



Activity report 2018

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The Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality identifies, coordinates and implements activities in two main directions – reconciliation, confidence building, facilitation/ implementation of engagement policy in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/ South Ossetia, peaceful resolution of the existing conflicts; also, facilitation of protection of rights of the representatives of ethnic minorities, living in Georgia, ensuring of equality and civil integration.

Creation of favorable environment for reconciliation, confidence building and better engagement of the population living in occupied territories is one of the central tasks of the State Minister's Office. The Government of Georgia has chosen peaceful, consistent and constructive course.

The main goal of the civil equality and integration policy is protection of rights of ethnic minorities, ensuring of their full-fledged and dignified participation in country's development, as well as facilitation of establishment and enhancement of tolerant environment.

Stemming from this, extensive activities were implemented in 2018; number of initiatives and programs were developed and implemented.

I. Reconciliation and Engagement Policy

1.1 New Peace Initiatives

25 years have passed since Georgia faces unresolved conflicts. At the 10th anniversary of Russian military aggression, de-facto annexation is still in progress; militarization of the occupied territories continues; fundamental principles of international law, human rights and freedoms are being violated openly and gravely, including ethnic discrimination of Georgian population of Gali and Akhgori districts, Russification policy and attempts of erasing Georgian traces, restrictions of the right to receive education in native language and to move freely, division of population living on both sides of dividing line by barbed wires and other artificial barriers, illegal detentions and infringement of the right to life, pressure on and intimidation of people. The society faces humanitarian challenges. Maintenance of peace against the background of permanent provocations is the every-day concern of the state.

Georgia confronts the above-mentioned challenges and difficulties by peace and development-oriented approaches, enjoying wide international support.

In 2018 Georgia made an unprecedented effort for peace and reconciliation, based on humanitarian needs of population, pragmatic interests, aspirations towards development and better future.

Through various peace initiatives, reconciliation and engagement policy, also by using humanitarian approaches, significant steps were made towards confidence building, improvement of social-economic situation of the population and increase of access to various opportunities. Thus, the Government of Georgia gives green light to constructive cooperation, dialogue with wide engagement of various representatives of societies and thus, cares about the welfare of the population prior to full-scale resolution of the conflict.

In 2018, the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, in partnership with other governmental agencies, developed new **Peace Policy Initiative – “A Step to a Better Future”**.

Peace Initiative is exclusively constructive and serves humanitarian goals, provides opportunity for solving various issues through humanitarian principles, in some cases, using status-neutral instruments and formats. The Initiative is based on flexible and pragmatic approach, corresponds to the interests and needs of the population and provides space for constructive involvement of all interested actors, community dialogue and cooperation. Implementation of this Initiative will significantly improve social-economic situation of the population on both sides of the dividing line; besides, it will have positive impact on the freedom of movement and deepening of people-to-people relations.

The Government of Georgia submitted the package of legislative amendments of the Peace Initiative “A Step to a Better Future” for consideration to the Parliament of Georgia in April 2018. The Parliament approved the package of legislative amendments on the basis of wide consensus after three hearings in June, 2018.

The Peace Initiative of the Government of Georgia also obtained wide international support from the EU, its individual member states, heads of the governments and from the USA, as well as international organizations and their institutions. This support was documented in a number of resolutions and declarations, including the European Parliament Resolution “Georgian Occupied Territories 10 Years after the Russian Invasion”, declaration of the NATO-Georgian Commission, Resolution of OSCE Parliamentary Assembly “Ten Years After the August 2008: War in Georgia”.

The Initiative envisages three directions:

- ❖ Facilitation of trade across dividing lines;
- ❖ Enhancement of educational opportunities for the residents of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia;
- ❖ Ensuring of access to various state services for the residents of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia.

Facilitation of Trade across Dividing Lines

The initiative aims to facilitate, simplify and expand trade across dividing lines without setting additional regulations for already existing agricultural trade. In particular, the initiative envisages:

- ❖ Enabling of the products originating from or produced in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia to access the internal market of Georgia as well as foreign markets through the privileged export opportunities available to Georgia (inter alia the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU and with other countries). It also implies the supply of goods produced on Georgian-controlled territories, or imported into Georgia, to Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.
- ❖ Introduction of a new status-neutral mechanism of identification for the residents of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia that implies registration with an individual (personal)

number and does not oblige a registered person to obtain any official document. Registration with a personal number does not imply granting or establishing Georgian citizenship and serves the goal of identifying and registering a person residing in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia. The person, registered this way, will have an access to various services, required for implementation of trade operations across dividing lines, such as registration as an entrepreneur, opening of bank accounts, registration of vehicles, receiving grants, etc., which is currently available for any interested Georgian or foreign citizen;

- ❖ Development of infrastructure for trade-economic activities adjacent to dividing lines, in village Rukhi that encompasses provision of services required for trade operations based on one-window principle. This space will bring together the relevant services of the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Internal Affairs, information and consultation center, multi-functional training center and business-incubator, auto market;
- ❖ Granting of a special tax payer status to any entrepreneur willing to engage in trade and economic activities across dividing lines. For these activities those with the special tax payer status will enjoy tax privileges and will be exempt from income and profit taxes, VAT;
- ❖ Introduction of status-neutral labeling. For accessing internal market, labeling of products originating from/ produced in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/ South Ossetia will be possible by indicating actual address (company, city name, street). In case of export, the rules established for international export will apply. It will be possible to indicate a legal address registered in special economic space (e.g. village Rukhi) as the place of registration of an entrepreneur;
- ❖ Enactment of mechanisms for stimulating trade across dividing lines, which imply creation of special sub-programs for facilitation of joint Georgian-Abkhazian/Georgian-Ossetian joint ventures and partnership programs. Also, the establishment of special independent fund is envisaged, where funds will be mobilized from various donors and actors, international partners and private organizations. For the purpose of facilitation of trade across dividing lines, the fund will serve the purpose of funding individual and joint business- initiatives and developing of villages adjacent to these lines.

Enhancing Educational Opportunities for the residents of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia

The goal of the Peace Initiative is expansion and simplification of educational opportunities for the persons residing in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/ South Ossetia, access to all stages of education and to quality education inside the country as well as abroad. In particular, the Initiative envisages:

- ❖ Involvement at all stages of education (pre-school, general, vocational education, post-secondary education preparation center) on the basis of registration with a personal number.
- ❖ Simplification of enrollment in Georgian higher educational institutions. In particular:
 - Maintains quota and state grant when passing unified national exams;
 - Provides an opportunity to pass unified national exams in Russian and Abkhazian/ Ossetian language at language exam;
 - Enables passing of Abkhazian and Ossetian language test for 1+4 program instead of general aptitude test that proved to be a challenge due to difficulties of understanding specific terminology of tests in Abkhazian and Ossetian languages;

- Creates post-secondary education preparation center for any interested person. In the framework of this program/center it will be possible to train-retrain students from Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia in preferred subjects. Following completion of one-year training course, as a result of overcoming minimum threshold, the student will be able to continue bachelor studies without passing unified national exams;
- Offers vocational education to those from Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, who fail to enroll to higher educational institution;
- Ensures covering of accommodation costs of the persons enrolled in higher educational institution.
- ❖ Simplification of access to international educational programs. In particular:
 - Ensures status-neutral recognition of higher education received in the occupied territory online and/or with the support of international organization;
 - Implies creation of special web-portal on existing educational opportunities;
 - Facilitates foreign language studies inside the occupied territories with the help of international partners;
 - Ensures funding of studies abroad through international education center;
 - Provides various flexible opportunities of travel to foreign countries for educational purposes.
- ❖ Simplifies access to vocational education and enhancement of qualification through creation of opportunities for registration with a personal number, online enrollment, covering of tuition and accommodation costs, establishment of innovation center and development of techno-parks in Rukhi.
- ❖ Facilitation of scientific cooperation within the framework of LEPL Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia and engagement in international programs, e.g. “Horizon 2020”, Fulbright Program, etc.
- ❖ Ensuring of protection and development of Abkhazian language in the framework of special state program while with the support of international partners continuation of efforts for ensuring the receipt of education in native language in the occupied territories.

Ensuring Access to Various State Services for the Residents of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/ South Ossetia

For the purpose of enjoying visa-free regime, the Peace Initiative envisages simplification of procedures for receiving the passport of the citizen of Georgia for the persons residing in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. Establishment of the facts of birth, death, marriage and divorce of the persons residing in these territories and issuance of the relevant civil acts will also be simplified.

According to the implementation plan of the Peace Initiative – “A Step to a Better Future”, activities are carried out to fully enact legislative amendments from the beginning of 2019. This implies the following directions:

1. **Legal**–adoption of the relevant sub-laws/ introduction of amendments into the existing acts; the process will be completed in the beginning of 2019.

2. **Infrastructural**–construction/arrangement of the infrastructure envisaged by the Peace Initiative in village Rukhi; Partnership Fund has developed the relevant project, implementation of which will start from the beginning of 2019.

3. **Financial** component that is already enforced – a) LEPL “Enterprise Georgia” has developed **new grant program “Enterprise for a Better Future”**, which was approved by the Government of Georgia on November 22, 2018. The Program implies facilitation of trade-economic activities across the dividing line and, for this purpose, support of individual and joint production and partnership projects of the population residing on both sides of dividing lines within 7,000 – 35,000 GEL.

b) **Establishment of special independent fund** is planned, which, in the framework of the Peace Initiative, will facilitate dialogue and confidence building between the divided communities, trade projects/ initiatives across dividing lines, as well as peace initiatives, people-to-people contacts and will assist the conflict-affected population residing adjacent to dividing lines. Development of the concept of the Fund and consultations with international donors is under way.

4. **Communication**–delivery of information to the community on the other side of dividing line through various dialogue platforms, people-to-people contacts, confidence building projects, social media, public diplomacy and other communication means. A clear interest is expressed from individuals and groups, related, inter alia, to particular initiatives.

Implementation of specific measures has started in the framework of the Initiative; in particular, **Entrant Training Program intended for the Youth residing in the occupied territories of Georgia**, envisaged under the Peace Initiative “A Step to a Better Future” was presented on November 21, 2018. The Program implies undergoing of special one-year training course for the youth residing in these territories, in Tbilisi and Zugdidi on the basis of free training center. These persons will be trained in preferred subjects and then, based on simplified procedures (without passing unified exams) will be enrolled in higher educational institutions. The pilot version of the Program will start from February 2019 and the full course will come into force since September of the same year. Full funding of education and provision of accommodation for the youth is envisaged.

One of the important tasks of the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality is to **make the benefits** stemming from the EU-Georgia integration process, including Association Agreement, **accessible for the residents of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia**. In this regard, enactment of visa-free regime with the EU countries is one of the tangible benefits of European integration, which shall become equally accessible to the population of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. For the purpose of enjoying visa-free regime, the Peace Initiative “A Step to a Better Future” envisages simplification of procedures for receiving the passport of the citizen of Georgia for the persons, residing in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. The relevant legislative amendments are already passed in this regard.

Besides, the main direction of the Peace Initiative – facilitation of trade across dividing lines envisages access of products, originating from/ produced in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia to foreign markets through dividing lines, using privileged export opportunities, which became available

for Georgia as a result of integration with the EU. It primarily includes Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Regime with the EU (DCFTA). As a result of enforcement of the Initiative, the residents of the occupied territories will also be able to enjoy this significant benefit stemming from the Association Agreement.

1.2 Formats of Cooperation with International Partners

In 2018, active cooperation was conducted with international partners. Number of events were organized discussing existing challenges and possible mechanisms for addressing them, as well as cooperation in the sphere of safety, conflict resolution, political, economic and humanitarian directions.

Peaceful conflict resolution and reconciliation and engagement policy of the Government of Georgia forms significant part of Georgia – EU dialogue. On February 5, 2018, the 4th meeting of Georgia – EU Association Council was held, one of the agenda items of which was peaceful conflict resolution. The Association Council confirmed strong position/attitude of the EU and its decisive role in conflict resolution process in Georgia through comprehensive/complex use of all the existing tools, including non-recognition and engagement policy. In parallel with expression of concern with regard to systematic violation of human rights, increase of militarization and other challenges on the occupied territories of Georgia, the Association Council agreed on the importance of continuation and intensification of large-scale policy and expressed support towards the reconciliation and engagement efforts of the Government of Georgia, aimed at the engagement of the population throughout the whole territory of the country. The Association Council mentioned the importance of further measures directed towards establishing of people-to-people contacts across dividing lines and confidence building among the conflict-affected population, as well as the importance of supporting reconciliation efforts.

On June 26, 2018, the fourth meeting of **Georgia – EU Association Committee** was held in Brussels, one of the important topics on the agenda of which, again, was peaceful conflict resolution. Once again, EU unambiguously reiterated strong support for the territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. Concern was expressed with regard to security and humanitarian issues in the occupied territories due to further aggravated situation. Along with other topics, the parties discussed reconciliation and engagement policy of Georgia, current and future steps. EU supported reconciliation and engagement policy of Georgia and in this context, welcomed the new initiative of the Government – “A Step to a Better Future”. The parties agreed to continue activities for the realization of this initiative.

On October 23, 2018, the second meeting of **Georgia – EU Strategic Dialogue** was held in the framework of which security and humanitarian situation in occupied territories was discussed; on the meeting, EU once again expressed full readiness to support the peace-building process.

Cooperation continued in the framework of **Georgia – USA Strategic Partnership Charter**. The People-to-people and Cultural Exchange working group of the Commission is headed by the Office of the State Minister. In the frames of this format, the USA supports Geneva International Discussions, continues support and cooperation towards peace, confidence-building and reconciliation.

For the purpose of coping with the common challenges and deepening of cooperation, in 2018 relations were developed among the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, the Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons of Ukraine and Bureau of Reintegration Policies of the State Chancellery of the Republic of Moldova. In particular:

- ❖ On May 17-18, 2018 the visit of the Minister of Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons of Ukraine Vadym Chernish took place in Tbilisi. The goal of the visit was sharing of experience of the Government of Georgia, civil society and donor organizations in peace- and confidence building. In the framework of the visit, the Minister and the staff of the Ministry visited the occupation line, signed the Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation between the Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons of Ukraine and the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality; besides, meetings were held with the representatives of various government agencies and NGOs.
- ❖ On July 16-19, 2018, visit of the staff of the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality took place in Kyiv (Ukraine), in the framework of which sharing of Ukraine's experience and further enhancement of relations between agencies took place.
- ❖ On November 13, 2018, tripartite meeting was held among the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality Ketevan Tsikhelashvili, Minister of Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons of Ukraine Vadym Chernish and Deputy Prime-Minister of Moldova for Reintegration Cristina Lesnik in Chisinau (Moldova). The parties exchanged information on the existing situation in the occupied territories of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova and shared experience with each other.
- ❖ On December 18-19, 2018, the meeting of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality Ketevan Tsikhelashvili, Minister of Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons of Ukraine Vadym Chernish and Deputy Prime-Minister of Moldova for Reintegration Cristina Lesnik took place in Tbilisi. The guests participated in the high level conference organized by the Office of the State Minister and Public Defender of Georgia – “Political and Legal Implications of Human Rights Violations in Conflict-Affected Areas”, as well as in the “Conference of Ambassadors”, organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia and visited the dividing line.
- ❖ In the framework of the visit, the government agencies of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia **signed the Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation**, as a result of which tripartite inter-agency platform was established. In the framework of the platform, parties will share information and use each other's experience for peaceful conflict resolution and peace-building purposes. Cooperation concerns important spheres, such as protection of human rights, coping with propaganda and information warfare, communication and confidence building with people residing in occupied territories and territories beyond effective control. This will further approximate and facilitate development of the existing cooperation among Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

1.3 Geneva International Discussions and Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) Meetings

The Government of Georgia continued constructive participation in Geneva International Discussions (GID). Four rounds of GID were held during 2018.

First Deputy State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality leads the second humanitarian working group, where one of the main issues and the central topic of the agenda is safe and dignified return of internally displaced persons and refugees. This is a principal and priority issue for Georgia and its international partners, substantial discussion of which is being intentionally hampered by other participants. Peaceful policy of conflict resolution will further continue, using all available tools for realization of this integral right of IDPs.

The major part of discussion in Humanitarian Group was devoted to human rights and humanitarian situation of the population residing in the occupied territory, in particular, to inadmissibility of additional restrictions to movement and the need of extension of this opportunity against the background of increasing people-to-people contacts enabling of humanitarian visits, access to their own agricultural lands, elimination of grave situation and of explicitly discriminative approaches in Gali and Akhagori districts, receipt of education in native language, as well as ensuring of other fundamental rights. In this regard, important issue is enactment of international human rights missions and mechanisms, which is major part of discussions.

It shall be mentioned, that the population, residing in the occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia regularly suffers from discriminative treatment. Particularly difficult situation is in Gali and Akhagori districts, where population is being discriminated on ethnic basis and fundamental rights and freedoms, provided in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in other respective treaties and conventions are violated.

Restrictions continue on freedom of movement of the population residing across the occupation lines of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia. According to existing information, in 2018, **96** persons were arrested towards Tskhinvali direction and **28** persons – towards Abkhazia direction. Vivid example of this is the detention of the local resident, Maia Otinashvili, aged 37, by the so-called border guards for the “illegal border crossing” in village Khurvaleti, located on the occupation perimeter in Gori Municipality on September 29, 2018. After 5 days of imprisonment, the so-called District Court of Akhagori sentenced Maia Otinashvili to 1 year of conditional punishment with 6-month “testing period” convicting her for “illegal border crossing”.

The situation is grave with regard to receipt of education in native language; in particular, at present 10 Georgian schools are remaining (school of Tagiloni was closed in 2017; the teachers and students were distributed to the neighboring Nabakevi school) in Gali district of the occupied Abkhazia. The situation in Gali city and adjacent villages of the so-called upper zone remains unchanged as compared with the previous year. Out of 9 schools, Georgian language is taught in 8 schools as a “foreign language” and only 2 hours are allocated for it per each class – 1 for grammar and 1 for literature. In #1 school of Gali city, Georgian language is taught as an optional subject in the 5th grade.

Education process from 1st to 6th (including) grades is conducted in Russian language. Consequently, Georgian can be learnt only from the 7th grade. Besides, subjects like biology, algebra, geometry, physics are taught in Georgian (teaching of history and geography of Georgia is prohibited), while history and geography are taught with Russian textbooks. At the same time, the process of removal of Georgian textbooks is actively implemented and, thus, subjects are taught with Russian textbooks.

Restriction of education in native language also continues in the occupied Tskhinvali region. Georgian schools of Akhlagori (1st- 4th grades) were moved to Russian educational program.

Attempts to change ethnic origin and identity in Gali district of occupied Abkhazia are actively taken. For this purpose, de-facto authorities compel the population of Gali district to change Georgian family names into Abkhazian, calling this the process of returning to “historical roots” (“Samurzakano Abkhazians”). According to 2017 data and information of public organization “Samurzakano Abkhazians’ Council”, 300 applications were submitted in Gali district concerning the change of family name and nationality.

This way, de-facto regime tries to erase Georgian traces in the occupied Abkhazia. These activities are implemented intentionally not only for changing identities of people, but also for amending the names of towns, villages and streets, to completely erase Georgian traces.

In parallel to this, the process of taking Abkhazian so-called passports is in progress; population is forced to take “residence permit”, which was introduced in accordance with the so-called Law “On Legal Status of Foreigners in Republic of Abkhazia” that “came into force” since April 1, 2016. According to present data, 7784 applications were submitted for obtaining the so-called residence permit in Gali district and out of those 3504 “permits” were issued.

In the framework of GID, special focus was made on the issue of killing of Georgian citizen, Internally Displaced Person Archil Tatumashvili in Tskhinvali on February 22, 2018. On February 22, 2018, in Akhlagori district, the representatives of the so-called security service illegally arrested the citizens of Georgia Archil Tatumashvili, Ioseb Pavliashvili and Levan Qutashvili. After taking Georgian citizens to Tskhinvali prison, Archil Tatumashvili was severely beaten and tortured resulting to his death. Notwithstanding continuous demands and international pressure, the representatives of de-facto authorities were refusing to handle the body to the family and Georgian side. This was ultimately done with 26 days delay in such a form that extremely complicated the possibility for verifying the cause of death.

Another central topic of the agenda was murder of the Georgian citizen Giga Otkhazia in village Khurcha on May 19, 2016 and the issue of immediate arrest and punishment of the perpetrator. Despite continuous demands from Georgian side, the murderer is still at large. Georgian side was also permanently raising the issue of investigation of murder of David Basharuli and handing over of the relevant materials to Georgian side.

In addition to the above-mentioned issues, discussion of the following topics continued in the framework of the Second Humanitarian Group: cooperation in the sphere of archives, protection of environment and

all other issues related to everyday needs of the population. Activities were implemented and certain cooperation took place with regard to the mentioned issues; this process continues and develops due to constructive and humanitarian approach of Georgian side as well as active support of international partners. One of the examples of such cooperation is the meeting between Georgian and Abkhazian specialists in Rome (Italy) in June, 2018 for the purpose of development of efficient mechanisms for fighting against brown marmorated stink bug in Abkhazia region. The participants discussed the existing situation, challenges and future steps.

The Office of the State Minister is regularly involved in the work of Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM). Each month, the representatives of the Office participate in Ergneti and Gali meetings, where various facts of human rights violations in occupied territories of Georgia are regularly discussed.

During the reporting period, 6 meetings were held in Gali and 7 meetings – in Ergneti. Due to destructive approach of the representatives of de-facto authorities, meetings in Gali stopped since June 2018, and meetings in Ergneti were stopped for 2 months (October-November) that resumed in December.

1.4 Engagement of Women in Peace Process

The Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality attaches importance to women's role and use of their potential in peace processes and continues facilitation of increase of their involvement in confidence building and reconciliation process. The Office of the State Minister is actively involved in the implementation of National Action Plan for 2018 – 2020 for Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. During the reporting period, in the format of regular dialogue mechanism, 5 exchange information meetings were held (3 – Tbilisi, 1 – Perevi, 1 – Ergneti) with the participation of GID and IPRM participants, representatives of local conflict-affected community, women's non-governmental organizations and experts. The meetings covered the facts of security and human rights violations at dividing lines with Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region as well as the challenges and the main directions of peace policy. It shall also be mentioned that during the last round of GID, held in 2018, information meeting was arranged dedicated particularly to women issues. With the initiative of the Office of State Minister and together with the Academy of the Ministry of Finance, in 2018 the implementation of projects started for facilitation of economic empowerment of conflict-affected women. During the reporting period, 17 women, residing in Zugdidi municipality, were given the opportunity to extend their theoretical knowledge and enhance practical skills for starting up their own business. Also, 4 consulting meetings, organized by the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality were held during 2018 with the representatives of the local conflict-affected community in Khashuri, Dusheti, Kaspi municipalities. The above-mentioned activities were implemented in the framework of the National Action Plan for 2018 – 2020 for Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security.

In this regard, the Office of the State Minister actively cooperates with relevant government agencies, local municipalities, civil society and UN Women in Georgia.

1.5 Identification of the Fate of the Persons Missing as a result of the Armed Conflicts

Identification of the fate and whereabouts of the persons missing as a result of the armed conflicts and in later periods as well as protection of the rights of their family members forms part of the state policy. Since 2018, the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality actively engaged in Georgian-Abkhazian Coordination Mechanism related to persons missing as a result of the armed conflict of 1992-1993 and in later period.¹ The activities of the Coordination Mechanism are strictly defined having only humanitarian nature; the bilateral Coordination Mechanism was established in 2019 and 12 meetings were held since then.

During the reporting period, activities continued in this direction. Number of meetings were held with the representatives of International Committee of Red Cross, LEPL Levan Samkharauli National Bureau of Forensic Expertise, LEPL State Service for Veterans Affairs, City Hall of Tbilisi Municipality, “Hermes” Ltd and other partner organizations.

Mortal remains of 22 persons missing as a result of the armed conflict of 1992-1993 and in later period were identified and handed over to the families in April, 2018. The identified remains were transported, their family members were informed and, in agreement with them, the measures were implemented for handing over, civic funeral and the ceremony of burial on the communal grave with military honor.

In May 2018, under the chairmanship of the International Committee of Red Cross, 12th meeting was held of Forensic Work Group (FWG) of bilateral coordination mechanism related to the persons missing as a result of the armed conflict of 1992 – 1993 and in later period. The main goal of the meeting was agreement on exhumation plan for 2018 and the opening of burial places.

For the success of the process of identification of the fate of missing persons, special importance is attached to obtaining of information, related to the whereabouts of graves and the circumstances of going missing. As a result of efforts of the parties involved in the process, remarkably big number of graves was identified in 2018 and in total, opening of 59 burial places and exhumation of 107 mortal remains was organized during this year.

Although majority of persons missing as a result of the armed conflict of 1992-1993 and in later period are already registered, certain number of families who have not yet declared missing of their family member still remains. In 2018, in cooperation with the International Committee of Red Cross, about 100 new cases were registered and the mentioned persons were included in Georgian list of missing persons. In accordance with the plan of intensified identification of the mortal remains of the missing persons, testing of biological samples also continued actively. In 2018, about 600 genetic expert services were provided; in particular, genetic testing- profiling took place of biological samples of the family members and biological relatives of the persons missing as a result of the armed conflict of 1992 – 1993 in Abkhazia and in the rest of Georgia.

¹ With the decision of the Government of Georgia stemming from the Government reorganization process, the issues of identification of the fate and whereabouts of the persons missing as a result of the armed conflicts and protection of the rights of their family members came under the competence of the Office of the State Minister

On December 3 and 4, 2018, in Yerevan was held the 12th meeting of Georgian-Abkhazian Coordination Mechanism related to the persons missing as a result of the armed conflict of 1992 – 1993 and in later period and the 13th meeting of the working group of medical-anthropological expertise. The meetings were chaired by the International Committee of Red Cross in the capacity of neutral intermediary. Specific future steps were discussed apart from the achieved results.

Over 2400 persons are missing in Georgia as a result of the armed conflicts of the 90s and in 2008. Their family members have to live in uncertainty and in permanently waiting mode. For the purpose of identification of the fate and whereabouts of the persons missing as a result of the above-mentioned conflicts, two coordination mechanisms were established under the auspices of the International Committee of Red Cross.

1.6 Implementation of Engagement Action Plan

The Government of Georgia continued active implementation of the State Strategy and Action Plan for Engagement. Special care was provided to the conflict-affected population. Emphasis was made on the directions such as access to healthcare and education, improvement of social-economic situation of vulnerable population, facilitation of people-to-people contacts and confidence building and ensuring of international engagement.

1.6.1 Healthcare

The Government of Georgia attaches special importance to the ensuring and simplification of access to healthcare services for the persons residing in the occupied territories. In this regard, **State Referral Program** continued to effectively operate, which provides free healthcare services to the persons residing in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. The residents of these territories, who cross the occupation line, have the opportunity to receive full-scale, needs-based medical service in any medical institution existing in Georgia. On the other hand, the Government of Georgia also works for the improvement of medical services inside the occupied territories and provides assistance to the local medical units.

According to incomplete data of 2018, 1,504 patients from the occupied territories received services under the Referral Program (Abkhazia region – 1162, Tskhinvali region – 342).

Through the Liaison Mechanism, which continues efficient operation in the framework of Engagement Action Plan, the Government of Georgia continued to supply necessary vaccines to Abkhazia region, including immunization, hepatitis B and veterinary vaccines, diabetes treatment, hepatitis C tests, anti-TB antibiotics and anti-HIV/AIDS medicine, the annual cost of which exceeds 500,000 GEL.

Ambulance vehicles, medical equipment, devices and various medical items are periodically delivered to Abkhazia region through Liaison Mechanism. In 2018, 1 ambulance vehicle was handed over to Abkhazia region.

The cost of the medical equipment handed over to Abkhazia region in 2018 equaled to about 1 million GEL.

The residents of the occupied territories of Georgia continue to be involved in Hepatitis C Elimination Program and to receive the relevant medical services. Enhancing access to the mentioned program for the persons residing in the occupied territories is under consideration.

It shall be mentioned that the amount spent by the Government of Georgia on healthcare component in 2018 equaled to about 7 million GEL.

1.6.2 Education

One of the priority directions for the Government of Georgia is ensuring and simplifying access to education for the persons residing in the occupied territories.

The Government continued implementation of the so-called “1 + 4” program, which allows the representatives of ethnic minorities, including Abkhazians and Ossetians, to get enrolled in higher educational institutions of Georgia by simplified procedures -passing only one exam in native language that is accompanied by 1-year training in Georgian language followed by 4- year bachelor’s program on selected faculty. Study in the framework of “1 + 4” Program is funded by the Government.

For further simplifying status-neutral procedure of recognition of education received in the occupied territory and ensuring more flexibility as well as for facilitation of involvement in international educational programs, with the initiative of the Office of the State Minister in 2018 one more amendment was introduced to the Order # 1067 dated December 1, 2009 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia. As a result, the opportunity for submitting the documents required for recognition, on behalf of the applicant, as well as participation in recognition process, along with international organization, was also granted to Georgian higher educational institution.

1.6.3 International Engagement and Confidence Building Projects

The Government of Georgia actively continued to support efficient communication between divided communities, implementation of confidence building projects and public diplomacy. One of the goals of the new Peace Initiative “A Step to a Better Future”, developed by the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, is facilitation of community dialogue and forming of basis for cooperation on various issues among the divided communities.

The Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality used all opportunities to reach out to Abkhazians and Ossetians and actively worked for the creation of new opportunities for dialogue and confidence building; it also supported and facilitated engagement of international organizations in the occupied territories and implementation of various confidence building projects by them. The staff of the Office regularly participated in various projects of international and local organizations aimed at confidence building and at conducting of thematic dialogue between conflict-divided communities. In 2018, the staff of the Office of the State Minister participated in 14 Georgian-Abkhazian meetings.

During 2018, a number of confidence building projects were implemented in the sphere of education, development of Abkhazian language, health, youth relations, human rights, archives, cultural heritage, etc. In close cooperation with the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality and with involvement of Liaison Mechanism, in 2018 Council of Europe implemented following bilateral confidence building projects:

- ❖ The meeting of Georgian and Abkhazian archive materials experts in Budapest (Hungary), Rome (Italy), Paris (France) and Venice (Italy) for the purpose of preparation of a joint publication on the topic of anti-Soviet rallies in Abkhazia region during the Soviet period;
- ❖ Follow-up meeting of Georgian and Abkhazian doctors in Venice (Italy) on the topic of prevention and treatment of drug addiction;
- ❖ Joint training of Georgian and Abkhazian doctors in Lisbon (Portugal);
- ❖ Follow-up training of Abkhaz language speaking Georgian and Abkhazian specialists in the technique of simultaneous translation in Budapest (Hungary);
- ❖ Training of Georgian and Abkhazian psychologists and psychiatrists in Istanbul (Turkey) on the topic of methodology of interviewing children- victims of violence;
- ❖ Participation of Georgian, Abkhazian and Ossetian youth in Peace Camp in Strasbourg (France);
- ❖ Lectures of EU experts on the topic of conservation of architectural heritage in Sokhumi;
- ❖ Training of Georgian and Abkhazian doctors in Paris (France) on the topic of treatment of TB and infectious diseases.

Meanwhile, the Government of Georgia continued working on continuation of existing assistance from donors and mobilization of additional support.

The Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality was facilitating and supporting engagement of international organizations in occupied territories and implementation of various humanitarian and needs-based projects. Meetings and consultations with international organizations were conducted practically on daily basis aimed at maintaining and strengthening their engagement in the occupied territories. In the framework of regular cooperation, the violation of human rights in the occupied territories, including the issues of restrictions to freedom of movement, receipt of education in native language, access to healthcare services, protection of cultural heritage, etc., the steps for addressing these issues, as well as the actions to be taken by the Government of Georgia in the framework of reconciliation and engagement policy, were discussed with international organizations. On July 19, 2017 the Office of the State Minister held meeting with the international organizations, acting in Abkhazia region in the framework of Abkhazia Strategic Partnership (ASP), where the activities of the above-mentioned organizations, the current projects, existing challenges and future perspectives were discussed. Regular meetings were also held with the representatives of civil society and non-governmental organizations, experts' community. In the framework of these meetings, information was exchanged on the existing situation in the occupied territories, current and planned activities of the Office of the State Minister, inter alia, with regard to the Peace Initiative, as well as the projects implemented and planned with respect to the occupied territories by non-governmental organizations and the challenges faced.

It shall be mentioned that during 2018, 64 additional projects were funded and commenced by international non-governmental organizations with regard to the occupied regions.

1.6.4 Liaison Mechanism

For communication with divided communities, importance is attached to efficient functioning of the Liaison Mechanism, operating in the framework of the Engagement Action Plan of the Government of Georgia, which maintains informal contacts among the above-mentioned communities, regularly provides Abkhazia region with various medicines and assists international organizations in implementation of confidence building projects. Also, Liaison Mechanism ensures delivery of various agricultural and plant protection facilities to Abkhazia region.

In 2018, with the purpose of supporting agricultural works, veterinary and anti-nodular dermatitis vaccines, spraying equipment against brown marmorated stink bug, pheromones, special equipment and necessary pesticides with total value of 600,000 GEL were handed over to Abkhazia region.

In addition, Liaison Mechanism:

- ❖ Conducted training on magnetic resonance tomography for Georgian and Abkhazian doctors in Israel;
- ❖ Funded the project of Zurab Danelia Union “Tanadgoma”, in the framework of which three wards were equipped in Abkhazia region;
- ❖ Funded the project of the international organization “Action against Hunger”, in the framework of which assistance was provided and awareness raising was conducted for the population of Abkhazia region on the issues of animal health;
- ❖ Funded delivery of rehabilitation equipment for children with disabilities in Abkhazia region;
- ❖ Conducted training on coverage of sensitive topics for the journalists working on conflict issues.

1.7 Addressing the Needs of the Affected Population in Villages adjacent to Dividing Lines. Donor Assistance

Since 2013, in the framework of Temporary Governmental Commission Addressing the Needs of Affected Communities in the villages adjacent to dividing lines, the Office of the State Minister, together with the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development, coordinates implementation of individual measures and programs by governmental and non-governmental organizations in the villages adjacent to dividing lines. Since 2013 number of social, infrastructural, healthcare, educational, agricultural, etc. measures stemming from the needs of the population are permanently implemented in the above-mentioned villages. The following measures were implemented in the framework of the Commission activities in 2018:

- ❖ **Provision with heating:** for the purpose of provision of the families residing in the villages adjacent to dividing line with heating in winter time, the Ministry of Finance of Georgia allocated 2 435 600 GEL. The families, registered as consumers of natural gas, received a transfer of 200 GEL on their account, and the families which are not registered as consumers of natural gas, were given 200 GEL. Total 12178 beneficiaries benefitted from the mentioned assistance,

including: 7909 beneficiaries from Gori municipality; 194 beneficiaries from Khashuri municipality; 527 beneficiaries from Kaspi municipality; 2875 beneficiaries from Kareli municipality; 366 beneficiaries from Sachkhere municipality; 138 beneficiaries from Oni municipality; 169 beneficiaries from Dusheti municipality. Governmental Commission also made decision on November 5, 2018 to allocate 200 GEL per family for the purpose of provision of the residents of the above- mentioned villages with heating in the winter period. Consequently, in 2019 funding was allocated for 13042 families, including: 12098 in the villages, where the population is registered as consumers of natural gas and 944 in the villages where gasification is not completed yet. For this latter purpose, 2 608 400 GEL was allocated from the state budget;

- ❖ **Gasification:** gasification, connection to the gas network and registration as consumers was completed in 62 villages of Gori, Kaspi, Kareli, Khashuri and Zugdidi municipalities (19 mln GEL); the number of consumers, according to actual situation, equals to 19 728;
- ❖ **Water supply:** water bore-holes, chlorination facilities and pressure towers were arranged in 33 villages; in particular, 32 bore-holes, 32 chlorination facilities and 31 pressure towers were arranged. The works for the arrangement of water distribution network were completed in 10 villages adjacent to dividing line. Also, projection for the arrangement of network is completed for 21 villages. Irrigation systems, 5 pumping stations were put in order;
- ❖ **Rehabilitation of roads:** rehabilitation of local road cover (asphalting), total 133 km, was implemented;
- ❖ Over 45 out-patient facilities were organized and equipped;
- ❖ **Education:** In 2017-2018 academic year, bachelors and masters studies of 1193 students from the villages adjacent to dividing lines were funded. The allocated amount equaled to 2 500 000 GEL. In addition to that, students are funded in the framework of social program (700 students); in accordance with the decision of November 5, 2018 of the Commission, about 1500 students will be funded in 2018-2019 academic year as well. The amount required for funding supposedly equals to 3 mln GEL;

In 2017-2018 academic year, in the framework of sub-program “Teach Georgia”, 12 consultants-teachers were assigned to the villages adjacent to dividing line:

- Teacher of Georgian language and chemistry to the village Atotsi of Kareli municipality;
 - Biology teacher to the village Arghuni of Dusheti municipality;
 - English language teacher to the village Kodistskaro of Kaspi municipality;
 - Teacher of mathematics, 2 teachers of Georgian language, 2 teachers of English language and 2 music teachers) to the villages of Mestia Municipality – Ushguli, Nakra, Chuberi, Mulakhi and Khaishi;
 - Geography, sport and English language teachers to the village Ghebi of Oni municipality.
 - Consultants-teachers help local teachers, conduct additional lessons and are engaged in various projects of facilitation of informal education.
- ❖ **„Enterprise Georgia“** – In the framework of the state program, micro and small business was encouraged (205 beneficiaries);
 - ❖ **Agriculture:** 38 perennial extensive-type modern gardens were planted on 152 ha land in the framework of the project “Plant the Future”. In the framework of supporting small-plot farmers, 17 438 ha land was plowed, cultivated and sown;

- ❖ **Timber materials:** 15,027 sq. m. timber resources were allocated in the framework of social cuts.

II. Civic Equality and Integration

Georgia is a multi-ethnic country. According to 2014 Census, the representatives of ethnic minorities constitute 13.2% of total population (excluding Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia).

Development and efficient implementation of the state policy related to ethnic minorities is one of the priority issues of the state. The goal of the above-mentioned policy is on the one hand to contribute to the protection of rights, full-fledged participation of the representatives of ethnic minorities in all spheres of public life and on the other hand to ensure preservation of their culture, further strengthening of tolerant environment.

The basic principles of civic integration policy apply to large groups of ethnic minorities as well as to dispersedly settled and vulnerable ethnic minorities and envisages preservation of their culture and identity.

The Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civil Equality coordinates elaboration, implementation and reporting of the state policy towards ethnic minorities. It also leads the activities of the State Inter-Agency Commission established for effective implementation of the “State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and Action Plan for 2015 – 2020”. In the framework of the State Inter-Agency Commission, thematic working groups are established, where acute issues and challenges are considered with involvement of non-governmental organizations and experts.

During the reporting period, a number of projects/programs and activities were implemented in the frames of the civic integration policy.

Concrete steps targeted at further improvement of engagement of ethnic minorities were undertaken within the following strategic goals:

- ❖ Ensuring equal and full-fledged participation in civic and political life;
- ❖ Providing equal social and economic conditions and opportunities;
- ❖ Ensuring access to high-quality education and knowledge of the state language;
- ❖ Preserving culture of ethnic minorities and ensuring tolerant environment.

2.1. Ensuring Civic and Political Participation

Ensuring equal and active participation of the representatives of ethnic minorities in Presidential elections held in 2018 was an important objective. In this regard, Central Electoral Commission (CEC) implemented the following important activities:

- ❖ Various electoral documentation was prepared and published in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages²;
- ❖ 15 video clips on available services were prepared in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages and broadcasted through regional TV companies;
- ❖ Information on electoral issues was provided to electors in CEC telephone/information center in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages;
- ❖ Verification of data in electors' uniform list was possible for the electors-representatives of ethnic minorities, residing in compactly settled regions in Armenian and Azeri languages which was uploaded on CEC official website (www.cesko.ge);
- ❖ Information/awareness raising campaign was conducted; the relevant materials were delivered;
- ❖ Re-training of the members of electoral administration – representatives of ethnic minorities with regard to electoral procedures was carried out;
- ❖ Promotion of participation of the vulnerable groups, including ethnic minorities, in electoral process was identified as priority direction for funding through grant competition³. LEPL under CEC – the Center for Development of Electoral Systems, Reforms and Training (Training Center), based on the decision of the Grant Commission, funded 10 projects of non-governmental organizations with total value of 219 062 GEL;
- ❖ Electoral Administration and the Training Center under CEC implemented the following information-training projects: “Electoral Development School”, “Electoral Law”, “Informed Young Elector”.

For Presidential elections of October 28, 2018, 346 electoral precincts were organized in 12 Regional Electoral Commission in the regions of compact settlements of ethnic minorities: Georgian-Azerbaijani – 209 precincts; Georgian-Armenian – 133 precincts; Georgian-Armenian-Azerbaijani – 4 precincts. Throughout Georgia, trainings were held for 43 352 members of Precinct Electoral Commissions, including 1639 members, representing ethnic minorities (ethnically Armenian – 762 members; ethnically Azerbaijani – 877 members).

During the reporting period, in Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti regions compactly populated by ethnic minorities, the activities of Public-Advisory Councils were intensified, as a result of which participation of the representatives of local ethnic minorities in decision-making process was facilitated.

² Electoral bulletin; uniform list of electors; the rule of filling in the bulletin; poster reflecting participation in voting; instructions for guidance of the members of Precinct Electoral Commission; checklist for the chairman of Precinct Electoral Commission; authorities of the secretary of Precinct Electoral Commission on the day of voting; functions of the Commission members regulating the flow of elector; functions of Commissions members registering the electors; function of the Commission members supervising the electoral box and special envelopes; functions of Commission members-supervisors; functions of the Commission members accompanying the mobile ballot box; training unit for Electoral Commission members – Safety of Elections; instructions and video clip for the Precinct Electoral Commission members on the etiquette of conversation and norms of behavior with the individuals with disabilities; training video “Procedures of Ballot Day” for the members of the Precinct Electoral Commission.

³ The directions of funding of grant competition was determined by the CEC Resolution №9/2018 dated January 22, 2018; the directions of funding of grant competition was determined by the CEC Resolution №93/2018 dated April 6, 2018

The representatives of ethnic minorities have not faced problems because of the lack of knowledge of the state language. They were provided with the relevant verbal explanations either in the state language or in the language they understand.

On December 14, 2017, amendment was made to the Decree #410 dated June 18, 2014 of the Government of Georgia “On Approval of the State Program on the Procedures and Terms of Internship in Public Institutions”. In particular, the procedures of internship were determined in public institutions for the representatives of ethnic minorities. According to the passed amendments, the students-representatives of ethnic minorities, who have undergone “Special Educational Training Program in Georgian Language”, were given an opportunity to obtain the relevant experience and develop professional skills through internship in public structures, which will contribute to involvement of youth in civic integration processes. Within the program, 142 selected young individuals-participants of “1+4” Educational Program (and in 2017, in the framework of pilot program – 65) have undergone internship in various public agencies, including self-government bodies and legal entities of public law.

2.2. Supporting Smaller and Vulnerable Ethnic Minorities

Protection of rights of smaller and venerable ethnic minorities and ensuring their full-fledged civic integration is the most important objective of the civic integration policy; various ministries are involved in this process.

Teaching the native languages of the representatives of smaller ethnic minorities (Ossetian, Chechen, Avar, Udi, Assyrian) continued in 2018 in particular public schools.

For the purpose of further strengthening and participation of Roma community, the Office of the State Minister identified strategic tasks. The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia implemented various projects in 2017-2018 in the framework of “Supporting Social Inclusion” program. The most significant were those initiated by young Roma that aimed at their socialization. Among them, 6 projects were funded with total value of 24 464.00 GEL, in which 54 young people and 111 volunteers students and young people were involved.

Enhancement of informal education encouraged involvement of Roma in common education system. In 2018, 263 Roma students attended schools that is unprecedented statistics.

During the reporting period, the process of registration of Roma continued. The relevant procedures were implemented with regard to registration of birth, citizenship, as well as issuance of IDs.

2.2.1. Pankisi Gorge Development Program

For the purpose of elaboration of Pankisi Gorge Development Program based on the the interests of the population and prospects of development of the Gorge, the Office of the State Minister initiated needs assessment followed by evaluation of findings in May, 2017. In this regard, Inter-Agency Working Group established in the framework of the “State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration” prepared Pankisi Gorge Development Program and Action Plan in 2018. In the working process, meetings and consultations were actively held with the population of Pankisi Gorge, representatives of the Council of

Elders, Council of Kist Women, representatives of educational institutions, the representatives of the civil society, other target groups working on the problematic of the Gorge.

The following priority directions were defined in the Program: development of tourism, access to high-quality education, implementation of infrastructural projects, support/popularization of culture, access to information, support and empowerment of youth and improving civic participation of the local population in various spheres of public life.

The following concrete activities were implemented during the reporting period:

- ❖ **Information campaign** on state services and programs was conducted with the initiative of the Office of the State Minister. The population of Pankisi Gorge was provided with information, inter alia, related to educational opportunities, vocational training and employment, health and social care, economic and financial programs, agriculture and protection of environment.
- ❖ With the joint initiative of the Office of the State Minister and LEPL Information Center on NATO and EU, with financial support of EU Delegation to Georgia, the **project** was implemented aimed at awareness raising among Pankisi Gorge women on Georgia's **European and Euro-Atlantic Integration**. In the framework of the project, teachers and directors of public schools of Pankisi Gorge (20 persons) participated in two-day workshop that took place in Tbilisi; they had an opportunity to receive information on the process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Georgia, discuss and consider acute issues, participate in cultural program. On the second stage of the project a study visit to Brussels is planned, where the participants will meet the representatives of the European institutions, also European colleagues and get familiarized with European education system.

For the purpose of popularization of Vainakh culture and further promotion of cultural dialogue, various activities were supported and organized by the Office of the State Minister:

- ❖ **Memorial evening, dedicated to the 155th anniversary from the birth of Kist enlightener and religious figure, Mate Albutashvili**, organized by the Office of the State Minister, Women's Union "Congress of Caucasian Women" and supported by the Reserve Fund of the President;
- ❖ In the framework of the program dedicated to the 155th anniversary of birth of the writer, enlightener and religious figure Mate Albutashvili, **Conference was held on the topic: "Biographical Features and Creative Work of Mate Albutashvili: Pankisi Gorge in Temporal and Spatial Cross-section"**. The conference was organized in National Palace of Youth. Twenty young people from Tbilisi and Pankisi Gorge (villages of Duisi, Jokolo and Chargali) schools participated in the Conference;
- ❖ **Vainakh Culture Days** – in the frames of cooperation of the Office of the State Minister and "New Georgian University", Poti, diverse program was organized, including music performances, public lecture on the phenomenon of Kist people in Georgian reality and Georgian-Vainakh relations, presentation of the books on Vainakhs;
- ❖ **Presentation of the book by Kist writer and poet Maia Margoshvili** was held in the National Library of the Parliament of Georgia. The collection named "Caucasian Sonata of White Nights" includes poems and novels of the author;

- ❖ In the attic of Kote Marjanishvili State Dramatic theatre the **performance was arranged staged by the students of public school of village Duisi of Pankisi Gorge – “Open Gallery”**. About 10 high school students participated in it;
- ❖ In the framework of the **events, dedicated to the creative work** of famous writer and public figure **Gigi Khornauli**, his books were presented in the village of Duisi of Pankisi Gorge. The books also include stories about Kists. The writer always had close relations with Kists, which he reflected in his creative work – his stories retell about remarkable brotherhood and friendship of Georgian and Kist peoples;
- ❖ Dui Dishneli **horse race** was organized in the village of Duisi, which was dedicated to the 200th anniversary of settlement of Kists in Pankisi Gorge; the winners were awarded;
- ❖ **In the framework of “European Days 2018”** information/education tour was arranged in David Agmashenebeli Academy of National Defense, in which participated the same-age participants of “Young European Ambassadors” and students from Pankisi Gorge;
- ❖ **Students from Pankisi Gorge** also visited the Administration of the Government of Georgia, where they received information on civic integration policy developments and discussed various initiatives.

2.3. Gender Mainstreaming

The Office of the State Minister devoted special attention to the awareness raising on gender equality issues (domestic violence, early marriages), identification/consideration of women’s needs and challenges:

- ❖ In the frames of joint initiative of the Office of the State Minister, “Tolerance, Civic Awareness and Integration Support Program” of the US International Development Agency (USAID) and UN Association in Georgia, the Project “Youth for Gender Equality” continued to be implemented in cooperation with the State Fund for Protection and Assistance of (statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking. The members of mobile group, established in the framework of the Project, conducted 120 trainings in 68 villages of 3 regions (11 municipalities, 3465 beneficiaries). Information campaign was efficient with positive dynamics of diminishing the cases of early marriages;
- ❖ With the initiative of the Office of the State Minister, in cooperation with the Legal Assistance Service, information/awareness raising campaign on the issues of domestic violence and state services was held in districts densely populated by ethnic minorities (Kvemo Kartli – Tsalka, Samtskhe-Javakheti – Ninotsminda, Kakheti – Iormughanlo, Akhalsopeli);
- ❖ Economic empowerment of women is considered as one of the priority issues. Consequently, the activities aimed at enhancing of their knowledge and skills were planned and implemented. In particular, the Office of the State Minister in partnership with the Academy of the Ministry of Finance, conducted a training course “How to Start and Develop Business” for women residing in Kvemo Kartli region. Sixteen participants, selected as a result of contest, were given the opportunity to expand theoretical knowledge and develop practical skills of entrepreneurship, also elaborate specific business plans;
- ❖ For ensuring involvement of women in electoral processes, meetings were held with the ethnic minority women in the village of Kapanakhchi of Marneuli municipality and in Ninotsminda municipality.

2.4. Ensuring Access to Media and Information

Georgian Public Broadcaster has the leading role in ensuring access to information for ethnic minorities.

TV Broadcasting. Live re-broadcasting of Georgian version news program “Moambe” at 18:00 and 20:00 with simultaneous translation in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages through regional TV channels is operational. This project – “Improvement of information access for ethnic minorities in known languages” is implemented by the Association of Regional Broadcasters and Public Broadcaster with the support of the US Embassy in Georgia. Also web-portal in seven-languages (Georgian, Abkhazian, Ossetian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, English and Russian) – www.1tv.ge was launched under the umbrella of the Public Broadcaster.

Radio broadcasting. News program in five minority languages, also in Kurdish is aired once a week in public radio. During 2018, weekly program “Our Georgia” was aired (chronometry – 40 min.) reflecting the issues of civic integration, ethnic and religious diversity of Georgia, cultures of various ethnicities, the existing challenges, traditions and peculiarities. Also, educational-entertainment program in Kurdish language (chronometry – 25 min.) was aired by Radio 2 once a week.

Printed media. During the reporting period, the state continued further financial support of Armenian language newspaper “Vrastan” (102 editions, 3500 copies) and Azerbaijani language newspaper “Gurjistan” (93 editions, 2000 copies). The newspapers were disseminated in Tbilisi as well as in the regions compactly settled with ethnic minorities, establishments of the Ministry of Corrections.

2.5. Improvement of Knowledge of the State Language and Ensuring Access to High Quality Education

2.5.1. Improvement of Knowledge of the State Language

Lack of knowledge of the state language is an important challenge in the process of civic integration. Implementation of the programs and projects aimed at improving the level of knowledge of the state language continued at all stages of education. “Professional Development Program of Non-Georgian Language School Teachers” was implemented in non-Georgian language schools. The aim of the Program is facilitation of professional development of non-Georgian language school/sector teachers and improvement of the quality of education through enhancement of teaching of the state language. The Program (2016-2019) is also oriented on training of local teachers of non-Georgian schools in preparation for subject examinations, as well as on learning of the state language. In the framework of the Program, the state language training course was conducted for two groups of local teachers of non-Georgian language schools of Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti regions, where 1080 participants were involved.

Program “Professional Development Program of Non-Georgian Language School Teachers” also envisages dealing with staff shortage in non-Georgian language schools of Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti regions. For this purpose, three groups of teachers were allocated at non-Georgian schools:

- ❖ 121 consultant-teachers
- ❖ 86 assistant teachers
- ❖ 77 bilingual assistant-teachers

Activities aimed at improving the level of knowledge of the state language were implemented by Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration within the “State Language Teaching Program”. In the framework of the Program, the representatives of ethnic minorities employed in the public sector, representatives of the local self-government bodies, regional administrations, resource centers of the Ministry of Education, public schools as well as any interested persons have the opportunity to learn the state language free of charge in 10 Regional Training Centers of the School⁴ and in mobile groups (levels A1, A2, A2+, B1, B1+).

During the reporting period the following activities were implemented:

- ❖ With the purpose to cover more geographic areas for teaching the state language, competition was held for selection of teachers, as a result of which 14 teachers were selected;
- ❖ The school implements the Project – “Facilitation of Vocational Training for Ethnic Minorities” aimed at facilitation and development of vocational training in Georgia, assisting the representatives of ethnic minorities to demonstrate and improve their abilities, to get actively involved in social life and contribute to country’s development. 10 groups were created in the framework of the Project. Each of them completed work for creation of B1+ level specific sectorial handbooks, which were printed;
- ❖ In the framework of the State Language Teaching Program, programs of two new sectorial directions were approved – A2+ level for teachers, B1+ level – civil education – in the framework of which pilot training was conducted in Kutaisi, LEPL Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration for two groups (26 representatives of ethnic minorities); certificates were delivered to 18 of them;
- ❖ 10 new sectorial B1+ level programs were approved in the framework of the State Language Teaching Program for nurses, teachers, accountants, agronomists, electricity specialists, food technology specialists, specialists in tourism, construction, animal farming and transport.
- ❖ Working meetings were held with participation of regional administrations of Regional Training Centers with the purpose of development of the State Language Teaching Program, familiarization with the amendments made to the Program, sharing of pedagogic practice, conducting sectorial training for teachers and teacher assessment;
- ❖ Within the State Language Teaching Program in 10 regional Training Centers of the School, located in Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kakheti regions, training courses were completed in 81 groups by 1,072 representatives of ethnic minorities enrolled in 2017 and in 144 groups by 2,047 representatives of ethnic minorities enrolled in 2018;
- ❖ In 2018, 3403 representatives of ethnic minorities were enrolled in the framework of the State Language Teaching Program, 246 training groups were created, 171 of them – mobile groups in 66 villages;
- ❖ As of December 2018, 1,361 representatives of ethnic minorities were trained in 10 regional training centers and mobile groups under the State Language Teaching Program;

⁴Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda, Tsalka, Bolnisi, Dmanisi, Marneuli, Gardabani, Sagarejo, Akhmeta, Lagodekhi

- ❖ Since September 2018, Zhvania School have conducted state language courses for the representatives of ethnic minorities involved in military service in the armed forces of Georgia in field training bases. 303 representatives of ethnic minorities have undergone A1 level language course;
- ❖ LEPL Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration together with the Regional Mission of UNHCR, implemented the Project – “Learn Georgian through Video Lessons”, in the framework of which CD was prepared with 12 audio lessons and the relevant illustrations. The course will assist the persons under international protection, those with no shelter and citizenship, who are under UNHCR mandate;
- ❖ All handbooks and the above- mentioned video lessons will be uploaded on the official website of the School www.zspa.ge (and the websites of UNHCR partners). Electronic resources are free for any interested person;
- ❖ For the purpose of popularization of the state language, the school announced essay competition – “Privilege of our Generation”. Award ceremony of the winners (representatives of ethnic minorities) was held in Tbilisi, Rustaveli Hall of the Parliament of Georgia at the event dedicated to the 55th anniversary of the Prime- Minister of Georgia Zurab Zhvania.

In parallel, various state agencies also implemented specific activities for the enhancement of the knowledge of state language. In particular, the Office of the State Minister and the Ministry of Education and Science, launched Georgian language courses at Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Implementation of the training program in Georgian language continued at the “House of Friendship” established by Tbilisi City Assembly.

The contest of Georgian-language theatre performances entitled “My First Georgian Role” dedicated to the Day of Georgian language was conducted for the students of non-Georgian language schools and institutions. It was organized by the Office of the State Minister in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport. The aim of the contest was to encourage Georgian language among students and develop competencies in Georgian language. The best three performances and the favorite of the Contest Commission were awarded.

With the involvement of the Office of the State Minister, awarding of the winner of Georgian Calligraphy Contest was held. About 800 students of II-XII grades from private and public schools of all the seven municipalities of Kvemo Kartli participated in the Contest. As a result, 64 winners were identified. The goal of the Contest was popularization of the art of calligraphy, promotion of traditional Georgian calligraphy among students and involvement of the representatives of ethnic minorities in Georgian writing and language related activities.

2.5.2. General Education

Ethnic minorities have access to all stages of education (preschool, general, higher, vocational, adults’), also in their native languages. According to the data of 2018, 211 non-Georgian language schools and 76 non-Georgian sectors operate in Georgia, including 82 Azerbaijani language, 118 – Armenian language

and 11 Russian language schools. Also, Georgian-Azerbaijani sector – 32, Georgian-Russian sector – 29, Georgian-Armenian sector – 10, Georgian-Azerbaijani-Russian sector – 1, Georgian- Russian-Armenian sector - 1.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport has undertaken the following steps:

- ❖ National Standards of Early and Pre-school Guidance and Education and Professional Standard of Tutors and Teachers was translated into Armenian and Azeri languages;
- ❖ In public schools, special attention was given to the establishment of safe educational environment and popularization of healthy lifestyle. For this purpose, the Program - “Prevention of Bulling and Facilitation of Development of Tolerant Culture at Schools” has started. In the framework of Program, 548 teachers (civil education and tutors), also 170 participants (total 718 teachers) have participated in training;
- ❖ Medical rooms were opened in about 50 non-Georgian language schools;
- ❖ 3341 students completed medium-level education and took final examination;
- ❖ At subject exams and subject-related competence proving tests, 1202 applicants have selected Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russian language as the language of examination;
- ❖ Translation into Azerbaijani, Russian and Armenian languages and editing of all (6) modules of subject methodologies was completed in June, 2018;
- ❖ With the purpose of introduction of modern teaching methods in non-Georgian language schools, trainings were conducted in April-May, 2018 as a result of which 1421 (68%) non-Georgian teachers were re-trained according to the third module of general professional course (“Positive Management of Training Process and Preparedness for Professional Development”);
- ❖ In the framework of Leadership Academy 1, 2 and 3, training-modules 1-3 (total 40 hr) of Leadership Academy 1 and training-modules 1-6 (total 80 hr) of Leadership Academy 2 were translated and edited;
- ❖ In the framework of the Leadership Academy 1, trainings were conducted in October 2017, therefore 171 (81%) principals of non-Georgian schools attended the training. In the framework of the modules 10-2 of the Leadership Academy 2, trainings started in December 2017 and completed in May, 2018. 143 directors (85%) and 124 facilitators (81%) attended the training;
- ❖ Over 600 students – representatives of ethnic minorities participated in winter and summer camps in 2018.

2.5.3. Higher Education

“Education Program in Training of Georgian Language” operates since 2019 which implies enrollment of young people at Georgia’s higher education institutions based on the General Aptitude Test in Abkhazian, Ossetian, Azerbaijani and Armenian languages. The number of students – representatives of ethnic minorities in higher educational institutions of Georgia was increased 6 times compared to 2010.

In 2018, 1231 enrollees obtained the right to continue education at higher education institutions of Georgia:

- ❖ On the basis of General Aptitude Test in Azerbaijani language – 806;

- ❖ On the basis of General Aptitude Test in Armenian language – 424;
- ❖ On the basis of General Aptitude Test in Ossetian language – 1.

In 2018, 190 enrollees obtained state education grant, among them:

- ❖ On the basis of General Aptitude Test in Azerbaijani language – 96;
- ❖ On the basis of of General Aptitude Test in Armenian language – 93;
- ❖ On the basis of General Aptitude Test in Ossetian language - 1.

2.5.4. Vocational Training

During the reporting period, activities continued aimed at ensuring access of the representatives of ethnic minorities to vocational training. In this regard, extensive activities were conducted by Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration. The goal of the School is overcoming the lack of highly qualified members of staff in public service through improving the quality of skills among public servants in the high mountainous regions, as well as teaching the state language to the representatives of ethnic minorities and other interested persons.

On the basis of the Decree # 182 dated April 4, 2017 of the Government of Georgia, State Program for Professional training-retraining of job seekers and improving the skills was approved. The goal of the Program is raising the competitiveness of job seekers in professions with high demand in the labor market through their training-retraining and/or further on-job probation and thus, facilitation of employment of the job seekers. The duration of the Program is from 2 to 4 months; the Program envisages State funding through voucher. With the initiative of the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, the persons legitimately residing in the occupied territories and the representatives of ethnic minorities were also considered as the beneficiaries of the Program. The above-mentioned persons will be exempt from the obligatory conditions of participation in the Program, such as having the document, certifying completion of basic course of general education. Consequently, the persons legitimately residing in the occupied territories and the representatives of ethnic minorities will have an opportunity to obtain the service, envisaged by the Program even without having such document. Also, such persons will be considered as priority beneficiaries within the Program.

2.5.5. Education of Adults and Enhancement/improvement of skills

During the reporting period Zhvania School of Public Administration implemented “Public Management and Administration Program”. As a result of the Program, 81 beneficiaries were re-trained.

2.6. Preservation of Culture of Ethnic Minorities and Encouraging Tolerant Environment

During the reporting period, various programs/projects and events aimed at preservation-development and popularization of culture of ethnic minorities continued to be implemented. To further popularize and promote the culture of ethnic minorities, the state proceeded with further support of the museums, theaters, cultural centers of ethnic minorities.

Also, the following steps were undertaken with regard to the protection of cultural heritage:

- ❖ Within the inventarization process of “Greek Monuments of Trialeti”, archive data was collected;
- ❖ Tender was announced in the framework of combined and multi-disciplinary inventarization of Polish cultural heritage with the purpose of ensuring public access to archive database;
- ❖ Permanent exposition related to the representatives of ethnic minorities, residing in Bolnisi, was organized in Bolnisi Museum;
- ❖ Jewish monuments were identified and displayed at the museum;
- ❖ Culture and traditions of the representatives of ethnic minorities residing in Bolnisi, were introduced to wide public - exhibition was organized;
- ❖ Two stones with Jewish inscriptions (XVIII c.) will be moved from Borjomi Museum of Local History to LEPL David Baazov Georgian Museum for exhibition;
- ❖ In the “Museum – the Space of Peace – Dialogue of Cultures” – meetings were held with the participation of the representatives of Jewish and Georgian societies. 20 creative and scientific events were planned and implemented;
- ❖ Trilingual publication “Architectural Heritage of German Colonists in Georgia” was released with co-financing of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Federal Republic of Germany.

The Office of the State Minister has undertaken the following activities in cooperation with the relevant agencies:

- ❖ The Office of the State Minister carried out large-scale celebration of the **100th anniversary of independence of Georgia** in the framework of which exhibitions, concerts, literary evenings, contests were organized with active involvement of the representatives of ethnic minorities from the capital, as well as regions. During celebration days, with the initiative of the Office of the State Minister, memorial of the first Muslim woman, elected democratically – Pari-Khanum Sofieva - was opened in the village Karajala of Gardabani municipality. After declaration of the Democratic Republic of Georgia in 1918, national elections were held in the main districts of Georgia, including Tbilisi district, Karayaz precinct. Non-party candidate, ethnically Azeri Muslim woman Pari-Khanum Sofieva beat the candidates of the leading parties – Social-Democrats and Federalists, “Hummet”, National-Democrats and Essers and became the fifth delegate of Tbilisi district Assembly from Karayaz region. Number of initiatives and activities is attributed to her name, including construction of railway station in her native village;
- ❖ **Multiethnic Festival “Under One sky – Dialogue of Cultures”** – annual multi-ethnic Festival since 2010 – “Under One Sky – Dialogue of Cultures”, with participation of young people – Georgians and the representatives of ethnic minorities residing in Georgia, is held in different regions of Georgia. In 2018, concerts were held in Telavi and Tbilisi;
- ❖ In Ioseb Grishashvili Museum of History of Tbilisi (Caravanserai) **the event was held, dedicated to the Day of Cultural Diversity**. In the framework of the event, folklore performances and dishes, characteristic for various ethnos were presented by creative groups of ethnic minorities residing in Georgia;
- ❖ **Diverse Program was planned and implemented by the Office of the State Minister in the framework of the week dedicated to the International Day of Tolerance:** public lecture was

conducted in Samtskhe-Javakheti State University, meetings with the students and beneficiaries of so the called “1+4” Program were held in Tbilisi, also with students in Tsalka municipality schools. In the framework of cooperation with UN Association in Georgia, official reception dedicated to the International Day of Tolerance was organized. At the reception 5 video-clips prepared by the Office of the State Minister in the framework of new Project “Get to Know Diverse Georgia” were presented. The goal of the Project is to promote successful, talented and interested fellow citizens – representatives of ethnic minorities. On the same day, performance of the Theater of Movement on the topic “Diverse Georgia” was presented. The week was closed with the concerts held in Tbilisi and Akhaltsikhe in the framework of the Festival of Multiethnic Art “Under One Sky – Dialogue of Cultures”.

2.7. Information/ Awareness Raising Campaign

Information/awareness raising campaign on various issues was conducted by the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality in the regions of compact settlement of ethnic minorities. In particular:

- ❖ **Large-scale information campaign** was organized on state services and programs, including agriculture and environment protection, health and social security, economic and financial program, also novelties were introduced to the representatives of ethnic minorities in Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Kakhet regions (50 meetings were held).
- ❖ **Project “Young European Ambassadors”** – the goal of the Project was to raise awareness on Georgia’s European and Euro-Atlantic integration among ethnic minority representatives in Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kakheti regions, also in the language they understand. Mobile groups, composed of young people, who have undergone special thematic school, provided the residents of Kvemo Kartli, Kakheti and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions with information on European integration of Georgia and the benefits stemming from it. 80 trainings were conducted in 56 villages of 3 regions (10 municipalities, 2133 beneficiaries).
- ❖ The Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality gave special attention to the awareness-raising campaign on opportunities for the representatives of ethnic minorities in the sphere of higher education. **Meetings were held for “1+4 Program” students** in Bolnisi, Akhalkalaki, Lagodekhi municipalities. The representatives of the LEPL – National Assessment and Examination Center, Ministry of Internal Affairs and David Agmashenebeli National Defense Academy participated in the information meetings.
- ❖ With the initiative of the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality and with the support of UN Association in Georgia and “Center for Civic Integration and International Relations” (CCIIR), Training of Trainers was conducted for youth on the topic – **“Facilitation of Accessibility of Vocational and Higher Education for the Representatives of Ethnic Minorities”**. 30 groups, composed of ethnic Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian young people were re-trained on existing opportunities in higher and vocational education. From January 2019, the participants of the Training of Trainers will provide information on “1+4 Program” and vocational education to the enrollees and graduates in the regions compactly populated by ethnic minorities.

2.8. Fulfillment of International Obligations

Georgia fulfills obligations undertaken in the frames of various international mechanisms in the sphere of human rights, in particular, protection of rights of ethnic minorities. Active cooperation is carried out in the framework of monitoring mechanisms of international organizations as well.

In 2018, the Office of the State Minister cooperated with the Delegation of the Advisory Committee of the Council of Europe and coordinated the visit of the delegation to Georgia, which was planned and implemented in the framework of the third monitoring cycle of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The Delegation held meetings with the representatives of governmental agencies, local authorities, representatives of civil society in Tbilisi, as well as in the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities.

Interim Report, prepared in the framework of Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Committee, was submitted to the Parliament of Georgia in October; one of the important parts of the document reflects the issues of protection of rights of ethnic minorities and ensuring civic integration.

During the reporting period, various activities (conferences, seminars, discussions) aimed at the protection of rights of ethnic minorities and their civic engagement were organized by international partners in cooperation with the Office of the State Minister.

In the process of implementation of the Action Plan for 2018, the Office of the State Minister has actively cooperated with civil sector, international organizations, diplomatic corps accredited in Georgia, local and international experts. In parallel, the Office of the State Minister had permanent communication with the population of the regions densely populated by minorities, representatives of local self-governance and non-governmental organizations. At the same time, the representatives of the Office of State Minister coordinated activities of the Office in the regions compactly settled with ethnic minorities - in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti.

While performing its work, the Office of the State Minister was supported by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and UN Association in Georgia (UNAG) in the framework of “Tolerance, Civic Awareness and Integration Support Program”.

In 2019, the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality will continue extensive activities in all the above-mentioned directions.

It shall be mentioned, that the Peace Initiative “A Step to a Better Future” will become fully operational from the beginning of the next year. A number of programs and projects will be implemented in its framework, which will facilitate improvement of humanitarian and social-economic conditions of the population residing in the occupied territories, obtaining of substantial benefits, as well as encouraging of people-to-people contacts, movement and cooperation based on mutual interests. Also, a number of

projects will be implemented with the purpose of improving social-economic conditions of the population in the villages adjacent to dividing lines. With support of international partners, even more dynamic steps will be undertaken towards confidence building and reconciliation between the divided communities. Specific projects will be directed towards peace, development and better future, which ultimately will serve to the common welfare.

Implementation of initiatives towards civic equality and integration will continue as well. Activities will be implemented with the aim to further improve civic engagement of ethnic minorities, enhance the knowledge of the state language among them and ensure access to high-quality education. Specific programs and activities undertaken will contribute to the preservation of cultural identity of ethnic minorities and provision of civic integration.