



ადამიანის უფლებების სწავლებისა
და მონიტორინგის ცენტრი

EMC

Human Rights Education
and Monitoring Center

RELIGION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

AN ANALYSIS OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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British Embassy
Tbilisi

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1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of the following research is to analyse governmental policy on education from the perspective of religious freedom. In particular, this research examines issues such as equal access to the right of freedom of religion in public schools. It also looks at the regulation and methods of teaching religion, examines their conformity to the standards of religious freedom and to the principle of secularism.

In order to encourage a religiously neutral and tolerant environment in public schools, considering the research results and identified shortcomings, several recommendations for the Ministry of Education and Science were prepared.

The actualisation of this research and its methodology will be reviewed in chapter two. The assessments of various local and international organisations, researchers and experts evaluating the realisation of religious freedom in public schools outline the different tendencies of violating the right of religious freedom, and these indicate the importance of studying this issue even further.

Chapter three analyses the current legal framework and policy documents regarding their conformity with the principles of secularism and the guarantees of religious freedom. Moreover, it examines and evaluates the effectiveness of the control and prevention mechanisms implemented by the Ministry.

The fourth chapter presents a discourse analysis of textbooks which were approved by the Ministry. It provides an analysis of history textbooks where it is examined whether balanced information about the different religious denominations and their comprehensive representation is given.

Chapter five examines teachers' sentiments and attitudes towards religious minorities. It also covers an assessment of school infrastructure in terms of its conformity with the requirements of religious neutrality. This analysis is based on the observation in public schools and the results of eight focus groups held in different schools.

The presented research was carried out by EMC and was part of the project "Supporting and Enabling a Secular and Tolerant Environment in Public Schools" which was financially supported by the Embassy of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

2 ACTUALISATION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. ACTUALISATION

The importance and actuality of the presented research is confirmed by several reports of local and international organisations who study religious teaching and religious freedom in public schools, as well as by the assessments of several interviewed experts and researchers. The indicated sources outline the problems of proselytism, indoctrination and discrimination which has been taking place in public schools for years now.

Report analyses show that an important change in governmental policy is connected to a new law which was adopted in 2005 and manifested the willingness of the government to implement an effective policy regarding the protection of religious neutrality and the principles of secularism. This turning point in educational policy groups problems and challenges in “before 2005” and “after 2005”. These are presented below in greater detail.

Reports of local and international organisations during 2001-2004 focus their attention on fundamental issues, including the influence of religious institutions on the education system as a whole, the problem of proselytism and indoctrination arising from the methodology of teaching in schools, the problem of inadequate or one-sided representation of religious content¹, the low level of education among religion teachers of religion², the presence of religious symbols in public schools³ and the discrimination of students based on religious grounds⁴.

From the existing sources it is clear that one of the most important problems within the education system used to be the question of institutional independence of public schools. During the period of 2001-2004, the Church openly intervened with the authority of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia (hereinafter the Ministry/ the Ministry of Education) and had a direct influence in the process of approving textbooks.⁵

The new Law on General Education, adopted in 2005, holds a new vision of the government and introduced the principle of secularism into educational policy .

These politics gradually reduced the direct participation of the Church in the process of forming the scope of educational policy and its general content.

1 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, And Labor; International Religious Freedom Report 2003 and 2004; Restrictions on Religious Freedom; <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2003/24358.htm>; <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2004/35455.htm>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

2 The Ombudsman's report, 2004; pg 50; <http://www.ombudsman.ge/files/downloads/ge/szounjmrncjpwcvdgasn.pdf>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

3 The Ombudsman's report, 2004; pg 50, <http://www.ombudsman.ge/files/downloads/ge/szounjmrncjpwcvdgasn.pdf>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

4 European Commission against Racism and Intolerance; Rreport on Georgia adopted on June 22, 2001; Strasbourg; April 23, 2002; pg 23; <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Georgia/GEO-CbC-II-2002-002-GEO.pdf>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

5 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, And Labor; International Religious Freedom Report 2001; Restrictions on Religious Freedom; <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2001/5649.htm>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

However 2008, the reports of international organisations claimed that the direct and open intervention of the Church in the sphere of the Ministry - characterized by the structural form and exclusiveness - still was a major problem. After 2008, the Church tried to maintain its influence on the educational system by exercising power in different ways, such as direct communication with the schools, teachers and students⁶.

The theory and practice of teaching religion at schools, the aspects of indoctrination, proselytism and religious intolerance remain problematic⁷.

From 2007 on, reports talked more actively about particular cases of discrimination, its systemic character and the problem of proselytism. The 2007 and 2008 annual reports⁸ of the Ombudsman gave special attention to some cases of religious intolerance, including intolerance in public schools, especially towards Muslims. These cases were made visible and were related with the issue of proselytism in public schools in Adjara.⁹

Students, who were Jehovah's witnesses, also became the victims of humiliation which was followed by the demand to change their religion or denounce their faith¹⁰.

Another problem are the ineffective reactions of law enforcement authorities. The protracting of investigations or ignoring possible criminal actions confirm this observation¹¹.

Moreover, reports and experts point out the ineffective internal control mechanisms of the Ministry itself¹².

The parents of students who have a religious minority background are less likely to use the existing legal mechanisms. Therefore, these facts are almost never discussed in disciplinary committees or in court. On the one hand this is caused by a lack of knowledge about these mechanisms, and on the other hand by a lack of trust in them¹³.

In-depth interviews with researchers and experts point out that the influence of the Church, and religious factors in general, have undergone some specific transformations over time.

According to experts and researchers, and despite the radical changes in legislation adopted in 2005, the educational policy of the Ministry has changed since 2008. It shifted from rigid secular politics to a rather softer approach. It also rejects the need of a clear secular vision.

6 Interview with Beka Mindiashvili, head of Ombudsman's Centre of Tolerance; Interview with Sopho Zviadadze - Caucasus Institute for Peace Democracy and Development, Program Coordinator of Civil Integration and Expert on religious issues

7 The Ombudsman's report on the condition human right protection in Georgia, firsts half of 2007; pg. 166

8 The Ombudsman's report on the condition of human rights protection in Georgia, second half of 2008; pg. 209; <http://www.ombudsman.ge/files/downloads/ge/kixclgyhdexhnxpvdvq.pdf>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

9 The Ombudsman's report on the condition of human right protection in Georgia, pg. 158-159; <http://www.ombudsman.ge/files/downloads/ge/rcdhxltppxuyaxakjilc.pdf>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

10 The Ombudsman's report on human right protection in Georgia, first half of 2007, pg. 165; <http://www.ombudsman.ge/files/downloads/ge/rcdhxltppxuyaxakjilc.pdf>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

11 The Ombudsman's report on human right protection in Georgia; second half of 2009, pg. 187; <http://www.ombudsman.ge/files/downloads/ge/rcbrpcdmwmmvalletoggp.pdf>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

12 Interview with Beka Mindiashvili, the head of Ombudsman's Centre of Tolerance

13 European Commission against racism and intolerance, report on Georgia (4th cycle of monitoring), adopted on april 28, 2010, pg. 19; <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Georgia/GEO-CbC-IV-2010-017-GEO.pdf>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

It is worth mentioning that the researchers do not view these changes as isolated decisions, but link them to the wider political crisis prevalent at that time and to the politics of concession adopted by the ruling party¹⁴.

The latest reports (2012-2013), and the assessments of experts and researchers, outline that the practices of indoctrination and proselytism did not become less problematic in the current context.

These practices are especially visible in public schools in Adjara where Muslim students are the subjects of permanent pressure¹⁵. During these two years, the abuse of Adjarian Muslims in three regions of Georgia (Nigvziani, Tsintkaro, Samtatskaro), the violation of their right to religious freedom, the cases of indoctrination in public schools as well as the tendencies of self-victimisation and christianisation of Muslims has become visible¹⁶.

The tendencies of proselytism and indoctrination have been openly discussed by the representatives of religious minorities¹⁷. In a conversation with EMC, the occurrence of these two practices was also confirmed by the Catholic Community of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kutaisi, Jehovah's Witnesses, Georgian Muslims, Adventists, members of the Lutheran and Baptist-Evangelical Church and other religious groups¹⁸.

The depiction of religious symbols in schools also remains problematic, despite the clear prohibition of it in the law. The reports also outline the tendency of collective prayer initiated by teachers in public schools which take place during academic process. Moreover, the presence of crosses and other religious symbols in the classrooms are still visible¹⁹.

According to the abovementioned reports, the tendency of discriminating, stigmatising and marginalising the representatives of religious minorities in schools also constitutes a problem²⁰. For the most part, these practices are initiated by teachers, but students are frequently involved in this process too²¹.

The problems outlined in these reports, the opinions of experts and researchers, the information obtained from religious minorities by EMC and the revealed intolerant attitudes of teachers indicate the severity of problems concerning the violation of religious freedom and religious neutrality in public schools. These violations are characterized by a large scale and intensity and must become the objects of a detailed analysis.

14 Interview with Simon Janashia, Assistant Professor of Ilia State University; Interview with Sopho Zviadadze - Caucasus Institute for Peace Democracy and Development, Program Coordinator of Civil Integration and Expert on religious issues

15 The Ombudsman's report on the condition of human right protection in Georgia, 2012, pg. 525; <http://www.ombudsman.ge/files/downloads/ge/iicsizmorgdfkahkdqvc.pdf>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

16 The crisis of secularism and the loyalty to the dominant group, the role of the State in resolving the revealed religious conflicts in Georgia; EMC, Tbilisi, 2013, pg. 24

17 Incidents of discrimination against Catholics taking place in Samtskhe-Javakheti, video prepared by EMC; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EN8dgOMs8Zc&feature=youtu.be>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

18 Interviews with the representatives of the confessions mentioned are recorded by EMC in 2013

19 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, And Labor; International Religious Freedom Report 2012; Government Practices; <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?dliid#wrapper>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

20 Interview with Nino Geldiashvili, former head of the Educational Resource Center of Gldani-Nadzaladevi

21 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, And Labor; International Religious Freedom Report 2012; Government Practices; <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?dliid#wrapper>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

The latent and complex character of the problems demands that the State identifies the problems and implements more proactive and systematic methodology to give it a continuous and institutional character.

In this regard, the current data, the results of the presented study, including the attitudes of teachers and the identified shortcomings show the existing risks and the need for their elimination if we want to establish a free and tolerant vision on education.

The strong intolerance, xenophobic attitudes visible in our society as well as the problem of alienating the Muslim community by the dominant religious group, has made the gaps in collective consciousness and, primarily, the shortcomings in the educational system, clear and demands for effective state intervention.

Moreover, the religious conflicts reflected those attitudes and dependencies that exist in public schools near the conflict zones²².

Given the existing circumstances, the importance of establishing a vision based on secular and liberal principles becomes obvious. Correspondingly, implementing consistent policies should reveal the scale and the form of the challenges ahead.

2.2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.2.1. Review of the legislative framework regarding religious freedom

The presented study covers three main components: the analysis of direct and equal access to religious freedom in public schools, the main regulative mechanisms concerning the practice of teaching religion and, third, the analysis of policy documents.

In addition, the study will examine the efficiency as well as the sufficiency of mechanisms applied in the process of policy implementation. For this purpose, the research will rely on the existing legal framework, public information officially requested from the Ministry and other relevant Departments, and semi-structured interviews with high officials of the Ministry.

It is important to note that this research only analyses the policy of the Ministry of Education and Science implemented in public schools and that, therefore, private schools are excluded from these observations.

2.2.2. Discourse analysis of school textbooks

The study conducted a discourse analysis of school textbooks towards different religious denominations.

²² The crisis of secularism and the loyalty to the dominant group, the role of the State in resolving the revealed religious conflicts in Georgia; EMC, Tbilisi, 2013, pg. 24

The research group relied on official information obtained from the Ministry which covers the subject of religion according to the National Curriculum, and on the textbooks which were approved by the Ministry of Education during 2013-2014²³. The history textbooks were selected considering the purpose of this research and the presence of a religious component in them.

According to data from the Ministry, two alternative textbooks exist for each class studying history. The research has also taken into account the matter of different classes and publishers. In particular, the need to maintain sequence and to be able to see the bigger picture demanded that the research object included all textbooks published by the same publication house.

Therefore, the research selected the history textbooks of history published by "*Bakur Sulakauri Publishing*", however, it was necessary to allow the exception of the books printed by "Logos Press" since those are the only approved textbooks for classes 5 and 6.

In order to evaluate the religious component, a statement analysis of the textbooks was made according to the following criteria: vocabulary, syntax, illustration, context, actors, and purpose. The main objects of analysis were the factors of maintaining neutrality, the representation of religious diversity and the promotion of rational understanding of events. A critical discourse analysis aims at revealing any hidden content that exists beyond the discourse. It examines how language is used as a weapon to make a certain identity or culture dominant. The use of particular discourses, words and meanings while writing can reflect the author's intention, viewpoint and ideology.

2.2.3. Analysis of school teacher's attitudes in eight public schools of Tbilisi

This part aims to reveal the attitudes of school teachers towards religious minorities, the students affiliated with these groups and the subject of teaching religion.

Additionally, the study aims to identify cases of indoctrination, proselytism and discrimination taking place in the schools and includes an analysis of school infrastructure and its conformity with the legislation as well as of the practices of teaching religion within the scope of the learning process.

To fulfill its objectives the study used qualitative research methodologies and, particularly, conducted semi-structured focus groups.

First, two pilot focus groups were organized in schools where ethnic groups are being represented in different proportions (under 5% and up to 20-30%) of the total school population. Given the different results obtained from the focus groups, the main part of the study had to be planned in concordance with a specified methodology.

In particular, three schools were selected where ethnic minorities constitute less than 5% of the student population and another three where ethnic groups represent 15-30% of the total number of students. Finally, focus groups

²³ Letter #467792, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, October 15, 2013

were conducted in eight public schools in Tbilisi²⁴. The participants were teachers of Literature, History and Civic Education²⁵.

The selected subjects were chosen because of the presence of the segment “Culture and Religion”. All focus groups were attended by six to seven participants.

²⁴ #77, 84, 98, 131, 92, 87, 89 and 163 public schools of Isani-Samgori and the municipalities of Old Tbilisi. Target schools were selected and based on their conformity with the purposes of the research defined in coordination with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia and the heads of the corresponding regions’ Resource Centers

²⁵ The subject of Civic Education, as a rule, was included in the subject of History and was taught by the same History teacher

3 KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

- ▶ Existing sources studying religious freedom and its maintenance in schools, including reports of local and international organisations, interviews with experts and researchers during the study as well as representatives of religious minorities, all outline the cases of indoctrination, proselytism and discrimination permanently taking place in public schools. Given these circumstances, the policy implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science appears to be ineffective in regard to guaranteeing religious neutrality and the freedom of religion. The absence of any systematic information about the violations of religious freedom as well as the invisibility of interconfessional issues in the process of teacher training, point out that the Ministry of Education is unable to fully recognize the existing crisis of secularism and the scale of the problems concerning the violation of religious freedom in schools;
- ▶ According to the current legislation, the Ministry of Education is unable to provide preliminary control on the practices of teaching religion and fully entrusts public schools to determine the content of teaching. This causes the risk of violating the guarantees aimed at maintaining religious freedom, and excludes this relationship from the sphere of effective control;
- ▶ The activities of the Internal Audit Department of the Ministry shows that the cases of religious freedom violation and religious neutrality taking places in public schools are being ignored or remain unidentified. Not only does the Department not use its authority to proactively control and enforce the law in the schools, but it functions ineffectively as a mechanism to respond to existing abrogation;
- ▶ The Department of National Curriculum, despite its authority, does not monitor the implementation process of the National Curriculum, which is considered to be an important legal mechanism in the process of fulfilling the Plan's objectives and in the process of measuring the quality of implementation and identifying any existing shortcomings;
- ▶ The analysis of the public school teacher training programmes indicates the deficit of interconfessional and intercultural issues in the trainings;
- ▶ Despite the attempt of the textbook authors to provide balanced, rationalised information emptied of national and religious privileges, a lack of comprehensive information on the different religious denominations, and their representation in a negative context remains problematic;
- ▶ The conducted research in eight public schools in Tbilisi revealed tendencies of intolerance and a refusal to accept the stranger. This outlines the high risks of indoctrination, proselytism and discrimination during the study process and confirms the successive disclosures of these approaches.

4 REVIEW OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK REGARDING TEACHING RELIGION AT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The main regulatory acts concerning the freedom of religion in public schools and teaching religion are the following: the Constitution of Georgia, the Constitutional Agreement between the State and the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church (hereinafter the Constitutional Agreement), the Law on General Education and other by-laws. This chapter will review and analyse each of these in terms of their convergence with freedom of religion and the principle of secularism.

4.1. CONSTITUTIONAL REGULATION OF TEACHING RELIGION AT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Constitution of Georgia covers the relations between the State and religion in the first chapter, i.e. General provision.

The first paragraph of Article 9 of the Georgian Constitution defines the principle of separation of state and religion:

“The State declares [...] the independence of the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church from the State”.

The Constitution also defines the status of the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church. The first paragraph of Article 9 defines that:

“the State [...] recognises the special role of the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church in the history of Georgia [...]”.

The legal content of *“the recognition of this special role”* is specified by in the Constitutional Agreement, which is also defined in the second paragraph of Article 9.

Article 9 of the Constitution of Georgia was amended on 30 March 2001, which introduced the notion of a constitutional agreement under Supreme Law. In the hierarchy of regulatory acts, the Constitutional Agreement is the highest legally valid act after the Constitution and Constitutional law.²⁶ On the one hand, this means that all other Acts should conform to the Constitutional Agreement, but on the other hand, it means that even the Agreement should conform to the Constitution and Constitutional laws. However, the Constitution itself defines one more scope to assess the Constitutional Agreement. These are the universally recognized principles and norms of International Law, particularly, in the field of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.²⁷

²⁶ 3rd Paragraph of Article 6 under the Georgian Law on Normative Acts

²⁷ Constitution of Georgia, Article 9

A Constitutional Agreement is an agreement between two equal subjects. According to this, the State neither establishes nor registers the Church, but recognizes it as a full-fledged legal entity.²⁸

An assessment of the scope of the Constitutional Agreement is important. According to the practice of the Constitutional Court of Georgia, it only applies to the contracting parties and does not cover any third parties.

“The Georgian State on the one hand and the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church on the other hand, and not any other religious organization, constitute the subjects of the Constitutional Agreement, which is evidenced by every single Article of the Constitutional Agreement.”²⁹

This implies that the Constitutional Agreement will not affect the status of any other religious groups and their legal status. However, the provisions of the Constitutional Agreement should not be understood as a refusal of granting the same rights to other denominations. In other words, the existence of the Constitutional Agreement and its provisions does not imply that other denominations cannot enjoy the same rights. Moreover, in case of inequality of rights this might be considered as discrimination.

Article 5 of the Constitutional Agreement covers the issues of general education. According to the first paragraph:

“teaching a course about the Orthodox religion in educational institutions is voluntary. The Church can provide advice in terms of the development of a curriculum, amendments, the appointment and dismissal of teachers”.

The second paragraph applies to the mutual recognition of the proof document of education issued by the educational institution. The third paragraph states that:

“the State and the church are entitled to implement joint programs in the education system. The State facilitates the functioning of the Church’s educational institution”.

Thus, three forms of Church participation in relation to public schools are defined in the Constitutional Agreement³⁰:

1. The Orthodox religion may be taught at schools as a voluntary course. The Church gives advice in terms of developing course content, and on the appointment and dismissal of teachers. This serves as a precondition to recognise the autonomy of the Church, and in general, of all religious organisations to teach religion and define its authentic content.
2. The State and the Church may jointly implement different programs in public schools. The latter is an independent subject of regulation, rather than teaching Orthodox religion as an independent course at public schools because this opportunity is regulated through the aforementioned case.

28 The Constitutional Agreement between the state and the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church, Article 1.3

29 Constitutional Court of Georgia’s Judgement №2/18/206, November 22, 2002 on the case of citizen Zurab Arshvili against the Parliament of Georgia

30 Only those analyzed forms of communication about the general education for the purpose of research, which obviously is not a thorough analysis

3. The State is obliged to support the functioning of the Church's educational institutions by various means.

The aforementioned does not exclude the possibility that the State might cooperate with other religious organisations through similar methods. Moreover, as it was mentioned above, the principle of constitutional equality obliges the State to support other denominations through all advantages which apply to the subject of the Constitutional Agreement.

According to the Constitutional Agreement, the second Article of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Ministry of Education and the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church³¹ considered the creation of joint working groups to prepare an agreement on the cooperation in the field of education, which should have been implemented in several areas. The following are among them:

- Developing procedures to compile the necessary textbooks to teach Orthodox religion and develop a curriculum, to recruit and train teachers, and to appointment and dismiss them;³²
- Developing procedures to prepare a curriculum for subjects on Orthodox Christianity and participation of Church representatives in the process of reviewing the appropriate literature;³³
- Legal provision for funding and property issues of the Church's educational institutions;³⁴ and
- Defining the forms and conditions of cooperation between the State and the Church on youth education.³⁵

Certain provisions of the Memorandum are a direct result from the Constitutional Agreement and do not themselves create a threat of religious teaching without taking parents' and students' choices into consideration.

However, in terms of compliance with the Constitutional Agreement, one part of the Memorandum is questionable. In particular, the part which determines the role of Church representatives in preparing the curriculum of those subjects which include issues of the Orthodox religion, and their role in the review process of appropriate textbooks. This note makes it possible that all aspects of those courses which include religious issues can be considered as containing topics of Orthodox religion. Among those courses are independent subjects such as Georgian Literature, History and other courses. Despite the creation and functioning of working groups, no result has been achieved when the process was terminated in 2007.

Public schools should be free from a religious worldview. The legal framework defined by the Constitutional Agreement allows the Church to participate in defining the content of teaching religion and the study process in case

31 EMC requested the Memorandum from the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, however, this document is not kept in the Ministry. The study used the text of the Memorandum which was published on the official web page of the Patriarchate. See: <http://www.patriarchate.ge/?action=text/samartali09>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

32 Paragraph B of Article 2, The Constitutional Agreement between the state and the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church.

33 Ibid, paragraph C, Article 2

34 Ibid, paragraph D, Article 2

35 Ibid, paragraph E, Article 2

this type of course exists in the education process. According to the Law on General Education, teaching of religion can only be an elective and the will to study of religion (According to the aims of this research by teaching of religion it is implicated confessional approach to religious education and by teaching about religion it is not meant confessional approach but rather neutral one) is to be expressed by students.³⁶ This issue is enshrined in the law on General Education, which links teaching certain religions to students' wishes.

This approach does not question the protection of a religious freedom standard at public schools. However, it is important that other religious denominations enjoy the same opportunities and that the existing regulations allow for this equal enjoyment. Any other practice is against the Constitution of Georgia which defines the relationship between the State and religion, and is also against the principle of freedom of religion.

4.2. THE LAW ON GENERAL EDUCATION OF GEORGIA

The Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law on General Education in 2005. It redefined the relationship between religion and education. The innovation brought several significant principles which represent the main postulates of the country's education policy.

The Law on General Education defines the independence of public schools from any religious and political groups as one of the main aims of the state policy on education³⁷ which not only separates, but also protects public schools from interference and influence of religious institutions. Through these changes the State has eradicated the institutional links between the education system and religious organizations, and this relationship is only defined within the scope of the Constitutional Agreement.

Article 13 of the Law defines a public school as a neutral space and prohibits

“the use of study process at public schools for the purposes of religious indoctrination, proselytism or forced assimilation”.

This highlights the will of the State to consider public schools as public spaces free of religious content, where religion is not seen as a belief as such, but as a system of knowledge. Thus, defining the convergence of education policy with the requirements of the secular framework. In other words, this approach excludes any religious preaching during the study process at public schools.

According to the same regulation, the celebration of state holidays and historical dates at public schools is not limited. This also applies to those events which aim at establishing national and universal values.³⁸

The next component which should ensure a school's neutrality from religious affiliations implies that the presence of religious symbols should be banned within public school infrastructure. In this regard the Law allows only one exception, namely, if this would serve any academic interests. The right to freedom of religion of a student, parent

³⁶ See below for details on the same page

³⁷ Sub-paragraph C, Paragraph 2, Article 3, Georgian Law on General Education

³⁸ Ibid, Paragraph 2, Article 13

or teacher is also highlighted, and they are protected from fulfilling any obligation which is against their belief, religion or conscience.

The Law does not consider the possibility of the State to offer teaching of religion to students. In case students express their will to receive religious education, however, it does not exclude the possibility to allow teaching of religion within the school education system, provided that it is done on a voluntary basis.

This implies that there should be a possibility of using the school infrastructure for this purpose. Thus, the Law affirms the right of students to receive religious education during their free time at school:

“Students of public schools are entitled to learn religion or conduct religious rituals voluntarily during their free time at school, if it serves the purpose of acquiring religious education.”³⁹

The aforementioned note explicitly determines the students’ right to acquire education of specific religion. The note in the Constitutional Agreement, which connects developing a curriculum, making amendments, and the appointment and dismissal of teachers on advice given by the Church, is gaining importance in the context of implementing this norm.

Thus, in case of a students’ will to learn religion, the Church (or any other religious organization) plays a significant role in the voluntary learning process. However, it does not make a final decision on the content of teaching and appointment of teachers.

In addition, the teaching is conducted on the school premises and therefore it is subject to the control and supervision mechanisms of the Ministry of Education.

4.3. TEACHING RELIGION IN OTHER EDUCATION POLICY DOCUMENTS

In order to evaluate the education policy, an analysis of the “National Goals of General Education” and the “National Curriculum” is important.

Review of the “National Goals of General Education”

The Government of Georgia approved the document “National Goals of General Education” on October 18th, 2004 in order to establish common approaches and ensure a single state policy in the field of education and science. In the document the Government considers the shaping of adolescents into tolerant citizens as the main goal of education. The Resolution states:

“[...]Mutual respect, mutual understanding and mutual knowledge skills have a special significance to the functioning of the society in today’s dynamic, ethnically and culturally diverse world. The school should develop the adolescent’s ability to protect human rights and respect individuals, which he/she will use to maintain his/her and other’s identity. The adolescent should be able to implement the acquired theoretical knowledge on basic human rights and live with these principles.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid, Paragraph 4, Article 18

⁴⁰ Sub-paragraph “T” of Georgian Government’s Resolution №84, October 18, 2004 about approval of “National Goals of the General Education”

Specific activities to implement this approach are discussed in the National Curriculum.

Review of the National Curriculum

The first National Curriculum, based on the “National Goals of General Education”, was approved in 2006 ⁴¹and identifies the objectives of the basic grade level:

“A student should be given information about Georgia’s and the world’s political, social, cultural, religious and ethnic diversity. Based on this information a student should be able to analyze significant historical and geographical events from the past and the present and similarity-differences of different eras and society development”.

The National Curriculum is the first attempt to reflect the national goals of general education into a document which discusses in detail the introduction of government policy in public schools.

A second curriculum adopted by the Ministry reiterates the same principles⁴² is considered to be a valid document and, therefore, determines the present education policy.

The current curriculum for the years 2011-2016, which identifies the goals of the learning process and the means to achieve it, includes several key components. Specifically, Article 5 of the plan states that *“the school should facilitate protection principles of mutual respect and equality”*.

Social and civic competence are considered to be a priority of the plan. The latter implies that:

“in order to integrate into civil life, it is necessary to develop such skills and values as constructive cooperation, problem solving, critical and creative thinking, decision-making, tolerance, respect of rights of others, recognition of democratic principles and etc.”⁴³

Research which studied this issue at the preliminary level in Georgian schools states that:

“despite the presented significant competences in terms of their intercultural nature in the competences of the National Curriculum, the first-hand ‘intercultural competences’ are not presented here, which should be considered as a weakness of the National Curriculum”⁴⁴

The Action Plan for the same time period, which is reviewed below, does not consider religion as an independent subject. However, this component is vastly presented at every level (elementary, middle and secondary) in the social science subjects⁴⁵ (History, Civic Education, Geography).

41 Decree №841 of the Georgian Minister for Education and Science, 28 September, 2006 about “the approval of the National Curriculum”

42 Decree №36/N of the Georgian Minister for Education and Science, 11 March, 2011 about “the approval of the National Curriculum”

43 Decree №36/N of Georgian Minister of Education and Science, 11 March, 2011 about “the approval of the National Curriculum”, Article 48, Part 3, sub-paragraph “l”

44 Study of the aspects of the intercultural education at the elementary grade level in Georgian schools, report of the study; Center for civil integration and international relations, Shalva Tabatadze, Natia Gorgodze, Tbilisi, 2013, pg. 11

45 The letter of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 21 January, 2014, MES 9 14 00023712

The National Curriculum does not consider teaching about religion as a compulsory subject. However, the school has the right to offer its students additional education services which are provided by the National Curriculum and/or education and mentor services which are not provided by the National Curriculum, including teaching about religion.⁴⁶

The list and description of additional education and mentor services is part of the Curriculum and is approved by the council of school teachers.⁴⁷ The school has the opportunity to decide about this type of teaching within its autonomy.⁴⁸ The public school itself decides on the content of the subject and those teaching materials the subject will be based on. Despite the fact that there is no preliminary control mechanism within the Ministry for this type of teaching, the school is limited in its decision by current legislation requirements and the goals of the National Curriculum.

This implies that the content of teaching complies with the "National Goals of General Education". The Ministry explains the current reality as follows:

"In order to provide a service which is not covered by the National Curriculum, the school within its autonomy should use those textbooks which are selected based on the main indicators of the general education system and enable the achievement of the national goals of the general education."⁴⁹ Besides the general legal framework which should limit the school, the Ministry on the practical level does not possess preliminary control mechanisms on the content of the teaching and materials. Approved textbooks are only used for subjects determined by the National Curriculum. Therefore we don't know what is used for teaching [teaching religion]. It is not provided and thus it is not necessary to be approved".⁵⁰

In this case, however, the Ministry is able to utilize those mechanisms which imply compliance control of the teaching process with the objectives of the legislation.

It is obvious that in the case of a school offering this type of subject to its students, the current legislation does not provide any effective control mechanisms on the content of teaching about religion.

According to EMC research in eight schools, religion is taught as confessional teaching in one school, namely, Tbilisi Public School N87. The Old Testament is taught in classes 3 and 4, while the New Testament is taught in 5th and 6th class. The textbooks used for teaching are neither approved nor coordinated with the Ministry of Education.⁵¹ The Ministry itself confirms that it does not have information on the teaching of religion in that specific school.⁵² Moreover, the Ministry does not have any information on how many schools across the country teach religion.⁵³

46 Decree №36/N of the Georgian Minister of Education and Science, 22 March, 2011 about "the approval of the National Curriculum"; Article 12

47 Decree №36/N of the Georgian Minister of Education and Science, 11 March, 2011 about "the approval of the National Curriculum"; Article 11, Paragraph 6

48 Letter #467792 of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 15 October, 2013

49 Letter MES 9 14 00023712 of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 21 January, 2014

50 Interview with Natia Jokhadze, head of the Department of the National Curriculum

51 Phone interview with Maka Bejhanishvili, principal of Public School N87

52 Interview with Natia Jokhadze, head of the Department of the National Curriculum

53 Letter #467792 of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 15 October, 2013

Despite flawed preliminary control mechanisms on teaching about religion, no explicit procedures or regulation rules apply when teaching of religion at a public school is based on the students' will. This should be considered as a deficiency of the current legal framework.

Besides allowing teaching about religion on a facultative basis, the National Curriculum provides that teaching "Culture and Religion" is covered in the following subjects and classes. Our Georgia (5-6), History (7-9,11-12), and Civic Education (7-8).

The National Curriculum defines the goal of teaching religion at the basic level:

"Teaching History, Geography and Civic Education should help a student realise the diversity of an individual's experience, importance of one's country's achievements in the wake of the acquisition of humanity. A student should be given information about Georgia's and the world's natural, political, social, economic, cultural, religious and ethnic diversity. Based on this information, a student should be able to analyse significant historical or geographical events from the past and the present and similarities and differences of various eras and the society development".⁵⁴

According to the National Curriculum, the goal of the subject Culture and Religion is:

"to illustrate the diversity of man-made cultural heritage on the earth to a student and help him/her to classify it, help a student identify the essence and importance of religion and diversity of the world's religious systems".⁵⁵

This document also determines the results of the study process at the end of every class or level, and also contains indicators for students to achieve those results which are grouped according to study areas. The goals of the plan are presented by illustrating several examples for the study area of Religion and Culture (see appendix #1).

It is worth mentioning that the plan does not consider the area of "Culture and Religion" in terms of achieving results in civic education subject areas, which can be considered as a shortcoming of a subject matter standard.

4.4. CODE OF ETHICS, PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND TEXTBOOK APPROVAL CRITERIA

The Ministry of Education approved a professional Codes of Ethics for teachers, principals, school resource officers and a Code of Conduct for students, which took into account the request for the prohibition of religious propaganda.

As a rule, standards of the aforementioned ethical code are a part of the employment contract and are mandatory for all persons who are subject of the agreement.

The Code of Ethics for teachers prohibits a teacher in his/her relations with a student from "religious (except those school teachers who are engaged in religious education activities) and political propaganda",⁵⁶ and it sets that "a teach-

54 Decree №36/N of the Georgian Minister of Education and Science, 11 March, 2011 about "the approval of the National Curriculum"; elementary level

55 Decree №36/N of the Georgian Minister of Education and Science, 11 March, 2011 about "the approval of the National Curriculum"; Culture and Religion

56 Decree N57/N of Georgian Minister for Education and Science , 14 July, 2010 about "the approval of Teacher's Code of Professional Ethics", Article 4.9.

er shall pay equal attention to every student regardless of their sex, race, language, religion, national, ethnic and social origin”⁵⁷

The Code of Ethics for principals shares the same standard.⁵⁸ Standards of ethics/conduct governing school resource officers⁵⁹ and students⁶⁰ also apply the prohibition of religious propaganda.

Ensuring the independence and impartiality of teachers, school principals, school resource officers and proper implementation of the ethical norms are also indicated in both of the aforementioned documents.

The Act, approved in 2008, defines professional standards for teachers, requirements for intercultural teaching and its practical implementation. The standard determines that:

*“a teacher is familiar with multicultural and multilingual approaches and principles of inclusive education and uses them for the planning and implementation of her/his own practice”*⁶¹

The general rule of approving textbooks for general education institutions is based on the following criteria in terms of assessing a textbook:

- To what extent does the textbook meet the requirements of the National Curriculum and does it facilitate achieving results in all areas of the subject program of the grade/level;
- To what extent is the textbook based on the methodical guidelines and cross-cutting priorities described in the National Curriculum; and
- To what extent does the textbook facilitate the development of those values and skills, which are presented in the “National Goals of General Education”⁶²

According to the same Decree, a textbook will not be assessed or approved in case its content, design or something else includes discriminatory or/and defamatory elements (language, nationality, sex, ethnic or social origin, etc.).⁶³

57 Ibid, Article 4.11

58 Decree N 80/N of the Georgian Minister for Education and Science, August 30, 2010 about “the approval of the Code of Ethics for School Principals”, Article 3.6/12

59 Decree N92/N of the Georgian Minister for Education and Science , May 27, 2011 “about the approval of the Code of Ethics for the school resource officer”, Article 2.6

60 Decree N79/N of the Georgian Minister for Education and Science, 30 August, 2010 “about the approval of the Code of Conduct for a Student”, Article 7.7

61 Decree №1014 of the Georgian Minister for Education and Science, 21 November, 2008 “about the approval of Teachers Professional Standard”, Article 5, sub-paragraph B

62 Decree N30/N of the Minister for Education and Science, 25 February, 2011 about “the approval of the rule and price for approving textbooks of the educational institution

63 The aforementioned note was re- included in the decree in 2012

4.5. REVIEW OF LEGAL MECHANISMS OF EDUCATION POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND CONTROL

In addition to substantive norms, which prohibits proselytizing, indoctrination, discrimination and defines teachers' professional and ethical standards in the public school system, the existing legal framework includes different legal mechanisms to control the implementation of these norms.

Due to the existing model of the education system, the control and accountability mechanisms are provided at different levels. Specifically, the control on the implementation of legislation requirements is carried out by the school as well as by the Ministry of Education.

According to the Law on General Education:

"The principal of the institution, structural unit and/or a member of the structural unit within their own competences are responsible for: the implementation of the National Curriculum by the public school, implementation of Georgian legislation in the field of general education, implementation of the Ministry's individual administrative-legal regulations, study process and proper expenditure of funds".⁶⁴

At the school level, the Disciplinary Committee reviews the cases of disciplinary misconduct by a teacher and makes a decision on them. The Committee consists of an equal number of teachers, parents and secondary school pupils. In case of an appeal against the decision adopted by the Committee the issue is reviewed by the Board of Trustees or the Appeal Committee.⁶⁵

Control mechanisms for the implementation of legislation requirements at the public school is not limited to the public school level. The Ministry as a State control body retains the authority to enforce repressive or preventive control mechanisms which it implements through the Internal Audit Department (a structural unit of the former General Inspection).

In case of a violation of the law within the system of the Ministry, official misconduct and/or incompatible action with the goals of the Ministry, the Internal Audit Department is authorized to do the following:

- Examine and discover, determine their causes and contributing factors, and implement preventive measures;
- Inspect in order to check and identify, prepare an inspection report and submit it to the Minister; and
- Prepare a report after having studied statements and letters containing information about these types of actions.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Law on General Education, Article 35.1

⁶⁵ Ibid, Article 38

⁶⁶ Georgian Government's Decree N 37 from May 21, 2004 "about the approval of the Regulation of the Ministry of Education and Science, Article 4.1.3

The scope of the competences of this department indicates that it can use reactive as well as proactive control mechanisms, which make the scope of its authorities broad and flexible. In particular, it reacts in case it receives information regarding a violation and also aims at detecting and identifying such facts.

On the one hand, this aforementioned department should respond to specific cases of violation and react and on the other hand, it should identify the main existing challenges within the system and contribute towards the shaping of policies of the Ministry of Education in order to eliminate these threats. The report about the violation prepared by the department may serve as a basis for the Ministry while using the mechanism provided by Article 49 of the Law on General Education. According to this significant control lever:

“in case of a structural unit of a public school violates the requirements of the Georgian legislation and individual administrative-legal regulations of the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry is responsible to issue a written notice and/or address the school’s Board of Trustees with relevant justified advise to terminate the school principal’s authorities before the end of the term.”⁶⁷

The Board of Trustees is responsible to review this case and make a justified decision. The Ministry may not agree with this decision and terminate the principal’s authority before the end of his/her term.

In addition, the Ministry has the authority to dismiss the Board of Trustees and/or terminate the authorities of the principal before the end of the term based on different reasons. One of them may apply to the case where the school fails to eradicate the violation.⁶⁸

Therefore, according to the current regulations, the Ministry is not authorized to directly make a decision regarding a teachers’ responsibility. However, in case the school does not react properly, the Department of Internal Audit of the Ministry will investigate the case and use legal levers to convince the school principal and the Board of Trustees to study the case.

Besides the aforementioned control mechanisms it is significant that the Ministry not only ensures the introduction of the National Curriculum in school systems, but also facilitates the introduction, and monitors the Ministry’s declared policy implementation in terms of self-control.

Obviously the monitoring should imply control over the extent in which the National Curriculum and its specific subjects achieve the goals of the plan. This authority is defined by Ministry regulation and falls under the competences of the National Curriculum Department.⁶⁹

If specific cases of violation of a student’s freedom of belief/religion, religious discrimination, insulting religious feelings or other similar cases reach the level of a criminal offence⁷⁰, criminal justice legislation will be enforced.

67 Georgian Law on General Education, Article 49. 6

68 Ibid, Article 49

69 Georgian Government’s Decree N 37 from May 21, 2004 “About the approval of the Regulation of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, Article 4

70 Article 142, Article 150, Article 156 and other Articles of the Criminal Code of Georgia

5 PRACTICE OF CONTROL, EXECUTION AND PREVENTIVE MECHANISMS BY THE MINISTRY

5.1 THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF ENFORCEMENT AND CONTROL MECHANISMS

Within the scope of this research, information was requested from the Ministry regarding the violation of the Law on General Education or other legal norms ensuring religious neutrality and the principles of freedom, including religious propaganda/proselytism, indoctrination, improper use of religious symbols, violation of freedom of belief/religion, religious discrimination, offending religious feelings/engaging students in religious rituals and other similar cases by a teacher/ school administration staff/ during the previous five years in the educational institutions.

The Ministry indicates that:

“information regarding violations of the principles of freedom of religious neutrality, legal acts and other kinds of violations mentioned in your correspondence at the educational institutions is not kept in the Ministry.”⁷¹

This indicates that the Ministry, on the one hand, does not have a systematic view of the problem or a strategy based on analyzing the problem, but on the other hand, statistics of these kinds of violations are not kept by the Ministry either. Despite various problems indicated in different reports none of these law violations in this regard are registered by the Ministry, which explicitly illustrates the ineffectiveness of the Internal Audit Department of the Ministry and the lack of proactive utilization of authority as well as the practice of reaction to violations.

Several significant documents indicate the ineffectiveness of the mechanism. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance states that the violations are not usually subjects of discussion for the school disciplinary committee and they cannot reach the court, which is caused by a lack of knowledge about these mechanisms and also a lack of confidence in these mechanisms.⁷² The U.S. State Department report also indicates the ineffectiveness of the General Inspection.⁷³

Besides the ineffectiveness of the Division of Inspection under the Internal Audit Department, the lack of monitoring the implementation of the National Curriculum constitutes a significant shortcoming in the activities of the Ministry of Education. The Commission states in its 2010 report that due to the fact the approach to teaching religious issues is newly introduced there is a need for its proper implementation, and the monitoring of this process if necessary.⁷⁴

71 The Letter #467792 of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, October 15, 2013

72 The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Report on Georgia, (fourth cycle of monitoring), adopted on April 28, 2010, pg.19. <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Georgia/GEO-CbC-IV-2010-017-GEO.pdf>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

73 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, And Labor; International Religious Freedom Report 2012; Government Practices; <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?dliid#wrapper>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

74 The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Report on Georgia, (fourth cycle of monitoring), adopted on April 28, 2010, pg.10. <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Georgia/GEO-CbC-IV-2010-017-GEO.pdf>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

Despite the necessity for monitoring and control mechanisms and their enforcement, the Ministry has not implemented such monitoring yet. The Head of the Ministry's National Curriculum Department believes the lack of a monitoring system presents a weakness in the Department's work and the education system:

"Monitoring of the National Curriculum is our Achilles Heel. We are aware of that. We have not progressed since the introduction of the new National Curriculum. We wrote the National Curriculum and we have not moved to the implementation of it".⁷⁵

Lately, the Department has started the monitoring process of the National Curriculum on a small scale which implies observation in classes, interviews with teachers and other methods. Currently, the monitoring process has been implemented in a small number of schools in Tbilisi.

EMC has contacted the Ministry of Internal Affairs in order to identify the violations of religious freedoms at school and to assess the effective response of law enforcement authorities. We requested recorded information from the last five years about those facts which took place in educational institutions, such as cases of violations of a freedom of student's belief/religion, religious discrimination, offences of religious feelings and similar cases by a teacher/school administration staff/school administration.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs⁷⁶ suggested an incident⁷⁷ at the Oni Public School and stated that law enforcement agencies have not recorded any similar incidents during the reporting period.

5.2. DEFICIENCIES OF TEACHERS' TRAINING PROGRAMS

One of the main reasons why the Ministry of Education rejected the idea of introducing teaching religion as a compulsory subject during the reform process in 2005 was the lack of qualified staff. The latter has constituted a significant problem for the education system. Despite developing a plan to teach religion, the Ministry refuses to introduce this subject as compulsory.⁷⁸

Besides some individual cases where disciplinary measures against teachers and principals were enforced, which may be called a reactive policy⁷⁹ of the Ministry, the allocation of proper state resources and efforts for the training of teachers was significant in order to introduce a new policy of reform.

In order to introduce the new vision of the Ministry and overcome wrongful practices used by teachers over the years, a training and resource renewal policy should have been defined as a priority issue which was not the case.

75 Interview with Natia Jokhadze, Head of the Department of the National Curriculum

76 Letter #2620897 of the Ministry of International Affairs of Georgia, December 25, 2013

77 Report of the Ombudsman of Georgia about the Human Rights situation in Georgia, 2012, pg. 525; <http://www.ombudsman.ge/files/downloads/ge/iicsizmorgdfkakhkdqvc.pdf>. (accessed 20/02/2014)

78 Interview with Sophiko Lobzhanidze, Consultant at the Legal Entity of Public Law –National Center for Teacher Professional Development.

79 Interview with Ana Zhvania, former deputy Minister of Education and Science of Georgia

The report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance on Georgia, published in 2010 (fourth monitoring cycle), devotes its attention to recommendations on monitoring the implementation process of new approaches of teaching religion and the necessity to bring these approaches to each school.

“ECRI gives recommendations that the Georgian government should approach every public school with a clear message about the recognition of religious diversity and respect in schools. The measures should be taken to ensure that every teacher respects the principle of religious neutrality, which is provided by the legislation. For instance initial and ongoing training for every worker in the field of education in multicultural environment should be provided.”⁸⁰

The data provided by the National Centre for Teacher Professional Development (hereinafter the Center), a legal entity under public law, indicates that, despite teachers’ training programmes and the organisation of several information events, the work carried out by the State remains insufficient in terms of covering intercultural content as well as in the quantity of teachers.⁸¹

According to the data⁸², the total number of teaching staff in Georgian public schools is 59 217.

Teachers’ training modules include issues of intercultural education and religious diversity. The topic on the main principles of intercultural education is included in the long-term training module on professional skills, *“Classroom management and conflict”*.

This module takes approximately nine hours. Two hours and 35 minutes are dedicated to *“Effective Strategies for Resolution of Value Conflicts”*; one hour and two minutes to *“General Principles of Intercultural Education and Effective Strategies for Intercultural Classroom Management”*.

A total of 1 272 teachers has participated in this training.

The topic of religious diversity is covered in the training module *“School Relation Ethics”* and this training lasts for about eight hours, out of which three hours are spent on *“Intercultural Education”*.

33 teachers in total have received this training so far.

In the first module (*“Purpose and Principles of Civic Education”*) of the long-term professional training programme for teachers of Civic Education 15 hours are dedicated to the issue of *“Freedom and Equality”*. In the second module (*“Civic Education Activities and Components”*), this is 36 hours. Out of these 36 hours, one hour and ten minutes is spent on the issue of *“Intercultural Education”*.⁸³

In this module, 251 Civic Education teachers have participated.

80 The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Report on Georgia, (fourth cycle of monitoring), adopted on April 28, 2010, pg.28, Paragraph 41

81 Letter #467792 of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, October 15, 2013

82 The data was provided in November 2013

83 Letter MES 7 13 00580119 of the the Legal Entity of Public Law –National Center for Teacher Professional Development of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, December 5, 2013

Only teachers taking part in the programme “Teach Georgian as a Second Language” receive a training course on “Ethnic and Religious Tolerance”.

80 certified teachers are involved in this project.⁸⁴

The scope and time spent on religious education issues in these programmes, the single character of the trainings and the number of teachers trained illustrates the insufficiency of the work the Ministry is delivering.

Representatives from the Centre agree with the assessment that the issues of intercultural education does not directly cover religion in the implemented training programmes. In addition, the information given during the modules is of a general nature. The Deputy Director of the Centre indicates that teachers’ intolerant attitudes are not considered to be an important challenge by the Ministry.⁸⁵

An analysis of the current situation indicates that the component of intercultural and religious education in teachers’ training, which should result in a change of teachers’ attitudes and behavior, has not been implemented properly by the Ministry. This issue remains on the agenda.

The legal framework for teaching religion in public schools and freedom of religion ensures the freedom of religion and religious neutrality, and defines that general education policy has to be compatible with the principles of a secular state.

Teaching about religion as a compulsory subject is not provided, however, it is possible for the school to teach this subject. Also, the legislation allows for the possibility of confessional teaching, on a voluntary basis and upon the students’ demand. The rule of the Church’s involvement in determining the content of teaching and the study process is defined in the Constitutional Agreement, which grants the same rights to other religious organisations.

The legislation does not determine, or explicitly define, any preliminary control mechanisms on teaching religion under the Ministry of Education. This can be considered as a gap in the legislation.

Despite the Ministry’s proactive and reactive control mechanisms, an analysis of the current practice indicates that the Ministry is not using them properly and, therefore, it does not ensure the proper enforcement of legislation in the public school system.

In addition, after the evaluation of the Ministry’s efforts in ensuring teachers’ training, it is obvious that these efforts are insufficient. Until now, the implemented activities have been unable to mitigate the risks of proselytism and indoctrination in public schools. This issue illustrates the need for the Ministry to set certain policy priorities.

84 Letter #467792 of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, October 15, 2013

85 Interview with Irina Abuladze, Deputy Director of the Legal Entity of Public Law-National Center for Teacher Professional Development

6 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF HISTORY TEXTBOOKS IN TERMS OF THEIR RELIGIOUS COMPONENT

The aim of the following chapter is to display how balanced the discourse of history textbooks are towards different religious denominations. The research examines the following textbooks which are approved by the Ministry of Education:

- Textbook: **“Our Georgia”**, class 5, Logos Press
Authors: Mzia Surguladze, Nino Mindadze, Vaja Neidze, Koba Kharadze
- Textbook: **“Our Georgia”**, class 6, Logos Press
Authors: Mzia Surguladze, Nino Mindadze, Vaja Neidze, Nino Eremashvili, Giorgi Mshvenieradze
- Textbook: **“History”**, class 7, Bakur Sulakauri Publishing
Authors: Giorgi Sanikidze, Levan Gordeziani, Lali Pirtskhalava
- Textbook: **“History”**, class 8, Bakur Sulakauri Publishing
Authors: Giorgi Sanikidze, Revaz Gachechiladze, Levan Gordeziani, Nino Kighuradze, Zviad Miminoshvili
- Textbook: **“History of Georgia”**, class 9, Bakur Sulakauri Publishing
Authors: Nodar Asatiani, Mariam Lordtkipanidze, Farnaoz Lomashvili, Roin Metreveli, Giorgi Otkhmezuri
- Textbook: **“History”**, class 11, Bakur Sulakauri Publishing
Authors: Nino Kighuradze, Giorgi Sanikidze, Levan Gordeziani, Lali Pirtskhalava, Revaz Gachechiladze, Nodar Asatiani
- Textbook: **“History”**, class 12, Bakur Sulakauri Publishing
Authors: Nino Kighuradze, Revaz Gachechiladze, Giorgi Sanikidze

The revealed tendencies from the textbooks are presented below:

1. “US-OTHERS”

The first step in the critical analysis of textbooks is the examination of strategies of self-representation and the representation of others. Textbooks for classes 5 and 6 reflect the dichotomy “us-others” more often.

Ethnic Georgians and Christians (hereafter Orthodox Christians) are represented as “us”, while other ethnic and religious groups, for example Jews, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Muslims, representatives of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Protestants or Catholics are represented as “others”. The textbook itself aims to introduce the different regions of Georgia and their local communities.

However, from the very beginning it distinguishes Georgians from people of a different ethnic background, resulting in the dichotomy “us-others”.

“This textbook will introduce all the regions of Georgia to you. Step by step you’ll find out why Georgians, living in different regions of our country, and the people of other nationalities are all considered citizens of the Georgian State. (Pg. 5, 5th class)

From the introduction on, the seemingly neutral sentence aiming to encourage pupils’ civic consciousness uses the dichotomy “us-others” already.

The textbook for class 9, while discussing Christian saints and the announcement of Christianity as a state religion, the following phrase is found:

“St. George was Cappadocian too - one of the greatest, maybe the most respected saint of ours”.

St. George is mentioned here as “our saint”, not as a “Christian saint”.

It follows that the word “our” functions as an equivalent to the word “Christian” and indirectly excludes “other” religious minorities living in Georgia, the latter becoming “others” themselves.

In the textbooks for classes 6 and 9 the role of Christianity in political decision making processes is clearly distinguished and these decisions are emphasized (pg. 106, 6th class; pg. 74, 9th class).

The textbooks also point out that the choice between a coreligionist (*us*) and a pagan/Muslim (*other*) was always made in favour of the former and against the latter. Despite the fact that the coreligionist Byzantine Empire had more than once been an unfavourable ally for Georgia, while the latter nevertheless kept supporting the “Orthodox” ally using the argument:

“Would it not be shameful if we side with the enemy of supreme being? (Christ)” (pg. 113, 6th class)

In the 6th class textbook there is an example of a Laz nobleman discussing the possibility of siding with Iran against the Byzantine Empire or siding with Iran against the Empire.

The authors evaluate the position of the supporters of the Byzantine Empire as “common sense” because:

“Georgians stand closer to the Byzantine Empire in terms of lifestyle and tradition, and have the same religion, while Persians are fighting against Christianity itself” (pg. 80, 9th class).

This position clearly prevents the possibility to critically analyze the opinions of both sides without any predispositions.

2. "ERASING" AND NEGATIVE CONTEXTS

In the history textbooks we find a positive self-representation and a negative representation of the "others". Moreover, there is a tendency of "erasing" or "silencing" the role of the different religious denominations, and of providing limited or no information about their activities. If, however, there is any information they are put in a negative context. Generally, in the case of other religious denominations, the tendency of "silence" is clearly manifested. Though Muslims and Islam are frequently represented in a negative context. In textbooks, especially those intended for the 5th and 6th class, the non-Orthodox thread is "erased" or "silenced".

For example, the textbook for class 5, describing the cultural heritage of Georgia, displays only Orthodox temples, while on the other hand, no illustrations of cult buildings of other religious confessions (Mosque, Synagogue, Catholic Church) are given. Page 55 speaks of Tbilisi:

"In Old Tbilisi, among the Orthodox Churches, you can also find the shrines of other religious denominations."

Thus, verbally designated shrines of "other religions" reproduces the dichotomy between "us" and "others". Ours (the Orthodox temples) are specified and placed in the foreground, while the others (religious buildings of other confessions), according to the authors, do not require any sort of specification.

According to the National Curriculum, a textbook must introduce pupils into the religious and ethnic diversity of Georgia. However, the aforementioned textbook gives more information on Christianity than "other" religions represented in Georgia. The history textbook for class 5 completely ignores the religious diversity in Adjara as well as the ethnic and religious diversity in the Kakheti region.

For example, the authors of the textbook remain almost silent on Muslim Georgians and their places of worship. Even if they mention Muslims or the Islam they speak of them in negative terms.

The 6th class textbook provides more information about the Islam, but this information is scarce and incomplete. The textbook analysis revealed a tendency of "erasing" and "silencing" the role of Muslims in two different ways: on the one hand, there is no positive information on the Islam and Muslims, about their culture and the influence Islamic civilization had on Georgia and, more generally, on medieval Europe; on the other hand, it seems authors feel ashamed to affirm the role of Islam in the development of the Georgian state and culture and, for this particular reason, Islam is integrated into larger groups, placing it in the background.

For example, page 42 and 43 provide limited information about the spread of religions in Georgia. In an introductory paragraph it is written that:

“Jews, Catholic Christians, representatives of the Armenian Apostolic Church and other, rather small religious groups, had been living amongst Orthodox Christians for centuries and contributing to the development of the Georgian State and Culture” (pg. 42, 6th class).

Thus, Jews, Catholic Christians, representatives of the Armenian Apostolic Church are mentioned together with Orthodox Christians, but Muslims are placed under the more general category of “other”, “small” religious groups.

On the one hand, the 6th class textbook does not mention anything positive about Muslims and on the other hand, it frequently represents them in a negative context. Providing incomplete information may encourage negative attitudes towards Muslims and create low self-esteem with Muslims themselves. There are only a few exceptions where information about the Islam is given in a neutral context. (e.g. pg. 5, 6th class)

It should be mentioned that in the textbooks for classes 5 and 6 where almost nothing is positively written about the Islam and Muslims are only represented in a negative context is rather problematic. However, information on the Islam becomes more diverse and acceptable in the textbooks for classes 7, 8, 9 and 11.

In the textbooks for class 12 less attention is paid to religion. In the 5th and 6th class textbooks, Islam and Zoroastrianism are often represented as political tools used for enslaving Georgian people. In the cases presented, conquerors were forcing Christian Georgians to “change their belief” and defending Christianity is equated with national pride. the textbook for class 9 it is outlined that Zoroastrianism and Islam both functioned as the ideological foundation of the “enemies”.

Thus, it is outlined that religion was used as an ideological weapon, since, during that time, it represented a political identity and a dominant symbol of the differences in civilization. However, we did not find an attempt of critical examination of this subject nor a comprehensive analysis. Representing other religions in negative context only, while providing limited or no information about them, - creates the danger of only perceiving them in a negative context and, therefore, it encourages spreading of inadequate stereotypes about these religions.

“A powerful Muslim state was situated in the south west of Georgia, the Sultanate of Rum, was situated. Its ruler, Ruqn ad-Din, thought: “It must be easy to conquer Georgia, since it is ruled by a woman”. He assembled a numerous army and marched towards Georgia. Besides that, he sent an abusive letter to Tamar, saying: “Either you convert to Islam and become my wife, or I will destroy your country!” (pg 44, 5th class)

The above text is considered to be gender insensitive.

“They gave land to local peasants only if they had already been converted to Islam. A large number of peasants were obliged to change their religion in order to stay in their homeland (pg 158, 5th class).

The following extracts are found in the textbook of class 6:

“The Arab commander demanded that first they were beaten with sticks and then converted to Islam. The brothers refused to change their religion” (pg. 115); *“After the battle that lasted 28 days Abul-kasim managed to seize Kvelistsikhe, captured Gobron and demanded from him to convert to Islam”* (pg. 116); *“The Islam spread*

out in Georgia when the southern lands of our country were annexed by the Ottoman Empire... People in exile were forced to convert to Islam" (pg. 43); "In the 70s of the 13th century, Egyptian Mameluks sacked the Holy Cross Monastery and changed it into a Mosque." (pg. 148)

While speaking of Arabs and Muslims, the conquest wars are frequently outlined while no information is given about the achievements of the Arabic culture. From the very beginning, Arabs and Muslim are mentioned as the "enemy" or "conqueror", while the influence of Islamic civilization and Arabic culture, philosophy, science or poetry on Georgia is completely ignored. This situation is more or less settled in the textbook of class 11, where the authors deal with the influence Islamic culture had on European culture and thought (pg 248-254, 11th class).

While 6th class textbook speaks of David the Builder as the ultimate enemy of Islam, the 11th class textbook gives several positive examples:

"Oh, the warriors of Christ! If we fight honestly we'll be able to defeat not only a numerous followers of Satan, but Satan himself!" (pg 124, 6th class).

In this quote, Muslims are mentioned as followers of "Satan". The mentioning Muslims in a negative context is rather symptomatic. Though, in the 11th class textbook, authors speak more positively about David the Builder's attitudes towards Muslims and even gives several examples.

"... Arab historian suggests that David often went to the Mosque, especially on Fridays. He used to listen to the sermons, read the Quran and gave gold to Muslim religious figures. David built a shelter for Dervishes and poets, often helping them by giving money and inviting them on majlis. He respected the Muslims more than they were respected by their own Muslim rulers" (pg. 253; 11th class)

The textbook for class 7 continues the tendency of putting the Islam and Zoroastrianism in a negative context, but there are several exceptions where the Islam or Muslims are mentioned positively (pg. 136; pg. 141; pg. 193, 7th class).

For example:

"Muslims turned out to be more humane than the crusaders. Not only did they not damage the Christian population of Jerusalem, but they even upheld the freedom of religion. "I know, as much as you, that Jerusalem is the temple of God and I don't want to insult its sanctuaries with a bloodshed" - Salah al-Din appealed to population" (pg. 136, 7th class).

In the same textbook there is a case where Muslims are presented as "victims". Outlining cases like this, where Muslims are presented as humane and, on the contrary, victimized, will prevent the stereotypes according to which they are always "conquerors" and "abusers".

"Originally, the inquisition was directed against Jews demanding they become Christians or leave their country. The politics directed towards Muslims had a similar character."

It must be mentioned that even in the case where Muslims are represented as victims, the violence against them is placed in the background. The textbook for class 8 also presents some exceptions where Muslims are more or less represented in a positive context and religious tolerance is not ignored.

“There were numerous different religions and their followers united under the Ottoman Empire. Of course, Muslims were privileged but the representatives of other religions used to have more or less normal living conditions (in this regard the Ottoman Empire differed from both medieval and Renaissance Europe where oppressing religious minorities was seen as normal). Religious minorities used to create the so-called “Milletias” (pg 50, 5th class)

The textbooks for class 6 provides more information on the different religious denominations, but, as in the textbooks for class 5, the dichotomy “us-others”, the tendency of “silencing” and “erasing”, generalization, positive self-representation and a negative representation of “others” are further maintained.

The analysis of the textbooks for classes 7, 8, 9 and indicated that the authors try to give information in a more balanced way. Though, the limited information on different religious denominations and representing them in a negative context remains problematic.

7 PROSELYTISM AND DISCRIMINATION TENDENCIES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS' INTOLERANT ATTITUDES

On the one hand the object of observation during the research in eight public schools in Tbilisi through focus groups was teachers' attitudes towards religious minorities and teaching religion, on the other hand it focused on revealing facts of discrimination, indoctrination and proselytism in the public schools as well as an observation of school infrastructure in terms of the presence of religious symbols.⁸⁶

The research revealed tendencies of intolerance and the rejection of different religious groups in teachers' attitudes which implies that there is a high risk of proselytism, indoctrination and discrimination during the study process, and this was also confirmed. According to the research results there is no connection between these practices and one single case, but it has a permanent character.

The results clearly indicate that teachers lack a culture of tolerance or understanding of its importance, which unfortunately is reflected in their attitudes towards students who belong to a religious minority.

In particular, a tendency of rejecting other religious and ethnic groups is revealed in teachers' viewpoints and this is reflected in the study process as an unequal approach towards these students. We see alienation and a passive form of resistance from students belonging to religious minorities against the current situation, however, the examples cited by teachers describe cases of "*adaptation*" such as participation in collective Orthodox prayer.⁸⁷

Strong signs of proselytism (preaching of the Orthodox religion) are visible in the majority of the studied schools as well as during classes, which is confirmed by teachers through examples of lessons' content and teaching practice.

The legislation gap, revealed in previous research, which leaves the content of religious education beyond the effective control of the Ministry⁸⁸ was also confirmed in the focus groups.

In particular, Orthodox Christianity (the Old and New Testament) is taught in one of the schools and the Ministry does not have any information about it. The content of the class is autonomously determined by the school.

⁸⁶ For details of the research methodology, See pg. 8

⁸⁷ See pg. 37

⁸⁸ See pg.18

The presence of Orthodox crosses, icons and other religious symbols in all of the studied classrooms as well as school corridors and other spaces was observed, however, with differences in frequency and intensity. The focus group participants confirmed this tendency also. Moreover, the celebration of Orthodox holidays is a common practice in the schools.

Significant trends revealed by the research

Orthodox Christianity as a determining factor of national identity

The lack of a modern and secular understanding of the concepts of “nation” and “citizen” is one of the most significant problems revealed in the analysis of teachers’ attitudes.

This approach considers the Orthodox religion as an equivalent to, and an essential factor of, national identity. Therefore, it eliminates the possibility for other religious identities to lead a fully-fledged civil and public life. Some teachers consider the Orthodox religion and the Georgian nationality as similar concepts, and eliminate other ethnic or religious affiliations from the context of national identity.

Teachers’ attitudes are based on the country’s historical experience and they are essentially constructed through the perception of the special role of the Orthodox faith in maintaining the Georgian identity.

This observation, which is supported by a historical context, persists in their reasoning in the contemporary political reality.

The focus group analysis indicates that these viewpoints determine and shape teachers’ negative attitudes towards different religions and their followers. Their attitudes reveal a certain rejection of those persons who are ethnically Georgian, but at the same time belong to another religious denomination.

“Georgians and Christianity are identical concepts”.

“When a Georgian was defending his homeland, he was defending his religion. When he was defending his religion-he was defending his homeland. This is essential for us. I teach students according to this principle”.

“We are an ancient Christian country. Christianity and identity are so intertwined that we cannot escape from it”.

“Everyone who is not Orthodox should realise that the Orthodox faith is leading in Georgia. It helped us to survive. Everybody should be aware that being Georgian was also associated with being Orthodox”.

“[Orthodox religion] has a leading role in the shaping of the Georgian identity. A Georgian person should be shaped spiritually in order to become Georgian..And in general as a person”.

"We had a Muslim student. I was teaching Law... Unfortunately we also had Jehovah's Witnesses... Unfortunately, because it is not acceptable for me that a Georgian person is a Jehovah's Witness".⁸⁹

The influence of religion on the study process

The teachers are aware of the legal limitations regarding religious neutrality, which implies that religious preaching is prohibited during class. However, they are not consistent and expressed conflicting opinions during the focus group discussions. This can be explained by the fact that they consider the imposed limitations as mandatory tolerance "imposed" on them by the State and they do not properly understand its genuine value.

The focus groups revealed that consolidating students' beliefs, and in particular "changing" students from other religious affiliations, are considered to be the personal mission of a teacher and that this constitutes the main aim of their work at school.

During the focus groups teachers described cases of proselytism as common practice in the study process.

There are two main approaches which are used for the purpose of "promoting/including" the Orthodox religion and preaching it during the study process. On the hand it is achieved through illustrating the positive sides of the Orthodox faith, on the other hand it is showed through putting the Orthodox religion in contrast to other religions. This is done by emphasising its advantages and rejecting other confessions.

Teachers are encouraging students and their parents to attend church. In addition, History and Literature are not taught according to scientific methods, but are based on religious analysis. Holy Father Sermons, Holy Scriptures and other religious texts are used during the study process.

"We have Grigorians, and Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims are less. We are trying to approach these students. I want to show them that the Orthodox religion is predominant, and none of the other sects. The same applies when we explain Diophysitism and Monophysitism, we are trying to convince students about the advantages of Diophysitism. But everybody has their own beliefs. We are obliged to respect others as well".

"I think that the promotion of the Orthodox faith is my duty as an Orthodox. Otherwise how can I teach about the Martyrdom of the Holy Queen Shushanik?"

"Everybody knows what the essence of a sect is. If we are capable, we should Christianise everybody, but we should do it tenderly and finely not to cause aggression".

"I am a History teacher and when I explain something, I tell everybody to go to church. We are always comparing pagan religions, Christianity and etc. A child is interested in everything, but I think classes about

⁸⁹ This trend was manifested in all of the studied schools, however, only material from public schools # 77, 84 and 92 focus groups are used for citations

religion are redundant”.

“Georgian [meaning the subject] is intertwined with religion. We frequently use parables, talk about religion with students. Families also became religious and recently children receive support. Students go to church on their own”.

“I cannot imagine a class about Georgian [subject] to be separated from our religion and history. It is united. I tell them about the Gospel parables. Scriptures of the Holy Fathers... For example the day before yesterday... I had the children listen to the audio children’s sermon and they wrote down their impressions. Then I was telling the priest: 30 writings of 30 students were charged with the same spirit, they acquired it properly.”⁹⁰

Exclusion of students belonging to religious minorities

According to the teachers who participated in the research, hagiographic texts and their teaching process is not perceived as painful by religious and ethnic minorities.

In addition, they believe that these groups do not feel oppressed or uncomfortable. At a different stage of the focus groups, however, the participants talked about the cases of resistance expressed by students and described forms of protest from students belonging to religious minorities.

It is interesting that the teachers do not have a critical understanding of these facts and they attribute these acts, either resistance or the desire to stay in the background, to the individual attitudes of students. Therefore, they consider it normal that this category of students “do not study”, “are not active”, “are not open”, “do not talk” and “do not participate in excursions” despite their desires and etc.

“It is very painless for those Muslims residing in Georgia, these children are not introduced deeply into religion. They don’t perceive Abo as a traitor... These children are so involved in the Georgian spirit that similar things are not painful for them”.

“Interviewer: What is the attitude of Armenians, Grigorians towards hagiography?”

Teacher: “There is no indication of any problem. If somebody is a Jehovah’s Witness, then he/she further reveals. He/she does not study or if you don’t ask, he/she won’t be active”.

“Nobody talks when it comes to Christian holidays. Due to the fact that everybody is Christian, apart from one or two Jehovah’s Witnesses, they prefer to stay in the background and do not to express their attitude. They also want to participate in excursions, but they cannot come. They are closed”.

⁹⁰ The aforementioned trends are characteristic to every examined school in different characters. The citations are used from focus groups material from public schools # 89, 84, 92 and 87

“When we had a talk about Christ, one Jehovah’s Witness student would not study the lesson”.

“There are frequently excerpts from the Gospel in the books. If we teach it as a fiction, nobody says anything. But if it has a religious nature, then every Azeri will pop up.”⁹¹

Collective prayer as a part of learning process

The research revealed that in several schools⁹² Orthodox prayers are performed and that teachers even talk about it. As a rule, the prayers are performed on a regular basis and they are part of the teaching process.

Moreover, participation in the prayers is voluntary and a student from another religious identity may stay outside during the prayer or use other forms of withdrawal. Obviously the presence of such practice causes alienation and exclusion of religious minorities.

Despite the voluntary character of the prayers, it is revealed that in some cases religious minorities participate in these prayers, which can be explained by their desire for integration into the group which can be achieved through the inhibition of one’s identity.

“We had a case at the elementary level when we had a student [from another religious identity]... Prior to every class they used to perform prayers, right? And the student was also doing the same... As soon as his/her parents found out about it, they made a big fuss about it”.

“For instance we read a prayer for studying. We told parents about it, if anyone does not want to participate, he/she can stay outside during the prayer. There is nothing special about it. They read it as a poem and that is it. This takes place in the morning.”

“I have an Armenian and Yazidi in my class. However, I start my lessons with a prayer. They usually pray with us”.

“I have one Jehovah’s Witness who stays seated and does not get up [during prayer]. I don’t prohibit it. It is up to him/her.”⁹³

91 The aforementioned trend is manifested in every public school in different characters. The citations are used from focus groups material from public schools # 92, 87, 89 and 131

92 Public Schools N 77, 84, 92 and 131

93 Materials from the focus groups conducted in schools # 84, 92 and 131 are used for citations

Teachers' attitudes on granting a privileged role to Orthodox Christianity in the process of teaching religion

In most cases teachers consider that teaching other traditional religions along with Orthodox Christianity is admissible, but they classify religious denominations and exclude the possibility of teaching anything about so-called "sects" while expressing especially negative attitudes towards them.

Also, they believe that the Orthodox faith must be privileged and came up with two arguments to justify this approach.

First of all, teaching Orthodox Christianity is considered to be a necessary condition for the "moral upbringing of students" and their "human" development, outlining a close and systematic connection between the content of educational material (especially in the subject Georgian language and literature) and Orthodox Christianity.

According to practices in public schools, students are provided with more information about Orthodox religion and only have superficial knowledge on other religions or ethnic groups.

"Orthodox religion must be taught more in-depth. Pupils need it as human beings too."

"Teaching religion, a fundamental study of Orthodox Christianity, understanding the commandments will bring children up differently, making them moral human beings. I welcome this kind of teaching."

"Every Georgian piece is related to God."

"Every Georgian piece is nevertheless rooted in the Bible"

- "Every religion should be taught, but no sects."

- "Larger sects can be included."

"Only traditional religions should be taught. No sects. We are categorically against them."

"While teaching Georgian history, we discuss Orthodox religion in a detailed manner. While teaching world history we do nothing like that. We just generally discuss the different religions."⁹⁴

Different approaches towards schools composed of mixed ethnic groups

Initially, the objects of observation were selected according to the different representation of various groups in public schools. The results of pilot focus groups had been confirmed by the major part of the research.

⁹⁴ The tendencies outlined are manifested in every examined school, though the indicated citations are from focus groups conducted in # 77, 84, 131, 163 public schools respectively

Particularly, it made it visible that the attitudes of teachers who teach at schools with students from different ethnic groups are not really different from the attitudes of those who teach at other public schools. The difference in expressing their attitudes, however, are noticeable.

In schools composed with students of mixed ethnic groups teachers show a more cautious attitude towards religious issues and refrain from emphasising Orthodox Christianity.

However, latently, their intolerant and Orthodox-oriented views/attitudes continue to exist. The dominant position of the Orthodox faith in schools with ethnically Georgian students gives more freedom to teachers to express their religious sentiments.

“We have 19 ethnic minorities here, even Mazdeans and worshipers of the temple of fire. Because of this, we, history teachers, are unable to focus on the Orthodox religion. We try to teach only what’s written and do not focus on other things. It should not be mentioned, but I’m in the parish and I have decided to go to Church. Despite of this, I don’t even cross in front of them.”

“There is no church corner in our school while there is in others. There should not be any pressure, they say. Our school doesn’t even provide the opportunity for any chapel or any other sort of religious building to exist. We have multi-ethnicity here and one cannot build for everyone separately. In these circumstances to have only one of them is unacceptable.”

“When I teach religion... we must take the existing contingent into account. Other religions represent only 1% of the total student population in our school. Therefore, we can freely talk about our religion, Orthodox Christianity, here... Considering that here I met this sort of principles, I continue to teach mainly focusing on Orthodoxy”⁹⁵

The exceptionally negative attitude towards Islam

The focus groups revealed an exceptionally negative attitude of teachers towards the Islam. Students were asked to write down three associations with the word “Islam” and then explain them.

The associations were mainly twofold: neutral and in most cases - negative. The contents and connotations of teachers’ views and attitudes towards Islam were as follows. The Islam was represented as a “*religion of occupants*” in the context of Georgian history as well as in the context of the contemporary world, emphasizing the hostility of Islam towards Georgia and outlining the difference in ways of life etc.

It is clear that the Islam is perceived as a religion of conquest and instantly gets a negative connotation. It is also believed that the Islam is similarly represented in history textbooks which increases the possibility of cultivating negative attitudes towards the Islam even more intensively.

95 Outlined tendency is manifested in most of public schools examined. Indicated citations are from focus groups conducted in N98, 131 and 87 public schools respectively

-“I wrote that when I hear the word “Islam”, I am reminded of religious conflicts, of our history.”

-I wrote the same. And also that in the 21th century there is no longer any hatred between Muslims and Christians.”

“I always have a negative feeling about the “Islam”. My history teacher seems to invest so much patriotism towards Orthodox Christianity in me.”

“Still, I have a more negative attitude towards Islam. Because they have a different way of life.”

“They created invading states. Books are also emphasising it. Islam used to be a violence. It always tried to spread religion with blood and fire. It is a violent religion. Even today, the situation stays the same in large number of countries. It is considered as fundamentalism.”

“-These Muslims always cause bad associations to me.”

-They created many good things, though”⁹⁶

96 The tendency is homogenous in every public school examined, the indicated citations are from focus groups conducted in # 77, 98, 92 and 163 public schools respectively

8 RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

- ▶ A prioritisation of issues such as defending religious freedom and the enforcement of this component in the relevant areas of work must be accomplished by the Ministry;
- ▶ It is important that in the process of teaching religion mechanism of preliminary determination exists, including compliance of course materials with the objectives of the legislation, and a normative regulation of this issue;
- ▶ The activities of the Internal Audit Department must be significantly focused on reacting to violations of religious freedom, including identifying systemic problems and developing politics of prevention;
- ▶ Comprehensive and large-scale monitoring of the planning process of the National Curriculum must be carried out. It will allow the Ministry to foresee existing violations and the scale of its problems. Future politics must rely on results of existing observations.
- ▶ National Centre for Teachers' Professional Development should modify its existing retraining programmes and/or introduce new programmes, so that they represent significant components such as interconfessional teaching and provide the necessary knowledge on the methods and approaches of intercultural education. From this point of view, teachers of subjects with the component "Culture and Religion" represent a special target group;
- ▶ The regulations of textbook approval should provide the possibility of stopping the approval procedure in case the content, design or any other parameter contains elements of discrimination or discrediting. However, it is important that the approval mechanism includes additional criteria which will contain not only the demand to ban discriminative approaches, but establish the obligation that textbooks consider the diversity of students and encourage the development of non-stereotypic and versatile reasoning;
- ▶ It is important that the Ministry of Education develops a guideline/instructions for school principals so they understand the importance of encouraging a tolerant attitude and religious neutrality in public schools. In addition, it should develop a guideline for teachers about the forms and methods of teaching religion;
- ▶ The Ministry should plan events of divergent scales to encourage civic consciousness as well as the transformation of intolerant attitudes of teachers, parents and students in order to develop a tolerant environment. It should be implemented especially in those regions where religious and ethnic minorities have a significant representation.

APPENDIX #1:

Subject: "Our Georgia"

Class: V-VI

Standard

Study Area: **Culture and Religion**

Social Science. V-VI.20. A student is able to describe the religions in Georgia.

Social Science. V-VI.21. A student is able to distinguish between the different components of culture and discuss their interconnection.

Social Science. V-VI.22. A student is able to describe manifestations of similarities and differences of Georgia's population's cultures.

Social Science. V-VI.23. A student is able to discuss the importance of travelling and trade.

Social Science. V-VI.20. A student is able to describe religions in Georgia.

The result is notable if a student is:

- Aware of, and to discuss, the purpose of religion and its role in one's life correspondingly to his/her age;
- Able to indicate the distribution areas of Christianity and other religions known to him/her on a map of contemporary Georgia;
- Able to compare religions represented in the different parts of Georgia and their rituals/cultural traditions (e.g.: wedding, funeral, New Year); and
- Aware of the fact that all religions are based on human values.

Social Science. V-VI.21. A student is able to distinguish between different components of culture and discuss their interconnection.

The result is notable if a student is able to:

- List the aspects and components of culture, and describe its manifestations;
- Explain in his/her own words what the cultural individual means;
- Describe the aspects of Georgian culture;

- List samples of folk culture which are known to him/her and possibly identify its elements of cultural tradition; and
- Distinguish between Western and Eastern cultural influences on Georgian culture (*e.g.: clothing, architecture*).

Social Science. V-VI.22. A student is able to describe manifestations of similarities and differences of Georgia's population's cultures and discuss relevant reasons.

The result is notable if a student is able to:

- Group folk stories, poems and songs from different parts (regions) of Georgia;
- Describe architectural monument(s) in his/her native land;
- Describe family or religious holidays of different nationalities residing in Georgia and draw parallels between them; and
- Compare traditional practices (cultural diversity) of Georgia's historical regions.

Social Science. V-VI.23. A student is able to discuss the importance of travelling and trade.

The result is noticeable if a student is able to:

- Discuss the possible consequences of travelling (*e.g.: transfer of experience/knowledge from one country to another, development of trade, spread of different elements of culture*); and
- Discuss the importance of data collected by foreign travellers about Georgia in order to study the country.⁹⁷

97 Decree N 36/N of the Georgian Minister for Education and Science 'about the approval of the National Curriculum', March 11, 2011