



GEORGIA

Review of the 111th session of the United Nations Human Rights Committee

NGOs input to the list of issues to be considered in the fourth periodic report of Georgia (CCPR/C/GEO/Q/4)

June 2014

This report is a joint submission of:

**Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (GCRT)
Human Rights Center (HRC)
With the coordination of the Human rights House Tbilisi (HRHT)
and the support of the Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF)**

Introduction

This report is a joint contribution by a Georgian NGO coalition to the 111th session of the United Nations Human Rights Committee. The coalition of NGOs includes the Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (GCRT), and the Human Rights Center (HRC). The work was further coordinated by the Human Rights House Tbilisi (HRHT) and with the support of the Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF). The above organizations have extensive experience in the field of human rights both at the domestic and international levels. The information submitted in the present report is mainly based on the cases referred to by the respective organizations.

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ART 2: Constitutional and legal framework within which the Covenant is implemented

Issue Nr. 2: Please provide updated information on the measures taken to enhance protection under the Covenant for the population of Abkhazia, Georgia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia by the Abkhaz and South Ossetian de facto authorities. Please comment on information that the Law on the Occupied Territories adversely impacts the work of humanitarian agencies providing assistance to the civilian population inside Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Georgia.

Property Rights (Article 17)

The process of borderization of the Georgia territory by Russia continues to violate the property rights of the residence living in the conflict zones, particularly of those living in the Georgian-controlled territories. The local population has lost access to their agricultural lands, which were their only source of income. The houses of a number of residents are now on the "wrong" side of the new borders.

Property rights of ethnic Ossetian citizens have been breached in Georgia. First after 1990s and then, after the 2008 armed conflict, many ethnic Ossetian families had to flee from Georgia and abandoned their properties. Only few of them managed to sell their properties, but in most cases those were misappropriated by Georgian families or by the state institutions.

Right to nationality and non-discrimination (article 24 and 26)

In the process of borderization it is important to highlight that individuals, particularly children born and/or left outside their country of nationality by operation of the new borders may be left in a position of extreme vulnerability at risk of both de jure and de facto statelessness and arbitrary and/or mass expulsion at a later stage.

Right to Healthcare

Abkhaz and Ossetian citizens often seek medical assistance in Tbilisi or Zugdidi. Russian border officers create serious problems to the residents of the Gali and Akhlagori districts when they try to travel to the other side of the ABL.

Sometimes they cannot cross the border because of the lack of passports or because they arrive out of the working time of the Russian soldiers, though patients are in urgent need of medical assistance. The Abkhaz authorities also forbid the imports of Georgia-produced medicines into their territory.

Right to Education

Georgian human rights defenders complain that ethnic Ossetian citizens of Georgia cannot have any access to education in their native mother tongue. In the past, there were several Ossetian secondary schools in Georgia but none of them function nowadays. Several international experts working on reconciliation initiatives

requested to the Government of Georgia to launch at least a Sunday schools for ethnic Ossetian children and adults in their mother tongue. Those requests were never taken into consideration.

In the Akhgori district there are several Georgian secondary schools where local ethnic Georgian children can receive education in their mother tongue. Georgian teachers work at local schools and children learn from textbooks published by the Georgian Ministry of Education.

The situation is much worse in the Gali district. The access to Georgian-language education was one of the primary concerns of most of the people interviewed by Human Rights Watch in the Gali district in 2011.

Right to freedom of movement (Article 13)

Travelling across the ABL is getting more and more problematic. Ethnic Georgian citizens of the Gali and Akhgori districts are required to have Abkhazian and South Ossetian passports to travel across the border.

Water Supply/Irrigation System/Gasification

The villages of the Shida Kartli region adjacent to South Ossetia face problems regarding access to drinking and irrigation waters as the pumping stations are located in the Tskhinvali controlled territory and access to these are blocked. During Saakashvili's term the South Ossetian authorities asked the Georgian government to supply the Akhgori district with gas in exchange of water supply in the Shida Kartli region, but the Georgian side refused. Now, the new government of Georgia proposed to the local government of Tskhinvali to resolve the problem through a mutual agreement. The proposal includes the provision of gas supply in the Akhgori district in exchange of removal of restrictions on access to water in the region of Tskhinvali. This agreement is yet to be signed and implemented.

ARTS 2, 3, 20 and 26: Non-discrimination, equality between men and women, prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred.

Issue Nr 3. Please indicate whether the State party plans to adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation addressing discrimination, including in the private sphere, prohibiting direct and indirect discrimination, containing a comprehensive list of grounds for discrimination, and providing effective remedies in judicial and administrative proceedings.

On 2 May 2014 the Georgian Parliament adopted a new Anti-Discrimination Bill prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of race, color, language, gender, age, citizenship, native identity, birth, place of residence, property, social status, religion,

¹ See also the report of Human Rights Watch "living in limbo" available at : <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/07/15/living-limbo>

ethnic affiliation, profession, family status, health condition, disability, expression, political or other beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity, and “other grounds”².

The bill has been widely criticized by Georgian civil society organizations. According to Georgian civil society organizations the adopted law differs significantly from the initial draft developed by the Ministry of Justice in consultation with Georgian NGOs³.

The new version no longer envisages the establishment of an independent implementing mechanism or the possibility to issue financial penalties. The creation of a mechanism of financial penalties was considered by Georgian human rights NGOs as one of the most important instruments for the prevention of widespread discrimination in Georgia⁴.

Another significant criticism against the bill is that it is not accompanied by an increase of state budget expenses for the body responsible for the supervision of the prohibition of discrimination – namely the Office of Public Defender of Georgia. As stated by the Public Defender of Georgia “its office will lack the possibility to undertake effective measures against discrimination within the existing allocated resources”⁵.

The Public Defender of Georgia also noted a range of flaws in the bill which will prevent him from carry out an effective supervision over its implementation, including the fact that the bill does not extend his authority to alleged violations committed by private persons and does not allow him to request documents related to the cases under review from private persons⁶.

Prior to the submission of the draft bill to the Parliament, a special clause was added stating that the bill should not be interpreted contrary to the 2002 Constitutional Agreement between Georgia and the Georgian Orthodox Church. The 2002 Constitutional Agreement refers to a “special role” of the Georgian Church and grants special privileges to it. Georgian civil society organizations expressed sharp criticisms over this new clause, stating that this restriction legitimizes an “abuse of right” of the dominant groups, in violations of the Georgian constitution itself, which recognizes the primacy of universal human rights norms and principles over constitutional agreements⁷.

² <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27192>

³ Please, see the joint statement of Civil Society and Religious Organizations of Georgia: <http://identoba.com/2014/04/15/antidiscr2/>

⁴ ibid

⁵ Please, see the statement of Public Defender: <http://www.ombudsman.ge/en/page/saqartvelos-saxalxo-damcvelis-mosazreba-diskriminaciis-yvela-formis-agmofxvris-shehexeb-saqartvelos-kanonis-proeqtze>

⁶ ibid

⁷ <http://identoba.com/2014/04/15/antidiscr2/>;
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR56/001/2014/en/01b5e8d5-6705-47cf-b0f6-fb3fab931aad/eur560012014en.html>.

Issue Nr 4: Please indicate whether the Criminal Code includes specific provisions prohibiting racist and xenophobic discourse, the dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority and expressions of racial hatred, incitement to racial discrimination, and banning racist organizations. Please outline the measures taken to combat hate speech and use of discriminatory language against ethnic, religious or other minorities, including in political discourse and the media.

During 2012 and 2013 religious minorities, particularly the Muslim community, faced serious discrimination and xenophobic attacks. Several incidents amongst different religious groups occurred in various villages where Christian and Muslim populations coexist. During this period the local Christian communities banned Muslim congregation to hold joint prayers and freely practice their religion. Furthermore, in May 2013, the Muslim community of the Samtatskaro village in eastern Georgia was not allowed to open a Mosque in the village which resulted in tensions between Muslim and Orthodox communities.

On 31 May 2013, the local Muslim population residing in Samtatskaro village was not allowed to hold the traditional Friday prayer. The incident started with a conflict at the entrance of the village, where the local orthodox Christians blocked the road in order to prevent several representatives of the Muslim community and other individuals from the Kvemo Kartli region to visit the village⁸.

According to the observations of Georgian human rights organizations⁹, the police didn't intervene to restrict the unlawful conduct of the representatives from the Georgian Orthodox Christians and to protect the Muslim religious minorities and ensure their religious rights.

The law-enforcement authorities failed to intervene in another religious motivated incident in the village of Nigvziani. In November of 2012, the local Christians community barred several Muslim Mufti and other Muslim residents from entering the village¹⁰. According to the observations of the Tolerance Center existing under the Auspices of Public Defender of Georgia, the Georgian law-enforcement present at the spot didn't intervene to arrest the misconduct and to arrest the violence.

On 26 August 2013 the representatives of the law-enforcement agencies dismantled a mosque minaret in the village of Chela, in the municipality of Adigeni. According to a statement released by the Revenue Service of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia, the material used for constructing this minaret was brought to Georgia in violations of customs rules¹¹.

The Georgian human rights organizations view this incident as an alarming indication of the Government's discriminatory policy towards religious minorities¹². As stated by the EU Special Adviser on Constitutional and Legal Reform and Human Rights in Georgia, Thomas Hammarberg, "when it comes to religious intolerance, the reaction of

⁸ For further information please visit: <http://gyla.ge/eng/news?info=1616>

⁹ For further information see the statement of the Georgian Young Lawyers Association of 3 June 2013: <http://gyla.ge/eng/news?info=1592>

¹⁰ For further information see also : ¹⁰ http://www.tolerantoba.ge/index.php?news_id=292

¹¹ For further information see also: <http://www.tabula.ge/en/story/74067-group-of-ngos-rights-of-muslims-rudely-violated-in-chela>

¹² See joint statement of Georgian human rights organizations: <http://gyla.ge/eng/news?info=1714>
<http://www.tabula.ge/en/story/74067-group-of-ngos-rights-of-muslims-rudely-violated-in-chela>

current authorities, both at political level and in terms of interventions by law enforcement, has been generally unsatisfactory”¹³.

Issue Nr. 7: Please comment on reports of discrimination, hate speech, public incitement to violence and harassment against lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) persons. Please provide information on measures taken to combat discrimination and social stigma against LGBT persons, including LGBT minors.

The homophobic attitude against the LGBT community remains a challenge. In 2013 Georgia faced an increased number of hate crimes committed against LGBT people and human rights organizations protecting their rights.

On 17 May 2013, the local NGO Identoba- working with the promotion and protection of the rights of LGBT people in Georgia, organized a silent public rally in occasion of the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO or IDAHOT). On the same day, the Orthodox Church mobilized more than 40 000 people against the silent rally and the police was unable to ensure the physical security of the participants. In April 2014 the Orthodox church further joined forces with and mobilized the non-parliamentary opposition parties including the Christian-Democrats, Nino Burjanadze’s Democratic Movement United Opposition, and other radical fundamentalist groups, including “Young Refugee Union”, “Leaders of Traditional Families”, pro-Russian organizations like Eurasian Choice, Eurasian Institute, to advocate against a similar public rally and planned activities arranged by . IDAHO NGO. The anti-LGBT coalition group also continued to advocate and criticise the adoption of the new Anti-Discrimination Bill by the Parliament.

The Anti-Discrimination Law was finally drafted this year but its adoption was accompanied by serious controversy between human rights defenders, bill authors and Orthodox clergymen. Intensive debates took place in the Human Rights Committee of the Parliament of Georgia. MPs discussed the bill in parallel to protest rallies of the Orthodox clergymen and parish outside the parliament building in Kutaisi. Finally, the Parliament passed the law, but the Patriarchate condemned its slightly modified edition, claiming, “believers will not accept the anti-discrimination law”.

The new provisions of the criminal code of Georgia states as following:

Art. #142 - Violation of Equality of Humans

Art #142’1 1: Violation of equality of humans due to their race, color of skin, language, sex, religious belonging or profession, political or other opinion,

¹³ See p.26 of the report of Thomas Hammarberg , prepared in his capacity as EU Special Adviser on Constitutional and Legal Reform and Human Rights in Georgia, addressed to High Representative and Vice-President Catherine Ashton and Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Stefan Füle. (September 2013)

http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/documents/virtual_library/cooperation_sectors/georgia_in_transition-hammarberg.pdf

national, ethnic, social, rank or public association belonging, origin, place of residence or material condition that has substantially prejudiced human rights, shall be punishable by fine or by corrective labor for the term not exceeding one year or by imprisonment for up to two years.

Art #142 '2: The same action committed:

a) By using one's official position;

b) That has produced a grave consequences, shall be punishable by fine or by corrective labour for up to one year, by deprivation of the right to occupy a position or to pursue a particular activity for up to three years.

ARTS 6, 7, 9 and 10: Right to life and prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, liberty and security of person, treatment of persons deprived of their liberty)

Issue Nr. 10: Please report on measures taken to effectively and thoroughly investigate the human rights violations committed during the 2008 armed conflict, including unlawful and disproportionate use of force by the Georgian military causing civilian casualties, unlawful detention, torture and inhuman treatment, to punish perpetrators in a manner commensurate with the gravity of the committed acts, and to provide victims with adequate remedies, including compensation.

In 2011, three Georgian NGOs - Human Rights Center, Article 42 of the Constitution and the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) prepared the report: Cannot Do it or Do not want? Ineffective Investigation of Facts during the Georgia Russia armed conflict (2008). The report provides evidences of severe and grave crimes committed during the armed conflict, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. According to the victims of war crimes, the Georgian government has so far been unable to conduct an effective and impartial investigations into the war crimes occurred during the 2008-armed conflict. None of the countries (neither Russia nor Georgia) admits the crimes to be committed. Georgia has started investigation on seven cases of crimes in which are accused members of the Georgian military forces.

Issue Nr.17: Please clarify whether detention facilities comply with the standard of minimum space for each prisoner. Please clarify whether the small cubicles (many measuring less than 2 m2) used in Prisons No. 8 (Gldani) in Tbilisi and No. 2 in Kutaisi for temporary holding purposes are still in service. Please provide information on measures taken to address the inadequate provision of activities for prisoners, both sentenced and remand prisoners, including work opportunities and access to education and vocational training.

For many years, torture, degrading and inhuman treatments has been a trend in the Georgian penitentiary system. ¹⁴ The 2013 report drafted by the Public defenders of Georgia includes several cases of alleged torture and inhuman treatments.¹⁵ The report further calls for urgent and impartial investigations into those allegations¹⁶.

The office of the Ombudsman has also raised many questions and doubts about the efficiency and impartiality of the investigations conducted in the penitentiary system¹⁷. The European court of Human Rights delivered several recommendations¹⁸ to Georgia with regard to the need of ensuring the independence of the body appointed to investigate cases of torture and ill treatments in detention facilities.

If the investigation is conducted by the agency, which might be responsible for the crime, it gives ground to legitimate doubt over the impartiality of the investigation.

In its 2013 report, the Public Defender of Georgia states that all applications submitted to its office with regard to alleged cases of torture and ill-treatment in detention facilities were forwarded to the Chief Prosecutor's Office for further investigation. However, the Chief Prosecutor office sent the cases to the investigation unit of the Ministry of Corrections,¹⁹ creating legitimate doubts over the impartiality of the investigations.

Another raised issue was the improper assessment of the committed crimes, as already reported by the European Committee against Torture (CPT) in its 2010 report²⁰. In several cases, the investigations was launched into alleged cases of "abuse of professional power", which is punished with less severe sanctions than a crime of torture or inhuman and degrading treatments²¹. This trend is also reported in the 2013 report of the Public Defender of Georgia²².

Another reported issue is the lack of protection of the alleged victim of ill-treatments during the investigation process. The Georgian legislation does not contain any provision to ensure the protection of the victims during ongoing investigation. The office of Public Defender also underlined this issue in his 2013 report²³.

¹⁴ Criminal Code of Georgia, Article 144¹ 144² 144³

¹⁵ Public Defender's Report on Human Rights and Basic Freedoms in Georgia, 2013 p 14

¹⁶ Public Defender's Report on Human Rights and Basic Freedoms in Georgia, 2013 p 14-23

¹⁷ 2011 and 2012 Reports of Public Defender of Georgia about Human Rights in Georgia

¹⁸ Nikiashvili v Georgia, judgment of October 9, 2012, Paragraph 87; Tsintsabadze v Georgia, judgment of February 15, 2011 par. 78; Enukidze and Girgvliani v Georgia, judgment of April 26, 2011 par. 243

¹⁹ Public Defender's Report about Human Rights and Basic Freedoms in Georgia, 2013, p. 26

²⁰ Report of Committee against Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment about visit in Georgia (February 5-15, 2010) Par. 17

²¹ Criminal Code of Georgia, Article 144¹

²² Public Defender's Report about Human Rights and Basic Freedoms in Georgia, 2013, p 29

²³ Public Defender's Report about Human Rights and Basic Freedoms in Georgia, 2013, p 30

Victims of torture have no access to adequate programs of rehabilitation. Georgia does not provide any state funded program. A number of NGOs have taken up the role to provide psycho-social services to such victims. The non-governmental sector lacks sufficient resources to cover the needs at the national level.

In the past years, one of the most acute problems reported by NGOs was the overcrowding in the Georgian prisons.²⁴ Following the 2012' Legal and political reforms²⁵, the number of prisoners was significantly and positively reduced with approximately 60%. However, the Georgian penitentiary system still has insufficient and inadequate living conditions, which are mostly connected with legislative shortcomings and infrastructural problems.

In its 2007²⁶ and in 2010²⁷ reports the European Committee against Torture (CPT) recommended to the Government of Georgia to estimate a minimum space of 4 sq. meters space for each prisoner in cell and to amend its legislation accordingly.

Non-governmental organizations welcomed with appreciation the new amendments to the Prison Code of Georgia adopted by the Parliament of Georgia on 14 April 2014.

The amendments take in account the recommendations of the CPT and rule a minimal space of 4 m² for certain establishments. However, this regulation did not refer to prisons²⁸, where minimal space per person is 3 sq. meters. Such a different approach to prisons is a bit unclear when imprisonment establishments are almost equal to other types of detention settings.

Although amendments were introduced to the law in accordance to the recommendations of the CPT, the infrastructure in several penitentiary institutions are yet to meet the standards of the national law. For example the condition in Prison # 7 as reported by the office of the Public Defender.²⁹

According to this report we can conclude that situation differs in different cells of the facility. Some cells has a minimal space of 2, 25 sq. meters for each prisoner, while in other cells the space is 2 sq. meters and in some others the space is only 1.8 sq. meters.

Re-socialization of prisoners must be the main purpose of the penitentiary system and it can be achieved through educational, rehabilitation and employment programs. However, only the 5% of detainees participate in educational, rehabilitation and employment programs³⁰. Therefore, Georgia fails to ensure the social rehabilitation of the detainees.

NGOs remain the only and major providers of educational, rehabilitation, and employment programmes for prisoners. Therefore, those programmes are

²⁴ 2007 and 2010 Reports of the Committee against Torture; Public Defender's Reports of 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011

²⁵ Amnesty Law of Georgia, 2012; amendments to the Criminal Code of Georgia about principles of consecutive and concurrent sentencing

²⁶ Report of Committee against Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment about visit in Georgia (March 21-April 2, 2007) p. 28

²⁷ Report of Committee against Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment about visit in Georgia (February 5-15, 2010) p 47

²⁸ Prison Code of Georgia, Article 15(3)

²⁹ Public Defender's Report about Human Rights and Basic Freedoms in Georgia, 2013 p. 37

³⁰ Public Defender's Report about Human Rights and Basic Freedoms in Georgia, 2013 p 56-59

implemented on a short basis, are not institutionalized and are based on short and urgent needs. The current services are thus limited and not sustainable.

Issue Nr. 18: Please comment on reports of acts of violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) persons. Please provide information (a) on prevention, investigation, prosecution and punishment of acts of violence and intimidation motivated by the victim's sexual orientation or gender identity in line with article 53(3) of the Criminal Code; (b) on investigations of physical assaults committed during and after the anti-homophobia demonstrations of 17 May 2012 and 2013 and their outcome. Please also respond to allegations that gay, bisexual or transgender (GBT) prisoners face discrimination and violence in prison and are often forced into prostitution.

During and after the 17 May 2013 anti-homophobia demonstration, Identoba (a local NGO) registered 34 incidents of violence and intimidation against LGBT persons and those, and persons defending their rights. Identoba estimates that the Ministry of Internal Affairs received information about more than 50 cases while the Public Defender received information about 32 cases of violence. However, the authorities failed to take appropriate measures to hold the perpetrators of those attacks accountable. After the acts of violence that occurred on 17 May 2012, only 2 individuals were detained for violating the Administrative Code and were fined with 100 GEL (approximately 55 USD).

Moreover, the authorities failed to properly investigate the violence committed on 17 May 2013. Despite the widespread violence, the Ministry of Interior filed charges against only 9 persons accused of violent acts. On that occasion, 4 individuals were detained for disorder and minor hooliganism, and fined with 100 GEL (60 USD) while the remaining 5 attackers (including 2 priests) were charged with the accusation of "violations the right to assembly" which provides a maximum penalty of 2 years in prison and/or a fine. On 1 August, during the preliminary hearing, the Tbilisi City Court dismissed the charges against one of the priest due to insufficient evidence.

ARTS. 2, 18, 19, 21, 22, 25, 26 and 2: Freedom of conscience and religious belief, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, freedom of association, right to participate in public life and rights of minorities (arts. 2, 18, 19, 21, 22, 25, 26 and 27)

Issue Nr. 25: Please respond to reports that journalists, activists, human rights defenders, opposition members and supporters (mainly during the 2012 pre-election period) have been subjected to harassment and intimidation, physical attacks, alleged politically-motivated arrests and dismissals from work. Please provide information on the investigations and their outcome concerning: (a) the violent dispersal of peaceful demonstrations on 7 November 2007, 15 June 2009, 3 January 2010, 25 March, 5 June and 15 September 2011; (b) the alleged arbitrary

detention and physical assault of independent journalist and human rights defender Gela Mtvlishvili on 20 May 2012; (c) the physical assault of Mamuka Kardava, leader of the Khobi Branch of the Georgian Dream Coalition, and Ioseb Elkanashvili, a member of the Georgian Dream coalition in Gori, on 20 May 2012 and 27 June 2012 respectively; (d) the incidents in Mereti (26 June 2012) and Karaleti (12 July 2012) when journalists have been physically and verbally assaulted.

In course of 2014, the Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, slammed a large group of civil society organizations, which were pushing for a legislative amendment to limit government's surveillance capabilities, and publicly stated that this campaign group was "damaging" Georgia's international reputation and "undermining" the country's security.

The NGOs participating in the campaign responded to the PM's statement with a joint public statement: "The remarks by the Prime Minister that non-governmental organizations are "damaging the country" are alarming. The only goal of the bill is to protect the right to privacy as guaranteed by European standards. The rhetoric adopted by the leader of the country discredits and supports the creation of negative stereotypes against non-governmental organizations and undermine the importance role of civil society in a democratic state."

Right to freedom of expression

Recently, Akhgori local officials fired the director of Akhgori district Youth Palace, ms. Tamar Mearkishvili on alleged illegal political activities. According to a statement of Tamar Mearkishvili, she was fired because of her interview to the Echo of the Caucasus where she complained about activities of the Akhgori local authority. In the past, Mikheil Saakashvili's government also fired her for disobedience. In the interview to the Echo of the Caucasus, ms. Mearkishvili said that the Russian authorities allocate huge funds for different projects in the Akhgori district but nothing was implemented.

The new government of Georgia changed its approach to the disputed entities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The name of the State Ministry for Reintegration was changed into the State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, which is led by Paata Zakareishvili, a former active participant of Abkhazian, Georgian and Ossetian civil society activists. The new government did not amend the Law on Occupied Territories. However, the policies have changed and NGOs working on reconciliation and confidence-building are now free to start cross-border projects with Abkhaz and Ossetian partners. However, the government of Georgia still refuses to sign an agreement on the non-use of force with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.