



საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობების კვლევის ფონდი
GEORGIAN FOUNDATION FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Towards Enhancing the Role of the Georgian Orthodox Church in the Country's Democratic Development

2017

POLICY STUDY



**National Endowment
for Democracy**

Supporting freedom around the world

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The publication includes research findings assessing the attitudes and perceptions within the Georgian Orthodox Church on the issues of domestic and foreign policy and recommendations for enhancing the Church's role in the country's democratic development. This study was conducted in the framework of the project "Investigating the Attitudes of the Georgian Church on Democracy and Development" supported by the National Endowment for Democracy.

Senior Researcher: ARCHIL GEGESHIDZE

Contributors:

EKATERINE METREVELI

KETEVAN EMUKHVARI

NANA SUMBADZE

TAMAR GEGECHKORI

TATIA KUKHALASHVILI

Technical Editor: Artem Melik-Nubarov

Copies Printed: 200

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ISBN 978-9941-27-690-3

Summary

This paper is devoted to the study of the current and future place and role of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) in the political and the public life of Georgia. In the last decade, the issue of the position of the GOC in the state, its attitude to certain aspects of the democratic transformation of society and the country's foreign policy orientation has been actively discussed. While no one disputes the historical role of the GOC in preserving the identity and statehood of Georgia, liberal NGOs, and the media, as well as individual political parties, are increasingly criticizing the GOC for its conservative views and excessive loyalty to the Russian Federation. Unable to compose a symmetric response in the form of academic publications or advocacy, the GOC took the defensive stance from the position of the offended. Meanwhile, the GOC and the Patriarch personally maintain a traditionally high level of public trust, using this circumstance as the counter-argument.

The purpose of the study is to identify how clergymen and experts on the topic see the place and the role of the Church in the country and the basis of its conservatism and threat-perception. This, in turn, will help determine whether there is a prospect for the transformation of the Church over time as well as its enhanced contribution to the democratic development of the country.

Qualitative analysis was chosen as our research tool. By reviewing relevant literature, discussion questions and two questionnaires were prepared for conducting in-depth interviews with three different target groups. The first target audience included 30 priests who work directly with parishioners. The second target audience consisted of five experts working in the field of religious freedom and rights. The third target audience consisted of undergraduates and doctoral students of the theological academy and seminary split into two separate focus groups.

The primary research finding that emerged from the analysis of transcripts is that the GOC despite the criticism from a number of NGOs will remain the powerful civil society organization and the strongest factor in Georgian public politics in the near future. Another important finding shows that the GOC's conservatism and threat-perception stems from the lack of comprehensive knowledge of the West and the expected benefits of Georgia's existing bilateral cooperation with the Euro-Atlantic community for its security and welfare. The third research finding is that with proper engagement with the GOC, it will cease over time to remain as a major conservative actor in Georgia's politics.

By nature, this paper is a policy study containing policy recommendations towards main stakeholders; namely, the GOC, the Government of Georgia, think tanks/media, and the donor community.

Introduction

The restoration of Georgia's independence in the early 1990s was no bed of roses. Then and since, romanticism and impatience, characteristic of Georgian public consciousness, have often been the reason behind unfortunate *faux pas*. As a result, instead of building new institutions, conflicts, organized crime and economic collapse accompanied the destruction of the Soviet system. Further, an ideological vacuum emerged, state institutions could not function properly, and the living conditions of the population deteriorated sharply.

Against this background, the Georgian Church was the only haven for physically unprotected and economically impoverished people.¹ The Church offered people closeness to God and spiritual peace, and hunger-stricken beggars were given daily bread. All of this was a great comfort to many (people) in those difficult times. As a result, the population, having passed through Soviet atheism, turned to the Church *en masse* which later became the basis for its rising power. Orthodoxy easily filled the ideological vacuum and Orthodox symbolism also easily replaced Soviet symbolism.² Gradually, the Church deserved the high trust of the people which, along with a high proportion of Orthodox Christians in the population, determined the formation of the GOC as one of the most influential institutions.³ Meanwhile, an institutionally weak state needed a partnership with a strong Church in order to strengthen its legitimacy.

In 2002, the Georgian Orthodox Church and the state entered into a constitutional agreement⁴ according to which a number of privileges were appropriated to the Church, including exemption from taxes. Certain rights were also granted to the Church in the field of education and cultural heritage.⁵ It was a manifestation of a harmonious relationship between the Church and the state.

Freed from Soviet totalitarian ticks, the Church, under conditions of political freedom, offered society an alternative nationalist ideology. Within a post-Soviet state with a non-conscientious policy, indoctrination was easy.⁶ According to this ideology, the Georgian nation is defined on ethnic and religious grounds. Being a Georgian meant adherence to Orthodoxy, although not all Orthodox could be Georgians.⁷ At that time globalization was gaining momentum on the international arena, the Internet became more accessible, interest in the outside world grew and Georgia itself tried to be more open. All of this gave an impetus to strengthen liberal ideology in the country, including towards civic nationalism, which weakened the monopoly of the above-mentioned religious-nationalist ideology. The Georgian Orthodox Church, bypassed by the

¹ E. Chitanava, "The Georgian Orthodox Church: National Identity and Political Influence," in *Traditional Religion and Political Power: Examining the Role of the Church in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and Moldova*, A. Hug, Editor, Foreign Policy Centre, p. 42.

² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³ S. Minesashvili and L. Kakhishvili, "Georgia: Foreign Policy Identity in the Domestic Arena as a Subject of Contestation," in *Caucasus Analytical Digest* No. 77, September 14, 2015, p. 15.

⁴ See: www.forbcaucasus.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/concordat.pdf

⁵ S. Minesashvili, "The Orthodox Church in the Democratization Process in Georgia: Hindrance or Support?" in *Caucasus Analytical Digest* No. 97, July 21, 2017, p. 6.

⁶ K. Rcheulishvili, "A New Public Role of Religion? Recent Issues of Religion and Politics in Georgia," in *Caucasus Analytical Digest* No.72, April 29, 2015, p. 7.

⁷ T. Kekelia, E. Gavashelishvili, K. Ladaria and I. Sulxanishvili, *The Role of the Orthodox Church in the Formation of the Georgian Identity (End of XX – Beginning of XXI Centuries)*, Ilia State University, 2013, p. 159 (in Georgian).

Renaissance and Enlightenment,⁸ had never undergone post-totalitarian reforms. It sensed a threat in the rapprochement of Georgia with the West in the context of globalization and gradually began to intensify preaching against this trajectory: “Modern global values generally represent a threat because they disconnect humans from Christian teachings, directly oppose Orthodox Christianity and welcome the devil, who is insidious and cautious.”⁹ The West was identified with debauchery and a source of degradation of spirituality despite the obvious technological progress and well-being that takes place there. Russia, on the contrary, was presented in a positive way as a co-religionist and leader of the Orthodox world.

After the Rose Revolution, when the liberal government came to power, pro-Western and, consequently, liberal propaganda intensified in the country, including anti-Church rhetoric. Part of this propaganda came from critical think tanks and NGOs producing increasing number of academic papers and roundtables. This coincided in time with the rapid deterioration of relations with Russia and, accordingly, the growth of anti-Russian rhetoric. Because the Church was seen as a loyal institution to Russia, propaganda against it was further strengthened.

Thus, began confrontation between the Church and the part of society which continues to this day. It can be said that this confrontation currently leaves a mark on public opinion which is something that is confirmed by numerous polls. This influence is manifested, among other things, in the dynamics of the level of support on the part of the population of the Euro-Atlantic course. For example, compared with 2011, the number of supporters of Georgia’s membership in the EU declined from 80 to 61 percent in 2015 while those who perceive the EU as a threat to Georgian traditions increased from 29 to 46 percent.¹⁰ It is noteworthy that during this period the growth of anti-Western propaganda from Russia is noted. According to 2017, however, these data have changed in the opposite direction: the number of those who support EU membership is 71 percent and those who see the EU as a threat to national traditions are at 42 percent. Observers believe that the moods of “Eurosceptics” are often contradictory which indicates the instability of their points of view. This may mean that such an attitude towards the EU is not fully understood.¹¹ On our part, we add that the ideological resource of the Church itself is limited in a sense that it cannot influence the country’s pro-Western course and traditional arguments do not resonate in the ever-changing context and environment.

With the deepening of the Euro-Atlantic course, the benefits to citizens of Georgia are becoming more evident. In this regard, we first have the signing of the Association Agreement and then the granting of the right to visa-free travel to Europe for Georgian citizens, both of which strongly influenced public opinion. The main thing, as said above, is that the influence of the Church on society delays neither the country’s democratic transformation nor its chosen course. Moreover, in time, it is increasingly difficult for the Church to convince the population of the opposite but is forced to slowly “adjust” itself to the evolving realities. Otherwise, the Church risks losing its eminence and, presumably, is doomed to weakening.

⁸ T. Kekelia, E. Gavashelishvili, K. Ladaría and I. Sulxanishvili, op.cit., p. 45.

⁹ E. Gavashelishvili, “Anti-Modern and Anti-Globalist Tendencies in the Georgian Orthodox Church,” in *Identity Studies*, Vol. 4, Ilia State University Press, 2012, p. 120.

¹⁰ *Knowledge of and Attitudes Towards the European Union in Georgia, 2009-2017*, Europe Foundation, May 2017. See: www.epfound.ge/knowledge-attitudes-towards-eu-georgia-2009-2017/

¹¹ T. Zurabishvili, “The EU as a ‘Threat’ to Georgian Traditions: Who is Afraid and Why?” in *Caucasus Analytical Digest* No. 99, October 30, 2017, p. 9.

Problem Description

Despite what has been said, the Church remains a powerful institution of civil society and continues its activities within the framework of the “traditional” worldview. Accordingly, the said ideological confrontation continues which, in principle, is detrimental to the country’s stable and progressive development. It is important to note right away that the Church, while maintaining strong levers for defending its interests, can still have some impact on the country’s political agenda. Proceeding from this, it remains relevant to anticipate the extent to which the Church can be subject to transformation and what needs to be done in order to help the process from the state and society instead of permanently challenging it with criticism. The place and role of the Church in political and public life has long attracted the attention of academic circles in Georgia and abroad. One undesirable common feature of this very interesting effort is that in many cases the Church is seen as a hopelessly conservative institution in the bad sense of the word; that is, an institution which tries to slow down the country’s democratic development and hinder its Euro-Atlantic course. At the same time, little attention is paid to the study of the constructive potential that this institution possibly has in terms of promoting Georgia’s development. Moreover, in the academic works and roundtables mentioned herein, as a rule, the views of the Church itself and its higher or lower hierarchs, are not presented. Only the picture as “seen from the outside” is suggested.

This proposed study precisely aims to fill this gap and represents an attempt to present the picture as “seen from the inside.”

Methodology

Qualitative analysis has been employed as the main research method for this study. The research methodology was predetermined by the nature of the research topics themselves as follows:

- a) Identification of the contributing factors of the place and the role of the Church in Georgia’s political and public life,
- b) Studying the attitude of the Church towards the main trends of modernization and democratic transformation and
- c) Establishment of the Church’s attitude to opportunities and challenges in the context of Georgia’s relations with the outside world.

At the initial stage, two pilot focus groups with the participation of doctoral students and undergraduates of the theological academy and seminary were held based on the previously discussed topics. In the course of the discussion, specific research questions were clarified which subsequently formed the basis for questionnaires for in-depth interviews (Annexes 1 and 2). As the primary target audience, 30 priests of different ages and rank were selected from Tbilisi and other regions of Georgia. The main criterion for the selection of respondents was direct communication with parishioners in their daily work. High and low frequency responses were identified during the process of analyzing the transcripts of the interviews. Accordingly, our conclusions were drawn based on high frequency issues. However, the rest of the answers was also taken into account while considering other specific issues. The second target group was smaller and consisted of

experts who were well versed in matters of church and religion. For them, a slightly different questionnaire was developed. The inclusion of this target group in the study was determined by the need to complement the insiders' view with that of unbiased and competent outsiders. In total, five experts took part in the study.

The qualitative research part of the study began in April 2017 and lasted five months.

Limitations

The proposed work has no claim to be a comprehensive study of the research issue for a number of reasons:

- Because of the time and costs involved, qualitative design cannot draw samples from large-scale data sets.
- Because of subjective nature of qualitative data, it is difficult to apply conventional standards of reliability and validity.
- Because the time of the research coincided with the scandal over the so-called 'Cyanide case,' some high-ranking hierarchs of the Church abstained from the interview.
- Because the issues related to internal trends and divisions in the Church are under researched, we had to simplify the analysis and/or limit it to assumptions instead of evidence-based facts and arguments.
- Because the main purpose of the research was to identify the views from within the Church, the opinions of many stakeholders such as the government, watchdogs, representatives of international organizations and the diplomatic corps as well as the donor community were not included in the study.

Main Research Findings

What follows are the main results of the study which were most apparent stemming from the analysis of the data:

1. **The GOC will remain the most influential institution for the near future.** For the sake of promoting its interests on many specific issues, the GOC will always be able to mobilize large masses of supporters. The stability of the influence of the Church is determined by a host of factors which in turn are stable or inertial. For example, its annual financial sustainability is ensured by a compensation that comes from the state and is backed up legally by the constitutional agreement of 2002 (Concordat). Additionally, the historical merit of the GOC in preserving Georgian identity and traditions is universally recognized. Further, the proportion of Orthodox Christians in the population is overwhelmingly large. Further, since 1992 the Patriarch's authority has always been higher than any public figure. Lastly, as long as government representatives consider themselves to be part of the Church, they will always respect the Patriarch and the priests while authorities as a whole will always see the support of the GOC as a source of their legitimacy.

- 2. The influence of the GOC and the Patriarch on parishioners is not absolute.** The high trust of the Patriarch does not mean that the population fully obeys his sermons. An example is the call of the Patriarch to abstain from abortion because this is first of all a “non-Christian act” and secondly it harms the demographic situation in which Georgia has found itself. Despite the fact that from a demographic point of view abortion has indeed caused serious damage, families continued to practice abortion on their own. Another example concerns the call to refrain from emigrating but those who have already managed to leave were invited to return to their homeland. Even though foreign dioceses were instructed to propagate repatriation, the effect was zero. The argument of the prospect of self-realization in the West outweighed the authority of the Patriarch.
- 3. The GOC priest corps is heterogeneous in its outlook.** Most still adhere to conservative views. These are middle-aged men who are imbued with religious-nationalistic views and believe that Georgian identity should be based on Orthodoxy. In their views the century of globalization carries threats to national traditions and culture, language and spirituality. The other group is in the minority. This is basically a young generation of clergymen who, firstly, do not have the experience of close relations with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and residence in the Russian Federation and, secondly, they know foreign languages and have an interest in knowing Europe and its achievements.
- 4. The attitude of the GOC to the West is not outright antagonistic.** Undoubtedly there is mistrust, suspicion and even some degree of contempt toward the West. The West is identified with a source of debauchery and degradation of spirituality. In the meantime, many conservative clergymen have never been to the West but all that they have heard about the West is fragmentary information gathered from Russian-language sources. Such a view, while prevailing, is accompanied by elements of respect for the obvious advantages and achievements of the West in education, technological progress, management and attaining superior welfare. After the Patriarch, as well as with the Holy Synod having publicly supported Georgia’s rapprochement course with the West and including with the European Union, the rhetoric of even the most ardent opponents of rapprochement began to soften. For example, realizing that it is impossible to go against the will of the majority of the population, priests began to approve the desire of young Georgians to get an education in Western universities; however, they add that “quality education can be obtained not only in the West but in Russia, China and Japan as well.” In the meantime, a group of younger generation priests displays a clear-cut readiness to learn more about and from Europe.
- 5. The skepticism of the GOC to the West is unsustainable in the medium to long terms.** This attitude is fed not by empirical knowledge but by myths and stereotypes created by the GOC itself. Priests know little about the West. Their attitude to the West is based on superficial knowledge of the processes taking place in Europe and the United States. They are also unaware of the practical benefits of Georgia’s relations with the EU, NATO, and the United States. They do not have information about dozens of specific programs and projects carried out in various agencies of Georgian public administration, economy, law enforcement, military, and the social sphere, including education and health.

- 6. The GOC's sympathy for Russia is not based on geopolitical analysis or the conviction about Georgia's civilizational affiliation to the Russian world and, therefore, it is a transitory phenomenon.** The GOC's sympathies for Russia do not have a sustainable foundation. An important limiting factor is its ethno-religious nationalism which focuses on Georgia's identity, traditions, language and culture. It is also important to note the transient nature of the existing sympathies which today predetermine the propensity for loyalty of part of the clergy to the ROC and Russia as a whole. In fact, these sympathies are determined by the following factors: a) the nostalgia of priests of the older generation for the past experience of communicating with the Russian world, b) the community of religion which proceeds from the primacy of belonging to the Orthodox world where Russia is the dominant co-religionist, c) ignorance of foreign languages other than Russian which make the clergymen limit themselves to the use of theological literature published in Russia and d) the perception of the Russian government and the ROC as a flagship of the struggle against "harmful liberal values." Because these factors are attributed to the over-middle-age clergy, over time, together with the change of generation in the GOC, they will cease to play a dominant role.
- 7. The GOC understands Georgia's foreign policy priorities in its own way.** The GOC has a different threat perception than the government does when it comes to relations with its neighbors and leading countries and alliances. Its attitude toward both Russia and the West is forked while Turkey is unambiguously perceived as a historical antagonist. In the case of Russia, duality is determined, on the one hand, by sympathy because of the factors described in the previous paragraph, and distrust of Russia, on the other hand, because of the aggressive policy it has pursued against Georgia and the Georgian Church since the 19th century onwards. The occupation of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region is especially noted. As for ambivalence towards the West, the GOC recognizes such advantages of Europe as its culture, education, order, welfare, work ethic, technological progress and infrastructure, among others, but in the meantime, thinks that Europe loses morality and ceases to be a moral guideline for Georgia. Since the example is contagious, further rapprochement with Europe will cause a spillover and eventually lead to the loss of Georgia's genuine values and national identity. This is where the skepticism towards the Western world and its institutions, primarily the EU and NATO, originates. In the case of Turkey, its dominance during the Ottoman Empire is projected to this day and the friendly neighbor by inertia is identified with the predator. The above-mentioned are the reasons why the GOC does not see any of Georgia's neighbors or any Western countries as truly reliable partners which would respect the principles of equality and unselfish cooperation. But the apparent antipathy towards Turkey is even potentially dangerous for inter-confessional harmony given the presence of the Muslim community in the country.
- 8. The Church is not a petrified institution and over time can modernize to adapt to the new realities of the contemporary context.** The Georgian Church has not undergone reforms since Soviet times. In the first decade of independence, the GOC, in coordination with the state, was able to achieve a monopoly among other religious denominations and has remained one of the most conservative institutions in modern Georgia. The primary source of the GOC's conservatism is the nature of Orthodoxy. However, Orthodoxy per se does not necessarily come

into conflict with modernization/Europeanization or pro-Western foreign policy priorities. The cases of European Orthodox countries are a good example. Another source of conservatism is the defensive position taken against the perceived onslaught of certain CSOs for already more than a decade now. Considering itself as almost the only defender of true national values, the GOC was never able to form the ideological basis of its conservatism in order to successfully parry the attacks from the “liberals.” In the meantime, the ranks of the Church are replenished with young priests, more tolerant of liberal views. In private conversations, as well as during communication with parishioners, young priests often express criticism of the clearly conservative acts on behalf of the GOC as well as curtsy to the ROC or Russia as a whole. They actively use social networks where they often enter into discussions and offer their liberal views.

- 9. In public space, there is a clear lack of a platform for dialogue between the clergy and various social groups.** Within the framework of the Concordat, the relations between the GOC and the state are clearly articulated and the practical interaction between the two takes place on its basis although not without periodic misunderstandings and mutual grievances. As for the dialogue between society and the Church on current issues of mutual interest, there is no permanent platform that could serve this purpose. Commercial media do not provide time for relevant programs where representatives of various professional and social groups, from one side, and representatives of the Church, on the other, could discuss these issues together in a relaxed atmosphere. The TV channel Ertsulovneba, owned by the Georgian Patriarchate, could not attract a wide audience because, among other issues, its editorial policy may not appeal to everyone. There is no dialogue in the academic environment either. In part, this is because of a scarcity of funding from the donor community which could support a regular exchange of views between representatives of the Church and civil society, including experts on religious issues. On the other hand, the parties themselves do not show a particular desire for such a dialogue and prefer to limit themselves to the use of one-sided methods. Examples from representatives of the academic sector could include articles, studies, reports, or expert assessments which rarely consider the views and arguments of the clergy. In the case of the clergy, examples of ‘monologues’ can be found on Ertsulovneba or in preaching in churches or also in such sad cases of extremism as the aggressive march against the LGBTQ community on May 17, 2014.
- 10. Currently, the GOC does not see its involvement feasible in the reunification of Georgia.** Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region are within the canonical boundaries of the Georgian Orthodox Church, recognized by the ROC. Accordingly, the Orthodox population of these regions is the parish of the GOC. At the same time, due to the well-known political problem as it exists, it is impossible to hold divine services in the Georgian language in these territories because Georgian priests are not allowed to cross into the breakaway regions. Meanwhile, the so-called Abkhazian Church strives to secede from the GOC. In Abkhaz society, there is a widespread antipathy against the GOC and the Patriarch himself.

- 11. In general, the GOC is critical of the media.** The pretext for criticism is the lack of professionalism and the perceived bias of the media. The real reason lies in distrust since the mainstream media are perceived by most of the clergy as part of an ongoing ideological campaign against it. For the sake of justice, one should note that in the media, especially on commercial TV channels, the voices of clergymen are not heard enough. Little time is given to discussions and cognitive programs with the clergy. In other words, there is a shortage of such programs where all the topics that represent the above ideological opposition can and will be considered within a constructive format. As a result, the GOC is reserved while talking about media freedom and believes that they need “advanced training.”
- 12. One of the sources of excessive conservatism in the GOC is the conservatism of the Church’s educational system.** The GOC has an extensive network of educational institutions throughout the country – universities, academies and seminaries, Sunday schools, etc. While curricula in these institutions vary, in general the training system needs to be updated. During focus group discussions, it became clear that the above-mentioned ambivalence towards the West is typical for students, too. The same can be said about the exaggerated assessment of the Russian factor. The necessity for updating the Church’s education was also shown by the analysis of the in-depth interviews we conducted although this issue deserves a separate study.

Conclusion

Immediately after the restoration of Georgia’s independence, the Church quickly gained strength and, at the end of the first decade, achieved the status of the country’s most trusted institution. During this time, the authority of Patriarch Ilya II grew steadily and keeps growing to this day. For sure, he is the highest moral authority of all times in modern Georgia and also one of the recognized leaders of the Orthodox world. Accordingly, the place and the role of the Church in the country’s political and public life are extremely important. Meantime, the Church has become a target of critique about its views on Georgian identity and foreign policy orientation. Often, criticism is heard from liberal political parties and CSOs, including the media. It is noteworthy that Western organizations and governments, sourcing information and assessments from these actors, also believe that the GOC, with its power, remains a retrogressive organization hampering Georgia’s modernization and democratic transformation.

In fact, the situation is different. Even though the perception of the West as the main threat to the degradation of Georgian identity has deeply settled in the Church and, at the same time, its piety for Russia sustains, it is still unable to influence the views of a critical number of parishioners with its own stereotypes and phobia. Contrary to this, cooperation with Western institutions and individual states has acquired enormous transformative power in Georgia. Its influence is increasingly felt on government policy and public consciousness. Numerous polls prove that skepticism about the West has not become the basis for the formation of public opinion. Moreover, Georgia’s pro-Western orientation and its Euro-Atlantic integration have become the main theme of national consolidation.

In the Church itself there is also a weakening of conservative views which is primarily determined by the above-described circumstance; that is, the nation's acknowledged pro-Western choice. However, the generational change in the Church, because of which young clergymen with more liberal views are replenishing its ranks, also affects the overall picture.

All of this in no way means, however, that the place and the role of the GOC in political and public life will necessarily weaken in the future. The Church will retain levers of influence over the public and, in this sense, will remain the most powerful organization in civil society. Moreover, it is quite possible that through dialogue between society and the Church, its transformation will accelerate with the natural process of the Church's transformation having already begun. As a result, the Church, being a retrogressive institution, will acquire the function of supporting modernization and building a Western institutional democracy. The fact that such a transformation is possible was demonstrated by the results of visits to Brussels and Washington in 2016 and 2017, respectively, of the delegations of the Holy Synod and other high-ranking representatives of the clergy.¹²

Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to achieve the following objectives:

- a) To create platforms for discussions and raise the awareness of Church officials on issues such as the cultural and spiritual essence of the West, priorities for development and Georgia's foreign policy, youth literacy, etc.
- b) To build the capacity of clergymen by providing them with access to foreign theological literature and direct acquaintance with the Western world so that they are able to update their worldview.
- c) To expand the cooperation between the state and the Church to solve mutually important problems.

The proposed 16 recommendations are grouped according to the aforementioned desirable results and are addressed to the Church, government and civil society (academia/media) as well as foreign donor organizations as sources of funding for the recommended activities. Note that some recommendations can have only one addressee while others can have more. In some cases, the recommendations either do not need foreign donor funding at all or local legal entities are sources of funding.

¹² In November 2016 and February 2017, clergymen visited Brussels to have meetings with the European Union and NATO. In November 2017, the high hierarchies of the Church, along with representatives of other religious organizations, were in Washington. During the visit, the clergy met with representatives of the civil sector, academia and government departments.

PLATFORMS FOR AWARENESS RAISING DIALOGUE AND DISCUSSION

The first four recommendations relate to the creation of platforms based on civil society organizations:

1. Increase the awareness of clergymen on the real values of the Western world, its culture, society, and priorities.

Addressees: Civil society organizations
Donor community

Rationale: The GOC's anxiety towards the West, in particular Europe, is mainly due to the incomplete knowledge of the modern free world, its true values, institutions, cultural development and public sentiments, etc. The existing system of the Church's education, which is designed to shape the modern worldview of its future clergy, is focused on the study of the world through the lens of Orthodoxy. Traditional media cannot fill this knowledge gap nor does social media despite its increasing use by the younger generation of the clergy. Unfortunately, there is no platform for discussing these issues with the participation of priests in the expert community either. Additionally, there are no specially developed programs on European studies based on think tanks where the clergy could receive professional knowledge. In part, the reason is the unawareness within the donor community about the expediency of supporting such projects.

2. Increase the awareness of clergymen on Georgia's cooperation and approximation with Western-led institutions and governments.

Addressees: Civil society organizations
Government of Georgia
Donor community

Rationale: Georgia's approximation and integration with the European and Euro-Atlantic institutions is one of the least familiar processes for clergymen as it comes to the terms of cooperation, expected outcomes and benefits for Georgia's security and welfare. The same goes for the relationship with individual European countries and the United States. One can also feel the influence of anti-Western propaganda conducted by Russia to which the GOC is susceptible. Based on non-governmental organizations, it is advisable to create training courses with the participation of representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense and other agencies that could provide first-hand information on the concrete results of Georgia's cooperation with the EU and NATO. For its part, the Georgian government should step up the pace of implementation of the government's strategy communication plan for Georgia's membership in the EU and NATO to strengthen resilience against Russia's anti-Western propaganda.

3. Increase the awareness of clergymen on the nature of the relationship of modern Georgia with Turkey and the rest of the Muslim world.

Addressees: Civil society organizations
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia
Donor community

Rationale: The GOC's contemptuous attitude towards neighboring Turkey can harm not only the established friendly bilateral relations but can also affect the state of the Church's relations with the Muslim community living in Georgia in the long term. The non-governmental sector could create a platform for dialogue with the Church about the essence of modern relations between Georgia and Turkey and the importance of a good-neighborly partnership for the sake of Georgia's security and well-being.

4. Organize roundtable discussions on topical issues of Georgia's development, foreign policy priorities and issues of religious freedom.

Addressees: Civil society organizations
Donor community

Rationale: The non-governmental sector could create a platform in the form of periodic roundtables with the participation of influential representatives of the clergy where issues and priority areas of the country's development would be considered in the format of open discussion. These could include but not be limited to: Georgia's relationship with the outer world as well as issues of demography, education, health, and the environment. These roundtable discussions would also deal with topical issues of the relations between the state and the GOC and issues related to freedom of religion, etc. The primary value-added of this platform will be the bridged divergent perceptions of the country's development priorities.

The following two recommendations are related to the creation of platforms based on the Patriarchate:

5. Organize a regular exchange between civil society and clergy members featuring the Patriarch or other high-ranking members of the Holy Synod.

Addressee: Georgian Orthodox Church

Rationale: Regarding the place and the role of the Church in society and its attitude to various questions of Georgia's foreign policy and its democratic transformation certain civil society organizations have a critical and often opposite opinion from that of the Church itself as well as conservative groups in society. At the same time, there is no direct dialogue between the Church and these groups. As a result, the "liberals" attack and the Church takes a defensive position. As always, the truth is somewhere in the middle and it can only be highlighted in discussion and direct dialogue. No such platform exists for the time being. We propose the creation of a permanent exchange of views on the basis of the Patriarchate in which the Patriarch himself and/or senior hierarchs of the Holy Synod could meet periodically with critical representatives of civil society. It would be better if the Patriarchate initiated the idea.

6. Organize an annual meeting of Georgian graduates of Western educational institutions with the Patriarch and other high-ranking members of the Holy Synod.

Addressee: Georgian Orthodox Church

Rationale: One of the myths and the corresponding phobias about the education of Georgian youth in the West relates to the belief that students become “brainwashed” during their study time and they lose their spirituality and the respect for their native traditions. Such a person, they believe, can lose his identity. The proposed idea implies the direct communication of high hierarchs of the Church with young people who have received education in Western universities and colleges. The aim of these meetings would be to learn from them and the extent to which the experience of living abroad and familiarizing themselves with Western culture and customs contributed to their spiritual and mental development. It is proposed to hold such meetings at least once a year.

The next recommendation is to create a platform based on the media:

7. Increase the air time for both TV and radio programs on religious topics.

Addressee: Georgian Public Broadcaster

Rationale: Since for-profit TV and radio do not favor religious topics, the Public Broadcaster should create a platform for professional discussions about the place and the role of the Church in Georgia’s democratic development. In specially prepared TV and radio broadcasts where a well thought out format and the mastery of the moderator will be crucial, all views on those topical issues that concern society should sound. Because the Public Broadcaster broadcasts in all ethnic minority languages as well, these programs may also be of interest to religious minority communities.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The following two recommendations are aimed at reducing the dependence of the clergy on the Russian language:

8. Set up English language study programs for young clergymen.

Addressees: Civil society organizations
Donor community

Rationale: Those among the younger generation of GOC priests wishing to learn the English language abound. They reveal interest in knowing the outside world, including digging deeper into the essence of the Western world. The specifics of their job, as well as the lack of language study courses within the Church, however, do not provide the opportunity to do this. NGOs could provide this opportunity for willing clergymen on a non-commercial basis. NGOs have more freedom in developing formats and curricula that consider the specifics of their job at church.

9. Make non-Russian foreign language religious literature accessible in Georgian for GOC clergymen.

Addressees: Civil society organizations
Donor community

Rationale: Sympathy for the ROC and Russia as a whole, which prevails in the older generation of clergy, is largely predetermined by the language barrier. Ignorance of European languages, especially English, is the main obstacle in using religious literature published in Europe. This makes the Russian publications of religious literature the only foreign source of information. This puts the need for both the preparation of professional translators-theologians and the translation of European religious literature into the Georgian language high on the agenda. It is advisable for non-governmental organizations in consultation with the GOC to create a training program and also begin translating literature according to a pre-agreed list of books.

The following two recommendations relate to providing the clergy with the opportunity of becoming better acquainted with the Western world:

10. Familiarize the GOC clergy and students with the views and priorities of the local government, CSOs and clergymen in Europe and the US.

Addressees: Civil society organizations
Government of Georgia
Donor community

Rationale: The purpose of such a tour is to familiarize GOC priests and students with the views of the local government and societies regarding the place and the role of religion and the church in a “Westernized” society. The participants of the tour will learn how the widespread myths, stereotypes, and phobias about Western civilization, so circulated among GOC clergymen, correspond to reality. Recent visits by the high hierarchs of the Church to Brussels and Washington have confirmed their usefulness. In the statements made, the clergymen recognized that they learned a lot of new things about the West and Western organizations during their visits which had not been known to them so far. It is desirable to give this practice a systematic character.

11. Familiarize the conservative GOC clergymen with the views and priorities of their colleagues in Orthodox Christian countries of Eastern Europe.

Addressees: Civil society organizations
Government of Georgia
Donor community

Rationale: The purpose of these tours is to make the older generation of conservative clergymen familiar with the experience of Orthodox Churches in Eastern European and Balkan countries. The program of visits should include meetings with not only local clergymen but also with representatives of the government, expert community, and local youth so that all standpoints regarding the compatibility of Europeanization and Orthodox Christianity are present as something to consider.

The following recommendation provides for the assistance of young clergymen in updating their worldviews:

12. Create opportunities for willing young clergymen to study abroad.

Addressees: Government of Georgia
Georgian Orthodox Church

Rationale: The more representatives of the clergy, especially young people, are educated in Western religious and/or civic educational institutions, the faster the divergent opinions of GOC conservatives and “liberals” will be bridged regarding the advisability of training Georgian youth in the West. The Georgian government could appeal to the governments of European countries and the United States to allocate appropriate quotas for Georgian clergymen.

The following recommendation relates to the cultivation of literacy and hard work among Georgian youth:

13. Preach the importance of quality education and diligence in learning among young parishioners.

Addressee: Georgian Orthodox Church

Rationale: Understanding the exceptional importance of a good education in the age of globalization is increasing among Georgian youth. However, the general situation with quality education is pitiable. This is a multifaceted problem but an important component of it is the reduced or completely absent motivation of many young people to work hard towards this goal. The GOC could take this fact into account in its daily work with parishioners and priests could use their sermons to highlight issues of reading books, a responsible attitude towards work and other skills that better prepare a human being for his future profession.

GOVERNMENT-GOC COOPERATION

The following four recommendations relate to cooperation between the Church and the government:

14. Undertake a reform of the system of the Church’s education.

Addressees: Georgian Orthodox Church
Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia

Rationale: The goal of the reform should be the preparation of future clergymen who, together with their religious education, will also have a secular education that will allow them to better understand the ongoing processes and phenomena in the international arena as well as the trends in the inevitable social transformation process that are predetermined by globalization. Excessive conservatism, which is inherent in many clerics, is largely based on their limited knowledge of the issues mentioned. Involvement of representatives of the “liberal wing” of clerics in the learning process should be encouraged. The Ministry of Education and Science, as well as the civil sector, could support such a reform.

15. Join efforts in addressing the needs of the Georgian diaspora in terms of preserving language, culture and affinity to homeland.

Addressees: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia
Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia
Georgian Orthodox Church

Rationale: In circumstances where it is not possible to bring back Georgian emigres, the main task is to create favorable conditions in the places where the diaspora resides in order to preserve the Georgian language and national traditions as well as affinity to homeland. The Patriarch and the Church in general understand the importance of this circumstance and created foreign eparchies. The process of purchasing land for the subsequent construction of churches and monasteries or ready-made buildings for the conduct of worship has begun. These places have already become sacred for Georgian migrants and often serve as centers for Georgian spirituality and a place for the joint celebration of national and church dates. Based on the importance of the issue, the state should come to the aid in expanding church infrastructure with an optimized location in terms of access for Georgian migrants scattered around the world. Sunday schools are part of this infrastructure and are often the only places for school-aged children to receive their primary education in their native language. Here again the state; in particular, the Ministry of Education and Science, should help with the literature adapted for children growing up in a non-Georgian speaking environment.

16. Coordinate efforts to develop the tourist attraction of religious sites of historical and cultural significance.

Addressees: Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia
National Administration of Tourism
Local governments
Georgian Orthodox Church

Rationale: The church periodically renovates the infrastructure of temples and monasteries through landscaping territory and, if necessary, repairing facades. An improved aesthetic appearance is an absolutely necessary prerequisite for attracting more visitors, including foreign tourists. However, without proper road infrastructure and/or the inclusion of the site in popular tourist routes, even a well-kept temple cannot attract the desired number of visitors and vice versa. This creates the natural necessity for coordinating efforts and sharing Church resources and those of state organizations of various levels and profiles which together can ensure the influx of tourists.

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**QUESTIONNAIRE
(Priests)**

The GOC's view of its place and its role in political and public life	
1	Traditionally, public trust in the GOC is high whereas in relation to other institutions of the country it is fluctuating. In your opinion, what determines this? Why could the state and political institutions not secure a sustained trust?
2	What determines the influence of the GOC (over an individual, over the government)?
3	What is the relationship between the GOC and the state? How was this relationship affected by: a) the 2002 Concordat, b) the 2011 legislative changes and c) the 2014 Law on Elimination of Discrimination?
The GOC's view of priority issues	
4	Can you list the most acute internal problems requiring immediate attention (unemployment, access to quality healthcare, etc.)?
5	How much does the government see the challenges facing the country?
6	What can the GOC do to help the government cope with these challenges?
7	What are the current and desirable roles of the GOC in education?
8	What role do the media play in the development of the country?
The GOC's view of Georgia's relationship to the outside world	
9	Who would you single out as the main actors in our region?
10	What would you point out as key issues with them?
11	Do you agree that Georgia should mainly be oriented toward the West and Western institutions?
12	How compatible are the notions of <i>Georgianess</i> and <i>Europeanness</i> ? What is the role of the GOC in preserving identity and in shaping new social values in the context of globalization?
13	The West supports Georgia in many ways, including in the development of state and civil organizations, humanitarian assistance, etc. How much do you support the continuation/deepening of such relations?
14	Which country or alliance do you consider most benevolent towards Georgia? Most malevolent? On what grounds would you assess their attitude to Georgia?
15	What are the moods of the majority of the GOC clergymen regarding the EU and NATO? Do their opinions coincide with yours?
16	How possible is the concurrent integration of Georgia into Western institutions and peaceful and good-neighborly relations with Russia?
17	Do you think it is desirable for Georgian youth to obtain an education in the West?
18	Abroad, mainly in the West, the Georgian diaspora is growing. Foreign dioceses of the GOC try to help Georgian emigres preserve their identity although they cannot be persuaded to return to their homeland. What do you see as a way out?
The GOC's view of its potential role in restoring Georgia's territorial integrity	
19	What role can the GOC play in uniting Georgia, in resolving conflicts? What is the significance of the fact that the Abkhazian Church is not recognized by the Russian Orthodox Church and remains within the canonical boundaries of the GOC?

Annex 2

QUESTIONNAIRE (Experts)

Expert view of the GOC's current and future place and role in political and public life	
1	Traditionally, public trust in the GOC is high, whereas in relation to other institutions of the country it is fluctuating. In your opinion, what determines this? Why could the state and political institutions not secure a sustained trust?
2	What determines the influence of the GOC (over an individual, over the government)?
3	How reliable are the figures indicating a high level of trust in the GOC?
4	What is the relationship between the GOC and the state? Are these relations cooperative or in conflict? How was this relationship affected by: a) the 2002 Concordat, b) the 2011 legislative changes and c) the 2014 Law on Elimination of Discrimination?
Expert view about the GOC's potential role in supporting the GoG	
5	What can the GOC do to help the government cope with existing challenges?
6	What is the current and desirable role of the GOC in school education?
Expert assessment of the GOC's view of Georgia's relationship to the outside world	
7	What is the view of the Church on Georgia's foreign policy? Does the majority of the GOC clergymen approve Georgia's pro-Western stance? What are overt and covert reasons for such a mood? What are the voiced and hidden reasons for such sentiments?
8	What is the role of the Church in preserving identity in the context of globalization?
9	Which country or alliance do you consider most benevolent towards Georgia? Most malevolent?
Expert view of the GOC's attitude to technology and modernization	
10	How does the Church look at the penetration of technological modernization in Georgia, including the development of social media?
Expert view on internal developments in the GOC	
11	How do you assess the latest phenomena inside the GOC? Is the so-called 'cyanide case' a separate phenomenon or what we are dealing with is part of a more systematic, profound problem?
Other	
12	The number of young people wishing to study abroad is constantly growing. Do you think that after receiving an education abroad their attitude/trust in the GOC is changing?
13	Do you watch the Patriarchate's TV channel? What is your opinion on its content, the values being propagated? How much is the editorial policy of the TV channel pro-European or pro-Russian?
14	What role can the GOC play in uniting Georgia, in resolving conflicts? What is the significance of the fact that the Abkhazian Church is not recognized by the Russian Orthodox Church and remains within the GOC's canonical boundaries?