribution to this crucial goal.

Common (European) Values

In this research, values usually refer to what people find important in their own life, in their life with others, and in their life in community and society. Both democracy and tolerance are moral values in the sense that they describe how to live together with others in various societal settings. All people have (moral) values, whether implicitly or explicitly; all societies have some kind of (moral) values (and with various degree of intensity and depth) (Solomon, Watson & Battistich, 2001; Veugelers & Vedder, 2003; Nucci, Krettenhauer & Narvaez, 2014).

Moral values are constantly influenced by religion, world views, political ideologies and others. More conservative societies tend to have a higher degree influence exerted by these value-orientation systems. Less conservative societies tend to have a lower degree of such influence, and people tend to have more freedom and opportunity to construct/develop their own values independently of institutions/regimes.

Common values as well as common rules and norms are fundamental for people to live together and to organize themselves as a community, society and country (Putnam, 2000). Common values can be fluid, changing under certain conditions over time but they are agreed upon and accepted by a group.

The link between morality and politics has been growing over the last decades. Politicians more frequently refer to values to justify their ideology; values legitimize the actions of politicians. It is logical to highlight this explicit link because "democracy and tolerance are both political values with a strong moral component; they express ideas about living together" (European Parliament, 2017, pp. 15-16).

Value is a fluid notion on paper and in practice. All societies have a different understanding of values depending on their social, cultural, historical and political circumstances. And the debate on what constitutes a common value, which values can be adopted and promoted across the society has been alive for millennia. The European Union has been relatively more explicit in this regard.

The European Union was created from the ashes and destructive consequences of centuries-old animosity and confrontation among the European powers. It was not supposed to erase national differences but instead to focus on commonalities. Many things still remain until now that divide Europe but what really made the European project a success story are the common values in its foundation. In particular, democracy and tolerance have been core pillars of the EU and its member states since the very beginning of the community's creation. Indeed, other countries and systems may also recognize and respect democracy and tolerance as their guiding principles and values, but due to the historical legacy of the EU and its individual member states, the EU has been particularly unique in prioritizing

"democracy and tolerance as the guiding principles for living together and organizing society, public life and politics". These common European values also create the foundation of all levels of education in the European Union.

On March 17, 2015, the Ministers of Education of the EU Member States adopted the Declaration on Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom, Tolerance and Non-discrimination Through Education. More importantly, common values are enshrined in the legal basis of the European Union. In particular, Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union states that the *"Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to all EU Member States seeking to offer a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality of the genders prevail"* (Official Journal of the European Union, 2016). It is clear that the EU member states have a clear understanding of, acceptance of, and consensus on these common values. That is why we refer to them in this study as 'common European values'.

Values are not taken for granted. They need permanent cultivation, reassessment and recalibration in parallel to the changing circumstances in societies. They also need permanent support and fostering across societies for long-term sustainability of these values, especially in younger generations and newcomers such as immigrants. The education system should be formulated in a way to effectively meet this important and challenging goal – cultivate and foster common values of democracy and tolerance in a society.

The Education & Training 2020 (ET 2020), a strategic framework that the EU followed from 2010-2020 to stimulate dialogue, mutual learning and comparative research in support of the Union's member states, identified four common EU-level objectives by 2020:

1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
3. Promoting equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship;
4. Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

Promotion of active citizenship and social cohesion can be of particular interest in our research. Both of them were incorporated into the EU education policy by the ET framework. The following onerous process of ET 2020 benchmarking introduced various aspects of education; "levels of participation, levels of reading, mathematics and science skills, rate of early leavers, percentage of students in higher education, percentage studying abroad, and percentage having attained various levels of education" (European Parliament, 2017, p. 12).

The 2015 Paris Declaration further encouraged the promotion of inclusion and fundamental values and identified four priorities for EU-level cooperation (European Parliament, 2017, p. 12):

1. "Ensuring young people acquire social, civic and intercultural competences by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and non – discrimination, as well as active citizenship;
2. Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particularly in the use of the Internet and social media, so as to develop resistance to discrimination and indoctrination;
3. Fostering the education of disadvantaged children and young people by ensuring that our education and training systems address their needs;
4. Promoting intercultural dialogue through all forms of learning in cooperation with other relevant policies and stakeholders".

It is thus obvious that the EU policy on common values and citizenship has four pillars:

1. Stimulating attention;
2. Facilitating exchange of best practices;
3. Collecting information by research;
4. Providing advice and support.

Democracy and Tolerance

When we are talking about common European values, we mean democracy and tolerance. These two are fundamental to European moral and political traditions which are cemented by its history. Their strong linkage to human rights makes them acceptable also for other countries worldwide.

Speaking about democracy and tolerance, it is critical to operationalize these complex and abstract concepts. The European Parliament's (2017) study can be instrumental in this regard – it distinguishes three components of democracy: political participation, democratic politics, and democratic society; and three components of tolerance: interpersonal relations, tolerance towards different social and cultural groups, and an inclusive society.

Democracy

Democracy goes beyond a simple understanding of a political system made up of voting and participation. Indeed, based on the above-mentioned analysis, democracy is "a cultural way of life respecting minorities, freedom of speech, and individual rights" (European Parliament, 2017, p. 16). Therefore, it is an ever-changing process, not a final state of governance, of constant fine-tuning and cultivation of this political and cultural system (Held, 2006).

European Parliament (2017, p. 18) conceptualizes democracy and provides its characteristics in the following terms:

DEMOCRACY	CONCEPTUALIZATION OF DEMOCRACY
Political participation	Active participation; knowledge about politics and political institutions; knowledge about different levels of government; commitment to political involvement; active participation in the community. Political participation is a rather neutral concept; it does not refer explicitly to democracy. Its focus is participation in the community, society and politics.

Democratic politics	Knowledge about democracy and democratic institutions; democratic attitude; knowledge about democracy versus an authoritarian regime; skills to critically analyse politics; skills to participate in debates; skills to participate in decision-making. Democratic politics refers to democracy as a political practice and is about engaging in democratic practices, in searching for dialogue and consensus. It puts participation explicitly within the democratic framework.
Democratic society	Positive attitude towards freedom of speech; commitment towards consensus-building; skills to deal with civic issues; balancing between freedom and equality; commitment to make society more democratic, just, and inclusive. Democratic society refers to making democracy stronger (i.e., to deepening democracy in politics and society). It is a form of critical engagement comprising an awareness of the tensions between politics and practice, but with the willingness to find a consensus.

Tolerance

Tolerance has been a buzzword in Georgia throughout its history. However, its real importance was not fully realized until Georgia regained its independence in the early 1990s and started to practice tolerance in its multicultural society in a painful process of state and nation building. It has not been an easy process ever since, and until now Georgian society has been in the process of adaptation.

The process is further complicated by the fact that tolerance is understood in different ways. Szilagyi and his colleagues (2017) define tolerance as "the acceptance of another person, another viewpoint, or another behavior that is different from our own" (p. 1). European Parliament (2017) further explains that the "concept of tolerance refers to living together as different people, in particular to accepting the otherness of people" (p. 18). Tolerance also means that one may not like another person, idea or behavior but one should tolerate and endure them.

30 years of ongoing democratization and globalization in Georgia have brought about the need and obligation to tolerate tolerance. It has become increasingly important to raise awareness,

promote dialogue between various groups and 'bridge' these differences for an inclusive society (Shady, 2010).

The concept of 'inclusiveness' has also become a buzz word in Georgian society in recent decades. It has also penetrated into the Georgian education system as a mantra for understanding and dialogue among all social and cultural groups. But an inclusive educational system is not enough to fully capture the essence of tolerance and making a society tolerant. Indeed, as the European Parliament (2017) rightly puts it, "the concept of inclusivity is more about including rather than adapting; it is the task of society to include people, and not of the individual to adapt to society" (p. 18). In other words, inclusivity can provide a general framework for all social and cultural groups to engage in society, but cannot prevent intolerance they may encounter during such engagement from individuals. Unlike this, tolerance is a deep-rooted phenomenon and moral concept for a democratic society as it "is embedded in democratic political, social and cultural processes", "focuses on living together as different people", and as a dialogical process involves the "interaction between different persons, groups, communities and societies" (p. 19).

It can be tempting for political or rhetorical reasons to decouple these two things from each other. Indeed, extremist and populist ideologists often claim that their societies are tolerant while preaching hatred and xenophobia against various social, national, cultural, ethnic, linguistic or religious groups. In reality, tolerance has an integral linkage to human rights, tolerance does not exist without protecting the rights of such persons or groups; "human rights are essential for tolerance, since the awareness that all groups of people have these rights makes discrimination unjustifiable" (European Parliament, 2017, p. 56). Thus, society can only be tolerant and inclusive if and when all its members recognize and respect both the commonalities and differences of each other.

Tolerance does not come by birth. It is proven that education can facilitate the smooth creation and development of multicultural contacts and intercultural dialogue (Grover, 2007; Schuitema & Veugelers, 2011; Council of Europe, 2010; Van Driel, Darmody & Kerzil, 2016). Therefore, it is no surprise that the concept of "tolerance" has had a central place in education policy for the European Union and its member states (European Parliament, 2017).

Much like in case of democracy, European Parliament (2017, p. 19) provides the proper conceptualization and characteristics of tolerance:

TOLERANCE	CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TOLERANCE
Interpersonal relations	Social competences; empathy; interpersonal contacts; respectful behaviour in public spaces. Interpersonal tolerance refers to living together with individual differences in daily life.
Tolerance towards different cultural groups	Tolerance towards other social and cultural groups; ethnic diversity, religious freedom, sexual differences/LGBT; respecting the rights of minorities; getting involved with other social and cultural groups; skills to contribute to decision-making in a diverse group/community; tolerance of differing points of view. Tolerance towards different cultural groups recognises differences in social and cultural backgrounds and focuses on living together with people from all these different groups with different identities.
Inclusive society	Knowledge about processes of inclusion and exclusion; knowledge about human rights; knowledge about (in)equality, discrimination, and social justice; commitment towards reducing inequality, discrimination, and social injustice; commitment towards making citizens more self – responsible; skills to critically analyse controversial issues in this regard. An inclusive society does not simply tolerate, but tries to overcome inequality, injustice, and exclusion; it focuses on integration, and on inclusion.

In sum, this chapter operationalised the common European values of democracy and tolerance. In turn, democracy was conceptualised as political participations, democratic politics and democratic society. And tolerance as interpersonal relations, tolerance towards different cultural groups and inclusive society.

After having a common and clearer understanding of common European values, it is now possible to review EU practices in teaching them in schools.

Teaching Common Values (TCV)
in the European Union Member States

European Union Education Policy

European Union education policy was born from within social and economic factors. It was reckoned as a tool for meeting the needs of equality and justice in a society in order to realize social justice and economic growth. Taking this into consideration, the EU education policy has two goals: (1) it reinforces harmony among EU citizens and (2) it successfully supports the EU programs, employment, technological development, environmental protection, research and others (Cankaya, Kutlu & Cebeci, 2015, pp. 886-887).

Limited cooperation in education on a European level started with the Rome Treaties. Integrational processes were activated in the second half of the 1980s; however, European Union member states did not want to move forward to a common European educational system. Therefore, the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 excluded harmonization in education policy. This was the reason for the fact that together with the Lisbon Strategy, intergovernmental treaties were also signed, commonly known today as the Bologne and Copenhagen processes on higher education and vocational education, respectively (Agostini & Capano, 2012, p. 147).

Taking the historic, economic, political and social factors into consideration, each EU member state individually defines the direction of development of its own education system. Education and culture are sensitive integral parts of national unity and identity; therefore, national capitals fully control the development, implementation and monitoring of education and training systems (Volante & Ritzen, 2016, p. 989).

European Union institutions play only a supportive role in improving the quality of education in the EU member states (Volante & Ritzen, 2016, p. 989). In other words, national capitals lead policy formulation, while the European Union assists them in the coordination process.

EU policy instruments in the education field do not have compulsory power but still maintain huge political importance. These instruments include communication, green book, white book, Council conclusions, Council resolution, recommendations and opinions (Lifelong Learning Platform, 2018, p. 30).

The European Commission plays an important role in supporting schools. For instance, it works with the EU member states on improving teaching and teachers' education standards via facilitating information and experience exchange among decision makers as well as financing projects of the Erasmus+ program.

Teaching Common (European) Values

Speaking about teaching the values of democracy and tolerance at schools, one should ask what the best way/method of teaching these values to pupils is. Where is the place for these values in primary and secondary education? What are the roles of other components and players of the education system in this process?

International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS, 2010a), the Active Citizenship in Europe study (Hoskins et al., 2012), the Eurydice (2012) report on Citizenship Education in Europe, Van Driel, Darmody & Kerzil (2016), and European Parliament (2017) are seminal works of recent decades on citizenship education and teaching values in Europe. In particular, the ICCS (2010a)

explores the knowledge, skills and attitudes of students, and the practice of citizenship education in schools. Its previous study of 2009 argues that citizenship education falls within activities/processes of curriculum, school, and the wider community (ICCS 2010b). The Active Citizenship in Europe study further investigates the active citizenship concept, including citizenship education, and good practices in this regard. It also argues that education policy and institutions can promote participatory citizenship, political participation and community involvement (Hoskins *et al.*, 2012, p. 19). The Eurydice (2012) study Citizenship Education in Europe focuses on the curriculum of citizenship education and analyses the state of affairs in policy and in schools in the European Union in this regard. The European Parliament (2017) explores the policy of teaching common values of democracy and tolerance in schools, and its implementation in practice. It also provides conclusions and recommendations in policy and curriculum.

The report of Van Driel, Darmody and Kerzil (2016) delves into existing European and international knowledge on education policies and practices for fostering tolerance, respect for diversity and civic responsibility amongst children and youngsters in the European Union. The study provides the following recommendations (p. 9):

1. *"Respect for others can be taught from an early age.*
2. *School policies that encourage ethnic mixing create conditions for inter-ethnic cooperation and foster tolerance. However, schools need to create the conditions for all children and school staff to develop their intercultural competence.*
3. *The way a school operates makes a difference. In particular, whole school approaches and schools with strong and dynamic ties to the local community have great potential for promoting cohesion.*

4. *New effective methods for creating inclusive classrooms, such as project-based learning, cooperative learning, service learning and peer education, have been developed in recent years in most European countries. These methods have demonstrated their value in combating intolerance".*

Harecker (2016) provides a clear link between values and the importance of developing them in pupils at schools:

"Persons have experiences: they grow and learn. Out of experiences may come certain general guides to behaviour. These guides tend to give direction to life and may be called values. Our values show what we tend to do with our life and energy. A value is only produced by a person's own behaviour and has a lot to do with the person's own opinions. Having values affects a person's behaviour. Developing your own values is both an individual and a lifelong process which should be supported in the classroom" (pp. 1-2).

We should start the discussion of teaching common values by saying that it is no easy task. Every individual has his/her own personal choices (values) and can express/articulate these views with various degrees of quality and clarity (teach the values). In other words, it very much depends on the subjective qualities of teachers and the education system environment.

An exemplary citizen (in terms of democracy and tolerance conceptualized in this research) is made, not born. We all learn those lessons and collect those attributes that are fundamental to living in harmony and social progress in various societal contexts, such as respect, equality, solidarity and other ethical principles that define us as human beings. Values education can promote "tolerance and understanding above and beyond our political, cultural and religious differences..." (Iberdrola, 2021).

The teaching process cannot be made me-

chanically. Pupils should understand these deep-rooted values and accept and adapt to them. The research of the European Parliament (2017) argues that "[developing] values... requires active cognitive and affective activities engaging the students themselves, in which students enter into a dialogue with their teachers as well as their fellow students" (p. 21). Dialogic teaching and learning methodologies are thus detrimental in achieving success in this complex process of developing moral values and citizenship attitudes (Solomon, Watson & Battistich, 2001; ICCS, 2010a; 2016; Hoskins, *et al*. 2012). Indeed, Illeris (2009) suggests that social-constructive dialogic teaching and learning methodology is the most effective way of teaching values because pupils engage more actively in interactive learning. Veugelers (2011) further adds that pupils have an opportunity to inquire about their environment, identify and convey their own position on it, reflect on their own moral values, and engage in the interactive discussions on these issues and in the quest of developing common values and norms. In other words, dialogic learning creates the environment in which pupils learn and develop common values via democratic learning.

Apart from teaching, schools as micro-societies can be valuable for pupils to practice common values. More horizontally and democratically organized schools can provide more opportunities to pupils to socialize into relationships and roles, and engage them into the experience-based learning process. Giroux (1989) calls this phenomenon a "hidden curriculum".

Modern European schools tend to stimulate values of democracy and tolerance via democratic culture. ICCS (2010a) demonstrates that there is a clear link between democratic school culture and the development of moral values and citizenship. Central and Eastern European countries had the communist legacy with authoritarian school culture that did not promote these values. Their transformation to de-

mocracy and their road to EU membership also included this radical shift in their education systems. The Bologna Process was supportive to this process. The EU's Eastern Partnership countries, including Georgia, have experienced a more difficult legacy and are still in the process of such transformation.

Another element of teaching common values of democracy and tolerance is the composition of teachers and students (Schuitema & Veugelers, 2011; Van Driel, Darmody & Kerzil, 2016); that is, how inclusive is the school in terms of pupils with different abilities as well as pupils and teachers with different social and cultural backgrounds? European Parliament's (2017) research argues that "[these] differences provide students with experiences and possibilities of practising a pluralist democracy characterised by tolerance... [In] order to develop an appreciation for diversity, contact and cooperation between different groups is desirable, and that education holds the potential to organise such diverse learning settings" (p. 22).

Teaching Common (European) Values in the European Union

Despite the consensus on the common European values of democracy and tolerance, all European Union member states have different approaches to teaching them in schools. They have different practices in incorporating democracy and tolerance into the curriculum. Democracy and tolerance-related issues are covered either in specific disciplines/subjects (both in value-oriented subjects such as civics, and as part of other subjects like geography, languages and economy) or in cross-curricular activities (e.g., projects in and out of school). ICCS (2010a) and Eurydice (2016) recommend the combination of all these different ways in order to increase the effectiveness of teaching. This is called a "whole school approach" and implies the following three ways

of teaching common values (European Parliament, 2017, pp. 21-22):

5. As a separate subject, for example, moral or value education, or citizenship education;
6. As part of other subjects, such as history, geography, social sciences and religion/ world view studies, as well as arts, biology and languages;
7. In cross-curricular activities, like projects both in and out of school.

Education policies of the EU member states stimulate the teaching of values but these policies are not harmonized, they differ from one country to another. Nevertheless, the evidence-based data on these education policies and practices demonstrate that the value development is promoted by the following principles (European Parliament, 2017, pp. 27-28):

● A whole school approach that includes the teaching of values in a specific subject, its integration in other subjects, as well as in cross-curricular activities;
● More dialogical methodology of teaching and learning;
● Democratic school culture;
● Inclusive education bringing together different groups of students and teachers;
● A link with the wider community.

The European Parliament's (2017) study also identifies various policy instruments (i.e., "the kinds of regulations and documents used for communicating and implementing policy") for teaching common values in the European Union member states. It indicates that all member states use different policy instruments from laws to national core curricula, and proves that "the more education policymakers value [teaching common values], the more instruments they use to secure the position of [teaching common values] in policy" (p. 41).

Various studies show that EU member states have different (but cross-) curricular approaches to citizen education, and that teaching common values is usually integrated into value-related or specific value-oriented subjects (Eurydice, 2012; ICCS, 2010a). They also show that "democracy is formulated as a governing principle and/or as a key objective of education in their respective countries" (European Parliament, 2017, p. 46). This is no surprise taking into consideration that all the EU member states are functioning democracies. In addition, the more countries prioritize teaching common values, the more likely they are explicit about value democracy in their policy.

The European Parliament's (2017) research provides the following explanation on teaching democracy (pp. 46-51) and tolerance (pp. 51-56) in the EU member states:

TEACHING DEMOCRACY	
Political participation	Teaching (about) political participation involves imparting knowledge about political institutions, promoting experiential learning through participation in the community and fostering commitment towards political involvement. The curriculum records that students should be made aware of the role of different levels of government, as well as of the role of social and political institutions (e.g. family, education, economy, church, administration, etc.) both for the functioning of society and for safeguarding social cohesion. At the same time, concepts such as state, nation, citizens, politics, and laws/rules are expected to be clarified by citizenship education. The students are also expected to clarify the interdependence between the individual and the state and between different types of regimes. Students should also learn the state functions (legislative, executive, judicial), along with their peculiarities and prospects. Finally, students should acknowledge their rights (individual-political-social) and obligations (as individuals and groups). This knowledge is expected to strengthen their commitment to political involvement and their active participation in society.
Democratic politics	This component of democratic education focuses on teaching about the concept of democracy, explaining its multiple meanings and how it differs from an authoritarian regime, and fostering a democratic attitude. Also vital to this component are developing democratic skills such as critical thinking, debating or deliberation, and consensus-building. In practice, this means that the curriculum must develop: (1) Political literacy through knowledge about the functioning of the political system of democracy in comparison with totalitarian systems; about democratic institutions; democratic forms of decision-making; human rights; international organisations/associations and global economic/social/political/ecological/ethical circumstances/problems/issues and dilemmas. (2) Critical thinking through getting to know/recognise/discuss/judge/hold a dialogue on/understand and critically reflect on the above-mentioned topics.
Democratic society	This component of teaching democracy is about the degree to which students are motivated to make society more democratic or to secure its democracy. This concerns developing skills to deal with civic issues and fostering positive attitudes towards values such as freedom of speech, justice and inclusiveness.

TEACHING TOLERANCE	
Interpersonal relations	Teaching about interpersonal relations means teaching students to empathise and behave respectfully towards one another. For example, students are expected to demonstrate skills for conflict resolution, giving positive feedback, listening, asking questions, expressing feelings and understanding someone['s] feelings, empathy, etc. (in Bulgaria); Or specific aspects of interpersonal relationships, such as communication skills (in Cyprus), sensitivity (in France), empathy (in Finland), and anti-bullying (in Malta, Netherlands and Spain).
Tolerance towards different cultural groups	How important is it in education policy to teach students to accept, respect or tolerate people of other cultural groups? For example, „to be non-discriminating of people of different gender, race, and ethnicity" (Belgium); references 'to the virtues of tolerance and cooperation with other ethnic groups in the modern multicultural society" (Cyprus); „students are invited to contribute to strengthening social cohesion, through the cultivation of social relations, tolerance and social solidarity in the context of today's multicultural society and intercultural dialogue" (Cyprus); learning foreign languages contributes to intercultural understanding (Denmark). Nevertheless, EU member countries do not have a uniform approach towards certain areas of tolerance, such as sexuality, religion and ethnicity. E.g. tolerance for sexual minorities only implicitly appears or is absent in the education policy of the Czech Republic, Greece, Estonia and Hungary, while Austria, Cyprus, Italy, Malta, Netherlands and Portugal explicitly include sexual minorities in their tolerance education. Moreover, religious diversity or freedom is not explicitly mentioned in the context of tolerance in educational policy of Greece, Hungary and the Czech Republic, while Ireland has explicit policy on religious tolerance.
Inclusive society	To certain extend, this component is closely connected to the previous component because „[building] an inclusive society is about reducing exclusion, inequality, discrimination and social injustice". This component of tolerance is concerned with the societal perspective instead of personal or intergroup relations. As part of this component, students need to learn about the negative societal effects mentioned above and the mechanism producing them, as well as develop the skills and commitment towards reducing them. For example, Romania positively discriminates the Roma people, so that they can be integrated into classes despite their weaker performances in national exams; human rights is considered as a key aspect of inclusiveness (Poland, Cyprus, Austria). Human rights are essential for tolerance, since the awareness that all groups of people have these rights makes discrimination unjustifiable. Policy should thus express sufficient awareness of the processes of inequalities and exclusion of specific groups.

The European Parliament (2017) study demonstrates that teaching common values (i.e., democracy and tolerance) is fairly important in the education policies of the European Union member states. The research provides this conclusion by analysing the following:

- The 'formal curriculum' which is the official documents outlining what schools are supposed to teach. The study of the official curriculum is critical as it emphasizes "on how education can contribute to the formation of democratic dispositions and the development of a democratic culture".
- The 'formal' aspects of the policy which are aspects not directly related to the content but to the steering or governance of education, such as policy instruments regulating teaching common values, etc.
- The correlation between the above-mentioned components.

In particular, the European Parliament (2017) research shows that teaching common values is very important in education policies in Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and moderately important in the Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania and Sweden. Unlike these countries, teaching common values is not so important in Spain and Belgium – Spain pays more attention to preparing students for the labour market whereas Belgium has less attention on teaching common values due to strong segregation in the country (pp. 35-37).

On average, the EU member states find the three components of democracy (i.e., political participation, democratic politics, and democratic society) equally important, while the three components of tolerance (i.e., interpersonal relations, tolerance towards different cultural groups, and inclusive society) are, despite differences across the member states, adequately addressed in the TCV policy.

Teaching Common Values in Estonia

The education system in the Republic of Estonia is regulated by the Constitution of the Republic, the Child Protection Act and the Education Act. Estonian education policy is based on a student-centered and inclusive approach. The content of Teaching Common Values / Citizenship Education is described in the national curriculum and is conveyed through the subject 'civics' and through general competences (European Parliament, p. 76).

The National Curriculum of Estonia considers Teaching Common Values as the most important aim, together with an inclusive education as the main principle of the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, and of the Lifelong Learning Strategy for 2020 (European Parliament, pp. 75-76).

Estonia uses the national curriculum as the policy instrument for teaching common values, and the social science subjects (e.g., 'Civics') for fostering these values. In addition to general competences introduced to the national curriculum in 2006 (including values, self-determination and social competences), active citizenship and cultural competence were incorporated in the document in 2011 and 2014, respectively (European Parliament, p. 76).

The most recent policy documents of Estonia highlight national values, active citizenship, equality, international cooperation and an inclusive society as goals for educational development (Estonia, 2020; Lifelong Learning Strategy, 2010).

It is important to underline that the issue of

democratic society (mostly, in the forms of political participation and democratic politics) has been fostered in the subject civics, as well as integrated into other social studies subjects, such as history, Estonian language and culture, and people studies. This is further strengthened by schools' participation in various social projects connected to TCV/CE, such as the Opinion Festival, Global Education workshops, visits to NGOs, etc. (European Parliament, p. 78).

Exploring the Estonian case, European Parliament (2017) concludes that

> "TCV/CE connected projects at schools are usually related to other subjects and general competences, such as entrepreneurship education, or religious studies in some cases. Interpersonal relations, tolerance and an inclusive society are all issues integrated into the pedagogical activities and tasks. School projects often use a methodology focusing on social behaviour and communication, teamwork, and learning through experience (e.g. the starting of student companies), amongst others means. Some examples of recommended methodologies for teaching TCV/CE are mind mapping, case studies, small-scale research, role plays, discussions, study visits, and practical tasks. Teachers see these methodologies as 'tools' for integrating different topics and addressing critical questions" (p. 78).

Teaching Common Values in Poland

Schools have to follow the core curriculum set by the Ministry of National Education, but have some autonomy in developing their own curricula based on it, and in determining teaching methods (European Parliament, p. 123).

The Teacher's Charter, a central document that describes the status and working conditions of teachers, provides that "...teacher responsibility is to educate the young generation in the atmosphere of freedom of religion, conscience and thought and respect for others [...] in accordance with ideas of democracy, peace and friendship with people of different nations, race and world views…" (National Parliament of Poland, 2006, 2). This is an explicit demonstration, on the level of teachers, of the prominent place for democracy-related values in Polish education (European Parliament, p. 123).

Moreover, common values are also stipulated in the preamble of the School Act and promote solidarity, democracy, tolerance, justice and freedom (European Parliament, p. 124)

From the perspective of curriculum content, the general vision of a 'good citizen' can be met across various school subjects, such as knowledge about society, history, Polish literature, knowledge about culture, and introduction to entrepreneurship (European Parliament, p. 124).

The education reform of the 1990s has been successful in terms of teaching democracy and democratic values in Polish schools (CIVED 1999; ICCS, 2010b). Nevertheless, compared to their peers from Western countries, Polish students were less confident in public institutions, had less interest in political and social activities, and endorsed fewer rights for certain minority groups (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Dolata et al. (2004) and Zachorska, Papiór & Roszkowska (2013) explain this gap by arguing that schools did not provide adequate active experiences to students.

This 'learning about values (through transfer of knowledge) vs. learning values through practical experience' axis remains an issue of debate in Poland. The debate on education is further complicated by the role of the Catholic Church which is actively engaged in values-related discussions in Polish society – European Parliament's study (2017) demonstrates that "prominent presence [of the Catholic Church]

in n schools often pushes both curricula and education practice into the direction of conservative and limited understanding and teaching of common values" (p. 125).

Another critical approach maintains that there is a difference between the intended education policy and its practical implementation at the school level. In particular, although the objectives and the principles of democracy are clearly described in the National Core Curriculum of Poland (e.g., active participation in the school and community life, responsible engagement, tolerance, openness), Polish schools lack know-how and the will to translate those general objectives into practice and to implement them in the school's daily life (European Parliament, 2017, p. 125).

Teaching Common Values in Germany

Teaching common values in Germany is inextricably linked to the subject of citizenship education. Due to the experience of totalitarian rule in the early days of its democracy, Germany has considered the development of democratic attitudes and citizenship education as indispensable ingredients in building a stable democracy since the post-World War II period. "Democracies need democrats" has remained a valid credo even in current times (European Parliament, 2017, pp. 98-99).

Policy documents, such as the education acts of all federal states which form a general framework determining the actions regarding schools and curricula, recognize the need to foster democracy, tolerance and participation (European Parliament, 2017, p. 101). The ultimate aim of citizenship education is not simply "to maintain the democratic status quo, but seeks to develop citizens' abilities to judge and act, which in turn enables them to rethink and reframe citizenship principles and structures,

especially those involving critical thinking and political participation" (European Parliament, 2017, p. 102; Lange, 2008).

The federal nature of the German education and political system prevents a uniform curriculum for school subjects in the country. Therefore, citizenship-related subjects in schools are given various names, such as politics and economy, social studies, and politics. All of them cover the topics related to the fundamental principles of democratic societies, contemporary societal issues such as cultural diversity and sustainable development, etc. Moreover, citizenship education is also used as a pedagogical school principle as every level of education and non-governmental organizations provide and distribute materials and trainings on democracy and tolerance (European Parliament, 2017, p. 99).

Teaching Common Values in Finland

The latest major education reform in Finland in the 1990s laid the foundation for world-known success in this field. Based on the reform, the Finnish education system moved towards decentralisation and individualisation (Tirri & Kuusisto, 2013; Kuusisto, Gholami & Tirri, 2016). Citizenship education has been a vital means of getting students involved and teaching them to be ethical, active members of society; thus, promoting tolerance and respect towards diversity (Tirri, 2008). Moreover, according to the Finnish approach, when education is multicultural and different cultures and ethnicities are included within its scope, it increases students' awareness and responsibility towards being active members of society (Rasanen, 2007; Talib, Lofstrom & Meri, 2004; European Parliament, p. 84).

Official documents and general laws on education are used as policy instruments for stimulating the teaching of common values. They are

supplemented by the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (NCCBE) which serves as a guideline for municipalities and schools to prepare their local curricula.

There is no single, concrete subject that is used for teaching common values. As a result of decentralization, fundamental values are defined at many levels from the Parliament to the National Board of Education to municipalities to schools (European Parliament, pp. 84-85). The values of equity, equality, humanity, democracy and cultural diversity are reflected through seven competences (NCCBE, 2014; European Parliament, p. 85):

1. Thinking and learning to learn;
2. Cultural competences, interaction and self-expression;
3. Taking care of oneself and managing daily life;
4. Multi-literacy;
5. ICT competence;
6. Working life competence and entrepreneurship;
7. Participation, involvement and building a sustainable future.

Each subject taught in Finnish schools improves these seven competences in various ways and aspects, whereas these competences serve as the means for teaching about democracy and tolerance (European Parliament, p. 85).

The new NCCBE (2014) lays a greater emphasis on participation. Knowledge about democratic participation, democratic politics and democratic society are included in different subjects, with more attention in social studies, religious education, history, languages, geography, and philosophy. In addition, extracurricular projects have been widely used in schools to teach democracy (European Parliament, p. 87).

The topics of tolerance are also included in all subjects but with more focus on religious ed-

ucation, secular ethics, history, social studies, and languages. Moreover, interpersonal relations and skills are developed as a part of all subjects and on a daily basis at Finnish schools (European Parliament, p. 88).

Teaching Common Values in Slovenia

The Organization and Financing of Education Act, and particularly its March 2008 amendment, enshrines the goals on which human rights education is based, including the "education conducive to mutual tolerance, developing awareness of gender equality, democratic and active citizenship, respect for differences, cooperation, respect for children's and human rights and basic liberties, and equal opportunities for both sexes, with a view to developing the ability needed to live in a democratic society" (European Parliament, 2017, p. 139).

Teaching common values started with the 1996-1999 education reform in Slovenia, when the subject of 'Ethics and Society' was first introduced in Slovenian schools. The subject has existed as 'Citizenship Education and Ethics' since 2001 whereas its curriculum changed radically in 2006-2011 reflecting on the extent of changes in Slovenia (including its EU membership), Europe and the world. The curriculum follows the concept of citizenship education in the 21st century, while the teaching methodology promotes the development of social and civic competences in young citizens. In addition, the common values are usually taught across various compulsory (such as social sciences, history, sociology, geography, philosophy, foreign languages, arts, sports, etc.) and elective (religion and ethics, civic culture, European studies, education for solidarity, philosophy for children, media education, etc.) subjects (European Parliament, 2017, pp. 137-138).

The legislation and curricula currently promote a cross-curricular and thematic approach to education for common values in Slovenia. Moreover, depending on the area of expertise, national institutions (such as the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, Educational Research Institute, National Examinations Centre, and faculties) and non-governmental organisations (such as the Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth, Amnesty International, Slovene Philanthropy, Humanitas, and others) also provide expert help (such as professional training, professional didactic materials, professional cooperation in school activities) to schools and teachers in realising the modernised curricular paradigm (European Parliament, 2017, pp. 139-140).

In sum, before exploring the policy on teaching common values in Georgian schools in the next chapter, it can be concluded that there is no harmonized or centrally regulated law on teaching common values in the European Union. Depending on social, cultural, political and historic factors, the EU member states have their own approaches towards TCV in schools. In addition, despite differences across member states, teaching common values (i.e., democracy and tolerance) is fairly important in the education policies of the EU member states, and the three components of democracy (i.e., political participation, democratic politics and democratic society) and tolerance (i.e., interpersonal relations, tolerance towards different cultural groups and inclusive society) are adequately addressed in their TCV policies.

Policy on Teaching Common (European) Values in Georgian Schools

Context and Policy Documents

Before we move to the research findings on teaching common values in Georgian schools, we first review the current state of affairs on a policy level, i.e. the evolution of TCV in Georgian schools and relevant policy documents.

Georgia regained its independence at the end of the 20th century, and with that it entered the period of instability that included dysfunctioning state institutions. Throughout the period of 1991-2003, the general education system of Georgia was charactarised by chaos, spontaneity, due to the lack of regulations and a clear vision of management, educational goals and policies, or strategies which could define national goals and the ways how these goals could be achieved. An extreme amount of

corruption (Janashia, 2004) and disrespect of the rule of law and regulations were also characteristic features of the Georgian school system. In addition, there was a scarcity of education professionals with expert knowledge of education planning, management, and administration. The situation was further exacerbated by the fact that the system of education in Georgia was "... insufficiently funded, with the consequence of decreasing educational standards" (Schmidt-Braul & Kopp, 2007, p. 285). The lack of regulations resulted in the advent of numerous private schools (along with pre-school and higher educational institutions) offering education whose quality was often disputed. Furthermore, there was no centralized national curriculum to ensure national standards and quality of education. Lack of centralized planning and administration did not mean that regionally, or even at

school level, educators could manage to plan educational process, deliver knowledge, and assess learning outcomes in accordance with the leading educational standards of the time. Accessibility of education was a major concern for a large part of the population as socio-economic problems created a large group of disadvantaged people. Moreover, a major concern in the classroom context was the misalignment of teaching and learning practices as well as approaches to standards as teachers were trained to deliver knowledge through 'commonly agreed' (authors' emphasis) facts and the validity or reliability of these facts were never questioned. Critique was not encouraged through the curriculum. The whole system of education was deteriorating (Andguladze & Mindadze, 2015).

However, democratic movements in the political and social life of Georgia since 2003 provided an energetic impetus for reforms the education system and align it with the European standards, norms, and values (Parliament of Georgia, 2005, 1995). Many reform initiatives intensified since 2004, e.g. through the World Bank-funded "Education System Realignment and Strengthening Programme," along with numerous other state initiatives, aimed at aimed at enhancing the following aspects:

- Decentralisation of education;
- Education system funding;
- University entrance procedures;
- Introduction of a National Curriculum;
- Teacher professional development (Andguladze & Mindadze, 2015).

The third phase of reforms in the school education system roughly falls between 2010 and 2012. Andguladze and Mindadze (2015) define it as "the phase of recentralization of the sector and putting greater focus on controlling for inputs, educational processes, and operations at educational institutions" (p. 296).

Recentralization in Georgia was a process of reclaiming power, authority, and control by the central government. The process of recentralization, to be more accurate centralization, was ensured, as Andguladze and Mindadze (2015) stated through the following actions:

- School boards of trustees lost their leading role in school governance;
- The Ministry of Education regained its power and authority to appoint school directors;
- Textbook selection and development became regulated by the central government;
- The Ministry of Education consolidated its full control over teacher professional development and training.

However, a major concern was that political agenda were assumed to be the actual rationale for centralization enabling the central government to safeguard tight control of its citizens.

The fourth phase is associated with the reform initiative which is formerly known as the New School Model. This is an ongoing reform and will be discussed in more detail in a separate section.

As it has been highlighted above, the changes since 2003 have been implemented in various forms and scales from infrastructure to teaching methodology to curriculum. These reforms have attempted, with various degrees of success, to Europeanize the education system, e.g. in terms of education quality, access to education, and social inclusion. As a result, the OECD (2019) concludes that "Georgia has seen tremendous recent improvement in educational participation and outcomes" (See also Parjanadze & Kapanadze, 2016; Chankseliani, 2013; Gorgodze, 2016; Kim, 2011; Mekhuzla & Roche, 2009).

Nevertheless, frequent changes in education policy and leadership also raised concerns and criticism on consistency and coherence of the

education policy and practice. While evaluating previous reform initiatives, Sharvashidze (2003) states that no clear vision was set and the actions lacked cohesion and coherence. The ideal system of education is still wishful thinking because many of the reforms were done with haste and without measuring outcomes, or even more, new reform initiatives were introduced without due preparation or relevant follow-up to ensure the sustainability of the reform agenda. Gorgodze (2016) also finds that school reforms in 2003-2012 were driven by political agenda and elections.

Supporting the field of education and strengthening the system has been declared as a major state priority by the Georgian government (Commersant, 2019), and it is reflected in the Unified Strategy of Education and Science 2017-2021 (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, n.d.). This strategy envisages nurturing many values which are supported through European culture and worldview. The document does put emphasis on the necessity to support education improvement through various actions, e.g. teacher training in order to "… contribute to the promotion of national and global values, human rights education, development of competencies of global and digital citizenship and sustainable development, intercultural education, and provision of child-friendly, safe, equal, nonviolent, highly cultural and motivating environment" (The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia, 2019a, p.31).

Moreover, the National Curriculum does put focus on values, such as sustainable development, human rights, constitutional rights and responsibilities, diversity, security and peaceful coexistence of different individuals in the society, equality, etc. (National Curriculum Portal, 2015). In addition, many values commonly supported in the European context are also represented in political discourse at the formal level; including reference to democracy, tolerance, equality, equity, etc.

The New School Model

The most recent reform of the education system of Georgia, the General Education Reform Support Programme, was initiated in 2019, January the 18th by order #48 of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, 2019b). This reform initiative intends to strengthen the Georgian school system and is implemented through a sub-program which is formerly and popularly known as the New School Model.

According to the programme, the New School Model was intended to be piloted in 156 schools throughout Georgia (ibid.). However, the pilot program was extended to 165 public schools with 34,000 students and 3,096 teachers. The reform agenda was designed to target both school management as well as teaching and learning aspect of secondary education. The implementation of the New School Model has been planned to occur stage by stage, starting with I-IV elementary grades in 2019, grades V-IX joining in 2020-2021 academic year, and according to the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, the model will be fully implemented in all public schools throughout Georgia by 2024 (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, 2020a; 2020c).

From school management perspective, the New School Model envisages giving more autonomy to an individual school so that it builds its own model of governance determined by the specificity of the local context, needs, and requirements on the condition that the methodology through which the model is defined is approved by expert groups. These expert groups will be created to support schools in each regions of Georgia (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, 2020b). As the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport explains, the success of the reform initiative largely depends on the decentralization of the process, assigning a significant role to local resource centers

which will assume consulting responsibilities. The expert groups are planned to be located at resource centers and consist of specialists of elementary, inclusive, and pre-school education, as well as subject matter professionals. "The concept of education reform begins in the classroom and involves both public school and resource centers as well as higher education institutions" (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, 2020b).

The New School Model presupposes building the type of school management model which is responsive to the local context and best fits the grassroots needs and requirements. Efficient management of schools is planned to be ensured, along with various aspects, through assessing and evaluating schools from two perspectives: a) school culture and b) students' academic achievement (*ibid.*). The fulcrum of the New School Model is a student-centered approach, and all the management and administrative processes revolve around the people involved: students, teachers, school administration, parents, other stakeholders which include local community, school administration field experts, or subject-matter experts). Accordingly, broader engagement should ensure that the strengths and weaknesses of school administration, teaching, and learning are identified and individual school profiles are created. The assessment of schools based on the obtained data should allow viewing a broader context with much accuracy, which, in turn, should ensure initiating, planning, and implementing specific activities with greater precision so that challenges are overcome more efficiently.

From the perspective of curriculum and didactics, or to put it simply, in terms of teaching and learning methodology, the milestone of the New School Model is the philosophy which views school as a context where young people acquire fundamental knowledge. "They have to study and understand the material so deeply and substantially that they can critically analyze and relate to different life situations. The school environment should be person-centered, caring, harmonious, collaborative, compassionate and secure, allowing all teens to realize their full potential" (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, 2020b). Accordingly, the New School Model ensures teaching and learning through a competence-based curriculum (OECD, 2019) which envisages strengthening of human capital, student-centred assessment methodology, cooperative culture, and team work based on a high sense of responsibility (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, 2019b).

The constructivist approach is the philosophical foundation of the curriculum, which means that learning happens through the exchange of personal experiences defining the social nature of the new National Curriculum through which teaching and learning is organised at schools. School management and curriculum development is supported by expert groups created for each region in Georgia with the intention to develop unique/original curricula to meet the needs and requirements of individual schools. The programme also aims at meaningful integration of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in the process of teaching and learning. As the Minister Order #48 defines (ibid.), the curriculum is expected to help learners construct solid, systematic knowledge and develop logical reasoning.

The General Education Reform Support Programme, through the New School Model, intends to develop a new mode of school and curriculum management which views a person/learner as the core of all educational activities. Accordingly, the reform aims at creating an educational environment which will equip learners/students with relevant knowledge and skills necessary to overcome challenges of the 21st century and to fully realise one's potential (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, 2019b).

The overall objective of the Programme is planned to be achieved through the following sub-tasks (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, 2019b):

- Implementation and development of unique school curricula based on constructivist philosophy and educational principles;
- Integration of ICT in the teaching and learning process;
- Development of effective and efficient school management approaches;
- Development of student assessment systems to support student achievement and development.

These tasks of the New School Model are to be achieved through a new mode of school management which is based on the principles of interaction and cooperation. The curriculum places emphasis on individuals who construct their knowledge with the help of complex tasks. The completion of these complex tasks requires not only knowledge, but analytic skills and proactive approaches. Assessment of students' learning outcomes is conducted not only through summative, but also formative assessment-evaluation approaches. Accordingly, the whole academic process largely relies on the development of internal motivation and sense of responsibility.

The New School Model puts much emphasis on the social nature of education – developing a knowledgeable, skillful, and responsible citizen who, along with taking care of one's own personal development, contributes to the development of the community and acts in the best interests of the state. Overall, the New School Model is based on core Western/European values – democracy, equality, equity, sense of responsibility, education, development, etc. Accordingly, its successful implementation and internalisation is of crucial importance for the Georgian state on its way to development and European integration.

In order to implement the New School Model, many instruments have been identified, a principle one of which is the National Curriculum (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, 2021), which defines the educational requirements for the Georgian schools. They can be grouped in three clusters: defining long-term goals and objectives, employing constructivist educational principles, and shaping a school culture based on empathy and support. In the process of implementing the NC schools are provided with specific tasks from the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia and the resource centres. Schools are responsible for implementing these tasks in the local context, and in this process, they obtain support from coaching teams set up by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, 2021). These coaching teams consist of subject-matter experts, primary education experts, technology experts, inclusive education experts, leadership experts and coordinators of the NC implementation. Thus, schools are sure to have access to specific expert knowledge which is helpful in managing educational settings and processes in their local contexts. Within the scope of the NC, giving complex tasks to students has been identified as one of the key instruments in the education process (Jakeli & Silagadze, 2018).

Though the New School Model and the National Curriculum put much emphasis on decentralization of decision-making and devolving tasks to individual schools, there are certain concerns with its implementation. Major issues might include the argument that once schools get specific tasks from the central government and local resources centres, their autonomy still might be limited by the instructions. Another concern, which is also outlined in the Ministry of Education and Science report, is that many tasks determined by the National Curriculum are not properly implemented in the school context. An example could be using

complex tasks as a form of teaching and learning, but there are certain concerns with timely and accurate implementation of this approach in the classroom context even though schools are encouraged to seek assistance from subject coaching teams (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, 2020a). Another concern might be that schools are supposed to develop their own thematic matrix through which different subjects are taught. However, very often there is the case that teachers lack knowledge and expertise in developing their own individual teaching matrix and they follow matrices developed as samples by subject teams. These aspects might raise certain concerns in terms of efficiency of the National Curriculum, the way it is implemented and overall school autonomy and its effective functioning.

Georgian Schools after the Bologna Process

If there is one single, large-scale development that had a positive impact on Europeanizing the Georgian education system, it is its alignment to the Bologna Process. In fact, inclusion of Georgia's education system in the Bologna Process in 2004 drastically changed the orientation of its development. Accession to the Common European Education Area created completely different needs and challenges for Georgia's education system. In particular, there was a shift from a teacher-oriented education process, which was characteristic in the Soviet education system (and continued this way in a default regime after the Soviet Union's collapse), to pupil-oriented activities. This process has been continuing to date in parallel to the ongoing education reforms.

Major philosophical differences between these two systems exist in that in the former case, the teacher stands in the center of the education process and his/her conveyed knowledge is factual (declarative). The process is implemented based on a scenario strictly planned by the teacher, and the interest, capability, free thinking, and cooperative attitude of and with a pupil is ignored. The learning process is a monotonous and tiresome routine and does not serve the development of a pupil's interests.

In the latter case, the pupil leads the lesson himself/herself in the conditions of teacher's facilitation and mutual cooperation while taking his/her cognitive capabilities and individual interests into consideration. The education activity in such circumstances is a permanent approximation towards a pupil's life experience, whereas the obtained knowledge is functional and dynamic. In parallel to permanent mutual cooperation between the teacher and the class, a pupil presents a problem and freely expresses his/her opinion, which is shared by teacher and peers. The knowledge is not conveyed automatically but rather the pupil arrives at the new knowledge by step-by-step discoveries. He/she thinks creatively and critically, and his/her interests are taken into account as much as possible in this process.

When we talk about mutual cooperation, we should also highlight the implementation of inclusive education, acceptance of peers/pupils of all "statuses" by a pupil and a teacher, and healthy communication with them. This is particularly significant for coexistence in the common European education area.

Such an approach towards the education processes, which is part of the European education system, its standards and values, is the key challenge for and priority of Georgia's education system. It was reflected in national curricula of various years, and was included with particular explicitness in the third national curriculum (2018-2024).

Skills and Values Defined by the National Curriculum 2018-2024

In order to fully grasp the context of teaching common (European) values in Georgian schools, we should look at the National Curriculum of 2018-2024 (NCP, 2016). It is one of the most important policy documents in this field. According to this document, the goal of learning-teaching is to develop the following interdisciplinary skills and values:

„Problem solving

» Recognizing, describing and analysing a problem;
» Seeking solutions to a problem, selecting the most effective of them.

Critical thinking

» Critical discussion and analysis of facts, perceptions, opinions;
» Formulating questions and seeking answers to them;
» Argumentative discussion, i.e. justifying his/her own opinion with relevant arguments and examples;
» Making a reasonable choice and justifying it.

Creative thinking

» Creatively implementing the idea;
» Detecting original ideas and realizing them; creating new ideas;
» Finding non-standard solutions to the presented problems;
» Striving for reconstructing-improving the environment;
» Accepting the challenge, making brave steps in school activities.

Cooperation

» Fairly distributing and implementing work during group/team work;
» Readiness for doing various functions (e.g. leadership) in group/team;
» Constructive discussion of different ideas and opinions;
» Sharing of resources, opinions and knowledge for joint problem solving, joint decision-making.

Communication

» Conveying something which has been felt, thought to the listener/reader, making impression over them;
» Sharing information via verbal and non-verbal means relevant to the communication situation;
» Skill of listening to and understanding others;
» Skill of understanding and appreciating personal dignity.

Entrepreneurship, taking initiatives and realizing them

» Demonstrating interest and curiosity in learning-teaching process;
» Seeking for new ideas, approaches, opportunities and their realization to improve learning;
» Readiness for accepting challenges, for making brave steps.

Orientation in time and space

» Understanding and interpreting modern reality through space-time prism;
» Multi-dimensional view taking time and space factors into consideration.

Research

» Defining research objective, research procedures, means of data collection and forms of data processing; selecting

relevant resources;

» Doing the research, processing data, presenting/organizing data in various forms;

» Data analysis, making conclusions based on argumentative discussion; assessing research findings;

» Protecting ethical and security norms while doing research.

Learning to learn, independent work

» Defining the value of activity/task;
» Planning the activity/task;
» Monitoring the learning process
» Socio-emotional management;
» Effective management of time allocated to particular activities.

Responsibility

» Implementing the obligations taken in school activities (school life);
» Finishing and handing over the work in established deadlines;

Managing one's own behaviour, taking responsibility for one's own behaviour and social activities.

The very same document also highlights the following priorities of the national curriculum based on national objectives of general education:

A. Protection of cultural heritage.
B Environmental protection.
C. Healthy life.
D. Civil security.
E. Conflict management.
F. Financial literacy.
G. Cultural diversity.

Article 18 of the National Curriculum of Georgia includes several regulations on school culture relevant to our research (in terms of democracy and tolerance). In particular, it provides that

"1. School should, via subject learning-teaching, school projects, sport, art and club activities (with engagement of pupils, teachers and parents), promote:
A) Establishment of mutual respect, tolerance and equality among pupils, parents and teachers regardless of their social, ethnical, linguistic belonging and worldviews;
B) Establishment of a creative and cooperative environment for members of school society;
C) Development of citizenship responsibility and civic engagement of pupils;
E) Establishment of positive attitude and tolerance towards cultural diversity;
H) Teaching the ways of peaceful conflict resolution".

According to the new National Curriculum of Georgia, social sciences are taught as an independent group of disciplines with the following subjects:

1. Society and I (taught in III-IV classes);
2. Our Georgia (taught in V-VI classes);
3. History of Georgia and the World (taught in VII-XII classes);
4. Geography (taught in VII-VIII classes);
5. Geography of Georgia (taught in IX class);
6. Geography of the World (taught in X class);
7. Geography of Global Problems (taught in XI class);
8. Civic Education (taught in VII-X classes).

This group also includes several elective subjects, such as American Studies, Economy and State, Basics of Entrepreneurship, World Culture, State and Law, Ethnography of Georgia, Military History and National Defence, as well as Environment and Sustainable Development.

This group of social sciences is particularly interesting and relevant for our research as it includes those subjects that primarily aim to (a) promote the upbringing of an informed, active and responsible citizen; (b) provide in-

formation on native environment to a pupil; (c) help the pupil define the place of his/her native country within the world's history and geography, making him/her a patriotic and humane person. Moreover, teaching the subjects of the social sciences group is critical for developing civic values in pupils. The very basic concepts which are to be introduced are personal development, initiative and entrepreneurship, social and cultural development, as well as citizenship and security. Pupils familiarize themselves with specific concepts, such as personality, identity, personal development, cultural similarities and differences, geographical locations, economics, governance and decision-making, citizenship, values and culture, ethical dimensions, diversi-ty, equality, conflict resolution, environmental protection, social responsibility, protection of cultural heritage, etc.

Taking the policy documents into consideration, one can conclude that on a policy level the State ensures that common European values, such as inclusion, tolerance, intercultural dialogue, democracy, equality, equity and others, are introduced, and young people have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with these values and ethical principles which are to define their future personal and professional lives as well as to contribute to a tolerant and democratic society.

Research Findings on Teaching Common (European) Values in Georgian Schools

After analysing the background and policy documents on teaching common (European) values in Georgian schools, let us now look at school practice, i.e. how this policy is implemented in reality. Our research methodology was designed in a way to thoroughly explore this issue.

Methodology

One of the most important components of the current research was the fieldwork, which involved in-depth study of the research object directly in the general educational institutions. It consisted of focus group discussions with schoolchildren and in-depth interviews with the heads of the selected public schools.

The preparation process went through several stages. On the first stage geographical area of the research was determined. The area of the field included all major cities and regional centres in Georgia, excluding the occupied regions. Accordingly, 22 public schools have been selected in Tbilisi, Rustavi, Mtskheta, Gori, Marneuli, Telavi, Akhalkalaki, Borjomi, Batumi, Zugdidi, Ozurgeti, and Mestia. During the process of school selection, the following circumstances have been considered:

- The field work was carried out after the end of the school year. Therefore, not every school could ensure participation of pupils in the focus group discussions;
- The number of pupils in target schools;
- Diversity of the school contingent.

Among the selected schools were both members and non-members of the New School project.

Each focus group consisted of 10-12 participants, mainly 10-12th grade pupils, in some exception-

al cases 9th grade pupils were presented as well. Despite the desire to maintain gender balance in focus groups, in most cases the number of female participants was higher than the number of male participants. In some cases, there was only one male participant, or male participants were not present at all.

For the study purposes the research team was interested in including representatives of the dominant groups and ethnic and religious minorities.

The second stage of the preparatory work was dedicated to the establishment of research teams. In particular, 30 researchers (students from various higher education institutions of Georgia) were ultimately recruited based on an open competition. They were assigned to groups and attached to the target regions. A preparatory workshop was held for the researchers about the research goals and methodology.

After the preparatory sessions, 10 visits were held in the target regions between July 14 – 28, 2021. A total of 38 focus group and interview reports were prepared, which formed the basis of this policy paper.

The field work was carried out in accordance with qualitative research methods. In particular, two main tools were applied: discussion with focus groups and in-depth interviews. With involvement of the research team and selected researchers, a focus group guidebook and interview guides were prepared. These tools were based on theoretical analysis of the research subject.

Induction coding and the discourse analysis was performed during this process. The information obtained during the fieldwork was particularly processed via qualitative data analysis program NVIVO.

Key Research Findings

The fieldwork aimed at studying both the perception and acceptance of European values by pupils of Georgian public schools as well as the role of public schools in the process of …. It also aimed to discover to what extent the Georgian general educational system achieved the goals of the National Curriculum.

As such, the research team was interested in not only the learning process carried out by Georgian public schools, but the subject of interest was also the sociocultural environment inside schools, which according to the research goals includes the existing social constructions, communication between teachers and schoolchildren, communication and relationships between pupils, level of academic freedom, and involvement of parents in school life.

Due to the complex nature of the research subject, the main focus was set on two values, democracy and tolerance, which were determined by the above-mentioned theoretical analysis, including studying of EU policy documents, foreign practices, and the National Curriculum of Georgia. In addition, particular attention was paid to social and national identity as well as the role of school in the value formation process.

Perception of European Values by Pupils

Democracy

The majority of the schoolchildren in virtually every region who participated in the focus groups have an almost identical position on democracy. According to the most frequent answers, democracy first and foremost is associated with freedom. The participants commonly defined democracy as not only personal freedom,

but also the freedom of speech and expression[1].

A relatively small proportion of the schoolchildren note that democracy implies the involvement of society in the process of governing the state. According to their point of view, it is important that the voice of the people be reflected in the decision-making process by the ruling elite of the state. According to the majority of participants with this position, democracy is the rule of the majority. Less than half of the participants express the position that a democratic system involves the interests of all groups in society in the decision-making process.

While comparing democratic and autocratic systems, the majority of participants note that democratic forms of governance are more acceptable because in democracies, public opinion is reflected in the decision making process and the interests of the society are considered by the ruling elite. In the case of an autocratic regime, there is a significant risk that the processes in the country will be managed in accordance with the opinion of one person and based on his/her personal will. Therefore, it is possible that the basic human and citizens' rights are either limited or violated[2].

One of the most interesting parts of discussion was related to the role of an individual in building the democratic system. According to the most frequently reported position, a citizen participates individually in building democracy through elections, and participation of every citizen with the right to vote is important for democracy, because otherwise his or her vote may simply be lost.

Additionally, the vast majority of pupils also see their role in a democratic state through performing their duties honestly and in good faith.

"For example, if you as an ordinary citizen teach at the University, where you talk to students about democracy, you also contribute to the building of democracy in the country through your professional activities", – underlined one of the participants of focus groups.

In several cases, the main focus was set on citizens' individual civic responsibility and personal dedication as one of the primary prerequisites for building a democratic state. "Rulers are always tempted to seize power individually, and in order to prevent this, citizens need to overcome their internal fears and fight for their rights"[3], one of the participants pointed out. It is notable that this statement was accepted and shared by other participants of the group discussion.

Alongside freedom, equality was named as one of the most important characteristics of democracy by focus group participants. In particular, participants note that equality and non-discrimination is an essential component of a democratic state and society. According to the most observed response, a society where oppression of different groups takes place will find it difficult to build an effective democracy. According to the participants, violence against the people with different lifestyles is a particular problem in this regard. As it has been noted, some people may be unacceptable for a certain part of the society, but it does not give anyone the right to use brutal force against them, especially when it goes beyond law.

Another important problem outlined by the participants in terms of equality was gender inequality in Georgia. The fact was particularly interesting as in some cases the problem was named and the discussion on gender inequality was started by male participants[4], who were

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1   The position was near unanimous during every discussion.
2   The position was near unanimous during every discussion.

3   Discussion 1. Public School Focus Group (2021).
4   Discussion 1. – Discussion 3-4, Discussion – 7-12, Discussion – 18-22. Public School Focus Group (2021).

the minority of the group. But the problem was developed in detail by female respondents. As participants highlight, women and girls are socially and legally vulnerable in contemporary Georgia. This vulnerability is reflected in the following circumstances: family resources are usually invested in the education and professional excellence of boys rather than girls. Very often parents think that boys should receive better quality higher education than girls. Also, there are stereotypical perceptions on differences between professions that suit male or female individuals, and another stereotype according to which boys can be more successful in certain professions.

In every case except for Tbilisi and Batumi, another problem was underlined according to which a son is usually considered an heir of the family's real estate. The given postulate was met with opposition from the participant only in one case[5], according to whom the family (under father's surname) manages to keep the real estate in possession this way. For example, if "a girl is given a land or a house and she marries a foreigner, then the property will be in the hands of a stranger."

The problem of gender violence and gender-based asymmetry in salaries at workplaces were separately highlighted by the participants during focus group discussions. Participants almost unanimously point out that similar approaches need to be changed, and the society needs to be freed from gender stereotypes.

Alongside equality, the rule of law has also been cited as a key prerequisite for democratic development. However, there was a controversy between participants in which some claimed the law might be executed in undemocratic states as well, or the law might not be fair and democratic. Thus, the view is expressed that the mere observance of the law does not equate to democracy, but, at the same time, it is import-

ant that the law be fair and democratic. Despite talking about the rule of law and justice, participants focused less on the court system and the judiciary as a democratic institution.

In sum, it is possible to say that the vast majority of the participants in group discussions equated equality, democracy, and freedom (including the freedom of speech and expression), and most participants understand citizens' roles in the democratization process. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that in most cases the participants themselves highlight topics such as restrictions on expression, discrimination, gender inequality, and the inadmissibility of different people as factors hindering democratic development.

It should also be noted that the students did not pay much attention to a democratic institution such as the judiciary, and there was less discussion and knowledge on the distribution of power between different branches of government (executive, legislative and judiciary) and their importance in a democratic state and society.

Thus, it can be argued that participants generally understand democratic values on an emotional level and talk about the issues that are personally painful and relevant to them. However, this general understanding is not cemented by well-structured, theoretical knowledge obtained (preferably) at school.

Tolerance

For the vast majority of discussion participants, tolerance is a value of significant importance that they unconditionally support. However, controversies related to perception of this value have emerged during the discussion process.

On the one hand, it has been clearly stated that Georgia is a historically tolerant state, where

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5   Discussion 18. Public School Focus Group (2021).

representatives of different ethnic and religious groups have lived peacefully side by side for centuries. But at the same time, it was highlighted that discriminatory attitudes, mostly by the elder generation, are recently notable towards 'different' persons. As for the personal attitude of the participants towards tolerance, the general position is that all people are equal and therefore, no one should be subject to oppression or harassment of any kind due to their different ethnic origin or religious affiliation.

The majority of participants from Georgian language schools draw a clear line between Georgian ethnic and religious minorities living in Georgia for generations and the people of different ethnic and religious faiths who do not live in Georgia and are recently immigrated to the country. According to their position, those representatives of ethnic and religious minorities, who were born in Georgia, who live here, "whose house is here," are full-fledged citizens of Georgia and full-fledged members of Georgian society. They should be treated in the same manner as representatives of the dominant group (i.e. orthodox, ethnic Georgians). However, they see some kind of problem in the fact that "particular members of certain (ethnic or religious) minorities often misuse their identity for additional privileges."[6]

Despite the stated position, participants' opinions are divided in regards to religious minorities, in particular, their freedom of religion and belief. More than half of the total number of participants think that freedom of faith and confession of religious minorities is an absolute human right. Furthermore, they believe that representatives of religious minorities are in full right to build places of worship and conduct religious services.

A minority of participants, less than half of the total number, mentioned that there is no need today for religious minorities to build places

of worship openly, without restriction. They stated that such an approach can endanger religious and national identity of Georgia, which is historically orthodox Christian. However, their attitude towards representatives of Islam and non-orthodox Christian denominations was also different. For example, they see no problem if catholic Christians build churches but they are against the construction of new mosques.

While arguing on this issue, some of the participants repeatedly stated that Georgia is a secular state, therefore, the state should not interfere in the religious life of its citizens at all. Although in a single case a participant stated that Orthodoxy is the state religion in Georgia[7].

It can be highlighted that participants were much more accepting towards ethnic minorities. Almost everyone mentioned that citizens with Armenian and Azerbaijani origin are "our part." Contrary to this, an attitude towards religious minorities was controversial.

At the same time, in many cases the participants sharply distinguish the representatives of different ethnic and religious groups of Georgia from recently immigrated individuals. Attitudes towards immigrants are negative. Participants are concerned that an open and loyal attitude towards foreign immigrants will endanger Georgia's national and cultural identity in future.

As for non-Georgian language schools involved in the project, it is advisable to separately discuss cases of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russian language schools. Most discussion participants from an Armenian school speak excellent Georgian and consider themselves as part of the Georgian state and society. They also see no differences between citizens of Georgia representing various ethnic groups.

Participants from Azerbaijani schools mention that life in a multicultural environment is en-

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6   Discussion 11; 14. Public School Focus Group (2021).

7   Discussion 13. Public School Focus Group (2021).

gaging, and they have good relationships with their Christian or Georgian friends. At the same time, almost half of the participants of the Azerbaijani language schools have a negative attitude towards ethnic Armenians, which can be considered as a reflection of the negative historical past and the existing difficult relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan[8].

It should be noted that unlike the Russian language school, Armenian and Azerbaijani language schools have predominantly monoethnic contingent. In Russian language schools, pupils of different ethnic and religious origin share the same classroom. Therefore, in the Russian language school, acceptance towards representatives of various ethnic and religious groups is much higher than in the Georgian, Armenian or Azerbaijani language schools. Furthermore, as the pupils of the Russian language school not that radicalism, fanaticism, and xenophobia contribute to reviving extremism in the country, and thus create serious risks for a state on its democratic and European developmental path.

It can be concluded that perception and understanding of tolerance in the research schools vary. There are particular groups (e.g. ethnic minorities) which are more accepted than others (e.g. religious minorities). Many issues regarding religious minorities are controversial. In addition, the negative attitudes of ethnic Azerbaijani participants towards ethnic Armenians provide ground for an assumption that there are signs of a latent conflict.

National, Social and Cultural Identity

Issues related to the national, cultural, and social identity became subjects of active discussion among participants. The majority of participants, virtually at every school, find it

8   Discussion 4. Public School Focus Group.

difficult to answer who is Georgian, and what are determinants for unique Georgian identity.

While discussing national and cultural identity, participants focused on identifiers such as history, customs, and traditions. But when the focus group moderator asked exactly which custom or tradition was a determinant for Georgian national identity, participants often did not have an answer. In some cases, it was mentioned that "Georgian spirit, hospitality, language, homeland and religion" formed Georgian national identity.

There were almost no answers to questions about Georgia's place in the modern world, what Georgian state and nation could offer the world today, including in cultural terms. In some cases, participants noted that Georgia hosts multiple monuments of the world intangible cultural heritage. However, besides cultural heritage, participants could not provide their vision about the contemporary role of Georgia in the modern world.

It was also hard to define which cultural area Georgia belongs to: Europe or Asia. More than half of participants believe that Georgia is more Europe than Asia, however, the vast majority, including those who consider Georgia a more European country, admit that Georgia is a unique, Caucasian phenomenon. They argue that Georgia is a country which is located on the crossroads of civilizations; therefore, having been on the crossroads for centuries makes Georgia different from both Europe where there is more freedom and Asia which has a distinct mentality, lifestyle and culture.

For the most part of the discussion, a European lifestyle is acceptable, and they would be happy to see Georgia as a part of European space. In some cases, pupils say that Georgia is a part of the European space as long as the government of Georgia has chosen this policy of European integration.

In conclusion, it is possible to say that participants do not have concrete answers on their own national, social and cultural identity. At the same time, they find it difficult to associate Georgia with any cultural or civilizational space.

The role of school in the process of value formation

One of the main objectives of the research was to determine the role of public schools in the formation of European values amongst pupils. Accordingly, during the focus group discussions and interviews with school directors, interviewers were interested in the school's role and function as well as the challenges that modern schools face in shaping pupils' values.

First of all, it should be admitted that the involvement of school directors was fruitful and important for conducting a comprehensive analysis of the research subject. Almost in every case, school directors have outlined the same problems that were identified by the pupils in focus groups, underlining the openness, sincerity and shared perspectives of respondents during the interviews.

School directors and pupils highlight that schools have a major role in shaping the value of schoolchildren. The majority of school directors note that during this process, particular importance is given to not only the information received from the teachers in the classroom, but the cultural environment in school too.

In this regard, both discussion participants and school directors[9] have noted that one of the main challenges at school was to combat criminal subculture[10]. As one director notes, it is important to have total involvement of schoolchildren, teachers, parents, and school administration. Only this kind of synergy can provide an opportunity for schools to form the European values among the schoolchildren.

In some cases, respondents admitted that the problem was caused by certain teachers who had a "somehow romantic" attitude towards the subculture: "teachers often speak with pride on how many mafia bosses they taught when they were pupils."[11]

It is noteworthy that the positive attitude towards the criminal underworld and organized crime is much lower among pupils who had an opportunity to study the subject "Society and I" during the 3rd and 4th year of education. As far as this tendency was notable at nearly every school, we may find the connection between teaching the subject and the formation of positive, non-criminal values among pupils.

Both the focus group participant and the school directors underline that the teacher's role is especially important in the value formation process. Virtually every participant points out that it is especially important to be able to express their opinion freely during the learning process, to express their position openly and not to be afraid that they will be humiliated because of it. Pupils say they are often reluctant or afraid to do so because they know a teacher may reprimand them.

Several directors also acknowledge this, saying that this problem is mostly seen in the older generation of teachers. Some of them also state that the recent generational change in the education system has significantly contributed to improvement of teaching and learning atmosphere.

In addition, school directors believe that the family often plays a greater role than school in shaping a pupil's values. Therefore, parental involvement in school life is of major importance.

9   Interview 1. Public School Focus Group (2021).
10   Discussion 1. Public School Focus Group (2021).

11   Respondent 20. 2021.

They say that one of the challenges is that a large number of parents are only interested in their child's academic performance, and their role is passive in school life beyond that issue. Although there are mechanisms provided by the legislation to ensure the synergy between school and parents, additional encouragement is necessary for successful implementation of these mechanisms in real life.

Another important trend identified during the interviews is that schools that are involved in the "new school project" are more successful in teaching European values than the schools functioning beyond this project. As respondents (i.e., school directors) point out during the interviews, this is largely due to the abundance of extra-curricular educational activities and innovative approaches to teaching in the project-member schools. Indeed, they argue that the mere teaching (i.e., simply conveying the knowledge to pupils) does not change much, and it is significant to use innovative approaches in the teaching process to facilitate development of critical and analytical thinking of pupils, to enable them to independently evaluate certain processes and trends, and to establish themselves as independent and responsible citizens.

As the research also concludes, the value formation process is often facilitated more by *who* conveys the information to pupils and *how* rather than the mere information indicated in schoolbooks. The fact that in many cases pupils still have internal barriers to openly express their point of view does not contribute to the European value formation process. Therefore, it is extremely important to encourage high standards of academic freedom for schoolchildren and teachers.

In addition, the difference between participant and non-participant schools of the New School Project also provides an important insight on how significant and impactful it is to use inno-vative teaching approaches in teaching process for value formation.

According to the above-mentioned, one may conclude that that a school, as an institution, despite its efforts, still faces several challenges in the formation of not only European, but generally, human and universal values among schoolchildren, including the deconstructing of the criminal mentality, ensuring high academic freedom in the learning process, and enhancing critical and analytical skills among schoolchildren. The fact that several schools can be considered as successful role models in teaching European values makes it possible to argue that that the objective is feasible and achievable.

Recommendations

Based on the fieldwork findings, it is recommended for strengthening the teaching of European values in public schools of Georgia to implement the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION 1:
RAISE AWARENESS ON DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Despite the fact that most of the focus group participants understand the importance of democracy, they lack the knowledge on democratic institutions. Democracy is largely understood by pupils on an emotional level. Therefore, it is important that school pupils not only understand the essence and significance of democracy emotionally and personally in the learning process, but also acquire a complex theoretical knowledge on a given issue.

As it was demonstrated during the discussions, the vast majority of participants do not possess comprehensive information on those institutions that guarantee irreversible democratization of Georgia. Therefore, it is important to focus on issues such as elections, electoral administration, division of power among legislative, executive and judicial branches, and the system of checks and balances. It is also recommended to provide more information on the role of the judiciary and the rule of law in the process of democratic transition as well as to focus on civil and political rights in addition to local and international legal mechanisms for protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Institutions, such as the Parliament, ministries, courts, local self-government bodies, media organizations, and others can play an important role by implementing visiting and/or short-term educational programs for schoolchildren, thus, providing first-hand experience to pupils to better understand how and why democratic institutions (should) work in practice.

RECOMMENDATION 2:
PROMOTE TOLERANCE AND EQUALITY

According to the fieldwork findings, public school pupils have much higher acceptance of various ethnic minorities than those of different religions or faiths. This tendency is especially visible in case of Georgian Muslim minority. Accordingly, it is recommended to pay special attention to freedom of religion and belief during the teaching of human rights and fundamental freedoms. At the same time, it is recommended to pay more attention to the idea of a secular state, as the discussions have revealed that a significant number of public school pupils think that a dominant group should have more privileges than minorities due to the fact that Georgia is a historically and traditionally Orthodox Christian country.

In order to ensure a high level of acceptance towards every citizen of Georgia, pupils should understand the basic principles of a secular state and fully realize that every citizen of this country is equal, notwithstanding of their ethnic origin or religious beliefs. Pupils should distinguish the idea and secular nature of a state, and the historical role of certain religions in state building and society development process. It is one thing to perceive Georgia as a part of European, Christian civilization, and another thing when Orthodox Christianity is considered as a state religion with much more privileges than other faiths and Orthodox Christians enjoy more benefits and are more protected than those with different beliefs. In this regard, public school pupils should have proper understanding of the principle of equality before the law.

It should also be noted that the teacher as a role model and moral authority for pupils plays a major role in the process of value formation among schoolchildren. Therefore, it is vital to increase teachers' effort in enhancing acceptance of various minority groups and reducing the level of alienation between representatives of dominant groups and minorities.

In other words, as the EU experience demonstrates, the attitudes of teachers are the most important things in teaching values. Teachers have to show that, for them, European values such as democracy and tolerance and everything related to them are important. When pupils see that teachers are authentic in promoting these values, they also believe that such concepts are not empty.

RECOMMENDATION 3:
RAISE AWARENESS ON NATIONAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Notwithstanding the fact that discussion participants have almost unanimously noted the uniqueness of Georgian culture, the question on Georgian identity or the place of the country in the contemporary world remains unanswered for many of them. It was difficult for pupils to provide their vision about Georgian cultural and historical identity.

Accordingly, it is recommended in the teaching process to pay more attention to the national identity of Georgia and the determinants of uniqueness of Georgian identity. Indeed, better understanding and awareness of one's own cultural or national identity will contribute to further reinforcement of one's tolerant approach towards other cultural or national identities.

In order to facilitate the implementation of recommendations 2 and 3, it is possible to use the best European experience. For instance, pupils can bet-

ter and more deeply understand cultural, religious and linguistic differences and further promote tolerance towards them via various activities, groups work, group discussions, or school projects in the framework of a Tolerance Week (from Estonia's example). Again, relevant institutions and organizations can play a vital role in making such initiatives a successful story by contributing to their implementation with their active engagement. Moreover, Georgian language schools and Armenian, Azerbaijani, Russian, or other language schools can have joint projects giving pupils with different backgrounds and origins to work together and better understand each other.

RECOMMENDATION 4:
AMEND TEXTBOOKS AND TEACHING METHODOLOGY

The successful practical implementation of previous recommendations is impossible without amendments to textbooks and teaching methodology.

Firstly, it is important to harmonize teaching materials of the subjects of social sciences with the goals of the National Curriculum and determine the exact ways of achieving the teaching results.

Secondly, it is necessary to revise and optimize civic education and history textbooks. It was noted in many schools that civic education is often taught by outdated (e.g. 2012) literature, and the quality of civic education largely depends on the teacher's personal efforts.

Assignments and exercises presented in the mentioned textbooks should encourage pupils to think independently as well as critically analyse and evaluate certain historical and political processes.

Thirdly, besides the textbook renewal, improvement of the quality of teaching process and

methodology should also be on the top of the agenda. As it was underlined during the discussions and interviews, pupils study subjects with more diligence when they are allowed to express their thoughts freely, teacher's opinions are not imperatively forced on pupils and there is an open space for discussion and debate.

At the same time, it is vital to encourage, support and empower teachers to learn and implement modern teaching methodologies. The real obstacles stem from not only the "old teachers" cliché, but also from lack of skills, instruments, and motivation of teachers; different parental expectations from school; controversies within society; and others. For example, teachers should have instruments, skills and knowledge themselves to assist pupils in practicing citizenship.

As the European Parliament (2017) puts it very effectively, teaching common values "takes place in various subjects such as knowledge about society, history, and… literature. The teaching programmes might be coordinated with an aim to promote critical reflection on values important for the democratic society. However, in the core curriculum, facts are more important than attitudes, and education might be reduced to knowledge. There is no time for a critical reflection left" (p. 126). This is where teachers can unleash the potential of pupils by promoting open discussion and allowing them to critically reflect on the newly-acquired information.

In sum, schools and teachers should be encouraged to develop, within their granted autonomy, programmes, methods and activities, which would give pupils more opportunities to learn about values through freely applying them in practice. This may also facilitate the revision of teacher education in order to provide teachers with more instruments for working with their pupils in 'real-life' situations and not only at the desk in the classroom.

In this regard, it is interesting to notice that problematic issues related to teaching process and methodology are less detected in the member schools of the New School Project. Therefore, it is highly recommended to expand the project area or for non-member schools to share the project's best experience.

RECOMMENDATION 5:
STRENGTHEN SYNERGY AMONG PUBLIC SCHOOLS, PARENTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

In some cases, the so-called criminal subculture was named as a major challenge for the contemporary school system. Teachers, who are proud to have been teaching certain crime bosses, encourage such a mentality.

To combat the problem, a systematic and complex approach is required. Public schools should have strict policies against so-called "watchers" and bullying motivated by criminal subculture. The role and authority of resource officers at schools should be increased as well. However, this problem should not be addressed only by repressive methods. It is critical to have wide discussions on the problem and engage parents and civil society representatives, alongside with the state, in seeking solutions. The synergy of school administration, teachers, parents, and civil society is an important prerequisite to combat the challenge. The Georgian Orthodox church, alongside with other religious and civic organizations, can also play a positive role in this process.

The synergy needs to be strengthened not only for fighting criminal subculture in schools but for every other aspect of school life. As it is explicitly demonstrated by the examples of the EU member states and academic research, a 'whole school' approach has a great potential for promoting quality education and cohesion with society.

RECOMMENDATION 6:
FURTHER DEVELOP SCHOOL CULTURE

Together with teaching information on European values (i.e. conveying knowledge), it is also significant to understanding the values via practical experience. Schools have a critical role in this regard as they represent a place to develop knowledge and cognitive skills, as well as a space for youngsters to learn how to behave and how to be engaged in various societal processes.

As the fieldwork demonstrates, there is a significant difference between the National Curriculum and the situation in schools. In other words, there is a gap between policy documents and school practice. Therefore, it is recommended for the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia to carry out comprehensive measures to further support the development of school culture. On their behalf, schools also need to correctly understand the goals set by the National Curriculum and respectively develop a plan to achieve them.

This process includes the following fundamental components:

A. Efforts should be made to increase the inclusivity of school life. Societal processes are highly dynamic, whereas amendments to textbooks often leg behind these processes. Thus, it is important to ensure systematic training of teachers as well as to enhance cooperation with the relevant civil society organisations which can enrich the teaching process with additional extracurricular activities.

B. Cooperation of Georgian schools with schools across Georgia and in Europe may also be interesting to improve school culture. It is recommended for the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia to promote such ties by organizing international and local meetings, conferences, projects, forums, exchange visits of teachers in the EU member states for experience sharing, exchange programs for pupils, as well as the participation in relevant programs of the EU and other organizations.

C. It should also be noted that in upper classes, when schoolchildren are preparing for unified national exams, the quality of the educational process in most parts of public schools sharply decreases – these pupils largely focus only on the subjects they need to pass in order to enter a higher education institution. Therefore, it is important for the school administration, as well as the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia, to review the existing approaches.

RECOMMENDATION 7:
REFORM THE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

The assessment system in the Georgian schools is strictly oriented on the assessment of a pupil's knowledge and takes no consideration of his/her behavioural aspects. This does not stimulate the pupil enough in terms of learning values. Thus, it could be valuable to consider changes in the evaluation/assessment system in the long term.

Finland's education system could be informative in this regard. The NCCBE of Finland specifies guidelines for evaluating values under the title of behavioural assessment. European Parliament (2017) highlights that

"In addition to this behavioural assessment, which is considered as an entity distinct from personal characteristics, students' achievements in different subjects are also assessed during and at the end of the school year. This consists of a numerical grade and verbal assessment on how a student has fared in terms of achieving the objectives within each specific subject area.

The school's curriculum usually specifies behavioural objectives based on the NCCBE and the student's behaviour is assessed based on these objectives" (p. 85).

These objectives take into account the school goals, policies, school culture and rules. Students not only receive feedback on their performance but are also involved in discussing and defining these goals and objectives. (European Parliament, 2017, p. 86).

This is not to say that the Finnish example can be copy-pasted into the Georgian reality. Indeed, the most optimal solution can be a mixture of various best practices adapted to the Georgian context. The scale of the concrete initiatives of the reform could be a topic of further, inclusive discussions.

Conclusion

This document reports on research from European University which explored the teaching of European values, i.e. democracy and tolerance, in Georgia's schools on a policy level and in practice. Using a comprehensive methodology of desk research, focus groups with pupils and interviews with school directors, this research studied if and how these European values are taught in secondary schools in Georgia in comparison to selected European Union member states. This policy paper represented the findings of this research.

As it is demonstrated by the findings, there is a gap between the intended education policy and the school practice. The National Curriculum of Georgia is a well-formulated document with necessary standards on paper. However, schools often lack know-how and the will or have other types of challenges to translate these standards into practice. In particular:

1. pupils have little knowledge on democratic institutions and their own national and cultural identity;
2. they do not have safe environment to practice tolerance, democracy, citizenship, open discussions, etc.;
3. teachers' behaviour, qualification, instruments available to them often are not conducive to favourable school culture;
4. school evaluation systems are strictly oriented on assessing the cognitive knowl-

edge, ignoring behavioural aspects of pupils and making it difficult to assess the value formation;
5. passive, indifferent attitude/approach of stakeholders such as family, community, and civil society in school life hinder the improvement process.

Therefore, this policy paper provides seven general sets of recommendations to stakeholders to contribute to bridging the gap between the policy and the practice:

1. raise awareness on democratic institutions;
2. promote tolerance and equality;
3. raise awareness on national and cultural identity;
4. amend textbooks and teaching methodology;
5. strengthen synergy among public schools, parents, and civil society;
6. further develop school culture;
7. and reform the school assessment system.

European University demonstrates its readiness to continue working with stakeholders to overcome these obstacles in order to further improve teaching European values in Georgia's schools and lay a stronger and more robust foundation to Georgia's European integration process.

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Student-Researchers Involved in the Fieldwork:

Mariam Esiashvili

Giorgi Jachvadze

Mariam Natradze

Mariam Meskhi

Tamta Kvrivishvili

Nika Khomasuridze

Nutsa Tsirekidze

Mariam Jinjikhadze

Ekaterine Doinjashvili

Tinatin Khabeishvili

Nino Pharsadanishvili

Nino Zotikishvili

Tamar Tkemaladze

Ana Gogochishvili

Tornike Chikhladze

Ana Chakvetadze

Ana Kiria

Elene Kerdikoshvili

Inga Putkaradze

Konstantine Khoperia

Aisun Mamedova

Mari Manvelishvili

Anjela Guregiani

Meri Kvariantashvili

Gvantsa Dzidziguri

Salome Makhatadze

Teona Laferishvili

Natia Totogashvili

Ani Gejadze

Nutsa Tsirekidze

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Final Beneficiaries: 11th and 12th Grade Students and Teachers of Georgia (in Tbilisi and Regions)