



## Minorities Confront Ethno-Religious Nationalism in an Ethnic Democracy: the Case of Georgia

*Azınlıkların Etnik Bir Demokraside Etno-Dini Milliyetçilikle Yüzleşmesi: Gürcistan Örneği*

Yuliya BİLETSKA<sup>a</sup>

### ARTICLE INFO

|                  |               |
|------------------|---------------|
| Article History  |               |
| Received         | 13 July 2023  |
| Accepted         | 25 March 2024 |
| Available Online | 22 May 2024   |

|              |                  |
|--------------|------------------|
| Article Type | Research Article |
|--------------|------------------|

### Keywords

Georgia,  
Ethnic Democracy,  
Ethno-Religious Nationalism,  
Muslim Minority.

### MAKALE BİLGİSİ

|                |                |
|----------------|----------------|
| Makale Geçmişi |                |
| Başvuru        | 13 Temmuz 2023 |
| Kabul          | 25 Mart 2024   |
| Yayın          | 22 Mayıs 2024  |

|             |                    |
|-------------|--------------------|
| Makale Türü | Araştırma Makalesi |
|-------------|--------------------|

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Gürcistan,  
Etnik Demokrasi,  
Etno-Dinsel Milliyetçilik,  
Müslüman Azınlık.

### ABSTRACT

This article examines the development of ethno-religious nationalism in Georgia under the presidencies of Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze, and Saakashvili, with a focus on Muslim minorities. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia faced numerous challenges, including ethnic conflicts, civil war, and economic unrest, which hindered the state- and nation-building efforts of the political elite. The ideological vacuum was filled by the Georgian Orthodox Church, which, in addition to its historical role in uniting Georgians, further strengthened the role of religion, resulting in the deep interweaving of ethnic and religious identities. Consequently, being ethnically Georgian and belonging to the Georgian Orthodox Church became prerequisites for being considered a “proper Georgian,” overshadowing the civil understanding required by Western liberal democracies. Based on interviews conducted in Georgia in 2016 and 2017, the study argues that Georgia operated as an ethnic democracy, posing a significant obstacle to civic integration and inclusive nation-building. Furthermore, Islam, as a minority religion associated with past “invaders” and neighboring countries, faced security-driven policies, leading to discrimination against Muslim minorities such as Adjarians, Meskhetian/Ahıska Turks, Azeris/Borçalı Turks, and Kists, who do not align with the Georgian Orthodox Church.

### ÖZ

Bu makale Gamsakhurdia, Şevardnadze ve Saakaşvili'nin cumhurbaşkanlıkları döneminde Gürcistan'da etnik-dini milliyetçiliğin gelişimini Müslüman azınlıklara odaklanarak incelemektedir. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra Gürcistan, siyasi eliten devlet ve ulus inşa çabalarını engelleyen etnik çatışmalar, iç savaş ve ekonomik huzursuzluk gibi çok sayıda zorlukla karşı karşıya kalmıştır. İdeolojik boşluk Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi tarafından doldurulmuş ve Gürcüleri birleştirmedeki tarihi rolüne ek olarak dinin rolünü daha da güçlendirerek etnik ve dini kimliklerin derin bir şekilde iç içe geçmesine neden olmuştur. Sonuç olarak, etnik açıdan Gürcü olmak ve Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'ne mensup olmak, Batılı liberal demokrasilerin gerektirdiği sivil anlayışı gölgede bırakarak “gerçek bir Gürcü” olarak kabul edilmenin ön koşulları haline gelmiştir. Gürcistan'da 2016 ve 2017 yıllarında yapılan mülakatlara dayanan bu çalışma, Gürcistan'ın etnik bir demokrasi olarak işlediğini, bunun da sivil entegrasyon ve kapsayıcı ulus inşası önünde önemli bir engel teşkil ettiğini savunmaktadır. Dahası, geçmişteki “işgalciler” ve komşu ülkelerle ilişkilendirilen bir azınlık dini olarak İslam, güvenlik odaklı politikalarla karşı karşıya kalmış ve bu da Gürcistan Ortodoks Kilisesi'ne bağlı olmayan Acaralılar, Ahıska Türkleri, Azeriler/Borçalı Türkleri ve Kistler gibi Müslüman azınlıklara karşı ayrımcılığa yol açmıştır.

### 1. Introduction

Soon after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, politicians who chose to orient themselves towards the West began advocating the principles of liberal democracy and human rights as a priority for future state-building. However, the implementation of these principles has been complicated by the economic, political, and identity crises experienced

during the early years of independence. As a consequence of separatist movements and civil wars, Georgia has de facto lost control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These circumstances have prompted a prioritization of concerns regarding territorial integrity and security, superseding efforts in nation-building. As a result, the Georgian understanding of the nation has been shaped primarily by an

<sup>a</sup> Asst. Prof. Dr., Karabük University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of International Relations, Karabük, E-Posta: yuliyabiletska@karabuk.edu.tr, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7496-1881

ethnic perspective rather than a civic one. The civic understanding of the nation has also been challenged by the growing role of religion, which filled the ideological vacuum that appeared in post-Soviet societies. The state-building in Georgia, particularly during the initial years of independence, has come at the cost of democracy and the rights of minority groups (Aydingün, 2013).

The scholarly literature on democratization emphasizes that many post-Soviet states, including Georgia, have fallen short of fully implementing the tenets of Western-style liberal democracy. To describe states that combine features from both authoritarian and democratic regimes, scholars usually refer to the term “hybrid regimes” (Diamond, 2002), the “grey zone” (Carothers, 2002: 9) or a “democracy with adjectives” (Collier & Levitsky, 1997). To explain the type of “diminished democracy” that exists in Georgia, I will refer to the model of “ethnic democracy” introduced by Sammy Smooha in 1989. Initially, Smooha formulated this model to explain the situation in Israel, but subsequently, it was extended to encompass other contexts, including post-Soviet states like Estonia (Smith, 1996; Jarve, 2005), Latvia (Smith, 1996; Diatchkova, 2005) and Georgia (Sabanadze 2005; Gürsoy & Biletska, 2016). I argue that this model of ethnic democracy is powerful in explaining the challenges that minorities have faced in states where the nation is equated to the constituent titular ethnic group. According to Smooha, the primary distinction between ethnic democracy and non-democratic systems, including ethnocracy, lies in the fact that while the majority aims to institutionalize its ethnic supremacy, it nevertheless extends democratic principles to all individuals within its citizenry. (Smooha, 2005: 241). He lays out his model by listing eight features. This model basically states that the conception of a nation in an ethnic democracy is based on a certain ethnic group which claims exclusive rights to the territory and state. Even though the representatives of other ethnic groups may have citizenship of this state, they are not considered part of the nation but rather seen as potential threats to the state and nationhood. Consequently, individuals belonging to non-titular nations are denied certain individual and collective rights that are bestowed upon the dominant ethnic group and regulated by the governing authorities. (Smooha, 2001: 29-36). According to Smooha (2001: 36-37), several factors contribute to the establishment of ethnic democracy, including the presence of ethnic supremacy and pre-existing ethnic nationalism before the advent of democracy, the presence of manageable minority groups, and the existence of threats to the state that necessitate ongoing mobilization and a steadfast commitment to democracy, whether driven by ideological convictions or practical considerations.

I will discuss the developments of ethno-religious nationalism in Georgia under the presidencies of Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze, and Saakashvili by referring to four Muslim communities: Adjarians, Meskhetian/Ahiska Turks, Azeris/Borchali Turks, and Kists. I argue that Georgia is an ethnic democracy and that this constitutes an important obstacle to civic integration and inclusive nation-building. I further suggest that as a minority religion, Islam is viewed as the religion of the former ‘invaders’ of the country and also the religion of the neighboring countries that maintain close ties with related minorities. The paper relies on the findings of field research conducted in Georgia in 2015 and 2016, which

encompassed interviews with various individuals, including public officials, experts, academics, NGO activists, clergymen, and representatives of minority organizations. The interviews enrich the narrative and offer a nuanced perspective, making this work an essential resource for scholars and researchers exploring similar themes in comparative contexts.

## 2. Ethnic Democracy in Georgia: a General Overview

To comprehend the process of post-Soviet nation-building and the origins of nationalism in Georgia, it is crucial to consider the country’s Soviet legacy. The Soviet nationality policy was based on a paradox. On one hand, it fostered a pronounced ethnic identity, while concurrently striving to cultivate a collective state identity within the framework of the Soviet Union. Soviet ethnic engineers introduced a category of *natsional’nost’* (национальность) which was understood in primordial terms with a strong emphasis on ethnic origin. In cases when *natsional’nost’* was assigned to a certain administrative unit, it was called a titular nation. The Soviet system created a hierarchy of nationalities based on the existence or absence of such an administrative unit. The attachment of a person to a certain territory promoted a territorial identity. However, as Aydingün argues, “this type of territorial identity, which had the potential to become a civic identity aiming to establish a civic link between the individual and the state, did not take root because of the strength of the ethnic identity” (Aydingün, 2013: 815). Moreover, it instead created the appearance of exclusive “ownership” by a titular group over a certain territory. Therefore, the representatives of other nationalities who were living on the territory of this administrative entity and had a homeland either within or outside of the Soviet Union were not considered part of this titular nation. As long as they shared the common Soviet identity and the Russian language as a lingua franca, these tensions were not critical. The pressure of the totalitarian regime created a factor of fear that deterred any kind of minority movement. Thus, especially during the last decade of the Soviet Union, the ethnic dominance of Georgians established in the territory of the Georgian SSR and Georgian ethnic nationalism forming the Georgian National Front became factors that played a significant role in the development of ethnic democracy in Georgia, aligning with Smooha’s approach (Smooha, 2001: 36).

Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who was the first president of independent Georgia from 1991 to 1992, advocated for the principle of “Georgia for Georgians”. He promoted a nationalist movement based on ethnicity, which led to the development of an ethnic identity rather than a civic identity. Nevertheless, Matsaberidze (2014: 8) posits that while Gamsakhurdia is predominantly recognized as a populist, certain declarations he made regarding future policies concerning national minorities were entirely rational, showcasing his dedication to implementing civic integration policies towards minorities. However, during his relatively brief presidency, these moderate assertions and strategies did not receive institutional articulation and implementation opportunities. Instead, there was an emergence of ethnic nationalism with territorial autonomies for national minorities. This shift implies a departure from the initially rational discourse on minority policy towards a more ethnocentric position, where institutional support for civic integration remains conspicuously limited.

A dominant nationalism that claims the privileged entitlement of the ethnic nation to the country is considered by Smooha to be the foremost feature of an ethnic democracy (2001: 29). Even though the right to citizenship was granted to all residents of Georgia, the principle of inclusion in the nation was based on three main characteristics: ethnicity, language, and religion. To be a “proper Georgian”, one had to have Georgian ethnic origin, possess a high level of proficiency in the Georgian language, and maintain affiliation with the Georgian Orthodox Church. Gamsakurdia claimed exclusive rights for Georgians over the territory of the state. In other words, Gamsakurdia established a state that “separates membership in the single core ethnic nation from citizenship” and “membership in the core ethnic nation is given, primordial, and innate,” which is considered the second main feature of an ethnic democracy by Smooha (2001: 29-30). Gamsakurdia openly advocated for the fusion of church and state, despite criticizing the actual structure of the church (Chitanava, 2015: 41). This approach can be considered revenge for the Soviet period, during which the church suffered. The nationalist approach launched by Gamsakurdia triggered the mobilization of national minorities. Although he was dismissed from power in 1992, serious tensions between the majority group and the minorities escalated into military confrontations in South Ossetia during 1991 and 1992, followed by conflicts in Abkhazia from 1992 to 1993. These armed conflicts resulted in the de facto loss of control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as well as tensions between the central government and authorities in Adjara, the intention of the Meskhetian Turks to repatriate to Georgia, and closer ties between the local political elite in Javakheti and Armenia. As Sabanadze stresses, the failure of Gamsakurdia’s regime “undermined the legitimacy of ethnocentric rule in Georgia”, so Georgians had to rethink how to build their state (Sabanadze, 2005: 124).

To gain a deeper understanding of the situation concerning national minorities in newly independent countries, Brubaker (1995) suggests examining them not solely within the framework of bilateral relations between minorities and the national majority, but rather as a triangular dynamic. One angle represents nationalizing states, denoting countries where the nation-building process is still ongoing. The second angle pertains to national minorities who are citizens of one state but typically hold emotional ties to another, often a neighboring country. These culturally affiliated neighboring states constitute the third angle, referred to by Brubaker as the external national homeland of the minorities. The link between these external homelands and national minorities is strong, though it is often perceived as interference in the internal affairs of the state where the minority resides. Consequently, both external homelands and national minorities are viewed as potential threats to the nation-building process of the state.

These “external homelands” of Georgian minorities have contributed to the adaptation by the state of a securitized perspective towards minorities. Sabanadze (2005: 127) argues that:

Minorities in Georgia are associated with threats of separatism, territorial disintegration, opposition to Georgia’s perceived or real national interests such as

independence, territorial-administrative arrangement, choice of regional and international political alignments, and with Georgia’s relative vulnerability vis-a-vis Russia.

Smooha considers this threat perception as an important feature of ethnic democracy and at the same time as a factor conducive to its emergence. He explains:

When the nation lives in a hostile environment and the minority constitutes part of this environment, the state may shape its regime according to patterns of ethnic democracy to be able to cope successfully with the external and internal threat. For this reason, the state mobilizes the ethnic nation to contain the threat (Smooha, 2001: 37).

After Gamsakurdia was removed from power, Eduard Shevardnadze (1995-2003) shifted the focus in nation-building from an ethno-religious one to a more civic one based on patriotism and territory. However, instability persisted in Georgia until Shevardnadze solidified his authority in the late 1990s. He abandoned the nationalist policies of Gamsakurdia’s era and prioritized maintaining the status quo by avoiding emphasis on Georgian nationalism and refraining from coercion towards minority groups (Wakizaka, 2019: 136). Under his rule, Georgia adopted a new constitution that recognized the equality of all citizens regardless of their national, ethnic, religious, or linguistic origins, as well as new educational and relatively liberal citizenship laws. With aspirations of becoming part of the European community, Georgia has also ratified numerous international treaties and conventions focused on protecting human rights and minority rights. For instance, in 1999, Georgia’s membership in the Council of Europe was contingent upon its commitment to repatriate Meskhetian/Ahiska Turks, who had been forcibly deported from Georgia during the Soviet regime. Although the general discourse of the political elite towards national minorities changed under Shevardnadze, the inclusion of minorities has remained poor both at the social and state levels. For example, in the Kvemo Kartli region, Georgians occupied all the official positions, despite the fact that Azeris constituted the majority in several settlements (Wheatley, 2009: 126). The lack of proficiency in the Georgian language and culture among Azeris in Kvemo Kartli resulted in limited opportunities for employment, leading to significantly higher unemployment rates among these minority groups compared to Georgians (Wakizaka, 2019: 136-138). While Muslims in Adjara are not considered an ethnic minority but rather a religious one, research indicates that they also experience less involvement in politics as a result of direct or indirect discrimination based on their religious affiliation (Gürsoy & Katliarou, 2016).

As Chechen-Kists in Pankisi, this group also experienced exclusion from Georgian socio-political life. However, as Wakizaka (2019: 136-139) points out, it happened due to inadequate state control in their regions, rather than Shevardnadze’s minority policies. Despite linguistic integration, Pankisi suffered isolation and poverty due to insufficient government capacity. Chechen-Kists, influenced by foreign Islamic groups, distanced themselves from Georgia, creating a distinct system in Pankisi. Overall, the limited state capacity allowed minority preservation but

led to their prolonged exclusion from Georgian society. Mikheil Saakashvili, who assumed power following the Rose Revolution, regarded the European Union as the sole viable trajectory for Georgia's future development. The nation-building project he adopted is usually considered to be more inclusive in comparison with past policies, with a strong focus on the objective of building a civic nation. As Wakizaka mentions, Saakashvili, discerning the inefficacy of nation-state building anchored in ethnic Georgian nationalism for Georgia, proposed redefining those residing within the country's borders as "citizens of Georgia" rather than solely as ethnically "Georgian." Securing support from minority groups became imperative in his pursuit to enhance stability and advance the process of nation-state building in Georgia (2019: 150). He made efforts to integrate minorities, building infrastructure in the regions where they live, supporting decentralization, and making some changes to higher education that allowed minorities to study at Georgian universities. In 2005, during the Saakashvili era, Georgia ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM). However, it did so with reservations regarding the precise definition of a "national minority". Subsequently, a National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration was formulated and embraced at the national level. Implemented in 2009, this action plan serves as a comprehensive roadmap, outlining national strategies and objectives across six key areas: the rule of law, education and the state language, media and access to information, political integration and civil participation, social and regional integration, and culture preservation and identity (National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration, 2009).

Saakashvili's orientation towards the West and overall dedication to democracy align with the conditions outlined by Smooha for the emergence of ethnic democracy in a context where one core ethnic group holds dominance. He stresses that the lack of such commitment "is liable to engender quasi- or non-democracy" (Smooha, 2001: 37). Even though Georgia does not agree with the definition of a 'national minority' in the FCNM, it accepts the existence of minorities on its territory, providing them with certain individual and collective rights. As Smooha posits, the distinguishing characteristic of ethnic democracy, in contrast to non-democratic regimes, lies in the extension of political rights to all citizens. At the same time, western types of democracies such as individual, republican, or multicultural democracies do not recognize any collective rights, stressing individual equality (Smooha, 2001). The main difference of an ethnic democracy from a consociational one is that the political rights provided to minorities are usually incomplete compared to those of the core nation. Smooha (2001: 32-33) considers incomplete rights granted to minorities as a fifth feature of his model. Thus, in Georgia, everyone who has formal citizenship is eligible to elect and to be elected. However, community members from minority groups find places only at the end of the candidate lists created by political parties trying to avoid reactions from the titular group (Gürsoy & Tulun, 2016: 108).

Along with obvious progress in relation to problems faced by minorities, Saakashvili was blamed for adopting "a populist nationalism" (Aydingün, 2016: 5). Saakashvili's policies aimed at establishing territorial integrity were

sometimes seen by minorities as discriminatory. Furthermore, in addition to seeking integration with the West, he introduced new symbols for the nation and the state with a strong emphasis on Orthodox Christianity. This paradox was viewed with suspicion by minorities. As mentioned by Freni (2011: 23), "Non-Christian minorities complained that portraying Georgia as a Christian state was a symbolic discrimination step". However, Wakizaka considers this step as "efforts to foster Georgian national identity as a civic one" (Wakizaka, 2019: 152). Saakashvili's policies made the model of ethnic democracy in Georgia more apparent, particularly its third feature, which describes a situation where "the state is owned and ruled by the core ethnic nation" (Smooha, 2001: 31). This means that the "official language, religion, culture, institutions, flag, anthem, emblems, stamps, calendar, names of places, heroes, days and sites of collective commemoration, laws, and policies are biased in favour of the core ethnic nation" (Smooha, 2001: 31).

The experience of post-Soviet Georgia shows the growing role of religion in the state and society. Indeed, religion assumed a significant role as a national marker, bridging the ideological void within post-Soviet Georgian society, which had endured civil wars, ethnic tensions, political volatility, and economic hardships. Religion served as a vital connection to the country's pre-Soviet history, allowing for a re-establishment of cultural continuity (Aydingün, 2013: 811). Moreover, being a strong national marker, it is considered a "national religion" that became a powerful instrument for the mobilization of the titular nation. Even though Wakizaka stresses that the post-2003 period in Georgia has witnessed a significant transformation of state-church relations and the pursuit of secularization, the enduring influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church remains undeniable. Despite efforts to enhance secularization, Saakashvili emphasized the continuing importance of Christianity in the integration of Georgia, highlighting the intricate interplay between the secular and religious aspects of the nation's identity (Wakizaka 2019: 157). In fact, the situation when "the state mobilizes the core ethnic nation" coincides with the fourth feature of Smooha's model of ethnic democracy (Smooha, 2001: 32).

As mentioned by Smooha in the case of Israel, where religion plays a central role in defining who is a Jew, in the case of Georgia too "ethnicity, religion, and peoplehood are intertwined" (Smooha, 2002: 485). In addition to the prominent position of Orthodox Christianity within the Georgian national identity, members of the Georgian Orthodox Church maintain close relationships with both the state and political figures. Many interviewees said that the church is a strong political actor in Georgia. For example, a representative of Georgian Reforms Associates (GRASS) mentioned during the interview that "The church is stronger than political figures. The church is considered to be the fallback solution; it is seen as the agent to solve problems when politicians' or others' efforts fail" (Interview, Tbilisi, 01.12.2015). A representative from the Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC) emphasized that "the Patriarch is the most successful politician in Georgia" (Interview, Tbilisi, 01.12.2015). Another expert said that "in Georgia, politicians visit the Patriarch – normally it should be the opposite. Here the president kneels down in front of the Patriarch and kisses his hand" (Interview,

Tbilisi, 04.12.2015). Numerous surveys also show that the church has strong public support. For instance, based on the public opinion poll released by the International Republican Institute in 2016, 89% of Georgian respondents felt the work of the Georgian Orthodox Church was favorable, giving it the highest rank among all institutions (Public Opinion Survey Residents of Georgia March – April 2016, 2016: 38).

Although the 1995 Constitution of Georgia declares the independence of the Orthodox Church from the state, it confers upon the church a distinct and privileged status. This special status for the Orthodox Church was also recognized in the Constitutional Agreement between the Church and the State, also known as the *Concordat*, signed in 2002. Furthermore, the establishment of the State Agency on Religious Issues took place in 2014. The Agency categorizes religions in Georgia as either traditional or non-traditional, promoting *de facto* a hierarchy of religions in Georgia. Although the main objective of the Agency is to ensure “equality and tolerance” (State Agency on Religious Issues), experts during this field research confirmed that neither an equal attitude towards all religions nor the solution of the acute problems of religious minorities were among the primary goals of the agency. A theology professor argued during the interview that “the Agency is a Soviet-type mechanism that aims to control people” (Interview, Tbilisi, 03.12.2015). Gürsoy and Tulun (2016: 97) conclude that the real aim of the Agency was to control minority religions. As Smooha argues, in ethnic democracy states impose control on minorities (2001: 34). Smooha stresses that because minorities are perceived as “a threat to the order and stability of society”; they are targets of security forces; so “they are watched by state agencies, and the activities of their activists and leaders are monitored” (2001: 34). The results of field research confirm the existence of such pressures on Muslim minorities in Georgia. The expert who conducted research on minorities at the Human Rights Educating and Monitoring Center (EMC) shared her experience, saying that soon after their team interviewed minority leaders, police entered their homes to interrogate them. This expert believes that it is a way to put pressure on minorities (Interview, Tbilisi, 01.12.2015).

### **3. Ethnicity and Religion as Sources of Discrimination Among Four Muslim Communities in Georgia: Muslim Adjarians, Azeris/Borchali Turks, Meskhetian/Ahiska Turks, and Kists**

Muslims comprise the largest religious minority in Georgia and can be divided into three groups. The first group consists of Muslims who are not ethnic Georgians, including Azeris (both Shia and Sunni) and Kists (Sunni). The second group comprises Muslims who are ethnically Georgian - the Muslim Adjarians. The ethnic origin of the third group, Meskhetian Turks, is a controversial topic. Officially classified as ethnic Georgians, they are commonly referred to and recognized as Turks by the general public. Although those who live in Georgia identify themselves as Muslim Georgians, the rest of the Meskhetian Turks, residing in Central Asia, Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, and the USA, have a Turkish identity and call themselves Ahiska Turks.

Although these groups have different experiences in

Georgia, they share common grievances. Integration into Georgian society and nation, the satisfaction of religious needs such as building mosques and religious education, and political participation are the main issues discussed by the interviewees.

#### **3.1. Common Problems: Integration, Religious Needs and Political Participation**

The main issue faced by the four Muslim minorities in Georgia is their exclusion from the core nation based on their ethnic and religious identity. As mentioned earlier, these minorities do not meet the criteria of “proper Georgianness” and are not considered a part of the nation. Instead, they are viewed as a potential threat to the current statehood and nation. The growing importance of religion contributes to the strengthening of both religious identity and nationalist sentiments, not only among the core nation but also among the minorities. The significance of the Georgian Orthodox Church and its relationship with the state has a significant impact on minority religions. According to the Caucasus House Report (2016: 37), “[t]he pattern and format of the relationship between the Georgian state and the Church does not accommodate equality and justice in the country.” Despite Islam being officially recognized as a “traditional religion”, it does not enjoy the same privileges as the Georgian Orthodox Church, such as tax exemptions and the restitution of properties confiscated during the Soviet era. As a result, leaders of Muslim minority communities are struggling to improve their situation by seeking legal remedies. In a report by the Public Defender of Georgia, it is mentioned that in 2016, just like in previous years, unequal and unfair rules for funding religious associations were applied in 2016 too (10 December Report on the Situation of the Protection of the Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia, 2016). Court cases initiated by Muslims to reclaim their properties confiscated during the Soviet era support Smooha’s model, which includes the right of non-core groups to advocate for change (Smooha, 2001: 33).

Besides integration problems, there are also difficulties facing Muslims related to religious education, the construction of places of worship, and the public expression of their religion. This field research demonstrated that the absence of state-sponsored religious education has a negative impact on minorities. Limited educational opportunities force young Muslims to seek educational prospects in countries such as Turkey, Iran, the UAE, and other nations. However, as one Muslim expert emphasized during the interview, “religious education must be organized in Georgia; otherwise, those coming from Turkey or Iran do not fit the interests of Georgia.” (Interview, Tbilisi, 01.12.2015). Moreover, obtaining a religious education abroad weakens the traditional understanding of Islam developed in Georgia and creates favorable conditions for the proliferation of different interpretations of Islam. The adoption of diverse interpretations of Islam has raised suspicions among Georgian authorities and has played a role in their perspective of securitizing Islam.

Muslim minorities face a common challenge of inadequate mosque facilities and encountering negative attitudes from the public when seeking permission to construct new places of worship. The findings of the field research show that resistance to the construction of mosques is an issue of the

struggle of symbols in the cultural landscape. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Georgian Orthodox Church filled not only a spiritual vacuum but also public spaces. “Communist symbols were gradually replaced with Orthodox Christian symbols” (Chitanava, 2015: 41). In this way, the majority religion sought to reassert its exclusive rights over the territory. In Batumi, the representatives of the Muslim Adjarians draw attention to the problem of this symbolic struggle, saying that “they do not want this to be seen as a Muslim [territory]. There are crosses everywhere in every large apartment, etc., and there are churches on every corner. They want to show that here [everything belongs to] Christians” (Interview, Batumi, 26.10.2015).

A similar strategy was applied to education and public offices. Even though compulsory religious education was removed from the curriculum in 2005, “religious inculcation and the obstruction of religious neutrality at public schools has continued to be problematic” (Chitanava, 2015: 45). Field research has demonstrated that Orthodox symbols and practices are still widely used in schools, continuing the religious indoctrination of students despite being prohibited by law. With respect to public offices, a former expert from the Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center remarked that there were several examples highlighting the power of the church, such as visits by police officers to the church and the broadcast of this visit on TV.

In an ethnic democracy where full privileges are granted based on ethnicity and religion, the likelihood of discrimination on an ethno-religious basis is quite high. According to the 2016 Public Defender report, cases of discrimination based on religion and nationality/ethnicity rank second and third, respectively, in terms of prevalence (17 percent and 14 percent, respectively), following discrimination on grounds of political opinion (18 percent) (The Report on The Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia, 2016: 64). According to the latest report, Muslim leaders in Adjara also complain about “the growing tendency of human rights violations, discriminatory and inappropriate treatment, and psychological duress of the local Muslim community members” (Islam in Georgia: Policy and Integration, 2016: 24). During the field research, many respondents also shared this view, emphasizing that Islam in Georgia is generally perceived as a backward religion and Muslims as “premodern people” (Interview, Tbilisi, 02.12.2015).

Furthermore, minorities are usually excluded from the country’s mainstream politics. Muslim minority groups in Georgia are barely involved in local or central government. A former Mufti, during the interview, gave the example that among the 32 members of the Religious Agency, there is not one member of a religious minority (Interview, Batumi, 26.10.2015). This clearly illustrates the lack of opportunities for religious minorities to influence state decisions that concern their religion. Despite the high concentration of Azeris in the Kvemo Kartli region (around 40 percent), only a few of them are in local government. Although during the interviews, some experts argued that the main reason for this was the lack of proficiency in the Georgian language, many Azeris interviewed stated that being fluent in Georgian is not sufficient for equal treatment (Interview, Marnauli, 02.12.2015).

The statements of Azeris also align with the case of Muslim Adjarians, who do not face a language barrier as Georgian is their native tongue but are also excluded from political life due to their religious identity. This allows us to argue that the primary reason for exclusion is religion. This argument was further supported by the findings of the field research. An expert on minorities in Georgia contended that:

In public service, there are specific cases of discrimination. If you want to work in public service you have to be a real Christian and a real Christian means that you have to be orthodox Christian, ethnically Georgian and be a “man” (Interview, Tbilisi, 02.12.2015).

Another expert pointed out that Muslims, even if they are well-educated, are not appointed to public jobs due to the strong influence of the church on local governments. Moreover, sometimes “public officers are appointed to local governments directly by bishops. There are those who say that the Adigeni mayor was appointed by the bishopric” (Interview, Tbilisi, 01.12.2015). The same expert also stressed that more recently, the situation has improved as Muslims have begun to use legal mechanisms to fight against discrimination. Nevertheless, interviews revealed that to get a job in public service, many Muslims choose to convert to Christianity, as “it is convenient to be Christian for practical life issues” (Interview, Tbilisi, 02.12.2015). Even in the private sector, there is a problem with hiring minorities. “No one says that you were not hired because you are Muslim, but if you are Christian, the doors are opened to you” (Interview, Tbilisi, 02.12.2015).

Another shared problem among Muslims in Georgia is the high level of unemployment. It should also be stressed that unemployment has been a general issue since the breakdown of the Soviet Union, regardless of religious identity. However, poor language skills, lack of education, and exclusion from official jobs have contributed to the deterioration of the conditions of minorities in comparison to the titular group. The results of this field research have demonstrated that unemployed Muslims in Georgia are seeking job opportunities in neighboring states and sending remittances to their families. This trend has fostered closer relations between Muslim minorities and Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey, creating a distinct way of life separate from Georgia.

### **3.2. Problems Peculiar to Each Muslim Community: Repatriation, Conversion, Fragmentation, Radicalization**

As has been stated above, besides the obvious similarities in problems faced by Muslims in general, each of these groups has particular problems of their own. The main problem faced by Meskhetian Turks is that they have been prevented from repatriating to their homeland. When Georgia acceded to the Council of Europe in 1999, it pledged that Meskhetian Turks could return and Georgia accepted the obligation to make the necessary legal arrangements. However, a number of research papers have shown a negative attitude among the public and political elite towards the process of repatriation of Meskhetian Turks to Georgia. (Nodia, 2002: 56; Gotua, 2013: 353).

As mentioned before, the official discourse of Georgia does

not accept their Turkish identity, emphasizing their Georgian origin. Despite the official Georgian policies aiming to promote the idea that Meskhetian Turks are ethnic Georgians, most of society continues to see them as Turks due to their language and religion, which are critical factors in determining “Georgianness”. As one of the lawyers who works for the Georgia Young Lawyers’ Association (GYLA) stressed, “the people sent from Georgia to Central Asia have already died, and their children have no connections to Georgia.” Therefore, even if these people come to Georgia, they will not be perceived as real members of the Georgian nation. Moreover, if the state helps to solve the social and economic problems of repatriates, society will start questioning why “our budget” is used for “their needs”. She also said that even if politicians agree to deal with the problems of minorities, they would not touch this topic in practice, as it could cause the loss of public support in the elections (Interview, Batumi, 29.10.2015).

The result of this field research shows that Meskhetian Turks must define themselves as Georgian to be able to return to their homeland. For example, a representative of *Toleranti*, an NGO that worked on the integration of Meskhetian Turks into Georgian society, said that there are no Meskhetians who claim to be Turks in Samtshe-Javakheti, and all those who have returned are Georgians, because Turks do not care about these lands and only Georgians are answering “the call of blood”. Moreover, she adds, “those who consider themselves Turks should go to Turkey” (Interview, Akhaltsikhe, 04.12.2015). Keskin and Anaç (2016: 290) argue that regarding Georgian identity, Meskhetian Turks made a strategic step in order to return to their homeland. As they are seen as Turks only by the public, not officially, they cannot apply for any minority rights, as official discourse defines them as ethnic Georgians (Aydingün, 2016: 416). Thus, as the results of this research have demonstrated, Meskhetian Turks experience both ethnic and religious pressure. Although not many of them have returned, those who have managed to return declare themselves to have Georgian origins.

As for Adjarian Muslims, the main problem they face is pressure to convert to Orthodox Christianity. A representative of a Muslim NGO argued that “there is pressure everywhere. Pressure is like a smell, we feel it everywhere. They don’t want us because we are Georgian Muslims. There is an ideological one-sided war here” (Interview, Batumi, 28.10.2015). To understand the reasons for this pressure, we have to examine the perception of Islam by the state and church. As argued by Aydingün (2013: 813), “the marginalization of Islam is not a reaction directed against Islam as a religion but rather against a religion that is associated with the Ottoman Empire, the threatening Islamic power that ruled in the region for about 300 years, and with the minorities who were loyal to the Ottoman Empire.”

Interviews have revealed that Islamophobic attitudes in Georgian society go hand in hand with Turkophobia. This negative attitude towards Turkey/the Ottomans, which dates back to the Russian Empire, was strengthened during the Soviet period. Currently, any involvement of Turkey-based religious groups is considered as interference by Turkey in the internal affairs of Georgia and therefore is perceived by some Georgians as part of Turkish expansionist policy.

Politicians from time to time launch campaigns against the construction of a second mosque in Batumi, portraying it as “an imminent threat coming from Turkey which would claim the whole of Georgia” (Chitanava, 2015: 48). This especially affects Adjarian Muslims, who are struggling to be included in the titular nation and also to preserve their Muslim identity. The results of this field research showed that both the people and priests put pressure on Adjarian Muslims because they continue to profess Islam, pointing out that they “are keeping their Turkish Muslim identity, [while] living in a Christian country” (Interview, Tbilisi, 01.12.2015). The church argues that the ancestors of today’s Adjarian Muslims were Christians who changed religion, and therefore they were betrayers (Interview, Tbilisi, 02.12.2015). For these reasons, in their struggle to be included in the core nation, Adjarian Muslims at times try to distance themselves from Turkey, underlining that “we do not want Turks, we are not Turks. We are Georgians” (Interview, Batumi, 29.10.2015). Furthermore, the pressure for conversion in Adjaria is justified as “a response to uncontrolled attempts to promote Islam by Turkish Islamic organizations, which they believe is part of an aggressive policy adopted by the Turkish state towards the Adjara region” (Islam in Georgia, 2016: 24).

As a result of pressure to convert, many people, especially young people from Adjaria, have converted to Orthodox Christianity. This has caused religious confrontations in families where the older generations are Muslims, as confirmed in a report by Caucasus House (2016: 24). The conversion policy implemented in Georgia can be explained by the desire to strengthen power over the territories. It can also be interpreted as a way to solidify the nation by appealing to the religious level of the Kingdom of Georgia in the country’s golden age. In brief, Adjarian Muslims experience state- and church-backed pressure to convert, as they are not considered “proper Georgians” due to their adherence to Islam.

The main problem of Azeris in Georgia is related to their poor proficiency in the Georgian language, despite the latest reforms in the Georgian education system that allow students from ethnic minorities to learn Georgian and have a university education. This field research has demonstrated the relatively positive results of this program, as the number of Azeri students studying at Georgian universities has increased. However, according to Yılmaz & Ögütçü, the lack of proficiency in the Georgian language continues to be the biggest obstacle to their successful integration into Georgian society. It affects their engagement in the economy, education, politics, and relations with Georgian society, effectively causing their isolation and the closed nature of this minority. Among other factors hindering integration, researchers mention the fact that they are not a diaspora, the fact that during the Soviet era they were taught Russian instead of the language of the titular nation of the republic where they reside, and the fact that they are not an indigenous people. Starting from the late 1980s, conditions created for this group were factors that only contributed to their emigration to other countries. Regarding discrimination based on religious grounds, the fact that they have a different ethnic origin from the titular nation is a relatively positive influencing factor, leading to significantly less discrimination compared to, for example, Adjarian Muslims, who share the same origin with



Georgians and are therefore expected to be Christians (Yılmaz & Ögütçü, 2016: 268-269).

As mentioned earlier, both Sunni and Shia communities of Azeri Muslims reside in Georgia. However, the absence of religious education within the country and the recent influence of Sunni and Shia groups from neighboring nations have significantly impacted them, exacerbating previously insignificant sectarian differences. Asker & Ögütçü (2016) emphasize that the primary challenge regarding religious matters in regions inhabited by Azeri Muslims stems from the ineffective operation of the All-Georgia Muslims Administration and Religious Agency established by the state. Due to questions surrounding the functions of this institution and interventions from various external religious groups, negative perceptions have arisen within certain segments of society. Efforts have been made to bridge the gap between the Muslim community and the state through government-established mechanisms aimed at managing divisions and preventing radicalization. However, the legitimacy of the religious leaders is sometimes doubted due to the influence of external religious groups. Consequently, the lack of state-developed mechanisms to address religious education deficiencies, coupled with the involvement of external religious groups – particularly from Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia – has led to the fragmentation of religious practices, especially among Sunnis. These divergent perspectives occasionally foster conflict and practices misaligned with traditional religious norms, resulting in societal issues. In essence, divisions exist not only among Sunni and Shia Muslims but also within different Sunni factions, further exacerbated by the activities of Wahhabi and Salafi groups alongside Turkish-origin communities, which negatively impact Sunni-Shia relations and deepen differences. These activities affect both Sunni and Shia segments of Azeri Muslims, contributing to concerns about radicalization in the country.

The Kists in Pankisi initially viewed themselves as Georgians during the Soviet era, but after 1991, they forged stronger ties with Chechnya-Ingushetia, developing a diaspora identity. The Kists perceive Georgia and Chechnya-Ingushetia as their homelands and form a spiritual connection through cultural ties, language, and resistance against Russia. Historical traumas, including the 1994 Chechen-Ingush Deportation and the two Chechen Wars, play a pivotal role in shaping the “Chechen-Vainakh diaspora nationalism.” The Georgian government’s anti-Russian stance allows the Kists’ diaspora nationalism to develop as a cultural and political identity. Consequently, the Kists maintain and enhance their identity through shared trauma, anti-Russian sentiments, and political aspirations, with Georgia’s position contributing to the rise of their political diaspora identity (Wakizaka, 2021b).

The most important problem that the Kists face in Georgian society is the perception of the radicalization of Islam in the region (Aydingün et al., 2016: 363). The dissemination of Salafi Islam in Pankisi Gorge following the arrival of Chechen refugees in the region has prepared the ground for this perception. The results of this research have demonstrated that some representatives of this group have joined ISIS. This fact has contributed to the deterioration of their image in Georgian society, as they are now perceived

as “potential terrorists.” Our interviews made it clear that the Kists are unhappy with this stereotyping. Furthermore, the revival of Chechen identity among the Kists, combined with the dissemination of Salafism, has created a shift of identity, causing tension between their traditional culture and Salafi culture and leading to a deepening isolation from Georgian culture. Wakizaka stressed that the Salafist-Sufist conflict revolves around the issue of preserving Chechen-Kist identity against assimilation into Georgian society (2021a). As an attempt to decrease the radicalization of Islam in the region, the Georgian government adopts policies aimed at promoting traditional Islam and fostering the integration of the Chechen-Kist community into Georgian society. Simultaneously, efforts are made to limit the influence of foreign imams and encourage local leadership within the community (Ibid, 44). This governmental approach seeks to bridge the gap between the Kists’ cultural identity and the broader Georgian society.

#### 4. Conclusion

Research data has demonstrated that the main reason for the discrimination experienced by the four communities discussed in this paper is their religion, Islam. Three of them – Azeris, Kists and Meskhetian Turks – are ethno-religious minorities whereas Ajarians are a religious minority. The case of the Ajarians clearly shows that ethnicity is not enough to be considered Georgian. Although ethnically Georgian, Muslim Ajarians are not recognized as “proper Georgians”. Struggling to be included into the core ethnic nation, they are encouraged to renounce Islam and convert to Orthodox Christianity, the religion of the majority.

Islam is perceived as the religion of the ‘invaders’ of Georgian land throughout history and also the religion of neighbouring countries considered to be the heirs of the ‘invaders’ and the ‘external homelands’ of these minorities, which has led the Georgian state, the Georgian Orthodox Church and certain segments of society to approach Islam with suspicion. As a result, Muslim minorities are approached through a security perspective despite the fact that some of their rights are recognised by the state. Therefore, the state seeks to control its minorities rather than protect their rights.

The approach of the Georgian state to its minorities can be considered proof of the ethno-religious character of Georgian national identity, which is still being constructed with the aim of contributing to the building of a strong state. These facts, together with Smooha’s approach mentioned at the beginning of the paper, allows us to define Georgia as an ethnic democracy because it combines a strong core of an ethnic nation and some incomplete rights for Muslim minorities. As for critics of Smooha’s approach, it should be stressed that he does not pay enough attention to the religion factor, focusing mainly on the state itself. The case of Georgia is an example where the church is a powerful institution which actively contributes to the building of a Georgianness based on an ethno-religious principle, together with state authorities restricting the rights of minorities.

The examination of Muslim communities in Georgia reveals a complex landscape of challenges and shared grievances. Despite their diversity in ethnicity, religious affiliation, and historical backgrounds, these communities



face common obstacles such as exclusion from the core nation, limited religious freedoms, and political marginalization. The intertwining dynamics of ethnicity, religion, and politics in Georgia have created a scenario where discrimination and unequal treatment persist, affecting various aspects of life including integration, religious education, and political participation.

Furthermore, specific challenges unique to each Muslim community, such as the repatriation issues of Meskhetian Turks, pressure for conversion faced by Adjarian Muslims, linguistic barriers for Azeris, and perceptions of radicalization among Kists, highlight the multifaceted nature of their experiences. These challenges reflect not only internal dynamics within the communities but also external factors such as state policies, societal attitudes, and geopolitical influences.

Despite these challenges, efforts are being made to address issues of discrimination, promote cultural understanding, and foster integration. The involvement of NGOs, international organizations, and governmental initiatives aimed at promoting religious tolerance and supporting minority rights demonstrates a commitment to addressing these issues. However, much work remains to be done to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all Muslim communities in Georgia.

## References

10 December Report on the Situation of the Protection of the Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia (2016). The Public Defender of Georgia. Retrieved from: <http://www.ombudsman.ge/uploads/other/4/4088.pdf> (Accessed: 04.04.2017)

Asker, A. & Ögütçü Ö.N. (2016). Borçalı Türkleri: İslam, Mezhep ve Din Temelli Sorunlar. In Aydıngün, A., Asker, A. & Şir, A.Y. (Eds.), *Gürcistan'daki Müslüman Topluluklar: Azınlık Hakları, Kimlik, Siyaset*, (pp. 219-244). Ankara: AVİM.

Aydıngün, A. (2013). The ethnification and nationalisation of religion in the post-Soviet Georgian nation-state building process: a source of discrimination and minority rights violations? *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 17(7-8), 810-828. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2013.859136>

Aydıngün, A. (2016). Etnik Demokrasinde Müslüman Azınlık Olmak: Yeni Başlangıçlar Mümkün mü? In Aydıngün, A., Asker, A. & Şir, A.Y. (Eds.), *Gürcistan'daki Müslüman Topluluklar: Azınlık Hakları, Kimlik, Siyaset*, (pp. 405-424). Ankara: AVİM.

Aydıngün, A. (2016). Gürcistan'da Din, Kimlik ve Müslüman Din Azınlıkları. Etnik Demokrasinde Müslüman Azınlık Olmak: Yeni Başlangıçlar Mümkün mü? In Aydıngün, A., Asker, A. & Şir, A.Y. (Eds.), *Gürcistan'daki Müslüman Topluluklar: Azınlık Hakları, Kimlik, Siyaset*, (pp.1-22). Ankara: AVİM.

Aydıngün, A., Asker, A. & Üner A. (2016). Pankisi Vadisi'nde Kistler: Selefilik, Gelenekçilik, Kimlik ve Siyaset In Aydıngün, A., Asker, A. & Şir, A.Y. (Eds.), *Gürcistan'daki Müslüman Topluluklar: Azınlık Hakları, Kimlik, Siyaset*, (pp. 347-370). Ankara: AVİM.

Brubaker, R. (1995). National Minorities, Nationalizing States, and External National Homelands in The New Europe, *Daedalus*. 124 (2), 107-132.

Carothers, T. (2002). The end of the transition paradigm. *Journal of democracy*, 13(1), 5-21.

Caucasus House (2016). *Islam in Georgia: Policy and Integration*. Research Report, Tbilisi. Retrieved from: <http://regional-dialogue.com/en/islam-in-georgia-policy-and-integration/> (Accessed: 04.05.2017).

Chitanava, E. (2015). The Georgian Orthodox Church: National identity and political influence. In Hug, A. (Ed.) *Traditional religion and political power: Examining the role of the church in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and Moldova*, (pp. 40-52). The Foreign Policy Centre (FPC). Retrieved

from: <https://fpc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/1707.pdf> (Accessed: 04.05.2017).

Collier, D. & Levitsky S. (1997). Democracy with adjectives: Conceptual innovation in comparative research. *World politics*, 49 (03), 430-451. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.1997.0009>

Diamond, L.J. (2002). Thinking about hybrid regimes. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), 21-35.

Diatchkova, S. (2005). Ethnic democracy in Latvia. In Smooha, S. & Priit J. (Eds.) *The Fate of Ethnic Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*. Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, European Centre for Minority Issues, (pp. 81-114). Open Society Institute, Budapest Hungary.

Freni, S. (2011). *Georgia as an Ethnic Democracy: a Study on the Azerbaijani and Armenian Minorities under Mikheil Saakashvili*, Tbilisi. Retrieved from: [http://minnet.tomdelf.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Georgia\\_as\\_an\\_Ethnic\\_Democracy-libre.pdf](http://minnet.tomdelf.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Georgia_as_an_Ethnic_Democracy-libre.pdf) (Accessed: 04.04.2017).

Gotua, G. (2013). Politicians views on the issue of Meskhetian repatriation. Report of research. *დეპორტირებული მეხებები - წარსული და თანამედროვეობა*. (pp.349-360). Tbilisi.

Gürsoy, H.E. & Biletska, Y. (2016). Azınlık Haklarına Kuramsal Bir Bakış. In Aydıngün, A., Asker, A. & Şir, A.Y. (Eds.), *Gürcistan'daki Müslüman Topluluklar: Azınlık Hakları, Kimlik, Siyaset*, (pp. 49-82). Ankara: AVİM.

Gürsoy, H.E. & Tulun, M. O. (2016). Post-Sovyet Gürcistan'da Azınlık Hakları: Ulusal ve Uluslararası Mevzuatö Devlet Politikası ve Resmi Görüş. In Aydıngün, A., Asker, A. & Şir, A.Y. (Eds.), *Gürcistan'daki Müslüman Topluluklar: Azınlık Hakları, Kimlik, Siyaset*, (pp. 83-122). Ankara: AVİM.

Gürsoy, H.E., Katliarou, Y. (2016) Post-Sovyet Acara'da Müslüman Acaralılar: Sosyo-Ekonomik Durum ve Siyasi Katılım In Aydıngün, A., Asker, A. & Şir, A.Y. (Eds.), *Gürcistan'daki Müslüman Topluluklar: Azınlık Hakları, Kimlik, Siyaset*, (pp. 193-218). Ankara: AVİM.

Järve, P. (2005). Re-Independent Estonia. In Smooha, S. & Priit J. (Eds.) *The Fate of Ethnic Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*. Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, European Centre for Minority Issues, (pp. 60-79). Open Society Institute, Budapest Hungary.

Keskin, S. & Anaç, Ö. (2016). Ahıska Türklerinin 1944 Sürgünü'nden Günümüze Gürcistan'a Geri Dönüş Mücadelesi ve 2007 Kadar Dönenlerin Durumu. In Aydıngün, A., Asker, A. & Şir, A.Y. (Eds.), *Gürcistan'daki Müslüman Topluluklar: Azınlık Hakları, Kimlik, Siyaset*, (pp. 275-294). Ankara: AVİM.

Matsaberidze, D. (2014). *The Role of Civic Nationalism in Transformation of the Internal Ethnic Politics of Post-Soviet Georgia*. ECMI Working Paper, no. 83.

National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration. (2009). Retrieved from: [http://smr.gov.ge/Uploads/National\\_C\\_e557820e.pdf](http://smr.gov.ge/Uploads/National_C_e557820e.pdf) (Accessed: 04.05.2017).

Nodia, G. (Ed.). (2002). *Ethnic-confessional groups and problems of civic integration in Georgia: Azeri, Javakheti Armenian and Muslim Meskhetian communities*. Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, Tbilisi.

Public Opinion Survey Residents of Georgia March – April 2016 (2016). Center for Insight in Survey Research. Retrieved from: [http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/georgia\\_2016.pdf](http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/georgia_2016.pdf) (Accessed: 04.04.2017).

Sabanadze, N. (2005). Georgia's Ethnic Democracy: Source of Instability. In Smooha, S. & Priit J. (Eds.) *The Fate of Ethnic Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*. Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, European Centre for Minority Issues, (pp. 115-138). Open Society Institute, Budapest Hungary.

Smith, G. (1996). The ethnic democracy thesis and the citizenship question in Estonia and Latvia. *Nationalities Papers*, 24(2), 199-216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905999608408438>

Smooha, S. (2001). "The model of ethnic democracy." ECMI Working Paper, 13, Retrieved from: [http://www.ecmi.de/download/working\\_paper\\_13.pdf](http://www.ecmi.de/download/working_paper_13.pdf) (Accessed: 04.04.2017).

Smooha, S. (2002). The Model of Ethnic Democracy: Israel as a Jewish

and Democratic State. *Nations and Nationalism*, 8(4), 475-503. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8219.00062>

Smootha, S. (2005). The Non-Emergence of a Viable Ethnic Democracy in Post-Communist Europe, In Smootha, S. & Priit J. (Eds.) *The Fate of Ethnic Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*. Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, European Centre for Minority Issues, (pp. 241-258). Open Society Institute, Budapest Hungary.

State Agency on Religious Issues, <http://religion.geo.gov.ge/eng/mission> (Accessed: 04.04.2017).

The Report on The Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia. (2016). The Public Defender of Georgia. Retrieved from: <http://www.ombudsman.ge/uploads/other/4/4442.pdf> (Accessed: 04.04.2017)

Wakizaka, K. (2019). *Living as 'North Caucasians' in Georgia: Identity and integration in Georgia among the Ossetian and the Chechen-Kist communities*. Ph.D Thesis, Middle East Technical University, Ankara

Wakizaka, K. (2021a). Diaspora Kimliğinin Yönü Üzerindeki Anlaşmazlık Olarak Gürcistan'daki Çeçen-Kistlerde Tasavvuf-Selefilik Tartışması. *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 10(1), 28-51.

Wakizaka, K. (2021b). Gürcistan'daki Çeçen-Kistlerde Diaspora Kimliği ve Anayurt ile İlişkileri, In Aydın E., & Sansar M. F. (Eds.), *Tarih ve Siyaset Bilimi Araştırmaları II*, (pp. 197 -211) Akademisyen Yayınevi

Wheatley, J. (2009). Managing ethnic diversity in Georgia: one step forward, two steps back. *Central Asian Survey*, 28(2), 119-134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930903034880>

Yılmaz, A. & Öğütçü Ö.N. (2016). Borçalı Türkleri: Sosyo-Ekonomik Durum, Siyasi Katılım ve Entegrasyon. In Aydıngün, A., Asker, A. & Şir, A.Y. (Eds.), *Gürcistan'daki Müslüman Topluluklar: Azınlık Hakları, Kimlik, Siyaset*, (pp. 245-274). Ankara: AVİM.