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## Introduction

The competency of the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality covers two key directions – support to the peace processes in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/ South Ossetia and participation in the above-mentioned processes and support to the protection of rights of ethnic minorities residing in Georgia and ensuring their civic integration. The function of the office of the State Minister is to elaborate, coordinate and implement the state policy in these directions. Budget of the Office, comprising of GEL 1,350 million, does not consider to carry out specific projects. Due to its specific character, the State Minister’s Office implements its activities in close partnership with other state agencies, international intergovernmental organizations and international or local non-governmental organizations.

### I. Occupied Territories

#### 1.1. Supporting the peace processes in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/ South Ossetia

In the field of conflict resolution the goal of the State Minister’s Office was and remains the creation of favorable conditions for confidence restoration and increase the engagement of population living in the occupied territories. For this purpose, the Government of Georgia has chosen peaceful, open, pragmatic and constructive course of action. The Government has initiated number of unilateral steps in order to create the opportunities for the restoration of confidence after the years of estrangement and further possibilities for the resolution of specific problems faced by the population living on both sides of dividing lines. On March, 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013 the Parliament of Georgia in its “Resolution on Basic Directions of Georgia’s Foreign Policy” has reinforced at a higher level of legitimacy the unilateral obligation for non-use of force declared by the President of Georgia in 2010 year in Strasbourg. Commitment to resolve these conflicts by the peaceful means was also included in the “Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union”.

*“The Government of Georgia has chosen peaceful, open, pragmatic and constructive course of action”*

The Government of Georgia initiated steps in order to harmonize Georgian legislation, including the law on “Occupied territories”, with the human right standards and humanitarian requirements of population of occupied regions. Moreover, the Government of Georgia has simplified procedure for issuing permission for the implementation of

economic activities on the occupied territories: based on the consultations with the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, instead of Government act, the authority for issuing the permission was transferred to the Minister responsible for the specific economic activity (such permission is issued in the form of order). Such steps will support the implementation of legal economic activities. Moreover, Georgia proposed direct dialogue to Abkhazians and Ossetians - the Prime-Minister of Georgia has publicly announced it on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2013.

Since January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014 the title of the Office of the State Minister was changed and became - "Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality" (SMRCE). With the initiation of a new title, Georgian government expressed its readiness for the confidence for restoration and conducting direct dialogue. Besides, it adequately reflects the second, important direction of the SMRCE activities - civic integration. Moreover, specific steps were undertaken in order to provide assistance to local population, living near the barbed wire fences under the severe conditions and facing safety and humanitarian challenges.

In the reporting period, visits to the majority of the villages have been conducted, enabling the Government to get familiar with the problems faced by the local population, to carry out analysis of issues on a priority basis. As a result, in order to respond on such identified requirements, the Interagency Governmental Commission was established. The Commission is co-chaired by the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality and Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia. In frames of the activities of the Commission the Government managed to implement number of activities in order to keep the population living along the dividing lines at their places through mobilization of budgetary funds as well as assistance from the international partners. Future implementation of the number of projects for the social and economic development of regions is under discussion. Due to the peaceful policy of the Government of Georgia, the number of incidents in Gali district and tensions along the occupation line has reduced. As a result of open policy of the State, we achieved the positive trend of increasing movement. Especially, from the occupied Tskhinvali region to the other parts of Georgia. For example, the number of people seeking medical care from the above-mentioned region increased four times. Free health care services for the population of occupied territories, as well as educational opportunities on other territories of Georgia, is a significant part of Government's engagement policy (it has been successfully implemented during last three years).

However, intensification of installation of wire fences by Russia, which has started in 2009 and the whole set of steps made in the direction of annexation of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region created new challenges.

So called “Agreement” signed between the Russian Federation and de-facto Government of Abkhazia on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015 is as illegal as other so called “Agreements”, which were signed earlier and international society does not recognize them. The above-mentioned initiative of Russia is the part of occupation started in August, 2008, which aims to create conditions for the annexation of occupied territories. This is an open challenge raised by Russia to the European aspirations of Georgia and population of Abkhazia. Despite these circumstances, the foreign policy course of Georgia remains firm and irreversible.

*„Due to the peaceful policy of the Government of Georgia, the number of incidents in Gali district and tensions along the occupation line has reduced“*

## 1.2. Geneva International Discussions and Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRM)

The First Deputy to the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality leads the second working group of Geneva International Discussions, where the issues of safe and dignified return of internally displaced persons and refugees from occupied territories of Georgia to their places, as well as other humanitarian issues are discussed.

The issue of returning of internally displaced persons, together with key topics to be discussed at Geneva discussions (obligation of non-use of force and international security mechanisms) becomes the subject of politicization from the occupational regime. The position of Georgian side, reinforced by growing international support, international law and basic civil norms for human rights is principal in this regard. These issues will remain on the agenda, until the essential discussion and process implementation takes place around these rights.

*“The issues of returning of internally displaced persons, obligation of non-use of force and international security mechanisms are permanently raised during the Geneva Discussions”*

Also, the issues related to the rights’ status, actual social and humanitarian problems faced by the residents of occupied territories represent the issues of particular priority. Freedom of movement, restricted access to the agricultural lands and plough-lands due to wire-fences and other artificial barriers, as well as restriction of contact with relatives, medical and other needs, condition of

occupation of population living on both sides of dividing lines, removing of restrictions and finding solutions of humanitarian character – these are the main priorities, forming the part of strategy towards the unified de-occupation and peaceful resolution of conflicts. During the last rounds of the humanitarian group of Geneva international discussions the situation existing in

the areas of occupied territories populated by ethnic Georgians acquired particular priority. In this regard, most vulnerable is Gali and Akhalgori local population.

*The restrictions faced by the people in terms of receiving the education in native language in Gali - one of the most painfully discussed questions for the delegation of Georgia. It should be mentioned that in this issue we have full support of international society in order to provide the residents of Gali with the opportunity to get education in native language.*

This issue, together with other facts of violation of human rights, which is often demonstrated as the process of ethnic discrimination, is the key topic of agenda of Georgian delegation. Working on the above issues will be continued with the support of international partners, in order to simplify living conditions and address the specific problems (movements for medical purposes, movement of school pupils on various sides of dividing line) of *the residents of occupied regions human beings on site.*

*“Various facts of violation of human rights on the occupied territories of Georgia are discussed during the IPRM meetings”*

In addition, among the issues discussed at Geneva International Discussions there are such topics as the protection of cultural heritage and cooperation of experts on these issues, environmental protection and cooperation for regulation of water, bridge and other types of infrastructure, which is directly linked to daily needs of people. These issues

are being worked on, and there is some cooperation which will continue and develop under the constructive and humanitarian approaches of Georgian side as well as with active support of international partners.

The Office of the State Minister is actively involved in the activities of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM). The representatives of the State Minister’s Office attend the meetings conducted on regular basis (once a month) in Ergneti (meetings in Gali are not held, due to subjective concerns of Abkhazian side). Various facts of violation of human rights on the occupied territories of Georgia are discussed in the mentioned format. In this regard it is significant to note the arrest of the local population and detention with accusation of “illegal crossing” of dividing line. In addition, discussion and solving of cases of robbery, violence, forced and gratuitous moving to various jobs, kidnapping for the extortion of money, murder and property repossession, as far as possible, are among the issues raised at Incidents Prevention and Responsive Mechanisms meetings. Although, illegal detentions still take place for so-called “violation of border”, but, as a result of active work of “hot line”, the situation has significantly improved, most of the kidnapped persons have been released quickly.

### 1.3. EU engagement and integration into EU

State Minister's Office actively cooperates with the European Union and other international partners to enhance its peace policy based on the principles of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Also, SMRCE actively participates in different formats and plays a leading role in their proceedings.

One of the most important achievements of the last three years was the signing of Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union - the document, which creates opportunities in the conflict resolution area. Our goal is to make the benefits generated via the European integration accessible for the population of occupied territories and we are making necessary steps in this direction.

The Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality has been actively involved in the process of negotiations between Georgia and the European Union with regard to the Association agenda. National Action Plan for the implementation of agenda was developed.

In terms of conflicts resolution, Association agenda considers further deepening of cooperation between the European Union and Georgia, intensification of effective cooperation and coordination at political as well as operational levels, conducting strategic meetings, joint development of mechanisms for conflict resolution and engagement, holding consultations in order to identify ways for the engagement of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region in the process of deepening Georgia - European Union relationship.

Association agenda also considers the implementation of confidence building projects by the European Union, support to the deepening of contacts between the people and encouraging local initiatives. In order to achieve this, on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015 the meeting of the Association Council Subcommittee on Justice, Freedom and Security under the Association board was conducted in Tbilisi. This is the part of a new institutional framework for the political dialogue

between Georgia and the European Union established following the enforcement of Association agreement. Situation in the occupied territories of Georgia, current challenges and tricky issues have been discussed at the meeting. Moreover, participants of this meeting also discussed the implementation of the State strategy on engagement. Particularly, the assistance provided to occupied territories residents, ongoing projects and offered benefits, including the benefits under the Association agreement.

*"Providing the population of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia with the access to the Georgia's EU integration benefits always was and still remains the main objective"*

Current challenges in the area of safety at the regional level and efforts for conflicts peaceful resolution were also discussed on April 1, 2015 within the political consultation format

between Georgia and the European Union. The participants of top-level negotiations have thoroughly discussed the following issues: violation of international obligations undertaken by Russia (including 12 August 2008 Cease-fire Agreement), possible outcomes of so-called “Agreements” signed by the Russian Federation with the regions (Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/ South Ossetia), aspects of engagement policy and challenges faced in frame of the Geneva International Discussions, the role of the European Union in the conflicts resolution and the process of ensuring stability in occupied territories. *The engagement of the European Union with its non-recognition policy is one of the top-priorities of the State Minister’s Office - particularly, in the existing in nowadays situation when we faced such challenges on the occupied territories.*

The State Minister’s Office conducted consultations with international organizations on a daily basis in order to maintain and strengthen their engagement within occupied territories despite the huge pressure and restrictions, encountered by the international organizations in terms of entry and implementation of activities on these territories. It should be mentioned that during last three years, international organizations undertook 149 different projects dealing with the problems of the occupied regions.

One of the important tasks for the State Minister’s Office – in past and in the future – is to make benefits get from European integration of Georgia, including the Association Agreement, available for the population of Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region. In this respect, the State Minister’s Office has carried out number of activities in order to achieve stronger involvement of occupied regions in the opportunities created by the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement.

The realistic prospects for the introduction of visa free regime of movement with the countries of the European Union represents additional tangible benefit of European integration, which according to the State Minister’s Office, should become equally available for the population of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. According to the prognosis of the Office, the facts of taking Georgian passports will increase among the population of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/ South Ossetia.

The State Minister’s Office has fulfilled the homework and contributed to the successful finalization of the second phase of the European Union – Georgia visa liberalization action plan.

Office of the State Minister was actively engaged in the implementation of the government strategy in regard with the effective communication on the process of the European Integration with the residents of the occupied regions. Amongst projects carried out by the Office informative video commercials regarding the Association Agreement and Agreement on Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. Commercials were transmitted on Georgian

Public Broadcaster (on prime-time) in 4 different languages, including Abkhazian and Ossetian languages. Special materials were printed and distributed in all these languages.

## 1.4. Implementation of the State Strategy and Action Plan for Engagement

The Government of Georgia strives to enable the population of occupied territories - Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia - to enjoy the rights and privileges, available for each citizen of Georgia. For this purpose, the activities considered under the engagement strategy have continued.

### 1.4.1. Health Care

Free health care services are one of the most successful directions of the engagement strategy.

Residents of occupied territories apply for various state programs. The most important among them is the State Referral Program. In order to be involved in this program a person from occupied territories should apply to the Office of the State Minister with a filled out application form. Therefore, the Office of the State Minister will serve as a mediator agency

*„Residents of occupied territories apply for various state programs. The most important among them is the State Referral Program and the Program on C Hepatitis Elimination”*

to the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia. The State tries to protect the above- mentioned program from the bureaucratic procedures. For the last three years over thousands of beneficiaries received medical services free of charge.

Despite the barbed wire fences and restrictions near the dividing lines, compared with 2012, the number of people seeking for a medical care from Tskhinvali region increased significantly. 70% of them arrived to Georgia via Kazbegi – Upper Larsi checkpoint. However, there are some cases, when people come to the territories controlled by the Georgian Government at a risk of life, avoiding barbed wire fences and occupation regime. Moreover, a number of patients, participating in the referral program, from Abkhazia is higher. Overall, for the last 3 years there is growing dynamics. In February 2013, the Universal Health Care Program, elaborated by the Government of Georgia, was extended over all age population groups living in occupied regions and holding status-neutral identification documents.



In April 2015 the program on C Hepatitis elimination was introduced in Georgia and the Government is ready to share participation in this program with the residents of the occupied territories.

During 2013 -2015 various medicines and vaccines, with the total cost exceeding GEL 500 000 were provided to the citizens of Abkhazia on a regular basis, under the Liaison Mechanism operated by the United Nations Development Fund. Through the Liaison Mechanism medical appliances, equipment, devices and items of various medical purposes were transferred to Abkhazia.

During 2013-2015 the total amount of financial resources spent by the Georgian Government for the health care services for the population in the occupied territories equaled to approximately GEL 11 million.

The construction of multi-profile, 220 bed university clinic, equipped with the modern technologies is ongoing near the occupation line, Zugdidi, village Rukhi. The clinic will be also equipped with the dormitory. The University Clinic in addition to Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Zugdidi and other city hospitals will provide necessary services to the people from occupied regions.

#### 1.4.2. Education

The Government of Georgia applied all efforts to stimulate the opportunities for the population of occupied territories to get education in Georgia, to create relevant mechanisms for continuing education overseas and to support joint research activities. For this purpose, the Government of Georgia is implementing “1+4” Program, enabling the persons residing in occupied territories to enroll and study at higher educational institutions, operating in the country through simplified procedures.

The State Minister’s Office has elaborated initiatives in order to make easier the acknowledgement of education documents obtained in the occupied territories. The issue is under discussion in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. In May 2014 year, International Center of Education was established, subordinated to the Prime Minister of Georgia. Its goal is to provide opportunities to the population, including those living on occupied territories, to undertake Master’s and Doctor’s studies in leading European and US universities. The center also accepts applications from Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.

### 1.4.3. Socio – economic issues

Construction of multi-functional trade center in the village of Rukhi was completed. It will promote trade with the crossing of the occupation line. Many citizens living in occupied territories visit Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Zugdidi for trade purposes. The government of Georgia will continue the promotion of such

projects in order to create additional opportunities for trade. There is ongoing work on the initiative aiming at the provision of additional socio-economic assistance to the population of occupied regions.

*“There is ongoing work on the initiative aiming at the provision of additional socio-economic assistance to the population of occupied regions”*

### 1.4.4. The cultural heritage

The condition of Georgian cultural-historical and religious heritage monuments existing on the occupied territories is worsening every day. The oldest specimens are purposefully destroyed. *In addition, they conduct the restoration works that are not typical for Georgian churches*

An Inter-agency working group was formed in the Office of State Minister, which has prepared the document about the condition of Georgian cultural-historical and religious heritage monuments existing on the occupied territories and “black archeology” in Abkhazia. These materials were sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The list of cultural monuments was determined by the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia. Further negotiations with UNESCO have been conducted under the guidance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, the National Agency for Cultural Heritage and Preservation of Georgia and the proper competency field experts are members of the working group. The issue of development of so-called “road map” for special route for UNESCO experts’ mission, to visit Abkhazia and monuments, has been raised at working group meetings conducted at the Office of the State Minister, in order to carry out complex works necessary for preservation of monuments and identify conservation sites. As a result of active and coordinated, as well as immediate and written communication, the following position has been distinguished: to conduct the mentioned expert mission with the joint representation of UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM and ICOM. The Office of the State Minister has submitted the report several times to the

Committees of Parliament of Georgia about the condition of cultural heritage monuments existing on the occupied territories.

#### 1.4.5. Neutral documents

Travel and personal identification documents are available for the population of occupied regions. During the last three years, the status neutral travel documents was recognized by additional two countries, Hungary and Romania. At this stage, the document is acknowledged by 12 states, including 9 member states of the European Union. Compared with December 2012, the number of issued neutral personal identification documents as well as neutral travel documents has increased. These documents enable legitimate movement overseas.

#### 1.4.6. Liaison Mechanism

The Liaison Mechanism represents an important instrument for the communication between Tbilisi and Sokhumi in relation to various issues considered within the agenda and for voicing important messages. Such messages could include (but not limited to) humanitarian needs, provision of information on ongoing or planned international projects, educational opportunities, etc. In 2015, in frame of the Liaison Mechanism following activities were carried out:

- The Abkhazian corner was organized and opened at the National Library of the Parliament of Georgia presenting Abkhazian literature and periodicals;
- The high polygraphic quality printed version of unique sample of historical monument and distinguished art item – Mokvi Gospel was published in Georgian, Abkhazian and English languages in cooperation with the National Center of Manuscripts (it was distributed in Abkhazia);
- Joint training for Georgian and Abkhazian doctors on the treatment of C Hepatitis was conducted in Istanbul, Turkey.

### 1.4.7. Projects of the Council of Europe

During 2013-2015 years, due to the close cooperation with the State Minister's Office and involvement of the Liaison Mechanism several confidence building projects of the Council of Europe were implemented, considering meeting of various professional groups residing on both sides of the dividing lines:

- Meeting of representatives of art from Georgian and Abkhazian society in Venice, Italy for the participation in the workshop on the topic – Management of Cultural Heritage;
- Visit of Georgian and Abkhazian teachers, as well as Georgian and Ossetian teachers to the town of Graz, Austria for the participation in the workshop devoted to the methodology for teaching foreign languages;
- Meeting of experts working on the issues of cultural heritage in Istanbul, Turkey;
- Study visit in Macedonia, with a purpose to get familiar with the methodologies of recording cultural heritage objects;
- Meeting of Georgian and Abkhazian experts in Sarajevo (at the meeting the archive materials were transferred). The project is ongoing and, within project, further meetings of Georgian and Abkhazian experts, visits to the monuments and etc. are planned.

*"Council of Europe confidence building projects involve meetings among various groups coming from both sides of the dividing line and holding different professional backgrounds. Meetings take place on neutral territory."*

- Training of English language teachers in Sokhumi with the participation of the European Council experts;
- Meeting of Georgian and Abkhazian teachers in Istanbul, Turkey in order to plan future meetings and workshops with a purpose of sharing experiences and familiarizing with modern teaching methodologies (this workshop was conducted in 2015 and is planned for the next years);
- Meeting of representatives of Abkhazian and

Georgian civic society actors and ombudsman who works in Istanbul, Turkey and Segovia, Spain for the discussion of issues related to the protection of human rights;

- Study visits of civic society representatives from Tbilisi, Tskhinvali and other cities to Bosnia-Herzegovina was also implemented. The purpose of visits - to get familiar with the experiences in the area of conflict resolution in the Balkans;
- Meeting of Georgian and Ossetian experts in Venice, Italy, discussing the issues of cultural heritage;
- Training visit of young Georgian and Abkhazian experts to Strasburg, France, devoted to the management of cultural heritage;
- Meeting of Georgian and Abkhazian civil society representatives in Istanbul, Turkey in order to improve the awareness in the area of domestic violence, including violence against women;

- Meeting of Georgian and Abkhazian specialists working in the museum management area in Venice, Italy in order to share experiences and discuss the condition of museums in Abkhazia.

*“Office of the State Minister uses every possible neutral platform to ensure the effective communication between the divided societies”*

Moreover, in February 2015 a series of European lectures on the topic of Functioning of European Structures was conducted in Abkhazia.

In 2016, implementation of a number of new bilateral, Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian projects is planned in cooperation with the Council of Europe. These projects will cover the

issues of modern training methodologies, violence against women and human rights, prevention of drug-abuse and treatment, environment protection, etc.

## 1.5. Communication between the divided societies

Office of the State Minister applies for all types of neutral platforms and opportunities in order to provide effective communication between the divided societies. During February and June, 2015 informal dialogue between representatives of Georgian and Abkhazian societies, including politicians, experts and with the participation of international organizations, was conducted in London. Similar meetings were also conducted in September, 2015 in Bern, Switzerland and Berlin, Germany. During these meetings the participants discussed the latest political events that took place in recent years, analyzed the current situation, exchanged positions and discussed issues that had direct impact over the lives of people, victims of the conflict. Participants of the Meeting had an opportunity to express interests and positions of societies, and to present their views in relation to the existing challenges and threats.

Besides, with the support of the international organizations, the periodical meetings between Georgian and Ossetian societies, including meetings with the participation of employees of the State Minister's Office, have been held. At such meetings the relevant issues and problems are discussed, attempts are made to identify the ways for their solution. Such meetings enable representatives from the societies divided by the occupation line to have effective communication and build confidence between each other.

## 1.6. Responding to the Needs of the Population affected by the installation of barbed wires fences and other barriers along the dividing lines.

Since 2013 year, one of the top-priorities of the Office of the State Minister is the assistance to the villages located near the dividing lines. The State Minister's office played leading role in the identification and responding to the problems faced by the population as a result of installation of barbed wire fences and other obstacles. In 2013 year, under the leadership of the Office, Inter-agency working group visited 77 villages of Gori, Kareli, Kaspi and Sachkhere municipalities located on the territories adjacent to the dividing lines and developed the Needs Assessment document.

On October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the Government of Georgia established temporary Commission responding to the needs of affected population from the villages located on the territories adjacent to the dividing lines. The Commission is co-chaired by the State Minister of Georgia for the Reconciliation and Civic Equality and Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia. Members of the Commission visited communities located on the territories adjacent to dividing lines and held meetings with the population of 48 villages. As a result of activities implemented by the Commission:

- During the winter period, GEL 200 was allocated to each of 11 440 households (50 villages) for ensuring heating for persons residing in the villages (Gori, Kaspi, Oni, Sachkhere, Kareli and Khashuri municipalities) adjacent to the dividing lines; in total GEL 2 880 000 was allocated from the State budget for the above-mentioned activities;
- Tuition fees for the study years 2013-2014 were financed for 471 students from the affected families of villages adjacent to the dividing lines, enrolled in the Bachelor's and Master's programs. Under the initiative of the Ministry of Education, this Commission also made decision to finance tuition fees for students from the affected families of villages adjacent to the dividing lines for 2014-2015 years;
- Rehabilitation-restoration works have been implemented in the schools. They have been equipped with communication facilities, school libraries were upgraded, computers and books were distributed to school personnel and pupils, the transportation for over 600 pupils was arranged;
- Modern public school for 90 pupils was constructed in the village Abano;
- Fresh water drill-wells were arranged in 9 villages;
- The irrigation systems were rehabilitated in the most of the villages;
- Gasification of 58 villages (13,375 households) is ongoing. For this purposes GEL 19 million was allocated from the State budget. Gasification works have completed in the majority of villages adjacent to the dividing lines (16 villages), works are implemented in an intensive

*„Tuition fees were financed for students from the affected families of villages adjacent to the dividing lines“*

manner in other villages;

- 20 outpatient medical facilities were constructed;
- The construction of clinic in the village Tkviavi, Gori municipality, is at its final stage. The hospital will be equipped in accordance with the modern standards and will offer services to patients by the end of the current year;
- Rehabilitation of motor roads was implemented;
- The works of identification of owners of property located in the villages adjacent to the dividing lines and property registration were implemented.

Within the activities of the Commission, for the solution of relevant problems faced by the affected population, the State Minister's office actively collaborated with the representatives of diplomatic corps and donor organizations. In particular, the meetings were organized with the representatives of the European Union, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), US Agency for International Development (USAID), Embassy of Japan, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, other organizations and partner countries.

The State Minister's Office developed and distributed among the representatives of international society brochure and documentary film, describing in detail the negative outcomes of borderization.

As a result, United Nations and the European Union allocated monetary assistance in the amount of GEL 500 for 1311 vulnerable families. Moreover, the thermal insulation means were provided to over 700 families during the winter period. Under the efforts of the US Agency for the International Development economic projects were implemented. With the assistance provided by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation the rehabilitation works were conducted for the houses damaged during 2008 year August war. For the assistance to the population of Shida Kartli, the Red Cross International Committee was implementing micro-economic project, under which the monetary grants have been also allocated. With the assistance of the European Union and United Nations, the kinder garden was rehabilitated in the village of Dvani. It is important, that as a result of request expressed by the State Minister's Office during the bilateral meeting conducted under the Strategic Chertier, assistance to the persons living on the territories adjacent to the dividing lines, about 40 small infrastructural project considering rehabilitation of drinking water system, irrigation channels, drainage systems and village roads were included in the list of key priorities of the package in the amount of USD 5 million, additionally allocated by the Government of United States for the provision of assistance to the Government of Georgia. About 4 000 families will benefit from the above-mentioned activities. This assistance also considers the creation of new sources of income for about 2000 especially vulnerable households living on the territories adjacent to the dividing lines via the vocational training, ensuring access to finance and micro-enterprise assistance.

With the help of the US Agency for International Development, the rehabilitation of Saltvisi-Tiriponi irrigation system was completed. As a result, irrigation system for about 20 thousand hectares of lands of 29 villages located on the territories adjacent to dividing lines was improved. It will bring benefit to 18 thousand families. Until 2008, large number of villages of Gori municipality was using Tiriponi irrigation system. However, following the August War, de-facto government blocked the channel. As a result, it was not possible to get yields in the villages left without water. After the rehabilitation of Saltvisi-Tiriponi magistral channel the problem of supply of the irrigation water was fully resolved.

In addition, as a result of Government's request and active cooperation, OSCE has prepared two projects – concerning the purification of contaminated water inflowing to the village Nigozi and construction of boring well for the village Zemo Sobisi – and attracted the necessary funds. As a result of negotiations conducted by the Office of the State Minister, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TiKA) has arranged new ambulance station, which was equipped with medical inventory, in the village Rene.

## II. Civic Integration

Development of the policy regarding the ethnic minorities and its effective implementation is one of the competencies of the State Minister's Office. The purpose of this policy is to protect the rights of ethnic minorities and to ensure their full integration into the society, promote establishment and further development of tolerant environment. In 2006, the Parliament of Georgia has ratified "the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities" and, therefore, it has undertaken the responsibility before the international community, which considers protection of rights of ethnic minorities and ensuring their full and dignified participation in country's development. The state strategy considers step by step implementation of these commitment.

One of the important instruments for implementation of this policy is the strategic document

*"The new strategy for civic integration is based on the principles of equality and the approach of "more diversity, more integration"*

of civic integration, which is elaborated and implemented by the State Minister's Office along with various state agencies. In 2013 and 2014 years the activities of the State Minister's Office have been carried out under the National concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration and Action plan for 2009-2014. The activities have been carried out in all six strategic directions determined under the concept: rule of law,



education and state language, media and access to information, political integration and civil participation, social and economic integration, culture and preservation of identity. In 2014 the above-mentioned concept and action plan have expired, accordingly, the Office of the State Minister has developed a new document. The new document – Civic equality and Integration State Strategy and Action Plan for 2015-2020 was approved on August 17, 2015 under Decree No.1740 issued by the Government of Georgia.

Prior to it, the Office of the State Minister, together with the group of independent experts, has prepared the assessment document of the policy implemented in previous years, which has provided the basis for the development of a new and more effective policy. Accordingly, new strategic document is based on the results, which have been revealed as a result of activities implemented in previous years and it considers the current recommendations and proposals. The new strategy for civic integration is based on the principles of equality and the approach of “more diversity, more integration”, and is aimed to form equal environment, as well as full participation of ethnical minorities in all spheres of public life and preservation of their culture and identity. New strategy:

- is based upon the previous experience and introduces new approach, how to conduct the work for effective achievement of goals;
- considers much more interaction with majority, since the civic integration is a process, which fully covers the society;
- gives special attention to the improved access of ethnical minorities to the decision making process and public services, which also means overcoming of language barriers;
- considers effective implementation of programs and projects appropriate for increasing of the state language knowledge level;
- considers protection of cultural (linguistic) rights of small groups representing the ethnic minorities;
- implies Gender mainstreaming;
- gives special attention to Roma population, their education and social-economic integration.

The process of working on new strategy of civic integration was open and transparent, which has created an opportunity for active participation for all stakeholders, working in the mentioned field. The strategy and action plan was discussed with the National Minorities Council under the Public Defender's Office, representatives of local civic society, international organizations, the Committee of Human Rights Protection and Civil Integration of Parliament of Georgia, political parties and experts, as well as the representatives of ethnic minorities

*“In order to effectively manage the process of implementation of the strategy and action plan the State Inter-Agency Commission was established”*

living in regions. The OSCE High Commissioner's Office on National Minorities has provided international expertise of the document.

In order to effectively manage the process of strategy and action plan the State Inter-Agency Commission was established. The Office of the State Minister coordinates the work of the Commission. Meetings of the Commission as well as thematic discussions and consultations, were conducted during the reporting period, also, recommendations were developed. Annual detailed action plan and reporting were prepared in cooperation with the relevant agencies. The reports have been submitted to the Government as well as to the Council of National Minorities, civil society actors. The activities were carried out in thematic work group formed under the Commission. This format gives the possibility to the non-governmental organizations, experts, all the actors working in the field to be involved in discussions on various issues. During the recent years concrete positive steps have been made in terms of protection of rights of ethnic minorities and ensuring equality. In particular, in April 2014 the Parliament of Georgia adopted the “Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination”. Also, Human Rights Strategy and respective Action Plan for 2014-2020 was approved. The rights of ethnic minorities is one of the important components of this document, in the preparation of which the Office of State Minister has actively participated. In July, 2015 the “Law on State Language” has been adopted, in which the concept of “languages of national minorities”, as well as opportunities of using these languages in the municipalities densely populated with ethnic minorities, is defined.

**In 2013-2015, activities have been carried out within the following directions:**

**Roma.** The process of registration of Roma is ongoing since 2010; the appropriate procedures were implemented in order to cope with their birth registration, citizenship, issuance of personal identification cards. In 2010-2012, 265 persons from Roma population, living in Leninovka and Gachiani, have been registered in the registration database; in 2013, 11 Roma were granted citizenship status; 8 persons received the non-citizen status; in 2014, 61 persons were registered and received appropriate legal status.

## 2.1. Education and State Language

The programs/projects and various measures were implemented during recent years, which have been directed towards the increased access to the education for the representatives of ethnic minorities.

### **General education**

- The textbooks in all subjects, from first to six grades, are translated into Armenian, Russian and Azerbaijani languages. The state will provide each pupil, representing the minority, with educational materials for free. The appropriate textbooks from 7 grades to 12 grades are in preparation process.
- The national teaching plan was translated into Azerbaijani, Armenian and Russian languages; in addition, the manuals and educational resources have been developed. The appropriate instructions for such documents as “beginning of teacher’s career” and “professional development and career advancement” have also been translated into Azerbaijani, Russian and Armenian languages.
- Under the sub-program of general education assistance program “school initiative”, the public schools existing in villages of Kakheti region – Phona, Areshperan and Tsitskanaantseri – received the state funding for teaching the Ossetian language.
- The emergency medical aid and first aid service was introduced in Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kakheti regions’ schools.
- In 2013-2015 the school children, representing ethnic minorities, had an opportunity to participate in Olympics in Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russian languages in following subjects: mathematics, history, geography, physics, chemistry and biology.

### **Higher education**

Since 2010, the simplified system (so-called quotation system) is approved for students representing ethnic minorities, which gives possibility to increase an opportunity of acquiring the higher education. Accordingly, the number of national minorities’ students has significantly increased in institutions of higher education, which is clearly the merit of this program. Statistics: 890 non-Georgian language students were enrolled in higher education institutions of Georgia; in 2014 the number of students has reduced to 673, and in 2015 – 741.

### Information/awareness raising campaign

During the reporting period, the meetings with youth living in Kvemo Kartli were carried out in the field of education; they were provided with information on the “4+1 program”. In addition, the work meetings have been carried out with teachers and lecturers, pupils, their parents, representatives of non-governmental organizations of non-Georgian language schools and Georgian language houses in Marneuli, Dmanisi, Gardabani, Akhalkalaki, and Tbilisi. In June 2014, pre-testing of university entrants has been conducted together with the Center for National Examinations by the Office of the State Minister, in which 250 young people from Kvemo Kartli have participated.

### State language

In recent years, considerable attention was paid to teaching of Georgian language; in addition, the programs were implemented, which aimed to teach Georgian language and to improve Georgian language teaching in non-Georgian language schools.

- The textbook “Georgian, as the second language” was developed for I-XII grade pupils. The textbook is transferred to the pupils for free.
- Electronic program – “Georgian, as foreign language” – is available for all interested persons, willing to learn Georgian language.

In 2014-2015, the implementation of programs “Georgian, as the second language” and “Georgian language for future success” continued, the purpose of which is to improve the knowledge of the state language and to support civic integration. Besides teaching of state language, the program “Georgian, as the second language” considers various extra-curricular activities – such as organizing of workshops, competitions, summer camps and Georgian language clubs. In 2014 the Georgian language clubs were

*“In 2014-2015, the implementation of programs “Georgian, as the second language” and “Georgian language for future success” continued”*

opened in 90 schools with 3545 participants (2625 pupils, 484 teachers and 436 local community members). 78 teachers of Georgian language were sent in non-Georgian language schools of Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti, under the mentioned program. The program – “Georgian language for future success” – considers training of teachers/volunteer teachers and then their sending to the regions densely populated with ethnical minorities, in order to assist teaching of Georgian language and local teachers. Since 2011, more than 600 teachers have been sent to the mentioned regions. Today, 285 teachers (198 assistant-teachers and 87 instructors) work in 210 non-Georgian language schools. The program covers 91% of non-Georgian language schools, throughout the country.

Z. Zhvania Public Administration School gives the opportunity to the representatives of the ethnic minorities (at central and local governmental structures and self-governing bodies),

employed in public sector, to participate in short- and long-term professional and educational programs; in addition, to improve the knowledge of the state language. Each subject course includes the direction of civil education. Z. Zhvania school regional training-centers are operating in Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti regions, where the representatives of ethnic minorities, employed in public sector, and the members of school administration have the opportunity to attend the Georgian language lessons for free.

## 2.2. Access to media and information

The law obliges the Public Broadcaster to prepare programs on minority languages and for minorities. This obligation is being fulfilled. Since 2003 the access of ethnic minorities to information has improved. The representatives of ethnic minorities have the opportunity to get the information on political-economic processes on

*“The Public Broadcaster produces news programs in five ethnic minority languages”*

a daily basis. The national “Moambe” is aired every day on Public Broadcaster 2nd Channel in five languages (Abkhazian, Ossetian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian). Since October 2014, informational-analytical program “Real Time” (*“Nastoyascheye vremya”*) - a joint project of “Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty” and “Voice of America” - is aired on Public Broadcaster. A weekly talk-show program “Our Yard” (*“Chveni Ezo”*) on ethnic minorities’ problematic and tolerance, was regularly prepared and aired. Since October 2014 it was replaced by the series of documentary *“Multinational Georgia”*.

The latest news are also aired via “First Radio”, in above-mentioned ethnic minority languages, which is complemented by the program in Kurdish language once a week. In 2013-2015 the state continued to support printed media in minority languages.

## 2.3. Civil and political participation

In 2012-2014 Parliamentary, Presidential and Local self-government elections were held in the country. Therefore, ensuring equal and active participation of ethnic minorities in elections was of crucial importance. The working group, established under the Central Election Commission, prepared and delivered the information, important for their active participation in elections, to the representatives of ethnic minorities:

- All the necessary materials have been translated into languages of minorities;
- The campaign, regarding the election process, was arranged for young voters and women for raising of awareness;
- The meetings, workshops and trainings have been conducted in Gardabani, Marneuli, Dmanisi, Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki;
- In addition, the Central Election Commission has provided financial support to 10 non-governmental organizations, working on electoral rights of ethnic minorities.

## 2.4. Social and regional integration

During 2013-2015, representatives of ethnic minorities were provided with the information about state health care programs and social assistance (the materials in the languages of ethnic minorities were prepared and distributed), under the program “providing information on the social guarantees to the national/ethnic minorities”. In 2013 the Office of the State Minister, together with the National Screening Center, was providing the information on the screening state program to the representatives of ethnic minorities. Informational meetings have been conducted with non-Georgian language population of Kvemo Kartli (Marneuli), Samtskhe-Javakheti (village Phoka) and Kakheti (village Kabali) municipalities. In 2014, 12 medical clinics have been constructed and equipped in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions, densely populated with ethnic minorities. In 2013-2015 implementation of various infrastructural projects was continued in regions densely populated with ethnic minorities. These projects covered gasification, rehabilitation of internal roads, irrigation and potable water systems, outdoor lighting, as well as repairs / renewal of school, sports infrastructure.

*“Implementation of various infrastructural projects was continued in regions densely populated with ethnic minorities”*

## 2.5. Preservation of identity and cultural heritage

During the mentioned period, the state has supported cultural centers and theatres of ethnic minorities. Cultural activities were carried out in order to facilitate the maintenance of uniqueness of ethnic minorities. Multi-ethnic cultural festival “Under One Sky” is worth mentioning among them, the interest to which is increasing from year to year from ethnic

minorities, as well as from Georgian youth; its geographical area is also expanding. In 2013-2015 five concerts (classical music and folklore) were conducted under festival. The youth of Tbilisi, Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kakheti and Adjara regions participated into this festival. In recent years, special attention was paid to the participation of youth, representing ethnic minorities, in various types of cultural activities.

- In 2014-2015 about 50 Azerbaijani students have visited Kakheti historical monuments. About 20 pupils of Kvemo Kartli have visited the National Museum of Georgia. The Pankisi Gorge pupils have visited Ethnographic Museum in Tbilisi. In addition, during mentioned period, the literature-historical-cognitive activities have been carried out in the villages Karajala and Duisi public schools;
- Informational meetings with the representatives of various agencies generate great interest among young people. They are given an opportunity to learn about the activities of different agencies, directly hear the view of decision-making persons on thematic issues and present their own opinions. In 2013-2014 years, the young people from Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti visited the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, the Teachers' House at the National Center for Teachers' professional development, the Office of the State minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs; these visits were organized by the Office of the State Minister.
- The lectures and workshops were carried out for students of higher education institutions with the participation and organizational support from the State Minister's office in Tbilisi, as well as in regions. The lectures-workshops and discussions were carried out in Samtskhe-Javakheti State University, Akhaltsikhe University, Tbilisi Iv. Javakhishvili State University. The topics of lectures were the diversity and tolerance, as well as rights of national minorities in Georgia, the state policy in terms of civic integration and etc.

## 2.6. Information/awareness raising campaign on the Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union

The Office of the State Minister of Georgia for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, together with the Office of the State Minister, implements the informational campaign on European integration of Georgia for ethnic minorities. The meeting with non-Georgian language students has been conducted in Tbilisi Iv. Javakhishvili State University. They were provided with the information on European integration process of Georgia. The

*"Ethnic minority representatives were provided with the information on European integration process of Georgia"*

Office of the State Minister has announced the competition of essays on the topic “European Integration and Me” for “4+1” program beneficiary students. The competition considered demonstration of opinions and attitudes of young people towards the European choice of Georgia. The competition commission has identified the authors of three best works. The winners were awarded, and the best articles were published in the newspapers “Vrastani” and “Gurjistani”. The informational materials were prepared and distributed in languages (Armenian, Azerbaijani, Abkhazian and Ossetian) of ethnic minorities during 2014-2015 years. The informational meetings, workshops and discussions were carried out with various target groups: students and senior pupils, representatives of non-governmental organizations, farmers of Marneuli, Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki municipalities, as well as representatives of regional media.

*Special attention was paid to the engagement of minority representatives in different cultural activities.*

- Office of the State Minister organized a special meeting in Marneuli among the representatives of National Examination Center, the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the ethnic minority representatives of the University enrollees. The latter was informed about the novelties of different programs involving the senior graders and about “1+4” program;
- Special event dedicated to the state language was held. Representatives of ethnic minorities presented the works of Georgian writers;
- In the same period, the project “Young Leaders’ Club” was established. In the framework of the project Office of the State Minister together with the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs organized lectures/debates aimed at raising awareness on civic integration amongst the representatives of ethnic minorities;
- Meetings on the human rights of young girls were held in Kvemo Kartli;
- 50 ethnic Azerbaijani children from the villages of Marneuli district attended the marionette opera show;
- Office of the State Minister together with the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia organized 2 concerts in the framework of Music Festival “Under One Sky”. Ethnic minorities from different regions of Georgia participated in the event;
- On the occasion of the week of festivities celebrating the International Day of Tolerance the Office of the State Minister organized the seminars/lectures in Kakheti and Kvemo Kartli engaging the local students. It also launched the photo contest “My diverse homeland” for the youngsters; winners were awarded with special gifts.
- Reception was held on the occasion of Women’s Day. Ethnic minorities’ women from Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti regions were invited to the event.



The relationship with the population, local self-governmental bodies, community leaders and non-governmental organizations was of crucial importance in the action plan implementation process. If necessary, for the purpose to effectively address various issues, the Office of State Minister has served as a mediator to various state agencies and local self-government bodies. The advocacy for the existing issues had a positive outcome in many cases. The Office of the State Minister has been developing close cooperation with the Council for National Minorities at the Office of the Public Defender of Georgia.

During the reporting period the State Minister's Office had close cooperation with the civil society institutions, international organizations, the diplomatic corps accredited in the country, local and international experts. Implementation of the civic integration state policy was supported by the United States International Development Agency (USAID) and United Nations Association of Georgia (UNAG).