ETHNIC RELATIONS

GEORGIA'S SLAVIC POPULATION

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As citizens of the newly independent Soviet successor-states that arose after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Slavs found it extremely hard to adjust to the new conditions. It was particularly difficult to accept the fact that Russian, their native tongue, which used to be lingua franca of sorts, had lost this function and its importance altogether. Large groups of the Slavic population found emigration the only answer; Georgia has already lost nearly all the Slavic groups that used to live on its territory.

The Russians

Slavs came to Georgia when the Russian Empire stepped up its involvement in the Southern Caucasus. Having strengthened its military and political position, Russia needed reliable local support in the form of non-military Slavic settlements, of which Russians were the largest group.

In 1865, there were 25,900 Russian newcomers in Georgia, or 2 percent of its total population; in 1886, their number increased to 42,500 (2.6 percent). By 1897, there were 92,813 Russians, or 5.3 percent. The Slavic military comprised 22.7 percent (21,113) of Georgia's total Slavic population. In the latter half of the 19th century, the process continued at a good pace. Slavs settled in great numbers in Tbilisi and the coastal cities, as well as in 21 villages.[1]

Wide-scale industrialization of Georgia unfolded in the 1920s and attracted numerous migrants from other republics. The collectivization and "de-kulakization" of 1930-1933, during which the country

[1] See: N. Zakariadze, "Czarist Colonial Policies and Georgia's Slavic Population," *Demography,* No. 1 (2), 2000, pp. 88-90 (in Georgian).

lost several millions of lives in Southern Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan, swelled the Slavic (mainly Russian and Ukrainian) population. Driven by famine, hundreds of thousands moved to Georgia. Between the 1926 and 1939 population censuses, the number of migrants in the republic increased from 110,500 to 354,000, that is, by 320 percent.[2]

In 1959, the number of Russians in Georgia reached its peak (407,900), only to start declining. On the eve of the widespread migration processes of 1989, there were 341,200 Russians living in Georgia. They and the other Slavic groups were badly hit by the negative post-Soviet developments. The Russians who failed to adjust to the new and absolutely unfamiliar situation burdened with anti-Russian sentiments regarded emigration to their historical homeland as the only solution.

The migration processes that started unfolding in the 1990s were clearly dominated by the military, civilians employed by the Soviet army and their families; they poured out of Georgia in great numbers and, together with their military units, moved beyond Georgia in the early 1990s. Over 60 percent of migrants were Slavs (mainly Eastern Slavs, that is, ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, and Byelorussians); nearly all of them (88.5 percent) were urban dwellers, therefore they headed to cities in Russia.[3]

In the 1990s, Russians, who suddenly became an ethnic minority in the former Soviet republics, were driven away by the mounting nationalism, idling industrial enterprises, and economic instability to seek a better life elsewhere, mainly in their historic homeland. Those who stayed behind found it hard to palate the new cultural, religious, and social context.

The nationalist rhetoric of the early years of Georgian independence was quenched to a certain extent under Eduard Shevardnadze. The poll of 1993 revealed that Russians and other groups were driven away not so much by political factors as by the economic crisis, unemployment, and crime. In 1993, the Russians were trying to escape social and economic difficulties rather than political circumstances.[4]

The fighting in Abkhazia drove its Slavic population to Russia and Ukraine. According to Felix Korla, in 1996 Slavs comprised 10 percent of Abkhazia's total population, which means that the 88,600-strong Slavic population (Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians) of 1989 shrank to 15,000-25,000 mainly elderly people. According to Georgian academic Revaz Gachechiladze, the larger share of them (the ethnically mixed families) resettled elsewhere in Georgia and, therefore, could not be counted as emigrants. In fact, about 50,000 Slavs who used to live in Abkhazia left Georgia altogether. They were emigrants in the true sense of the word.[5] Those who stayed behind in their Abkhazian homes are in a very bad position indeed, alleviated to a certain extent by the aid extended by all sorts of organizations based in the Russian Federation (the Moscow Mayor's office in particular) acting through the local Russian communities in Abkhazia.[6]

According to the 2002 population census, the number of Russians dropped (compared with the figures of the 1989 census) to 68,000,[7] half of whom live in Tbilisi.[8] As distinct from other national minorities, the Russians were urban dwellers; few of them lived in the countryside. There are no compact Russian settlements in the cities of Georgia (exceptions are few and far between). Today, because of the intensive emigration, the Russian diaspora consists mainly of elderly people. In the last few years, Georgia lost quite a few Russians and their families, who moved away with the Russian military bases when they withdrew from Georgian territory.

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[2] See: R. Gachechiladze, *Population Migration in Georgia and Its Socioeconomic Results,* The Letters for Discussion Series. The U.N. Development Program—Georgia, Tbilisi, 1997, p. 12 (in Georgian).

[3] See: Ibid., p. 37.

[4] See: Ibid., pp. 43-45.

[5] See: Ibid., p. 33.

[6] See: A. Feofanov, "Iubileynaia obshchina," *Chegemskaia pravda,* No. 26, 2005.

[7] Certain public organizations quote smaller figures.

[8] See: The State Department of Statistics of Georgia. Results of the 2002 General Population Census of Georgia.

Everyday Problems

Those Georgians who lived in the Russian Federation were badly hit by the acute political disagreements between their country and Russia. Back home, many thought that Georgia should have responded in kind to Russia's aggressive anti-Georgian steps and deportations of Georgians. Neither the Georgian authorities nor the ordinary people at large, however, showed anti-Russian sentiments. Against the background of discrimination of Georgians in Russia, the Georgian authorities did their best to demonstrate their benevolence toward all national minorities, Russians included. The Georgian public organizations expressed their regret over the developments in the Russian Federation.[9]

Whatever the case, the number of Russians in Georgia will hardly remain the same: emigration will undoubtedly be spurred on by the recent laws of the Russian Federation designed to encourage ethnic Russians to move to their historical homeland. In October 2006, the Congress of Russians Living Abroad decided that the Russian Federation would shoulder the responsibility for those who wished to return to their historic homeland.

The Federal Migration Service was responsible for practical implementation of the State Program for Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots to Russia that came into force on 1 January, 2007. The state offers newcomers Russian citizenship, housing, jobs, and social insurance, and pays for their resettlement. Seventeen billion rubles of budget money will be spent in the next three years. Late in 2007, the Federal Migration Service will open its office in Georgia, but it is unlikely to be overworked: there are hardly any Russians willing or able to move away left in the Southern Caucasus; those who stayed behind are too old to look to a future in Russia with hope.[10] Not everyone at the congress accepted the idea of financing emigration. Valeri Svarchuk, who headed the Georgian delegation, was one of them: he would have preferred stronger support of the Russian diaspora using money supplied by Russian businessmen.[11]

Under Soviet power, Russian was the language of inter-ethnic communication; those who did not know Russian could not expect to be promoted. The Russians living in the Union republics never bothered to learn the local tongues. This was true of Georgia, as well as of the other republics. In independent Georgia, the Russian language lost this function, those born in the independent country have no reason at all to study Russian. So far it remains the language used by different ethnic groups to communicate among themselves, but this function is declining rapidly. For the reasons enumerated above, the Russians in Georgia do not know enough Georgian to cope with the current realities (especially with respect to the education reforms).

The innovations in this sphere will drive even more young Russians out of the country. Alla Bezhentseva, Chairperson of the Iaroslavna Union of Russian Women in Georgia, said that Russian children born in Georgia after 1991 studied in Russian schools because their parents had doubts about the local educational system and hoped that this would help their children to find employment in Russia. Russian children did not know enough Georgian to be able to study in Georgian schools; many Russians whose knowledge of Georgian is inadequate are driven to the Russian Federation in search of employment or further education, unemployment and low salaries being two other factors.[12]

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[9] See: J. Rekhviashvili, "Georgia: Ethnic Russians Feel Insulted from Tensions," *RFE/RL,* 11 October, 2006.

[10] See: *"Russkoiazychnym zhiteliam SNG predlozhili vernut'sia na Rodinu," Nezavisimaia gazeta,* 25 December, 2006, available at [http://www.ng.ru/courier/2006-12-25/12_narodinu.html].

[11] See: *Iu. Taratuta, A. Konfisakhor, R. Pearl,* "Vsemirny congress sootechestvennikov poluchil gospodderzhku," *Kommersant,* No. 200, 25 October, 2006, available at [http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.html?docId=716076].

[12] See: J. Peuch, "Southern Caucasus: Facing Integration Problems, Ethnic Russians Long for Better Life," *RFE/RL,* 21 August, 2003.

In 2003/2004 academic year, there were 168 Russian schools in Georgia; 55 of them were one-language schools. The others taught in two or three tongues, along with the Georgian, Azeri, and Armenian schools.[13] The number of Russian schools in the republic dropped along with the numerical strength of the Russian population. While in the past most students of Russian schools belonged to ethnic groups other than Russian, new trends have appeared recently in this sphere: the non-Russian ethnic groups (Armenians and Azeris) prefer Armenian, Azeri, or Georgian schools; today few Georgian parents send their children to Russian schools, which have no choice but to close down.

Russian speakers find it hard to cope with the new rules of the entrance exams to the higher educational establishments: under the recent education reform, the tests are conducted in Georgian. Young Russians who know everyday Georgian well enough still have insufficient knowledge of the language to pass the tests. Those who continue their education in Russia tend to settle there permanently.

The Russian population of Georgia is struggling with socioeconomic problems. According to Alla Bezhentseva, the relatives of those who moved to Russia survive on what they receive from them. Unlike many Georgians, urban-dwelling Russians can hardly expect help from the villages. In a country where the salaries and wages are impossibly low, help from abroad is more than welcome. Ms. Bezhentseva is convinced that Russians are facing economic rather than political problems.[14] The Russian population, in which elderly people predominate, depends on their small pensions and aid from Russian organizations for their survival.

There are several organizations in Georgia engaged in helping the local Russians, the largest of them being the Otchizna Union of Russian Compatriots in Georgia, which has 24 structures. It has been functioning since June 2004 and is actively involved in the program realized by the Foreign Ministry of Russia.[15] The Union helps receive qualified medical aid, places students in Russian higher educational establishments, sends war veterans to health resorts, and renders them financial aid. All the other structures—the Iaroslavna Union, the Slavic House in Georgia, and the Nadezhda International Humanitarian Charity Association—are funded mainly by state organizations of the Russian Federation. They work in various fields, extend material and financial aid, and organize cultural events.

Russian journals and newspapers are sold in Georgia; there are also local Russian-language publications (including the newspapers *Svobodnaia Gruzia* and *Vecherniy Tbilisi* and the *Russkiy klub* magazine). People in Georgia have access to Russian-language satellite TV programs, which few can afford. The Obshchestvennoe veshchanie TV channel in Georgia offers a weekly 25-minute information program in Russian (Georgian Obshchestvennoe veshchanie radio offers a similar 10-minute program in Russian). Many Russians have no problems with understanding information programs in Georgian, even though they can hardly speak the language.

The Griboedov Tbilisi State Academic Russian Drama Theater is an important center of Russian culture. It regularly shows plays in Russian and arranges Russian culture evenings. The theater, which was founded in 1845 on the initiative of Count Vorontsov and named in 1934 after great Russian playwright Alexander Griboedov buried in Tbilisi, played an enormous role in drawing the Georgian and Russian cultures closer; it marked its 160th anniversary in 2005.

The Cultural and Educational Russkiy klub Union, a member of the International Union of Russian Compatriots with members in 57 countries, plays a very special role in preserving the Russian culture

[13] The Ministries of Education and Science of Georgia. The Main Indices of Day Secondary State Schools of Georgia for the 2003/2004 Academic Year.

[14] See: J. Peuch, op. cit.

[15] See: S. Mamedov, Iu. Simonian, A. Gordienko, "Nevoennoe rossiyskoe prisutstvie na Iuzhnom Kavkaze," *Nezavisimaia gazeta,* 25 December, 2006, available at [http://www.ng.ru/courier/2006-12-25/12_kavkaz.html].

in Georgia. The Russkiy klub Union has about 5,000 members of all nationalities and has been functioning since 2005. It concentrates on cultural and educational activities and helps to improve relations between the two countries. It runs a *Russkiy klub* publicist and literary monthly.

Dukhobors and Molokans

So-called sectarians scattered across the country form a special group of Georgia's Russian population with a very specific culture of their own. They are mainly Dukhobors and Molokans. The former, an extreme protestant sect, appeared in the Russian Empire in the latter half of the 18th century (in the Voronezh, Tambov, and Ekaterinoslav gubernias); in the 19th century they came to Javakhetia. In 1837, convinced that the Dukhobors threatened the state, the Russian emperor moved them to the Caucasus; in 1841, they settled around Akhalkalaki in the southeast of Georgia.

At first they were strictly ruled and closely supervised; in the 1840s, when they received all sorts of privileges, their situation improved. This happened because by that time the Russian authorities not only regarded the newly acquired South Caucasian territories as a military-strategic and political target, but also started looking for economic advantages.[16]

The newcomers were mainly moved to two geographic areas. In the southeast, they settled in the villages of the Ninotsminda (previously Bogdanovka) District: Gorelovka, Efremovka, Orlovka (Terpenie), Spasovka, Rodionovka, Tambovka, Bogdanovka, Troitskoe; in the east they came to the village of Krasnagorka (previously Malkhazovka) of the Sagaredjoisk District; the village of Ul'ianovka[17] (previously Novoalekseevka) of the Signagskiy District, the village of Ninigori (previously Novo-Mikhailovka) and the village of Svobodnoe (previously Grafovka) of the Lagodekhskiy District.[18]

The Molokans mainly settled in Eastern Georgia: the villages of Krasnagorka, Ul'ianovka, Ninigori, and Svobodnoe. A few of them lived in Tbilisi. In 1990, they emigrated: today there are practically no Molokans in Georgia. Ninety families are still living in the village of Svobodnoe; and there are several families in the village of Ul'ianovka. All of them preserved their ethnic identity; they understand, but do not speak Georgian. Russian is the tongue in which they wish to educate their children; a nearby village school offers primary education in Russian; for secondary education students have to go to the district center several kilometers away from the village. Molokans emigrate to Russia in search of education in their native tongue.

The Dukhobors are more numerous than the Molokans. After moving to Georgia they united into communes. Agriculture and usury were their main occupations. Over time, they became an ethnographic group with customs and traditions of their own. Initially they were sent to eight villages of the Ninotsminda District. In 1898-1900, when part of the commune moved to Canada, the commune split. In 1999, descendants of the migrants came to Javakhetia to celebrate the 100th anniversary of their ancestors' emigration.[19] In 2001, the Dukhobors of Gorelovka village celebrated the 160th anniversary of their resettlement in Georgia.[20]

In 1926, there were 5,171 Russians living in the Ninotsminda District; in 1959, the number dropped to 4,616; in 1970, to 4,344; in 1979, to 3,830; and in 1989, to 3,161. The number of Russians

[16] See: *Russkie starozhily Zakavkaz'ia: molokane i dukhobory,* ed. by V. Kozlov, Moscow, 1995, p. 20.
[17] Before reaching the village of Ul'ianovka, the sectarians from the Saratov Gubernia first lived in Tbilisi in 1859.
[18] See: Russkie starozhily…, p. 142.
[19] See: G. Rioneli, "Dukhobors: 250 years of Wandering," *The Caucasian Accent,* No. 19 (92),1-15 October, 2003 (in Georgian).
[20] See: "Etnograficheskiy zapovednik," *Mnogonatsional'naia Gruzia,* No. 3, November-December 2001.

living in compact groups on the territory of the Gorelovka village council dropped 57.2 percent compared with 1926; the average family size decreased from 6.2 to 2.8 members.[21]

Between 1988 and 1991, the money allocated by state departments, state structures, and the state budget, as well as private means, was used to buy 113 houses from the Dukhobors, who lived in five villages within the Gorelovka village council. This was done through the Georgian Merab Kostava Society and the Armenian funds, the Parvana Fund being one of them.[22]

The Dukhobors of the Gorelovka village council insisted that their houses be bought from them; they also wanted more money to be able to move back to their historical native area (mainly the Tula Region of Russia). The young people were especially enthusiastic about emigration. Much strength was spent on convincing people from the mountains of Ajaria badly hit by natural calamities to move to the houses vacated by the Dukhobors. The houses were bought from them for a trifle, but the ecological migrants from Ajaria did not find the climate to their liking. Many houses were merely abandoned and later used as building material and firewood.[23]

The Dukhobors were encouraged by the 1998 decision relating to the Dukhobors of Georgia issued by Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Evgeni Primakov. The State Duma passed a special resolution on the same issue. The Georgian Ministry of Emergencies supplied buses, while the International Migration Organization paid for their transportation. In January 1999, the community leader, Lyubov Goncharova, accompanied the larger part of her fellow sectarians to the Briansk Region. Those who stayed behind have not abandoned the idea: they are attracted by the better economic conditions they hope to find in Russia and a chance to avoid the current tension between the Russian Federation and Georgia.

The Dukhobors in Ninotsminda support themselves through cattle-breeding and the products of their own labor on private plots of land; in the last 15 years, however, they have been pestered by the local Armenians and ecological migrants who have claims to the same land.[24] The land reform changed many things in the Dukhobors' everyday life. Currently, there is a land commission working in the area; the land belonging to the cooperative the Dukhobors set up to replace the collective farm in Gorelovka will be re-distributed. So far the Dukhobors are left with 600 hectares of the initial 5,000 hectares; each family has to survive on 6 to 15 hectares. The sectarians insist that the farm was used to preserve their traditions of communal life. These changes made emigration inevitable. Tatiana Chuchmaeva, head of the Dukhobor community, said that 470 local Dukhobors have already applied to the RF government for permission to move to Russia. They have already been promised free transportation and housing, together with privileges, for the next 6 months.[25]

Between 1992 and 1996, the Dukhobor cooperative accumulated a debt to the state in the amount of 4 million laris, the payment of which will bankrupt it. On 28 November, 2006, at a round table in the office of Georgia's ombudsman, the Dukhobors asked for their debt to be written off. Expert Hedwig Lohm, associated researcher at the European Center for Minority Issues, pointed out that "if the Dukhobors move to Russia, the Russian government will use this fact against Georgia. The Dukhobors want to keep away from political games and prefer to remain in Georgia."[26]

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[21] See: T. Gugushvili, *Georgia's External Migration and Demographic Problems (1990-1998),* Tbilisi, 1998, pp. 75-76 (in Georgian).

[22] See: N. Akhmeteli, "Taxes, Land Reform and Better Life in Russia: The Dukhobor`s Georgian Exodus," *Georgia Today,* 24 November, 2006.

[23] See: D. Kamikadze, "Dukhobor Tribulations," *IWPR`s Caucasus Reporting Service,* No. 106, 20 November, 2001.

[24] See: L. Vardanian, "Tevdoradze's Visit Ended Peacefully," *Samkhretis Karibche,* No. 31 (59), 2007 (in Georgian).

[25] See: O. Vartanian, "Land Reform May Be the Last Straw for Georgia's Dukhobor Community," *IWPR`s Caucasus Reporting Service,* 20 September, 2006.

[26] See: Interpress, 17 November, 2006.

The Ukrainians[27]

Ukrainians first came to Georgian territory in the latter half of the 18th century soon after Empress Catherine the Great disbanded the Cossack organization called Zaporozhskaia Sech for disobedience. Cossacks fled in great numbers to the empire's southern fringes.

Early in the 19th century, Russian military units (there were Ukrainians among the military) moved to Georgia as settlers. After their long military service, soldiers lost contact with their homes and relatives, which explains why many of them, Ukrainians as well as people of other nationalities, preferred to remain in Georgia on the land they received from the state next to the units in which they had served. This happened mostly in Eastern Georgia, but the practice did not survive because there was no one wishing to use the privilege. By the mid-19th century, the practice was discontinued altogether.

Officers, some of them Ukrainians, employed by the administrative structures were not numerous, but they preferred to settle in Georgian cities forever. In the 19th century, Ukrainians moved to Georgia for political reasons to avoid infringements on their rights and repressions of all sorts. The economic factor was even more important: those peasants who had been deprived of land had to move elsewhere in search of unoccupied landed plots. With the abolition of serfdom in Russia, in 1861 the process became even more widespread. The simultaneous events in Georgia left many landed plots vacant; Abkhazia attracted Russians, Ukrainians, Armenians, Greeks, and members of other ethnic groups.

Development of navigation on the Black Sea, which stimulated construction of new ports, a railway, and spas, attracted qualified Ukrainians with the prospect of employment. The above suggests that that Ukrainians moved to Georgia for two reasons: political (repressions at home) and economic (landless peasants arrived in search of vacant land and industrial employment).

In 1887, there were 8,500 Ukrainians living in Georgia (64 percent of them were urban dwellers, others lived in the villages). The Ukrainian inflow showed no tendency of slowing down. What was more, Georgia attracted members of the Ukrainian intelligentsia: writers, academics, actors, and journalists. Early in the 20th century, a Ukrainian theatrical company was set up under M. Beliaeva in Tbilisi; in 1902-1913, she staged several dozen plays. It was at the same time that prominent Ukrainian poet Lesia Ukrainka lived in Tbilisi together with her husband, ethnographer K. Kvitka. In the 1890s, Mikhail Grushevskiy, prominent historian and public figure later elected as first president of the Central Ukrainian Rada (1917-1918), was a student of Tbilisi grammar school No. 1.

Of the total 2,500,000-strong population of Georgia (according to the 1917 population census), 185,000 were registered as Russians (in actual fact, according to Ukrainian public organizations, 70 percent of them, or about 129,000, were Ukrainians). Their absolute majority lived in industrial centers (Tbilisi, Batumi, and Sukhumi) where they were engaged in different spheres (workers, handicraftsmen, traders, and the intelligentsia). There were few Ukrainians living in the Georgian villages. According to the 1970 figures, 82.2 percent of Russians and Ukrainians preferred to live in cities.

In 1917, the Ukrainians convened a military conference that set up the Ukrainian Military Rada of the Caucasus and the Ukrainian Rada. The former published a newspaper that was first called *Vesti* and later *Ukrainskie vesti.* In the same year, the Ukrainian Rada, supported by the Central Ukrainian Rada, convened the first Ukrainian conference of the Southern Caucasus in Tbilisi to coordinate the activities of the Ukrainian communities and alliances as well as party organizations.

[27] The section is based on the following sources: M. Boris (Chairman of the Ukrainians' Coordinating Rada), *Konferentsia: Istorii i realii etnicheskikh obshchin Gruzii (9 November, 2001),* Tbilisi, 2003; *Assotsiatsia ukraintsev Gruzii,* Tbilisi, 2006.

In 1918, Ukraine established diplomatic relations with Georgia and sent an extraordinary diplomatic mission to this country under the supervision of I. Krasovskiy. In 1918, the Ukrainian Rada convened its second conference; Ukrainian communities were set up in Tbilisi, Batumi, Sukhumi, and Poti to preserve the Ukrainian language and culture. They were also involved in public and political activities and took part in the elections of the Tbilisi and Batumi dumas; several Ukrainians were elected to the latter. In 1919, Ukrainian Alexander Kliuzhniy was elected to the Georgian legislature.

In 1917-1926, the number of Ukrainians in Georgia dropped because of the outflow of Ukrainians to Ukraine. In 1922, more Ukrainians came to Georgia; during 12 years (between 1926-1939), the number of Ukrainians in Georgia increased 3.2-fold to reach the figure of 46,000 in 1939. Georgia's rapid industrial and agricultural development, which created numerous jobs for qualified workers, attracted people in great numbers.

Post-World War II industrialization attracted even more Ukrainians, who contributed to the construction of the metallurgical plant in Rustavi and several hydropower plants and to the development of the Colchis lowland. The retired military preferred to stay behind in Georgia.

Between 1959 and 1979 the share of Slavs, Russians and Ukrainians included, decreased from 11.3 percent to 8.3 percent, but if we look at a much longer period of time (1926-1979) we shall see that the total number of Russians and Ukrainians in Georgia increased from 110,400 to 416,600.

According to the 1989 general population census, there were 52,400 Ukrainians in Georgia, or 1 percent of the total population. They lived in Tbilisi, Sukhumi, Batumi, Rustavi, Kutaisi, and Poti. In the post-Soviet era, they could either emigrate to their homeland or any other country or remain in Georgia. Ukrainians were driven away by the social and economic difficulties and problems that inflicted the republic for many years.

The large emigration wave has been left behind: those who would like to leave stay for financial reasons; some people prefer to remain because of the high integration level. Despite certain problems created by their inadequate knowledge of the Georgian language, elderly people prefer to stay in Georgia close to their Georgian relatives and friends. Mixed marriages keep members of such families in Georgia.

According to the 2002 population census, there are 7,039 Ukrainians in Georgia, half of them live in Tbilisi; Ukrainians also live in the autonomous republic of Ajaria.[28] According to the Ukrainians in Georgia, their total number in the republic is twice as large since many Ukrainians were erroneously registered as Russians in the census papers.

On 1 September, 1999, the first Ukrainian school named after Mikhail Grushevskiy was opened in Tbilisi. On 8 June, 1997, Georgian Citizens' Day, President Shevardnadze asked the Ukrainian children what they would like most of all. They asked for a Ukrainian school. It was opened two years later, the delay caused by funding problems. The pupils come from mixed marriages; primary school teaches in Ukrainian; older children study the Ukrainian language and literature, while other subjects are taught in Georgian. The younger generation of Georgian Ukrainians knows Georgian better than their parents and grandparents. Today, Ukrainian children are educated mainly in Russian or Georgian schools and go to higher educational establishments in Georgia or Ukraine. Every year the latter funds higher education for 10 Ukrainian students from Georgia.

The Ukrainians in Georgia have to cope with the same problems as the rest of the Georgian population. According to the Ukrainian structures, unemployment is the main stumbling block, which they cannot eliminate single-handedly. These structures are mainly concerned with preserving the ethnic specificity of the local Ukrainians. Much is being done by the Association of Ukrainians Living in Georgia set up on 15 February, 1992. From the very first day, it has been

[28] See: State Department of Statistics of Georgia…

working in close contact with other organizations of national minorities, the ministries of culture and education, the parliament, the mayor's office of Tbilisi, etc. Mikhail Boris elected as its leader in 1994 still holds this post.

New Ukrainian public organizations have been set up since 1995 in places where Ukrainians reside in compact settlements: the cultural-public organization Slavutich in Rustavi, the Chervona kalina alliance in Kaspi, the Olesia alliance in Zugdidi, etc. They are all engaged in cultural, educational, and charitable activities. On weekends, the Tbilisi cultural-educational center offers computer, dancing and singing courses, and English lessons. The center receives more or less regular technical and financial aid from Ukraine.[29]

On 19-20 May, 2001, the embassy of Ukraine in Georgia convened a forum of the Ukrainian public organizations of Georgia. It was held in Tbilisi to draw the public organizations closer together and set up a coordination center in the form of a coordinating Rada of the Ukrainians, complete with a Charter and governing structures. It united 18 organizations.

The Poles[30]

According to the 2002 general population census, there are 870 Poles in Georgia, the majority of them living in Tbilisi, while the rest are scattered across the country.

Caucasian Poland is one of the world's oldest communities of ethnic minorities; the first Poles who came to Georgia in more or less large numbers were driven by the political repression that followed the 1794 riot. The Polish soldiers involved in it were taken prisoner and executed. Poles remained in the Caucasus because of Russia's military actions in Daghestan and Chechnia; it was during the war that the Polish tongue acquired a new term "Kaukazczycy" meaning the Poles living in the Caucasus.

In the 1830-1850s, there was a "Group of Caucasian Poets" consisting of forty exiled Polish writers. In the 1830-1840s, the Tbilisi Polish population was about 900-strong. Later, in 1897, the number increased to 4,200. According to the 1922 population census, there were 2,300 Poles in Tbilisi (not counting the military); in 1926, there were up to 1,780; in 1939, about 1,500; and in 1959, up to 1,300.[31] In later years, their number was steadily decreasing. The last wave of emigration was caused by economic problems: the Poles, mainly engineers, musicians, teachers, doctors, and artists, could hardly find employment in Georgia.

In the 1920s, there was a Polish school in Georgia; until 1924, there was a Club of National Minorities in Tbilisi built on the initiative of the Polish community, which also owned all its property. The Club united Polish workers. Part of the building was occupied by the Polish School of Labor.[32]

The Polish intelligentsia played an important role in developing cultural and educational institutions. Since 1907, the Poles set up several organizations: the Polish House societies in Tbilisi and Batumi engaged in cultural and educational activities among the local Poles; it had a Polish amateur theater, libraries, and reading rooms. Literary and musical events, as well as readers' conferences, were

[29] See: T. Turula, "Our Diaspora: A Visit with the Ukrainian Community in Tbilisi," *The Ukrainian Weekly,* Vol. LXX, No. 30, 28 July, 2002.

[30] The section is based on M. Filina (Chairperson of Polonia, the Cultural-Educational Union of the Georgian Poles), *Konferentsia: Istoria i realii etnicheskikh obshchin Gruzii (9 November, 2001)*.

[31] See: Sh. Kakuria, *Tbilisi Population, 1803-1970,* Metsniereba Publishers, Tbilisi, 1979 (in Georgian).

[32] See: A. Songulashvili, *Culture of the National Minorities of Georgia,* Metsniereba Publishers, Tbilisi, 2002, pp. 13, 20 (in Georgian).

a regular feature of the Poles' cultural environment. In 1914, an Aid Committee for the Victims of War was set up at the Polish House to support the Polish refugees.

It was at this time that the Polish Democratic Center in Tbilisi, which united all the local organizations, came to the fore. The intelligentsia was actively involved in founding military unions of Poles; the congress of the Polish organizations and unions convened in 1917 in Tbilisi played an important role in the lives of those who lived in the Caucasus. In 1918, the first issue of the *Polish Weekly* appeared, which covered the events in the Polish community; its last (seventh) issue appeared on 7 August, 1918.

Between 1918 and 1921 many of the Georgian Poles, especially those who came during World War I, preferred to go back home. In 1926, there were no more than 6,000 Poles in the Trans-Caucasian Federation.[33]

Independent Georgia offered new opportunities to the local Poles. On 9 February, 1995, descendants of the Poles who settled in the Caucasus in the 19th and 20th centuries formed an Association of the Poles of Georgia. In 1997, its branch appeared in Erevan. In Georgia, the association is actively creating an archive and is compiling lists of local Poles and the members of mixed families. Today, it unites about 700 members, mainly university professors, doctors, engineers, and teachers.

At first the new structure concentrated on rendering financial and humanitarian aid to Poles living in the villages, the disabled, and the Kaspi orphanage.

The Georgian Poles have very poor command of Polish: this ethnic group has become almost entirely assimilated. Today, the Poles belong to mixed Polish-Russian, Polish-Georgian, and Polish-Armenian families; their ancestry betrayed only by their Polish family names.

In 1996, the local Poles opened a school for children and older students; in the summer of 1997, they were given the opportunity to visit the land of their forefathers.

On 3-5 December, 1998, the Mickiewicz Days in Tbilisi initiated by the association (in 1998, it was renamed the Polonia Cultural-Educational Union of the Georgian Poles) developed into Days of Polish Culture; on 3 December, the academic community attended a seminar at the State University, which produced two publications. Since that time cultural events of this sort have become a regular feature of local life.

In October 2000, Tbilisi State University hosted an international conference called "200 Years of Poles in the Caucasus," which summed up the Poles' contribution to the region's development; in the same year the Polonia Union marked its fifth anniversary. The Senate of Poland and the Georgian parliament highly assessed its contribution. Recently its efforts were awarded with an international order, Fidelis Poloniae.[34]

There is a center of Polish Culture in Abkhazia called The White Eagle and a Sunday school that teaches the Polish language.

The Czechs[35]

According to the 2002 general population census, there are 46 Czechs in Georgia, 39 of whom live in Tbilisi.[36] In the 1990s, the number slightly dropped; this was when the government of the Czech

[33] See: "Pol'skie zhenshchiny," in: *Zhenshchiny Gruzii: Polietnicheskiy i konfessional'ny aspekt,* The Women of Multinational Georgia Association, Tbilisi, 2006, pp. 46-51.

[34] See: *Svobodnaia Gruzia*, No. 259-260 (22617), 28 November, 2002.

[35] The interview the president of the Czech community in Georgia Zlata Praha gave on 21 October, 2006 was used in this section.

[36] See: State Department for Statistics of Georgia…

Republic drew up a program, under which compatriots from countries with harsh economic conditions (the Soviet Union and Rumania) could move to their historical homeland. Few of the Czechs, however, chose to leave Georgia.

In the 19th century, Georgia, then part of the Russian Empire, attracted the first Czechs by its fantastic landscapes and local exotics. Some of them found the local attractions irresistible: they settled down and started families. Later, skilled workers and other specialists came to Georgia in search of employment. In 1925, Georgia received the second wave of Czech immigration: qualified specialists, academics, engineers, and mechanics.

Being involved in the construction of plants, hydropower facilities, and railways, they helped to build up Georgia's industry. Tbilisi owes the underground crossing at the Central Railway Station to Peter Šmalcel, who was also involved in a no less impressive project—the tunnel at Zeleny Cape. Nikolai Šmalcel, who was one of Georgia's first hydro engineers, simulated hydraulic processes for essentially all the large hydropower plants.

The Czechs made an important contribution to culture. In 1880, well-known opera singer Joseph Rátil (Navrátil), a soloist, leader, and teacher at the Prague and Helsinki opera houses, spent 32 years of his life in Georgia. Lado Agniashvili, known all over Georgia for his teaching and public activities, his vast knowledge of Georgian folklore, as well as his literary and journalist contributions, invited the Czech singer to set up and lead a Georgian folk choir. The singer was the new choirmaster for 10 years. He was the first to put over 30 Georgian songs to music and arrange them.[37]

Stage designer Franz Novak spent many years working at the Tbilisi Opera House; another Czech, Ivan Sokol, founded the first factory of wind instruments in Tbilisi; stage designer Joseph Brouček worked with the Paliashvili Opera House and the Rustaveli Theater. Assistant professor at the Batumi Conservatory Irina Kherzh trained five Grand Prix winners; for several years Gertrude Šmalcel was a solo singer and performed the leading parts in Abesalom and Eteri, Tosca, Eugine Onegin, and others. Recently the Georgian Musical Society celebrated her 90th anniversary.[38]

Doctor of Medicine and Surgery Ivan Přibil is well known for his contribution to medicine. In 1822, he founded the Tiflis (Tbilisi) Military Hospital and became its chief medical advisor. His contribution to the study of the climatic properties of Eastern Georgia cannot be overestimated. In 1838, he initiated testing of the Abastumani and Uravela springs and carried out climatic research in the vicinity of Akhtala in Gurjaani. He did much to develop the Borjomi spa and popularize its mineral waters. He is also the founder of the Caucasian Medical Society. Another Czech, Antonin Lukeš, organized a gymnastics society of Georgia called Shevardeni (Falcon).

Today the Czechs in Georgia speak Russian and study at Russian schools. Since 1996, they have been represented by the Zlata Praha organization set up on the recommendation of the then Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia Mikhail Ukleb and his Czech colleague, Alexander Wonda. Seventy of its total membership of 110 have Czech ancestors; others are merely interested in the Czech Republic. The Analitpribor, the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information, as well as the Georgian National Center of Health Protection, are also members with the status of a legal entity. Until recently, the Zlata Praha Society was allowed to use the latter's offices free of charge. Recently the building was earmarked for sale, which means that the Czech society might find itself homeless.

Zlata Praha maintains wide contacts across Georgia, the CIS, and in the Czech Republic to promote business between these countries and Georgia; it is doing a lot to encourage an interest in Czech politics, culture, science, art, language, and history, as well as in drawing up policy related to ethnic minorities, civil integration, etc. In 2005, Zlata Praha initiated thirteen events, including three large

[37] See: Ts. Beridze, "Cheshskiy muzykant Iosif Ratil v Gruzii," *Cheshskoe zemliachestvo v Gruzii "Zlata Praha." Sbornik statey,* ed. by Harold Šmalcel, Bene Dicta Publishers, Tbilisi, 2006, pp. 87-91.

[38] See: "Cheshskie zhenshchiny," in: *Zhenshchiny Gruzii: Polietnicheskiy i konfessional'ny aspekt,* pp. 65-68.

concerts and two conferences. With the support of the European Center for Minority Issues, Zlata Praha published a Georgian-Armenian-Russian-Azeri dictionary of frequently used words.

On Saturdays, the society offers lessons in the Czech language, history, culture, and songs. Concerts are held on its initiative in the Catholic Sts. Peter and Paul Cathedral and in the concert hall of the Georgian Musical Society. Together with the embassy of the Czech Republic, it organizes events at the State Opera and Ballet House, the State Drama Theater, and the embassy.[39] The embassy of the Czech Republic in Tbilisi is a loyal and dedicated ally of the Zlata Praha Society.

The Belorussians

According to the 2002 general population census there are 542, Belorussians in Georgia; half of them live in Tbilisi, while the rest are scattered across the country. The largest group outside Tbilisi is found in the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria.[40] They have no clear ethnic identity and tend to associate themselves mainly with the Russians.

The Bulgarians

Sixty-two Bulgarian families (300-400 people in all) came to Georgia in the 1860s on two ships via Ukraine, from the Sea of Azov. One group settled in Ochamchire; the other in the village of Vladimirovka at Sukhumi. There was a compact Bulgarian settlement in the village of Chakvi as well. According to the 1989 population census, there were 650 Bulgarians living in Georgia.[41] According to the 2002 general population census, there are 138 Bulgarians in the country, 65 of them live in Tbilisi. Others can be found in Ajaria and Guria, smaller groups are scattered across the country.[42] They are mainly women who married men of other nationalities; the Georgian Bulgarians are mostly Russian speakers; there is a Bulgarian community in Tbilisi; the Bulgarian consulate offers Bulgarian language lessons on Sundays.

Conclusion

In the 1990s, the number of Slavs (Russians in particular) in Georgia dropped considerably. The socioeconomic factors and Russia's migration policy will cut down the number still more. Since most of the Russians who stayed behind are elderly people, we can expect that if the present trend continues, the Russian community will disappear in the next 20 to 30 years. The same can be said of the other Slavic communities, which are even smaller.

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[39] See: H. Šmalcel, "Informatsia o Cheshskom zemliachestve v Gruzii 'Zlata Praha,' " in: *Cheshskoe zemliachsetvo v Gruzii "Zlata Praha,"* pp. 75-78.

[40] See: State Department for Statistics of Georgia…

[41] See: "Bolgarskie zhenshchiny," in: *Zhenshchiny Gruzii: Polietnicheskiy i konfessional'ny aspekt,* pp. 26-29.

[42] See: State Department for Statistics of Georgia…