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**Border Settlements in
the Past and Present
(Kakheti)**

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**International Scientific Research Institute
of the Peoples of the Caucasus**

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Introduction

The monograph was prepared and published within the framework of the project – “Ethno-cultural transformation of the border population in the post-Soviet period (Kakheti)”, the winner of the grant competition for supporting scientific research projects and international scientific events in the cross-border regions of Georgia of the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia. The project was implemented at the International Research Institute of the Peoples of the Caucasus by the researchers: V. Vashakidze, V. Urushadze, N. Jalabadze, and L. Janiashvili.

The study of the border regions of Georgia has not only a scientific and theoretical, but also a practical goal since it is directly related to the issue of state security. In conditions when 20% of the country's territory is occupied, the main task of the Georgian state is to restore territorial integrity and ensure peace and stability at the borders. At the same time, this issue is becoming even more relevant, given the changing mood of Georgian society and the international geopolitical situation.

Azerbaijan and Georgia are linked by a strategic partnership, that has shaped the policy of their relations. These two neighbouring countries form an axis that connects the Black Sea with the Caspian Sea and the West with Central Asia and Afghanistan. Major infrastructure projects - the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway have brought the two countries closer together. In the conditions of the Russian hybrid warfare, it is very important to maintain peaceful and stable relations between these neighbouring States. Georgian-Azerbaijani relations are inferior to the scale of the Caucasus and fall into the interests of major geostrategic players. In this regard, it was necessary to conduct an interdisciplinary study and reveal the factors that cause certain problems in the relationship between these two states (separatist and ethnocentric tendencies among the border population,

social conflicts, religious confrontations, migration processes, etc.).

Due to certain objective and subjective circumstances, the process of delimitation-demarcation of the Georgia-Azerbaijan border is not finally been completed. This applies to the section of Kakheti bordering Azerbaijan, which is part of the municipalities of Lagodekhi, Dedoplistskaro, Sighnaghi, and Sagarejo.

Since ancient times, the territory under study was an area of contact between the population of Georgian and Caucasian Albanian origin. Later, the kingdoms of Kartli (Iberia) and Albania fought each other over this territory; Since the 15th century, the mentioned territory, referred to in Georgian historical sources as Hereti, was called “Kakheti”. In the 17th century, in the community on the eastern outskirts of Hereti (Kaki/Kakhi), the “free communities” of Avar and Tsakhur Leiks were formed and two political formations were established: the Char-Belakani (Kak-Eniseli) and Elisli sultanates. Since 1803, this territory was part of the Russian Empire, from 1921 - part of the Azerbaijan SSR, and then part of modern Azerbaijan. Thus, due to hard times, today one part of the historical Hereti belongs to Azerbaijan and the other part to Georgia. For almost two hundred years of life first in the Russian and then in the Soviet empire, Kakheti’s history has not passed without a trace; To this, we must add a rather difficult thirty-year period that has passed since the restoration of Georgia’s independence. During the Soviet era, the administrative border between Georgia and Azerbaijan changed its location several times for various political and economic reasons.

The situation was complicated by the fact that in Soviet times the borders between the Soviet republics were conditional. For example, in the Sighnaghi region, the border passed along the Alazani River, which changed its course several times, due to which a large territory ended up on the side of Azerbaijan in the 1970s. True, later the Georgian village of Erisimedi was built in this area, but the state border here has not yet been defined. The section of the border in the municipality of Sagarejo is also controversial, where the recognized monument of Georgian Christian architecture, the David Gareji monastery complex is located. All of this caused discontent in Georgian society. Besides, in the post-Soviet period, part of Azerbaijani authors attribute most of

the territory of Eastern Georgia, even including Tbilisi, to historical Azerbaijan. The mentioned narrative hurts public sentiments in both countries in general, especially on the border population. This situation is worth considering, given the intense trade, economic and socio-cultural relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia.

The research team studied the past and the present ethnocultural situation in the settlements of the Kakheti region at the Georgian-Azerbaijani border, features of perception of ethnic and political boundaries by the border population, the role of historical narratives and the ethnographic environment in these processes, demographic transformation of the studied region in chronological terms, forms of settlement of the border population, their economy, religion, and social life, relations between neighbouring ethnic groups, the influence of the media environment, the non-governmental sector and the state policies of Georgia and Azerbaijan on the ethnocultural processes in the region.

The book presents a comprehensive study, where besides historical and ethnological aspects for the first time the focus is made on the influence of traditional and modern information and communication systems on public life in the border settlements. The unique and distinctive characteristics of digital media have necessitated the scientific study of the issue. From this point of view, the research allowed us to determine the degree of media credibility among the population of villages bordering Azerbaijan; the risk of misinformation and the impact of foreign media on ethnic groups; the intensity and effects of the use of digital and traditional media in everyday life, etc.

The monograph is intended for specialists, students, and the interested public.

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CHAPTER I FROM THE HISTORY OF KAKHETI

§ 1. The Ancient Population of Kakheti and the Territory of their Residence

Kakheti is the extreme eastern part of the modern Georgian state and includes the basins of the Iori and Alazani rivers. From the west, it borders the Georgian historical-geographical region - Kartli (the dividing line between them was the Aragvi River), from the east and south - on Azerbaijan, and from the north - on the Republic of Dagestan (Russian Federation). Present-day Kakheti is divided into four small units: Inner Kakheti (the right bank of the Alazani River), Outer Kakheti (the middle reaches of the Iori River), Kiziki (the area between the Iori River and the lower reaches of the Alazani River) and Gagma Mkhari/Thither Area (left bank of the Alazani River).

Kakheti, like other historical-geographic regions of Georgia, is a “country” formed due to long-term and complex historical events. Neither territorially nor ethnically, Kakheti was the same as it is today. According to written sources, on the territory of the present Kakheti there were several small “countries” (exactly, *Kakheti*, *Kukheti*, *Hereti*, *Tsuketi*, *Sujeti*, *Kambechani*), which were inhabited by autochthonous tribes of the same origin or more or less related to them. From time to time, these “countries” either expanded at the expense of others, formed new political or administrative entities or even completely disappeared. Each such change contributed to the activation of ethnogenetic and ethnocultural processes. Added to this were migration flows from different parts of Georgia, as well as from foreign countries.

It is possible to characterize the population of Georgia anthropologically, including Kakheti, from the Bronze Age. The study of the relevant craniological material revealed that the Mediterranean type of the South European race lived here, as well as on the territory of Eastern Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the North Caucasus.¹

¹ M. Abdushelishvili. Anthropology of the Caucasus in the Bronze Age, Tb., 1982, p. 42–48. (in Georgian)

The paleoanthropological study of the population of the Caucasus continued based on craniological material from the era of extensive iron production. During this period, as well as throughout the Bronze Age eastern and southern Georgia, mountainous and foothill Georgia, northern Armenia, the area of Lake Sevan, western Azerbaijan and the mountains and foothills of the North Caucasus, were inhabited by “an anthropological type of a Caucasoid variety of the Mediterranean race of a common genetic origin”² The anthropological type of the population of the Caucasus did not change even in the Hellenistic period.³

It is noted that this homogeneity is, of course, conditional, since the complex process of racial genesis itself implies the influence of migration flows, although “the substrate of the ancient population was so strong that it could withstand various infiltrations, possibly mixings.”⁴ The preservation of this anthropological type in a practically unchanged form for such a long time, together with several reasons (eg. natural-geographical environment) was also caused by the fact that in the ancient period, the population of the Caucasus was mainly in contact with Europids, who were widely distributed in the south (inner regions of Iran, Mesopotamia, Anatolia). In this vast territory, as in the Caucasus, mainly one type of population lived, the same processes took place, and the ethnic unity that developed as a result of the relations of local groups remains anthropologically within the limits of the variability that is characteristic of this region.⁵

It was said above that the identity of the morphological features of the Caucasian population of the Hellenistic period with the population of the previous period is beyond doubt. Craniological material from late antiquity gives grounds for a similar conclusion.⁶

Based on the above, it can be said that from the Early Bronze Age to Late Antiquity, the Caucasus (and hence Kakheta) was inhabited

² Anthropology of Georgia in the era of widespread use of iron production, Tb., 1988, p. 29-30. (in Georgian)

³ M. Abdushelishvili. Anthropology of the population of the Caucasus in the early antique and Hellenistic periods, Tbilisi 1978, p.29.(in Georgian)

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ L. Bitadze, D. Chitanava, Sh. Laliashvili, E. Kvavadze, T. Zubiashvili., Ethnic identity issues of the population of Kartli and variation of anthropological types from the 3rd Millenium to the 21st century, Tb., 2011, pp. 201–202 (in Georgian)

⁶ *ibid.* pp. 404, 420–422.

by one Mediterranean type of the South European race, which was characterized by a certain polymorphism. Accordingly, it was at the final stage of the mentioned last period that the foundations were laid for the causes that determined the most important epochal events in the anthropological history of the Caucasus, culminating in the formation of various anthropological types among the population of the modern Caucasus.

It should be emphasized that the anthropological type of the population and the belonging of this or that people to a specific language (moreover, to ethnic) group are two different indicators, independent of each other. From a methodological point of view, their correlation is unacceptable, otherwise, it will lead us to false conclusions.

The above conclusions are confirmed by the data obtained as a result of the study of DNA genetic markers of paleoanthropological material.

Although the Caucasus is characterized by ethnic and linguistic diversity, studies have proved the occurrence of a small number of biological species there. They are presented in different proportions in different ethnic groups, which led to ethnic diversity. In the Caucasus, and more precisely in its western part, haplogroup G2a dominates, and in the east - haplogroups J2 and J1.⁷

Their high percentage indisputably evidences that the formation of the ethnic groups of the indigenous population of the Caucasus occurred based on populations with these haplogroups. This testifies to the genetic relationship of the peoples of the Caucasus.

A comparative population-genetic study strengthened the opinion that haplogroups G2a and J2 strongly predominate among Georgians, which, as mentioned above, are characteristic of the population of the Western and Eastern Caucasus, respectively. For example, it is confirmed that haplogroup J2 is leading in the Georgian historical-ethnographical group living in the mountains of Kakheti - the Tush, and Georgians living in Fereydan (Iran).⁸ The foregoing undoubtedly

⁷ A.A. Klesov. Slavs, Caucasians, Jews from the point of view of DNA genealogy, pg. 60. (in Russian)

⁸ R. Shengelia, G. Andriadze, L. Bitadze, D. Chitanava, N. Chikovani, E. Khmaladze, M. Kekelidze, Sh. Laliashvili. Comparative population genetic study of the population of Eastern Georgia. Anthropology and ethnology of

points to the genetic relationship of the Tushetians and the deported population from Kakheti to Fereydan in the 17th century.

Thus, the study of DNA genetic markers unequivocally confirmed the conclusions obtained as a result of anthropological studies that the ancient population of Kakheti consisted of autochthonous, indigenous tribes genetically related to their Caucasian neighbours.

Archaeological findings reveal that the territory of modern Kakheti was populated from time immemorial. Monuments of the Lower Paleolithic (Melaani village), Upper Paleolithic (Iori Valley, to the south of Mount Kotsakhurebi, modern Signaghi and Dedoplistskaro regions) and Neolithic (Lagodekhi region, the village of Beshkent) eras can be traced here.⁹ It is believed that the Neolithic settlements from the Alazani valley, as well as the remains of similar settlements of the same period in the Aragvi and Mtkvari(Kura) valleys, represent a further development of the Sioni archaeological culture (late Neolithic) and are genetically related to it.¹⁰

In the Early Bronze Age (the middle of the 4th millennium BC is considered its initial stage), the Kakheti region was included in the Kura-Araxes cultural area.

The fact that the monuments of this period have been found in all geographical zones (plains, mountains, highlands) is extremely important. Kakheti is among the densely populated regions.¹¹ The situation here is almost the same as in the neighbouring Shida Kartli, where the settlements are located along the river banks at a distance of 2-4 km from each other.¹²

the Caucasus. Proceedings of the international conference dedicated to the 90th anniversary of the birth of academician Malkhaz Abdushelishvili. Tb., 2016, p. 157.

⁹ K. Pitshkelaury. The ancient culture of the population of the Ior-Alazani Basin, Tb., 1965, p. 29–30. (in Georgian)

¹⁰ D. Muskhelishvili, G. Cheishvili, A. Daushvili. Stages and features of the consolidation of the Georgian nation from time immemorial to the present, Tb., 2016, p. 6. (in Georgian)

¹¹ The Bronze Age of the Caucasus and Central Asia, Early and Middle Bronze of the Caucasus. Edited by K. Kushnareva and V. Markovin, Moscow 1994, p 15 (in Russian)

¹² O. Lortkipanidze. At the origins of ancient Georgian civilization, Tb., 2002, pp. 70–71. (in Georgian)

Therefore, according to experts, the entry of a significant population flows into the Caucasus, especially into its southern part (and, of course, into Kakheti), is practically impossible. Rather, we believe that we should share the point of view that the spread of the Kura-Araxes culture to the south may indicate the movement of part of the inhabitants of this region to the south,¹³ that is, that the ancient population of Kakheti, even in this era, did not undergo noticeable changes.

The Middle Bronze Age begins in the second half of the 3rd millennium BC - Kura-Araxes culture is replaced by the Early Kurgan culture. In the latter, archaeologists consider the monuments of Martkopi and Bedeni cultures. Today, there is controversy regarding the origin of the Early Kurgan culture, although its traces were confirmed in some settlements of the Kura-Araxes period.¹⁴ It is also noted that the Early Kurgan pottery is obviously related to the Kura-Araxes ceramics.¹⁵ We share the opinion that the Early Kurgan culture should have arisen as a result of the socio-economic development of the population, the carrier of Kura-Araxes culture, which, in the final stage of the Early Bronze Age, could have tended to increase sheep breeding, which indicates that the population gradually moved to transhumance.¹⁶

Academics believe that from that time, life stopped in the settlements of the Kura-Araxes epoch throughout the entire territory of Eastern Georgia (and, consequently, Kakheti). The population movement started and a big union of transhumance tribes was formed.¹⁷ The era of Trialeti Kurgan culture began, which lasted almost until the middle of the 2nd millennium BC.

These cultural monuments are a direct continuation of the Bedeni culture, which, in turn, is a later stage of the Early Kurgan culture and

¹³ O. Japaridze. At the dawn of the ethnocultural history of the Caucasus. Tb., 1989, p. 375. (in Russian)

¹⁴ O. Japaridze. At the origins of the ethnogenesis of the Georgian nation. Tb., 2006, p. 24. (in Georgian)

¹⁵ E. Gogadze. On one aspect of the genesis of the Kolkhian culture, "Guria", II, Tb., 1997, p.41. (in Georgian)

¹⁶ Idem, Stages and features of the consolidation of the Georgian nation from time immemorial to the present, p. 10.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.12; D.Muskhkishvili, Basic issues of the historical geography of Georgia, I, Tb.,1977, pp.22–27. (in Georgian)

continues the traditions of the preceeding Martkopi culture.¹⁸ At the same time, it is worth noting that the radical change in economic life (transition from agriculture to cattle breeding) of the population of the Middle Bronze Age in Eastern Georgia (respectively, in Kakheti) and in the area of distribution of the Trialeti culture as a whole, some researchers consider the result of the invasion of herdsmen from the steppes of the North Caucasus, which did stimulate those processes.¹⁹ Also, they do not exclude the role of the migration of tribes the carriers of Western Asian (Hittite, Hurrian) ethnocultural traditions in the emergence of the Trialeti culture²⁰

We fully share the opinion that the creators of the Trialeti culture were the Eastern Georgian indigenous tribes of Kartvelian origin. Researchers go even further and believe that the people who created the Trialeti culture must have been “Kartvels”.²¹ We consider it wrong to exaggerate the role of the invasion of herdsmen from the steppes of the North Caucasus or the migration of the population carrying Hittite or Hurrian ethnocultural traditions from Western Asia. The economic activity of the population is primarily determined by the geographical and climatic conditions in which it lives and works. In our opinion, the above situation should have been caused by global anomalous natural and climatic phenomena. Today it is well known that at the turn of the III-II millennia (approximately 2200-1900 BC) the Middle East (Anatolia, Northern Mesopotamia, Northern Iran) suffered a raging drought, which left a heavy imprint on the historical processes in the region. We believe that it also covered the South Caucasus, especially its eastern part. The lowland agricultural population, dependent on primitive irrigation systems, was forced to leave their homes and seek water-rich areas. Such were the mountains and foothills. Naturally, the type of economy also changed, and yesterday’s farmers were forced to support themselves by raising livestock. This is confirmed to some

¹⁸ E. Gogadze. Periodization and genesis of Trialeti Korghan culture, Tb., 1972, p. 79. (in Georgian)

¹⁹ Idem, At the origins of the ethnogenesis of the Georgian nation, pp. 310–311.

²⁰ Idem, Periodization and genesis of Trialeti Korghan culture pp. 79–84; Idem, At the origins of ancient Georgian civilization, p. 99.

²¹ Idem, Stages and features of the consolidation of the Georgian nation from time immemorial to the present, pp.13-14.

extent by the fact that not a single agricultural tool was found in the hundreds of excavated mounds of the Middle Bronze Age.²²

From the middle of the 2nd millennium, the situation in Eastern Georgia changed radically again. Populated areas reappeared in the plains, indicating a re-intensification of agriculture along with the demographic explosion.²³ There is no doubt among the researchers that the mentioned turn in economic life had to be carried out peacefully and there were no ethnic changes in the population. This is also evidenced by the fact that the so-called “Central Transcaucasian culture” that replaced the Trialectic Middle Bronze Age culture was actually spread over the same area.²⁴ Kakheti was also within this framework.

The material culture revealed in the Ior-Alazani valley at the middle stage of the Late Bronze Age is characterized by well-formed features. Its distribution area is the Greater Caucasus in the north, the Tsnori-Sighnaghi line in the east, the Aragvi River in the west and the Kura River in the south.²⁵

At the third stage of the Late Bronze Age (also called the Early Iron Age) in the Ior-Alazani valley in the 11th-10th centuries BC, three local variants of one culture were identified.²⁶ The question arises: who were the creators of the local archaeological cultures discovered in the Ior-Alazani valley at the turn of the 2nd-1st millennia?

Ancient Eastern texts do not tell us anything about the tribes that settled in this region, nor about the political unions that had been formed there; information of Greco-Roman authors is of a later period. The only written source, which is the basis for the study of the ethnic history of modern Kakheti is the initial essay of the compendium “Kartli’s life”—*History of the Kings and Patriarchs of the Georgians*, the author of which is considered Leonti Mroveli. Scientists unanimously admit the importance of the historical and geographic data given in the work.

²² L.Dzidziguri, *Ancient agriculture of Transcaucasia*, Tb., 2000, p. 302 (in Georgian); Idem, *Basic issues of the historical geography of Georgia*, pp. 27–32.

²³ O. Japaridze, *Archeology of Georgia*, vol., 1991, p. 229.

²⁴ K. Pitskhelauri, *Central Transcaucasian archaeological culture in the 14th-13th centuries BC*. Tb., 2005, p. 106 (map CCLIX).

²⁵ K. Pitskhelauri, *The main problems of the history of the tribes of Eastern Georgia (15th-7th centuries BC)*, Tb., 1973, pp. 178–180 (in Georgian).

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 183–189.

Leonti Mroveli's information about the historical-geographic borders of Kakheti, Kukheti and Hereti coincided with the boundaries of the local variants of the archaeological culture in Eastern Georgia, in particular Kakheti, identified according to the archaeological materials of the 11th -10th centuries BC.²⁷

Since the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age, the archaeological culture and its local variants revealed in Eastern Georgia and Kakheti, particular, have not been affected by any strong influence from the outside. The local tribes: Kakhs, Kukhs and Hers are the creators of those local archaeological cultures, on the basis of which the historical-geographical regions - Kakheti, Kukheti and Hereti were formed. At least since the Bronze Age, the ethnic substratum on the territory of Eastern Georgia was not changed.²⁸

According to Leonti Mroveli, after the death of Kartlos, his wife divided the land left by him between his five sons: Mtskhetos, Gardabos, Kakhos, Kukhos and Gachios. „To K'akhos she gave the land between the Caucasus and the mountains of K'akheti, from the river Aragvi to the river T'q'et'ba, which is a border of Hereti“.²⁹

According to Leonti Mroveli, “to K'ukhos she gave Bostan-kalaki, which is now called Rustavi and also the land from Aragvi to Hereti, down to the edge of Mount K'akheti, between the rivers of Alazani and Mt'k'vari.”³⁰ Thus, Kukheti included the area of the confluence of the Aragvi River with the Mtkvari(Kura) River and the territory of outer Kakheti.

As noted by Leonti Mroveli, the country belonging to Heros is” the land on the north side of the Mt'k'vari, from the mouth of the Little Alazani to T'q'et'ba, now called Gulgula.”³¹ According to the sources, Hereti meant the eastern territory of today's Kakheti, Kiziki - Gaghmamkhari and Saingilo.

²⁷ K. Pitskhelauri. The main problems of the history of the tribes of Eastern Georgia (15th-7th centuries BC), Tb., 1973, p. 196.

²⁸ G.Melikishvili. On the question of the ancient population of Georgia, the Caucasus and the Middle East, Tb. 1965, p. 102 (in Georgian).

²⁹ Leonti Mroveli, The Lives of the Georgian Kings, in The Georgian Chronicles of Kartlis Tskhovreba (A History of Georgia), Tb.,2014, ed., Stephen Jones, p.16 (in English)

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.p.14

When are the names of Kakheti, Kukheti, Hereti supposed to appear? It is substantiated that the name of a particular territory is given by the ethnic group that appropriates this land and water. These small units of the population, even if they are of the same origin, are called by their proper names. Due to various historical processes, they either diverge or merge. In the case of joining and the emergence of a relatively large ethnopolitical entity, they bear the name of the hegemon of the union.³²

Who were the Kakhs, Kukhs and Hers ethnically? Any narrower meaning of the roots of the first two names (Kakh-Koch) is still unknown.³³ Nevertheless, in our opinion, there should be no doubt about N. Mari's observation that "kh-i" is a typical suffix of Georgian tribal names. The researcher brings several examples (Kol-kh-i, Mes-kh-i/Moso-kh-i, Java-kh-i/Tao-kh-i, etc.). He considers it undoubted that the suffix "kh-i", used in the formation of a tribal name, belongs to the Kartvelian language world.³⁴

Mari Brose focused on the geographical names based on the above-mentioned roots. He pointed out that on the territory of Eastern Kakheti (Saingilo), in the Belakani region (Azerbaijan), on the left bank of the Alazani River, the toponym Kaki (respectively, Kakhi) was attested, which is very similar to the root formant, from which the name of the country "Kakheti" should have come from.³⁵ The existence of toponyms or ethnonyms of the same root in one region is a sign that a population of the same ethnic (in our case - Kartvalian) origin lived there.

The fact that Kakhos and Kukhos (respectively, Kakhs and Kukhs) were ancient "Kartlosians" by flesh and blood is also noted by Leonti Mroveli. The chronicler clearly defines the composition of "Georgians' relatives".³⁶

The ethnonym "Heri" is first met in ancient written sources.

³² N. Berdzenishvili. Questions of the history of Georgia, VIII, p. 263–264 (in Georgian).

³³ T. Papuashvili. Information about "Kakhi", "Kukhi", and "Heri" and their corresponding country names "Kakheti", "Kukheti", "Hereti," In the book: Foreign and Georgian terminology denoting Georgia and Georgians, pp. 427.

³⁴ N. Marr. Conversion of Armenians, Abkhazians and Alans by Saint Gregory (Arabic version). St-Petersbourg, 1905, p. 167.

³⁵ M. Brosset. Histoire de la Géorgie. Introduction, St-Petersbourg, 1858, pg. VII.

³⁶ Idem, Leonti Mroveli, p. 29–30.

In his geography, Claudius Ptolemy (90-168 AD) along with other tribes that played an important role in the ethno-political history of Kakheti, names the “Hers”.³⁷ Generally, many scholars touched upon the etymology and identity of “Hers” and various, often contradictory, opinions are expressed. Some researchers consider them to be a non-Georgian tribe. We do not share this opinion since we consider it not sufficiently reasoned. We share the opinion that the name “Heri” is related to the Georgian linguistic world, in particular with the ancient Georgian term “Eri”(nation), and it should be a concept having not only ethnic but also social connotations.³⁸

As described by Leonty Mroveli, Hereti, in turn, consisted of some small “countries”: Kambechani (Kiziki), Sujeti (the plateau of the middle course of the Iori River), Tsuketi (the North Caucasus mountainous part adjacent to Hereti, the upper part of the Samuri Gorge and the section of today’s Saingilo between the rivers of Qhapi-Chai and Gish), Velistkikhe and the “Thither Area” of modern Kakheti including Saingilo.³⁹

In addition to the Kahs, Kuhs and Hers, ethnic groups of both Georgian and non-Georgian origin, both mountain and lowland, closely or distantly related to them - Tsanars, Tush, Pkhoels (Pshavs and Khevsurs), Gardabanis, Durdzuks, etc. took part in the formation of the modern population of Kakheti.

The ethnonym “Tsanari” is mentioned for the first time in the *Geography* of Claudius Ptolemy. The work mentions that the “Sanars” live above Albania. *Conversion of Kartli* further clarifies the boundaries of their residence. This is the Central Caucasus, in particular: Darialani, the ridge of the Liakhvi-Ardon watershed and the road from Pshav-Khevsureti to Chachan-Kisteti.”⁴⁰ Information about Tsanars is also preserved in Armenian, Arabic, Persian and Byzantine

³⁷ Claudius Ptolemy. *Geography*. Ancient Caucasus, encyclopedia. Vol. I, Sources (second revised and supplemented edition), Tb., 2022, p. 374.

³⁸ Idem, Information about "Kakhi", "Kukhi", and "Heri" and their corresponding country names... p. 439.

³⁹ D. Muskhelishvili. Issues of the political geography of Kakheti and Hereti in the 12th -13th centuries, collection of the historical geography of Georgia, vol. III, Tb., 1967, p. 118; Ibid, Basic issues of the historical geography of Georgia, II, p. 65–67.

⁴⁰ S.Janashia, Works, Vol. I, Tb., 1949, p.4 (in Georgian).

sources.⁴¹ According to their analysis, it is clear that the Tsanars lived mainly in the Tergi(Terek) valley, at the gate of Dariali and its adjacent mountainous region. Later, most of the historical Tsanars changed their name. From the name “Tsanaretis Khevi” (Tstanareti Gorge) referred to in the *Conversion of Kartli*”Tsanareti” disappeared and only “Khevi” remained.⁴²As for the ethnic identity of Tsanars, the root “san” “tsan” clearly reveals its connection with both Svan and Megrelian-Chan (i.e. Zan) languages. Therefore, we believe that the Tsanars were one of the Kartvelian tribes.

Together with Hers (Gers) and Tsanars (Sanars) Claudius Ptolemy names another ethnic group of Georgian origin –”Tusks” – Tushes. Tusheti, Georgia’s Historical-geographical area a mountain region of Kakheti. It is located in the north of Main Caucasus Ridge, in the valleys of Alazani of Tusheti and Piriqita Alazani, and at their confluence, on the plateaus of Omalo and Diklo-Shenako. Tusheti borders on the republics of Ingushetia and Chechnya (Russian Federation) from the north, the Republic of Dagestan (Russian Federation) from the east, Shida Kakheti regions from the south, Pshavi and Khevsureti from the west.⁴³The Tushs are divided into two linguistic groups: Chagmatush (speaking the Tush dialect of the Georgian language) and Tsovatush (their home spoken language is Tsovatush, or Batsi [belongs to the Nakh language group], and outside they speak a dialect similar to the Kakhetian dialect of the Georgian language). Due to the above, some researchers think that the Tushes are originally a Nakh tribe, while others attribute the Tush to the Georgian ethnic world.⁴⁴

Pshavi is located on the southern slopes of the Caucasus Mountain Range, in the valleys of the Pshavi Aragvi River and its tributaries. It is bordered by Tusheti and partially Iori valley from the east, Mtiulet-Gudamakari from the west, Khevsureti from the north, and Shida Kartli from the south. The name Pshavi appears in the 15th century,

⁴¹ For more details, see T. Papuashvili. The Kingdom of Rans and Kakhs, Tb., 1982, pp. 27–30.

⁴² R. Topchishvili. Historical-ethnographic regions of Georgia, Tb., 2017, p. 144.

⁴³ G. Tsotsanidze. The terms "Tusheti" and "Tushebi", in the book: Foreign and Georgian Terminology Denoting Georgia and Georgians, Tb., 1993, p. 539.

⁴⁴ Idem, The terms "Tusheti" and "Tushebi", in the book: Foreign and Georgian Terminology Denoting Georgia and Georgians, Tb., 1993, pp. 539–540.

before that, together with Khevsureti, it was called Pkhovi.⁴⁵

Khevsureti is spread on the southern and partly northern slopes of the Caucasus Mountain Range, in the valleys of Khevsureti Aragvi, Arkhotis Tskali (Asa river) and Shatil-Migmakhevi Tskali (Arghun river).⁴⁶ Khevsureti is bordered by the Republic of Ingushetia (Russian Federation) from the north, Pshavi from the south, Tusheti and the Republic of Chechnya (Russian Federation) from the east, and Khevi and Mtiulet-Gudamakari from the west. Khevsureti people speak the Khevsurian dialect of the Georgian language.

According to the historical tradition preserved by Leonti Mroveli, the country of Gardabos, with its political centre in Khunani, the same Mtuери Fortress, was populated by "Kartlosids", that is, Kartv tribes, from ancient times.⁴⁷ Gardabani people actively participated in the ethnopolitical processes of Kakheti from the last quarter of the 8th century to the 10th century.⁴⁸ It has been confirmed that in the mentioned period, a part of the Durdzuks (the ancestors of today's Chechen-Ingush) appeared in the political composition of the principality of Kakheti, and then the kingdom of Rans and Kakhs. This is evidenced by the penetration of Georgian cultural flows into Ingushetia, which is confirmed by the construction of Christian churches, the existence of Georgian epigraphic monuments and manuscripts, the presence of significant borrowings from the Georgian vocabulary in the Ingush language, etc.⁴⁹ Naturally, such a connection could not be unilateral, and at that time, in the life of Kakheti elements of Nakh culture were also involved.

Thus, if we summarize the above, it becomes clear that the most ancient inhabitants of the territory of today's Kakheti were the autochthonous Kartvelian tribes, who had close political, socio-economic and cultural ties with neighbouring and indigenous tribes who at every stage of history were involved in the ethnopolitical and cultural processes that took place in the country.

⁴⁵ T. Ochauri. The terms "Pshavi" and "Khevsureti", in the book: Foreign and Georgian Terminology Denoting Georgia and Georgians, p. 534 (in Georgian).

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 535–536.

⁴⁷ Leonti Mroveli, History of the Kings and Patriarchs of the Georgians, The Georgia Chronicles, Tb., 2008, p. 29, ed. R. Metreveli

⁴⁸ Idem. The Kingdom of Rans and Kakhs. pp. 77–94.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 93.

§ 2. The Country of Kakheti and its Eastern Borders

One of the most important conditions for the emergence of ethnic communities is the possession of a certain geographical territory. This territory is a safe haven for the people living here, it contributes to the formation of their economy and lifestyle, and also largely determines their national character. Over time, the population fits into it so organically that it perceives it as an integral part of itself. The knowledge that the native land is connected with the historical fate of the people who settled here, was passed down from generation to generation since ancient times. Since an ethnic group identifies itself only through confrontation with other groups, in the view of the ancient civilized nations the “world”/”country” was a place where they, or “we/our group”, lived. The ethnic group comprehended it as a specific territory, where order and harmony reigned, and was strictly demarcated from the space where another ethnic group lived or was inhabited by “others”. That is why every nation selflessly defended and carefully guarded its habitat and could not tolerate its encroachment.⁵⁰

Historical sources allow us to trace the long history of the formation of modern Kakheti and highlight its separate stages. The name Kakheti, in its narrow meaning, i.e. Kakheti proper, originally included the territory of the Sammasaxliso⁵¹ belonging to Kakhos; in the next period, as part of the united Kartli (Iberia) of the Parnavazids, the Samamasaxliso of Kakheti was transformed into the Saeristavo⁵² of Kakheti; from the 8th century, on the basis of the Saeristavo of Kakheti an independent feudal political unit, the Principality of Kakheti was formed. In the 1020s, after the annexation of the kingdom of Hereti, the Kakhetian kingdom was established; since the time of David Agmashenebeli, the Kingdom of Kakheti has been an organic and integral part of a single Georgian feudal monarchy; after the collapse of the Georgian statehood (15th century), the late medieval

⁵⁰ V. Vashakidze. The territory of the state - "an icon of collective memory", *Annals*, 2016, No. 12, p. 60–67 (lit. see *ibid.*) (in Georgian).

⁵¹ Samamasakhlishi — territory owned or controlled by the Mamasakhlishi; Mamasakhlishi — the head of the other chiefs; the ruler of a country, region.

⁵² Saeristavo- The administrative -territorial unit in ancient Georgia, which was ruled by Eristavi

kingdom of Kakheti was founded; after the death of King Teimuraz II of Kartli (1762), Kakheti became part of the united Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti, which from 1801 became part of the Russian Empire; From May 26, 1918, until the annexation of Georgia and forced Sovietization, Kakheti was part of the First Georgian Republic, and from February 25, 1921, until the collapse of the USSR, it was part of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia; after the restoration of the independence of the state of Georgia (April 9, 1991), the Kakheti region is one of its administrative-territorial units.

The first king of Kartli Pharnavaz united Kakheti and Kukheti (Samamasaxliso countries of Kahos and Kuhos) into one Saeristavo. This is a qualitatively new stage in the development of the country of Kakheti because this time the concept of Saeristavo of Kakheti already includes Kukheti. According to the source, the mentioned administrative-territorial unit of the Kingdom of Kartli was adjacent to Hereti in the east. The border was supposed to start from the confluence of the Berduji River (today the Dzegam-Chai River) at the Kura and the ancient Georgian city of Hunan (today Tofrah-Kala on the right bank of the Kura in Azerbaijan) along the Kura, up to the city of Rustavi. then sharply to the north, along the line between Samgori-Chadivari and Mount Gareji to the river Iori; from here through the Sameba gorge to the Gombori pass, then through the Turdo gorge (where the old settlement of Tketba-Gulgula is located) up to Alazani. From here along Alazani to the west, then to Bakhtrioni; then along the Alazani-Machareuli watershed mountain in the direction of the Alazani-Shtori watershed ridge to the Caucasus. ⁵³

Kakheti and Kukheti are considered together also in the first half of the 4th century. It is very interesting that a certain part of Hereti, namely Sujeti, together with the settlement of Daba Bodbe, is part of the Kakheti by that time. ⁵⁴

Kakheti and Kukheti, united by King Mirian into a single kingdom, were reborn in two separate kingdoms during the reign of his successor Bakar. The situation was similar at the beginning of the reign of Vakhtang Gorgasali. The circumstances changed in the

⁵³ D.Muskhelishvili. The ethnological conception of Leonti Mroveli and the question of the ethnic identity of Hers, p. 28–29. (in Georgian)

⁵⁴ D.Muskhelishvili. Ujarma fortress pp. 58–59(in Georgian).

later period of Vakhtang's reign. At this time, Kakheti and Kukheti were still united into one "Saeristavo" (duchy). "Dimitri, Eristavi⁵⁵ of Kakheti and Kukheti" is named among the king's nobilities.⁵⁶

During Guaram Kuropalate's being as Erismtavari⁵⁷ of Kartli (second half of the 6th century) „King Bak'ur's sons, the descendants of Vakht'ang's son Dachi, to whom the crown was granted by King Vakht'ang, remained in K'akheti. They seized K'ukheti and Hereti by the river Iori and settled in Ujarma, and remained in subjection to Kuropalate Guaram.”⁵⁸ Based on this reference from "Kartlis Cxovreba"(*The Georgian Chronicles*), it is assumed that "Hereti by the river Iori" refers to "Sujeti", the territory of the Gareji deserts and Bodbe, and the centre of this whole above-mentioned vast area is Ujarma... On the other hand, the town of Ujarma was located in Kakheti itself, and therefore, from an administrative point of view, the entire territory, with Ujarma being its centre, was perceived as Kakheti.⁵⁹ One thing is quite clear, the concept of "Kakheti" was gradually expanded at the expense of Kukheti and partially Hereti.

In the 7th century, Kukheti and Hereti were again separated from Kakheti. The Arab author al-Balādhurī (9th century) describes in detail the conquest of the South Caucasus by the Arabs in the middle of the 7th century. It is interesting for us that Kakheti and Kukheti are mentioned in the list along with other conquered countries.⁶⁰ The Arab commander Habib ibn Maslama al-Fihri signed "acts of protection" with individual countries. This situation continued until the 780s.

According to Vakhushti Batonishvili, Grigol the Mtavari seized control of Kakheti, Kukheti and Gardabani. He abolished the name "Kukheti" and adopted the title of Chorikoz(Chorepiscopus) of

⁵⁵ The same Erismtavari, see below ftn.57

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 200

⁵⁷ Erismtavari/Eristavi - the head of a Georgian province. A provincial governor approved by a king.

⁵⁸ Juansher Juansheriani, The Life of Vakht'ang Gorgasali, in: The Georgian Chronicles of Kartlis Tskhovreba (A History of Georgia), Tb.,2014, ed., Stephen Jones,p.107 (in English)

⁵⁹ D.Muskhelishvili. The ethnological conception of Leonti Mroveli and the question of the ethnic identity of Hers, p. 37. (in Georgian)

⁶⁰ Baladzori. The Book of Conquest of Countries. Translated from Arabic by prof. P. K. Juse. Baku, 1927, p. 18(in Russian).

Kakheti.”⁶¹ As we can see, during the reign of Grigol (787-827) the extent of “Kakheti” and the notion expanded considerably and it included Kakheti, Kukheti and Gardabani. Above we have already spoken about the Gardabani people and defined the territory of their residence, that is, the borders of the Kakheti principality expanded to the southeast. As for Kukheti, Grigol “Chorikoz” “abolished the name of Kukheti”, which indicates that from then on the term “Kukheti” was no longer used as the name of an administrative unit, but had only the meaning of a geographical concept.

When Grigol turned Kakheti (with Kukheti and Gardabani) into an independent political entity, Hereti was conquered and reigned by the nephews of Adarnase.⁶² The kingdom of Hereti was founded. It bordered the small principality of Qabala on the east (the river Turyanchai separating them), Kura and Konoashin ridges on the south, and the Caucasus ridge on the north.⁶³

A special event in the political history of Kakheti is the annexation of the Kingdom of Hereti by Kvirike III the Great (1010-1037) in the 1020s. According to Vakhushti Batonishvili, “this Kvirike conquered Kakheti and Hereti and was named king of Kakhs”.⁶⁴ Thus, Kakheti and Hereti merged politically and the term “Kakheti” included Hereti as well.

In the 11th century, the eastern border of the Kingdom of Kakheti started at the confluence of the Iori and Alazani Rivers, at Khoranta. Then it followed the bank of Alazani to the north to the place where the Gisishtskali River joins Alazani. From here, the boundary ran along the river Gikhistskal, first in the direction to the east, and then to the north to the source of the river, which is located on the main ridge of the Caucasus.⁶⁵

At the beginning of the 12th century, namely in 1104-1105, the Kingdom of Kakheti became part of the feudal state of united Georgia.

⁶¹ Batonishvili Vakhushti. Description of the Kingdom of Georgia, p. 557. (in Georgian)

⁶² Ibid, p.558

⁶³ D. Muskhelishvili. Basic issues of the historical geography of Georgia, II, p. 125. (in Georgian).

⁶⁴ Batonishvili Vakhushti. Description of the Kingdom of Georgia, p. 561. (in Georgian)

⁶⁵ Idem, The kingdom of Rans and Kakhs, p. 112.

David IV Agmashenebeli “took Hereti and Kakheti.”⁶⁶ Since then, Kakheti was an organic part of the United Kingdom of Georgia and actively participated in its socioeconomic political and cultural life. This continued until the Georgian state collapsed as a result of external aggression and complex processes that occurred in the country later. In the 15th century, the Kingdom of Kakheti was again restored.

In the late Middle Ages, the first king of the Kingdom of Kakheti was Giorgi I (1466-1476). He sat on the royal throne of united Georgia, but he was unable to preserve the integrity of the country and he had to be content only with Kakheti. According to Vakhushti Batonishvili, Giorgi “conquered all of Kakheti... he wiped out the name of Hereti”.⁶⁷ The latter (like Sujeti and Kukheti) is now only a geographical concept.

Under the terms of the Amasya Treaty signed between Iran and the Ottoman Empire in 1555, Iran “inherited” the kingdoms of Kartli and Kakheti and the eastern part of Samtskhe-Saatabago (Mtkvari / Kura river basin). While the war with the Ottomans was going on, Iran was content with the relatively light vassalage of Kakheti, but after the mentioned truce, it took away the Tsuketi (dominion of Tsakhuri) of the Kingdom of Kakheti.⁶⁸ It was a heavy failure; the territory was confiscated and turned into a unit directly dependent on the Shah of Iran.⁶⁹ From that time, the eastern lands of Kakheti were threatened by the raids of the Dagestani people. The tendency to narrow the concept of “Kakheti” begins, which deepened even more at the beginning of the 17th century.

In 1603, the Iranian Shah Abbas I (1587–1629) besieged the fortress of Yerevan and summoned King George X (1600–1605) of Kartli and King Alexander II (1574–1605) of Kakheti to fight the Ottomans. The Georgian army took an active part in the capture of the Yerevan fortress (1604). The satisfied ruler of Iran generously rewarded the Georgian kings, but he also implemented his cunning plan: he gave the villages in Iran to King George and appointed a salary of 300 tumans in return, the province of Lore and the valley of the

⁶⁶ Life of the King of Kings David, Kartlis Cxovreba. ed. R. Metreveli, Tb., 2008, p. 311 (in Georgian).

⁶⁷ Idem, Description of the Kingdom of Georgia, pp. 567–568.

⁶⁸ Essays on the history of Georgia. T. IV, Vol., 1973, p. 119 (in Georgian).

⁶⁹ N. Berdzhenishvili. Issues of Georgian history, III, chapter, 1966, p. 263 (in Georgian).

Debeda River were lured out (the shah created a khanate in Lore, and settled the Turkmen tribe of “borchalu” in the Debeda valley); Abbas I assigned a salary of 700 tumans to the king of Kakheti Alexander; in return, he demanded the province of Kak-Eniseli (Saingilo), where he then established a Muslim sultanate. He appointed a Muslemized Kakhetian prince there as a ruler, who was directly subordinate to the Shah of Iran. With this cunning move, Abbas I destroyed the boundaries of Kartli in the south and Kakheti in the east.

This was not enough for the ruler of Iran, who had the intention to destroy Kartli and Kakheti; therefore he repeatedly invaded Kakheti in 1614-1617. Many villages and towns of that time were never rebuilt. The Iranian historian of the 16th -17th centuries, Iskander Munshi, in his work “The History of Shah Abbas the Great” notes: “Such a country (Kakheti - V.V.), which annually provided countless benefits and incomes, was destroyed and wiped off the face of the earth.”⁷⁰ Kakheti lost two-thirds of its population - up to one hundred thousand people were killed by the enemy, and up to two hundred thousand people were exiled to the interior provinces of Iran.⁷¹ It was decided to settle the Turkmen people in the depopulated Kakheti region.⁷²

By order of Shah Abbas II (1642-1666), 15 thousand Turkmen families resettled in the lands of Shida (inner) and Gare (outer) Kakheti. About 80,000 Turkmens were resettled in the Kakheti plain. Naturally, “the Eli people intended to dominate the Georgians and a dispute and a fight arose between these two peoples.”⁷³

The way of life of the resettled nomads threatened the population of Kakheti with complete degeneration: the cultivated agriculture of the plains was threatened with extinction, and the inhabitants of the mountains, who lived off the harvest of the plains and winter pastures, would starve to death. The great challenge was the general uprising of 1659. As can be seen from the source, Kakhetians, faced with the choice of life and death and fed up with the arrogance of the Turkmens,

⁷⁰ V. Puturidze, ed., Information about Georgia in Iskander Munshi’s work, Tbilisi, 1969, pg.109(in Georgian)

⁷¹ Essays on the history of Georgia. Vol. IV, pp. 272–273.

⁷² *ibid*, p.272

⁷³ V. Puturidze. Mohammad Taher's information about Georgia, materials for the history of Georgia and the Caucasus, 30, Vol., 1954, p. 394 (in Georgian)

didn't spare anyone. The few who escaped the sword fled.⁷⁴

At the end of the 17th century and the first quarter of the 18th century, the situation in Kakheti worsened even more. The settlements of the Kakhetians, located beyond the river Alazani, gradually grew due to new immigrant flows from Dagestan. At the beginning of the 18th century, the so-called "Free communities" of Chari, Belakani and Tala grew significantly stronger. They partially managed to lure away the Kahelian peasants and made them change their ethnic orientation in favour of Leks, which was seen by the peasantry tired of serfdom, as an opportunity for gaining freedom. The resettled Leks and Kakhetian peasants, who changed their ethnic orientation, expelled most of the nobles living here to the other side of Alazani; however, soon the Leks subjugated and taxed the Georgian villages.⁷⁵

In 1727, the Ottoman sultan finally approved the seized land to the Charian Leks with a special firman. Thus, in the eastern part of Kakheti (Saingilo), the state of the Char-Belakan Agalars was formed, which soon subordinated the Sultanate of Elis. Since then, the eastern border of Kakheti has moved from the Qapu-Chai River to the west, to the Gavazistskali River.⁷⁶

In 1744, with the consent of the Iranian Shah Nadir (1736–1747), Teimuraz II (1744–1762) occupied the royal throne of Kartli, and his son Erekle II (1744–1762) took the throne of Kakheti. The latter, after the death of his father, became the king of the united Kartli and Kakheti (died January 11, 1798). The enthronement of a Christian father and son was a great success, given that the country had been ruled by Muslim rulers for more than a century.

The kings of Kartli and Kakheti were well aware that if the Char-Belakani problem was not resolved, "Lekianoba"⁷⁷/Lekianism threatened entire Eastern Georgia, especially Kakheti, with the destruction.

They relentlessly tried to curb the Lek raids and strengthen their position in the eastern part of the South Caucasus. In these constant

⁷⁴ Beri Egnatashvili. Life of New Kartli, Tb. II, Vol., 1959, p. 438. (in Georgian)

⁷⁵ Essays on the history of Georgia. Vol. IV, p.427. (in Georgian)

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 428.

⁷⁷ Lekianoba (Georgian: ლეკიანობა) was the name given to sporadic forays by Daghestani people into Georgia from the 16th to the 19th centuries.

wars, there were both failures and successes, but without joining the opposite side of Kakheti, the eradication of Lekianism was impossible. This led to the depopulation of the right riverside of Alazani. Constant raids of Char-Belakanis and Dagestanis did not allow firm settlement in this area. For the retention of the population and the revival of intensive agriculture, it was necessary to have lasting peace and pursue a stable, purposeful state policy. Erekle II tried to achieve this, but his goals were hampered by the conflict of interests of the three great states, Russia, Iran and Ottomans in the South Caucasus. In determining the foreign policy course, the royal court of Kartli and Kakheti gave preference to Russia of the same faith. The “Treaty of Friendship signed in Georgievsk Fortress on July 24, 1783, was a hope for Erekle II to preserve the kingdom (although the king’s sovereignty in the field of foreign policy was limited), to protect it from Iranian-Ottoman aggression and constant raids of Char-Belakanis and Dagestanis; for the Russian authorities, this was a condition for the expansion of the empire. Indeed, on December 18, 1800, the Russian Emperor Paul I (1796-1801) signed a manifesto on the abolition of the Kartli and Kakheti Kingdom and its annexation to the Russian Empire.

The document signed by Paul I was finally confirmed by the manifesto of the new Emperor Alexander I (1801–1825) on September 12, 1801. Already in the former Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti, Russian power was established. Naturally, the appetite of the Russian Empire was not satisfied with this, and it gradually began to conquer both the Georgian Kingdom-Samtavros and other peoples of the Caucasus and bring them within the borders of its own state. When dividing the newly annexed territories into administrative units, Russia was guided by its imperial intentions and ignored both the interests of the local population and the principle of historical justice. At the same time, it had the power to manage migration processes, through which, at its own will, it artificially changed the ethnic composition of this or that region, using it as a tool of its domination.

In 1803, the Russian army raided Char-Belakan; in 1830 it finally conquered it and introduced Russian rule there. According to the administrative division of Tsarist Russia, Char-Belakan was a “tributary country of Georgia” in 1803-1830 and a part of Georgia in

1832-1845; in 1844-1860 it was a military district and from 1860 to 1917 the Zakatala district.⁷⁸ According to this division, Char-Belakan (including the Sultanate of Elis) embraced the territory between the rivers Qhani-Qhob and Gavazistskali. It was bordered by the Alazani River to the southwest, the Agri-Chai River to the southeast, and in the north - Khorav mountain range, located beyond the Caucasus. Six villages of the upper reaches of the Samur River (part of the present-day Rutul district of the Republic of Dagestan), the so-called Tsakhur Mahal⁷⁹, were part of the Elis Sultanate. In 1860, "Tsakhur Mahal" was removed from Char-Belakan military district. From then on, the northern border of Zakatala district passed along the Caucasus ridge.⁸⁰ According to the administrative division, Zakatala District was included in Tbilisi Governorate.

The events of February 1917 caused unrest in the Russian Empire (including the Caucasus). Before Georgia's independence was declared, the district was taken over by Azerbaijan.⁸¹

On May 26, 1918, the independence of the Georgian state was restored. The question of establishing a border with Azerbaijan immediately arose. The Azerbaijani side demanded to resolve the issue on a religious basis, therefore the Zakatala Oblast (Saingilo), Borchalo uyezd⁸², Akhaltsikhe uyezd and Batumi Oblast should belong to Azerbaijan. This unprecedented and groundless principle of demarcation between states was unacceptable from the very beginning. The Government of Georgia decided to follow the historical, political, economic and strategic issues. On June 11, 1918, a commission was created (I. Tsereteli, D. Oniashvili, P. Ingoroqva, N. Odishelidze). According to its decision, "Georgia's state border runs from the south along the Lesser Caucasus, goes to the southern border of Borchalo uyezd, and goes to the northern shore of Gogcha Lake, extends to the northern shore of Lake Gogcha, turns to the Akstafa river, goes to

⁷⁸ Z. Edili. Saingilo, Tbilisi, 1947, p. 4 (in Georgian).

⁷⁹ free society, a kind of micro republic

⁸⁰ M. Dumbadze. From the history of Eastern Kakheti (Saingilo), Tbilisi, 1953, pp.5-6. (in Georgian).

⁸¹ N. Mirianashvili. Territorial changes of Georgia with Transcaucasian republics 1918-1938. Tb., 2012, p. 69 (in Georgian).

⁸² Uyezd-administrative-territorial division

Dzegami station, embraces Saingilo and ends at Silavati mountain.⁸³

Thus, Georgia and Azerbaijan expressed their respective positions, although in reality the jurisdiction of the Azerbaijani government extended to Saingilo and Azerbaijani military units were stationed there. The Georgian government hoped to solve the existing problem peacefully, especially against the background of the fact that the issue of dividing the border with Armenia got extremely tense and escalated into a war, and part of the country's territory was still occupied by the Turks.

On April 27, 1920, the Red Army entered Azerbaijan and established Soviet power there.

After the Sovietization of Azerbaijan, the units of the 11th Army moved towards Georgia. After the first clashes, the Georgian army went on the offensive and successful combat activities moved to the territory of Azerbaijan. On May 19, 1920, the decisive attack was supposed to begin, but the day before, General G. Kvinitadze received a telegram from the chairman of the government. According to the order of N. Jordania, the commander had to stop hostilities and start peace negotiations with the enemy.⁸⁴

It is quite obvious that this decision of the Georgian government was dictated by Russia, where on May 7, 1920, an agreement was signed between Georgia and Russia on secret terms. Russia recognized the state independence of Georgia; at the same time, according to the mentioned agreement, all the uyezds and oblasts of Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Batumi, as well as the Zakatala and Sukhumi Oblasts were recognized as "undisputed constituent parts" of the Republic of Georgia (§ 4). The authorities of Soviet Azerbaijan sent a telegram to Moscow and expressed dissatisfaction with this decision. Soviet Russia immediately changed its position in favour of the Baku Bolsheviks. According to an additional agreement between Georgia and Russia dated May 12, the issue of the Zakatala Oblast was to be decided by a mixed commission, which would include an equal number of representatives of Georgia and Azerbaijan. Russia headed the commission. Before the decisions of the commission, the parties did not have the right to introduce a

⁸³ V. Nozadze. The struggle for Meskheta for the restoration of Georgia Tb. 1989, p. 14 (in Georgian).

⁸⁴ Idem, Territorial changes of Georgia with Transcaucasian republics 1918-1938. Tb., 2012, pp. 78–82 (in Georgian).

new contingent of troops into the Zakatala Oblast, i.e. more than it was on May 12. At that time, only units of the 11th Army were there. Thus, the Georgian army had to leave their positions.

Undoubtedly, the mentioned supplementary agreement was unfavourable for Georgia. "Everything was planned in advance. If the commission discussed the issue and it came to a vote, the position of the Russian representative would be decisive. He would, of course, support the Bolsheviks, and thus the problem would be solved to the detriment of Georgia."⁸⁵ Here the government of Georgia failed to show principles and foresight.

On June 12, 1920, a treaty was signed between the Republic of Georgia and Soviet Azerbaijan in Akstafa. Regarding the territory of our interest, an agreement was reached, according to which the issue of Zakatala Oblast should be transferred to the arbitration commission, which was provided for by the aforementioned supplementary agreement between Russia and Georgia. Of course, they did not forget that neither side was supposed to send additional troops into the disputed region.

On June 9 of the same year, an uprising began in Saingilo. Residents occupied the district centre, formed a government and appealed to the Georgian authorities with a call to annex the district. Additional units of the 11th Army were sent to suppress the rebellion. Georgians were treated with particular cruelty.

The defeated population, among which, along with the Georgians, were Leks and Azerbaijanis, took refuge in the Signaghi Uyezd. By June 18, the uprising was crushed. The Georgian government responded to the introduction of additional troops into the district with only a note of protest.

In late 1920 - early 1921, the 16th Cavalry Division of the 11th Army, and units of the 58th and 20th Rifle Divisions were additionally transferred to the Zakatala region. On February 15, 1921, the 11th Army launched an offensive from Akstafa-Foilo, and on February 17-18 crossed the river Mazim-Chai and invaded Lagodekhi⁸⁶. Russia again annexed Georgia. The Sovietization of Georgia took place on February 25, 1921.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 85.

⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 97.

The historical territory, protected by the blood of our ancestors for thousands of years, has faced a new, unprecedentedly difficult challenge. For the Bolsheviks, the borders between the Soviet republics no longer had any state significance. After that, it was not about the state borders, but about the lands of actual ownership. Against this background, the Georgian Bolsheviks were particularly active. In the territorial dispute between Azerbaijan and Georgia, it was clear from the very beginning that the authorities of Soviet Russia, and especially its leaders of Georgian origin, were on the side of their Azerbaijani “comrades”. Ordzhonikidze’s declaration that “oil-producing Azerbaijan is “a hundred times more important than Georgia.” during the mentioned events of May 1920 is indisputable proof of the above position.⁸⁷

On July 5, 1921, a conference of representatives of the Soviet Socialist Republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan was held in Tbilisi, which adopted the following resolution:

“1. The political borders between the Azerbaijan SSR and the Georgian SSR remain unchanged, as long as they are not specifically mentioned in the following articles.

2. The conference between Georgia and Azerbaijan on the issue of the Karayazi Valley stated: a) Full exclusive ownership and use by the peasants of the Kazakh uyezd of the Karayazi Valley, approximately within the following limits, and the existing state border between the Azerbaijan SSR and the Georgian SSR shall be protected: the border of actual ownership begins From the Red Bridge over the Khrami River and goes to the station Beukkiasik, including it, goes to mountain Kirishli, passes to mountain Keshish-Gzoi, then descends to the southeast and runs the Shikhli-Karavan-Kais pass, crosses the main road, turns to the north, climbs to Lebsizin-Dag, crosses the Aramdar gorge and bypassing Kutan goes to mountain Kalagiri and then up to the Iori river, passes by to the border of Kesaman, then follows the state border.

Note: The determination of the exact border of the Kazakh peasants’ property is entrusted to a special mixed commission, which

⁸⁷ G. Cheishvili. «For not to mislead and not to be misled”, Matsne” Series of History, Archeology, Ethnology and Art History, 2019, #2, p. 138 (in Russian).

will begin work two weeks after the signing of this agreement.

b) Kazakh uyezd peasants, who are the actual owners and users of this field, in all cases enjoy the Constitution of the Azerbaijan SSR and are subordinate to the Kazakh uyezd Executive Committee.

3. In connection with the Eldar Valley, the Conference establishes: instruct the Joint Commission, referred to in Article 2, to establish and confirm on the spot the actual ownership of this Valley.

4. Concerning the Zakatala region, the Conference determined: The Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic renounces all its claims within the state borders of the Zakatala region, about which the Revolutionary Committee of Georgia will issue an appropriate statement.

5. The peasants of both sides must be provided with the use of pastures, grasslands for transhumance and other amenities that they really use, without objections.⁸⁸

It is difficult to find suitable words to describe how the government of Georgia transferred the Zakatala region, an indigenous Georgian land, to the Azerbaijani SSR. The Georgian Bolsheviks were not satisfied with this and made disputable certain sections of the border forests and pastures: Chiauri forest massif, Shiraki valley at the Alazani basin, winter pastures of Eldar-Samukh and Gareji, border line from Davit Gareji complex to Kura river.

Mixed commissions were created, their sessions were held, they found out who was the actual owner and user of that or another territory, etc.⁸⁹ It should be noted that the Azerbaijani side skilfully manoeuvred the economic interests of its “working masses” with the statements of the above-mentioned agreement and in many cases achieved success.

In 1936, the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic was dissolved. Its constituent republics independently joined the Soviet Union. It was necessary to determine the boundaries between these republics. To this end, on March 5, 1938, an inter-republican conference of representatives of the CEC of the SSR of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Council of People's Commissars of

⁸⁸ Z. Abashidze, V. Vashakidze, N. Mirianashvili, G. Cheishvili. All Georgia (Historical borders of the Georgian state from ancient times to the present day), Tb., 2014, pp. 148–149.

⁸⁹ Idem. Territorial changes of Georgia with Transcaucasian republics 1918-1938. Tb., 2012, pp. 146–206.

Agriculture was held in Tbilisi. On March 23, 1938, the decision taken here was considered by the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Georgian SSR. It was determined: "Approve the administrative borders of the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan, according to the attached map at a scale of 1: 500,000, witnessed by the participants of the meeting, taking into account the elimination of graphic (technical) inaccuracies made in the designation of boundaries."⁹⁰

Thus, from 1921 to 1936, the Bolshevik government of Georgia transferred only to Azerbaijan 3,627 km² of indigenous Georgian lands.⁹¹

After the restoration of Georgia's independence, the question of solving the problem of the border with Azerbaijan was once again raised. We hope that all border problems, no matter how complex they may be, will be solved in a way that suits friendly and partner countries. The solution of this issue is a necessary task since the history of mankind has shown that the establishment of a clear border between countries and its observance is an indispensable condition for good neighbourliness and peace. Iv. Javakhishvili writes: "The Georgian people and their government are obliged to their descendants and history to pay due attention to the establishment of state boundaries and stand as a sober guard over them. This will not destroy either brotherhood or good neighbourliness with those who think about brotherhood and friendship, and will save the Georgian people from any impending danger."⁹²

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 207.

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 213; Idem, *All Georgia (Historical borders of the Georgian state from ancient times to the present day)*, p.153.

⁹² Iv. Javakhishvili. *Borders of Georgia*, Tb., 1919, p. 51 (in Georgian).

CHAPTER II

ECONOMIC LIFE AND TRADITIONAL CULTURE

§ 1. New Settlements

The Kakheti section of the Georgian-Azerbaijani state border in the Soviet period as in the case of other republics, was conditional, which sometimes caused misunderstandings. For example, in the Signaghi region, it passed along the Alazani River. In the 1970s, since this river changed its course several times, a large territory ended up on the side of Azerbaijan.

We conducted a field ethnographic study in the villages of the Kabali community of the Lagodekhi municipality populated by Azerbaijanis: Kabali, Karadzhal, Uzuntala, Ganjala and in the villages inhabited by Georgians of the Matsimi community: Matsimi, Rachisubani, Giorgeti; in the villages inhabited by Azerbaijanis: Mughanlo, Kesalo, Lambalo, Tulari, Kazlari and the Georgian village Udabno in the Iormughanlo area of the Sagarejo Municipality; in the places of residence of Georgians in the Signakhi municipality: the village of Erisimedi of the Jugaani community, the village of Iliatsminda of the Bodbe community and the town of Tsnori; the villages of the Dedoplistskaro municipality Samtatskaro, Pirosmari and Sabatlo (populated by Armenians). It is noteworthy that most of these villages were settled relatively late, so the ethnographic material is correspondingly not as rich. Due to their specificity, border settlements require special attention from government agencies; the local population is well aware of this and with this in mind, the local respondents were candid during the interviews with us and boldly spoke about their problems. In addition, the region under study is very interesting and relevant from a scientific point of view due to its multiculturalism and multiethnic composition.

The historical events that took place in the period of the late Middle Ages had a painful impact on the demographic situation of the Kakheti region, bordering on present-day Azerbaijan. The population, reduced by the destructive campaigns of Iran, could no longer cope with the constant raids of the Dagestanis, and the political leaders of the country could no longer control the situation. These raids

accelerated the migration of the Georgian population of this area and the devastation of the villages. So, in the 1770s, when the German explorer I. Guldenshtedt visited those places, the last inhabited villages in the east of Kakheti were Gavazi and Chikaani, and on the opposite side, in the Chari village of Belakani, only the narrative about the Georgians' settlement in that area was preserved. The people of Chikaani and Ghavazi were accustomed to the raids of Leks and were forced to use the same methods.⁹³

A similar situation was encountered by a German scholar further south, in the villages of Kiziki. The local population had fields and pastures 10-12 miles away from the villages. Leks often stole their cattle and captured people⁹⁴ The depopulated Georgian villages on the other side of the Alazani River were gradually covered with forest and thickets. In the first half of the 19th century, when Jacques Francois Gamba visited the place, there were lots of remains of Georgian settlements in the territory up to Belakani.⁹⁵ Part of the lands was cultivated by the Kakhetians, who seasonally came from Kiziki and Gurjaani. They sowed grain, harvested it in autumn and returned. At the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, Dagestanis settled in several villages in the vicinity of Lagodekhi and Kvareli. Part of them, which used the winter pastures of Kakheti and paid for that, began to bring their families, took possession of household plots and established temporary settlements.⁹⁶

The Russian Empire, which dominated Georgia, took over the management of ethno-migration processes and acted in line with its colonial interests. The government tried to create the desired situation in Georgia through migration processes. On October 22, 1819, for this purpose, a special provision was adopted, paragraph three of which provided several benefits to the resettled colonists.⁹⁷ As a result, the number of non-Georgian groups (Russians, Armenians, Germans, etc.) in the region gradually increased.⁹⁸

⁹³ Guldenshtedt's trip to Georgia, vol. I Tb., 1962, pp. 29,31

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 27

⁹⁵ Jacques Francois Gamba, Journey to the Caucasus, vol. II, Tbilisi, 2021. p. 50

⁹⁶ N. Omarashvili, Dagestanis living in Kakheti (history, life and culture of immigrants). Tb. 2008, pp. 83-85, 131

⁹⁷ National Archives of Georgia, sheet 2, case 2869. 94.

⁹⁸ V. Jaoshvili population of Georgia in XVIII-XIX centuries. Tb., 1984, p. 85.

Russian officials began to especially look for free land for fellow colonists in Kakheti. At that time, the government assumed a settlement of about 100 thousand people. Emigrants were given a significant amount of land, both for ownership and for rent; for two years they paid no rent or other taxes, and for the next three years they had to pay only half the taxes; men were exempted from military service for 2 years; They enjoyed privileges in trade and industry, in the purchase of tools for cultivating the land, while travelling, etc.⁹⁹ Gaghmamkhari (the left bank of the Alazani River), Lagodekhi, where the Russian army was located in the 19th century, became a place of settlement for retired soldiers, participants in various uprisings and persons undesirable for the Empire. Thus, Russians and Poles ended up in this region; Their descendants lived here mainly until the 1990s when the socio-economic conditions deteriorated sharply. Though in the 1870s, the population from some villages of Kakheti (for example, Bodbiskhevi) moved here, Russians still made up the majority of Lagodekhi and its environs in the 1880s.¹⁰⁰

After Russian dominance in the South Caucasus and the elimination of the danger of Lek and Iranian raids, the fertile lands of Kakheti, bordering on present-day Azerbaijan, were turned into pastures and became attractive to the population of Georgia and the South Caucasus. At the beginning of the 20th century, the mountain population of Eastern Georgia, who used the pastures of Shiraki and the Alazani riverside freely before the rule of Russia began to settle in the Shiraki region. They used these places as winter pastures since ancient times, and when peace came, the fertile lands attracted them, for habitation. At first, the mountain shepherds used the part allotted to them pastures for crops and carried harvest in the mountains. Later,

⁹⁹ D. Chumburidze Russian settlements in Georgia (19th-20th centuries) and "Transcaucasia department of the Migration Department". A. Bendianishvili, A. Daushvili, M. Samsonadze, D. Chumburidze, Kh. Kokrashvili, O. Janelidze, in the book Russian colonialism in Georgia (referred to from the book The traditional economic environment of the Georgian village and the prospects for its development (historical and ethnological study of the Kakheti region)," Tbilisi. 2018, p. 37 (in Georgian).

¹⁰⁰ K. Digmelashvili, D. Kvavadze, Historical Monuments of the Lagodekhi Municipality. Tb. 2021, p. 16 (in Georgian).

some people started to build dugouts and bring their families.¹⁰¹

In 1862, to prevent the access of Georgian highlanders, the Russian government imposed taxes on the use of the Shiraki pastures, as it was planned to resettle people from Russian provinces here; In 1904-1905, the government had already patently limited the resettlement of Georgians in Shiraki and tried to return the already established highlanders to the mountains, which at that time was opposed by a part of Georgian society.¹⁰² At the same time, the families who migrated from the villages of Western Georgia and Kakheti began to exploit the lands surrounding Lagodekhi. So, already in 1912, Georgian schools were established here.¹⁰³

According to written sources and field data in the Georgian villages of the region, the population moved at the beginning of the 20th century from different parts of Georgia: Upper Imereti, Racha, the mountainous part of Eastern Georgia and neighbouring Kiziki. This process continued in the Soviet period on a relatively small scale. In the 1930s, Georgian (Ingilos) migrants from the village of Qhoraghani (Azerbaijan, Kakhi district) founded the village of New Qhoraghani. Later this village was called Samtatskaro.¹⁰⁴ In the 1980s, a large-scale movement of eco-migrants began, and it more or less changed the ethnodemographic situation in certain areas of Eastern Georgia.¹⁰⁵

The ancestors of the Turkic-speaking population (today's Azerbaijanis) mainly settled in the region in the 19th century. According to G ldenstedt, by the second half of the 18th century, the population of Turkic origin in Kakheti was sparse. In the 1750s, King Erekle II resettled them from the Mugan Valley in the vicinity of Batoni Castle, north of Telavi. During this period, there were villages of "Turkmen Tatars": Karadzhal, Muganlo, Kafanakhchi and Kizilaadzhi. At

¹⁰¹ R. Topchishvili, Cultural and historical issues of migration of the mountain population of Eastern Georgia (on the example of Pshavi and Khevsureti) pp. 53-55 (in Russian)

¹⁰² *ibid.* p.55

¹⁰³ *Idem.* Hi historical monuments of Lagodekhi municipality. p. 16

¹⁰⁴ Socio-cultural Aspects of social development planning (Tsitelskaro district). Ed M. Gegeshidze, Tb. 1979, p.49 (in Georgian)

¹⁰⁵ T. Trier, M. Turashvili, Resettlement of Ecologically Displaced Persons Solution of a Problem or Creation of a New? Eco-Migration in Georgia 1981-2006, ECMI 2007, p.5.

that time, 250 families of “Turkmen Tatars” lived in Kakheti, and preserved their religion, traditions and customs.¹⁰⁶ They led nomadic cattle breeding, therefore, in search of new pastures, they gradually moved to other places in Kakheti; in particular, in the 19th century, they created compact settlements in the current municipalities of Lagodekhi (Kabali community) and Sagarejo (in the vicinity of Mughanlo).

Nomadic herders used the land near Alazani as winter pastures. According to the resident from the village of Kabali: “Here is a good dewy place, there are fertile lands and cattle are easy to keep. At first, they came seasonally, and once when they were convinced that it would be easy to endure the winter here and feed the cattle in summer, the Kabali River was also near and they would not worry about water all year round, they decided to settle in these places. They resettled from the Telavi region, Gardabani (Karaizai), and also came from the territory of today’s Azerbaijan (Shirvan Valley)”.

The population of Turkmen origin also settled in the vicinity of Iormuganlo (Sagarejo municipality). Azerbaijanis living here call this place “Kara Chof” (black bush, black thicket), and call themselves the people of Karachof. Their ancestors, like those from the village of Kabali, were pastoralists from different parts of Georgia and today’s Azerbaijan.

The village of Sabatlo, populated mainly by Armenians, is located in the municipality of Dedoplistskaro, on the border with Azerbaijan.¹⁰⁷ There is evidence in the scientific literature, according to which the Armenians fled from the Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes of 1918 from Azerbaijan (Nukh region) and the name Sabatlo comes from the village of the same name, located in the vicinity of Nukh. Later, a part of the population also came from other areas. In Soviet times, this village was called Red Sabatlo.¹⁰⁸

Since the 1930s, the process of resettlement of the population in the studied region was stopped, as arbitrary resettlement was forbidden during the Soviet period. The government had full control over both group and individual migration through the passport system (institution of registration). In the 1980s, on the lands bordering Azerbaijan, on

¹⁰⁶ Idem. Guldenshtedt's trip to Georgia, p. 39

¹⁰⁷ Idem. Socio-cultural aspects of social development planning, p. 50.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

the initiative of the secretaries of the Communist Party of Sagarejo (M. Mezvrishvili) and Signaghi (T. Kevkhishvili) districts, the villages of Erisemid, Pirosmeni and Udabno were founded. Initially, migrants from Kakheti's different regions were supposed to resettle in Erisimedi, however, at the end of the 1980s, disaster victims after natural disasters that occurred in Georgia (Adjara and Svaneti) at that time were settled there. Erisimedi was inhabited mostly by Adjarian eco-migrants. Several families moved here from the villages of Kakheti. Upon arrival, Adjarian ecomigrants were met by 13 families. Among them is one Ingilo family from Kakhi; Several Kist families moved from Duisi: They used to work on livestock farms, and then, when the settlement was formed, they brought their families and got houses.

In the 1980s, Adjarian eco-migrants settled also in the village of Pirosmeni in the municipality of Dedoplistskaro on the border lands with Azerbaijan. Eco-migrants from Svaneti settled mainly in the village of Udabno, in the municipality of Sagarejo.

Thus, the formation of new settlements in the research area began in the 19th century. After the influence of the Russian Empire spread to the North Caucasus Mountains, the threat of their raids on the fertile lands of the Alazani Plain and the Iori Plateau was also removed. Gradually, a surplus population settled here from Imereti, Racha, Saingilo, and the mountains of Eastern Georgia, as well as Turkmen (now Azerbaijani) herdsmen and Armenians. Georgian public figures actively participated in the resettlement of ethnic Georgians. Later, in the 1980s, on the initiative of patriotic-minded statesmen, several villages were founded, where mainly eco-migrants from Adjara and Svaneti settled.

§ 2. Economic Life

Traditionally, the main source of income for the population of the villages bordering Azerbaijan in the Kakheti region is agriculture and cattle breeding. As mentioned above, due to historical conditions, the area under study was mainly used as a pasture until the middle of the 19th century. In connection with the emergence of new settlements,

the area of fields gradually increased due to the reduction of forests and pastures. Crops were sown. Maize was more popular among the population that migrated from western Georgia to the Lagodekhi region, although they also grew wheat, barley, oats, rye, beans, etc. Viticulture and winemaking occupied an important place. Chernozem and sandy soils were considered the best for grain and vineyards.¹⁰⁹ Since the fields of the region under study have long been used almost entirely as pastures, their fertility has greatly increased, and the cultivation of both grain and other crops became very favourable here.

Under the conditions of collectivization, separate branches of agriculture were purposefully introduced, agrotechnical measures were regularly carried out, and the reclamation system was developed and systematically used. New high-yielding sorts of grain recommended by the Ministry of Agriculture of the USSR were introduced. They had distinctive genetic features: they were frost-resistant, more resistant to pests, they were prolific and less “capricious”. In the 1970s and 1980s, such varieties were: “Upkho I”, “Aurora”, and “Kavkaz”.¹¹⁰ It was easier to introduce these varieties in the newly created settlements, because the population, who moved from Western Georgia or other regions, was less familiar with local varieties of grain, traditional ways of growing it, and tools. Therefore, the process of mechanization, the introduction of new plant varieties bred by the new selection, and the unification of agricultural sectors were relatively painless. All this has significantly increased arable farming revenues.

A particularly important agricultural sector for Kakheti was viticulture and winemaking, which already had outstanding economic efficiency in the 1830s, as half of the wine produced here went to the market.¹¹¹ Based on historical specifics, the share of viticulture in the

¹⁰⁹ L., Beriashvili, The tradition of soil utilization and protection in Georgia, Tb., 1989, p. 128 (in Georgian)

¹¹⁰ A. Daushvili, Agriculture in Kakheti during the crisis of the Russian model of socialism. In the book, the traditional agriculture in the Georgian village and the perspectives of its development (historical-ethnological research of the Kakheti region). Tb. 2018 p. 193 (In Georgian)

¹¹¹ A. Bendianishvili, Russia's colonial economic policy and agricultural specialization of Georgia. In book: A. Bendianishvili, A. Daushvili, M. Samsonadze, D. Chumburidze, Kh. Kokrashvili, O. Janelidze, Russian colonialism in Georgia, Tb., 2008, p. 229 (in Georgian)

agriculture of the zone bordering Azerbaijan was small. We can say that here this branch of agriculture, unlike other villages of Kakheti, is currently less effective. True, wine is consumed almost everywhere and income from viticulture plays a certain role in the family economy, but in some villages (the village of Udabno, the Iormuganlo region, etc.), the natural conditions for viticulture are unfavourable, and in some places, vineyards are replaced by more profitable crops. For example, in the village of Samtatskaro (Dedoflistskaro municipality), with the help of the state and the agricultural sector, walnut orchards were grown in a large area. Probably, this kind of situation led to the fact that the majority of those who moved to the settlements under study in the last century came from the agricultural zones of Georgia, where viticulture did not have great traditions. Individual family farms are focused on beekeeping. For beekeeping favourable are: Kiziki, Samtatskaro, Erisimedi in the Signaghi municipality, the villages of Lagodekhi municipality at the edge of Alazani River; here spring comes early and various plants bloom, there are also sunflower and leguminous crops: clover, alfalfa, etc. Here, bees develop early and also collect May honey.¹¹²

Due to the agro-ecological and landscape features of Kakheti, the population of Turkmen origin that settled here had to adapt to local ecological and economic conditions. In this regard, the situation between the Kabali community of the Lagodekhi municipality and the Iormuganlo community of the Sagarejo municipality is completely different. The lifestyle of nomads and the forms of buildings and settlements were conditioned by the principles of traditional, nomadic life. Simple tents were relatively convenient for nomads.¹¹³ Sturdy, solidly built agricultural and residential buildings were incompatible with this way of life. In Georgia, nomad Eli people eventually adapted to the local agricultural ecological environment and, accordingly, adopted the local type of housing.

¹¹² N. Jalabadze, Animal husbandry. In the book, the traditional agriculture in the Georgian village and the perspectives of its development (historical-ethnological research of the Kakheti region). Tb. 2018 p. 600-614 (In Georgian)

¹¹³ A. Jenkinson. Diary of a trip to Central Asia"(1558 to 1560). // English travellers in the Muscovite state in the 16th century / transl. from English. Yu. V. Gauthier. L., 1937, pp. 169-170, 178.

Traditional dugout "Karadam" (black house) was common among Azerbaijanis. It is a complex building, where several storage rooms are located under one roof. Among them, is a stable for livestock. The roof of Karadam was a stepped pyramid, supported by four large wooden poles. Air and light entered the Karadam through a hole in the dome, from where the smoke from the hearth came out. Karadam was almost invisible from the outside and looked more like a barn with a narrow dark corridor. The furniture and utensils of such a building were very simple. There were wooden boxes for agricultural products, as well as chests and long wooden beds. There were goatskin bags for storing flour and a pit for wheat. A kerosene lamp or a torch (kara chirak) was used to illuminate the room. The floor was partially covered with carpets and rugs. During the Soviet period, the structure of the settlement and residential buildings changed radically. Dugouts were replaced by one- and two-story stone buildings. Trading, educational and cultural institutions appeared in the centre of the settlements. In the centre of a typical Azerbaijani village of the 20th century, there was a place where the male population gathered to relax and discuss everyday problems; there was a spring with a small pond, from which the village got drinking water and watered the cattle. Azerbaijani settlements were mainly located along the banks of rivers and irrigation canals. Separate yards, gardens, and residential and outbuildings were characterized by the absence of a specific layout.

The peculiarity of farming and everyday life is well reflected in the structure of villages and the residential complex. At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, in the village centres, the construction of mosques began in several places. Some of the traditional features of the buildings have been preserved, in particular, the houses face the road with a blank wall, and the facade faces the courtyard. Yards are relatively small and located close to each other.

In Georgia, in contrast to the countries of the Middle East, the necessary base for nomadic extensive farming was less. Therefore, they began to gradually switch to local traditional symbiotic farming. The main branch of the economy in the mountains of Kakheti was cattle breeding, it formed the basis of the economic well-being of the local population. In summer, herds of Kakhetian lowland shepherds

were scattered on the slopes of the Caucasus Mountains, and in winter, shepherds from Tusheti and Pshavi spent winter in the Shiraki Steppe.¹¹⁴ Pastoralists of the Turkic origin of the region under study were also involved in this traditional system of transhuman animal husbandry. It is worth noting that in the 1930s, in the conditions of mass collectivization, the livestock of Azerbaijani villages of Sagarejo, in the vicinity of Iormuganlo, was collected into public farms, and livestock breeding, mainly sheep breeding, remained the leading branch. In the 1990s, the flocks of sheep were transferred to private ownership, and the local population is still engaged in cattle breeding. Gourds and other crops take up a small share of family farms. private activities (mainly trade), public service (for example, employment in the village council) and work as a day labourer are also sources of income. They consider the social benefits provided by the state to those with many children to be very important because there are quite a lot of such families among Azerbaijanis.

Due to the lack of pastures, especially summer pastures, flocks of sheep from Iormuganlo graze in the summer in neighbouring municipalities (Signaghi, Dedoplistskaro), as well as relatively far away, in Truso (Kazbegi municipality), Trialeti (Tsalka), Ninotsminda in Javakheti, Aspindza municipality, etc. In winter, the herds spend the winter mainly in the territory of Sagarejo. The shepherds of Iormuganlo use the resources of neighbouring municipalities (Signaghi, Dedoplistskaro), they start farms and even settle there. It should be noted that during the Soviet period, herds were driven to pastures in neighbouring Armenia, in Leninakan. Since the 1980s, after the aggravation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and the collapse of the USSR, cattle from Iormuganlo to Leninakan are no longer exported, and pasture bases are expanding in Georgia. As we were told on the spot, there are more than a million sheep in the villages of Iormuganlo.

The situation is different among Azerbaijanis living in Lagodekhi. Here, due to the restriction of cattle breeding, the specific share of agriculture gradually increased. Families of Turkmen origin who

¹¹⁴ A. Bendianishvili, Russia's colonial economic policy and agricultural specialization of Georgia. In the book A. Bendianishvili, A. Daushvili, M. Samsonadze, D. Chumburidze, Kh. Kokrashvili, O. Janelidze, Russian colonialism in Georgia, Tb., 2008, p. 234 (in Georgian)

settled in Kabali were initially only engaged in cattle breeding, however, since the climatic conditions and soil here were very favourable for the development of agriculture, they switched to the cultivation of individual crops. During the Soviet period, this process was accelerated by the reorganization of agriculture in the communist way, which was accompanied by the unification of crops. At that time, they mainly focused on the cultivation of tobacco and essential oil crops and the development of sericulture, which led to a reduction in the area of pastures and the restriction of cattle breeding. After the collapse of the communist system, collective farms were abolished, and the role of private farms increased. From then on, private farmers have the opportunity to supply the city with agricultural products and make a good profit; Azerbaijanis living in the Lagodekhi area easily gained insight into that and occupied a significant segment in Tbilisi's agrarian markets. In the new situation, they started setting up greenhouses and growing horticultural crops (cucumbers, tomatoes). They mainly make a living from agriculture, they grow melon crops and wheat. In the Kabali community, each family has 5-10 greenhouses, the annual income from which is 25-50 thousand lari. Products are sold mainly in Tbilisi or to the so-called "dealers" on the spot. True, there is gas in the local villages, but the greenhouses are still heated with firewood.

In the 19th century, sericulture was also developed in the region; mulberry gardens, tobacco and basil plantations were planted. Indeed, sericulture was mostly practised by the residents of western Georgia, but in the first half of the 20th century, the development of this industry began in Kakheti and later it turned into an agricultural industry characteristic of the Kakheti region¹¹⁵, which, apparently, was contributed by the population migrated from Imereti.

Funds received as a result of labour migration have a significant share in the income of the population of the region. The vector of migration of Azerbaijanis from Kabali is mainly directed towards Kazakhstan. Most of the people here work in small businesses and catering establishments. It is significant that the Kabali Azerbaijanis are employed in the restaurant business of Kazakhstan; as natives of Georgia, they widely practice Georgian traditional cuisine and food culture.

¹¹⁵ Idem, Formation of agricultural life in Georgia. p. 40

After the collapse of the USSR and the establishment of a border regime between the former republics, part of the local population took advantage of the proximity to the border for their business and opened foreign exchange offices, catering points, shops, etc. on the Azerbaijani side. This activity is mainly carried out by Georgians living in the border villages. Azerbaijanis are also involved in trade relations, they were mostly engaged in buying cattle in different places in Georgia and selling them in Azerbaijan. In 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the movement of people on the Georgia-Azerbaijan border was restricted, which continues to this day. This caused a heavy blow to the income of the persons engaged in the mentioned activity.

In some places (the villages of Pirosmeni, Sabatlo, Samtatskaro, etc.), the population notes that the economic situation has more or less improved recently: highways have been built, in many places, the structures of the drinking water supply network are being repaired or have already been completed, reclamation systems are operating in several villages, civil organizations benefit from the assistance provided to them (see the relevant part of the monograph about this), schools, sports grounds, etc. are being built. However, to improve their living conditions, people from these villages go abroad or to other regions of Georgia. They often move from villages inhabited by Adjarians to Batumi and the coastal strip of Adjara.

Socio-economic cataclysms, the opening of the borders of the closed system and the facilitated transportation to foreign countries, both from the whole of Georgia and from the border regions, led to an increase in labour migration to foreign countries. In addition, representatives of different ethnic groups go in different directions. Azerbaijanis prefer Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkey or Russia, Armenians - Russia and partially Armenia; Recently, Georgians have been leaving for Turkey, European countries (mainly Greece, Italy, and Germany) and the United States. In addition to the reasons listed above, technological progress and social factors of global integration can be considered determinants of this process, causing the infiltration of individuals with a different culture into a new cultural milieu. During external migrations, intensive departures of community members begin with the arrival and adaptation of one or more members of the

society in a certain place. It is they who create a certain core, which later helps the members of this ethnic-social circle to adapt to the new environment. Migration vectors are connected with the already formed emigration social network, which forms the entire system. The system is characterized by specific information and material flows. It is this specific network that makes the migration and adaptation of a particular person possible. Its functions include the preservation of religious rites and ethnic and cultural characteristics of migrants, etc.¹¹⁶

Our Azerbaijani respondent, who left to work in Kazakhstan, says that close relatives help each other to go abroad, and nephews, cousins and other relatives help in finding employment. That's why there are more people from Kabali in Kazakhstan than in neighbouring Azerbaijan. The smaller migration of Azeris from here in Azerbaijan is explained by the fact that Georgia has better living conditions than there is beyond its border, for example, in the neighbouring Belakani district.

Labour migrants try to preserve elements of ethnic culture through their social connections in foreign countries. At the same time, it is often migrants who appear before us as carriers of elements of global culture, partly through them, family members and representatives of a wider social circle are first introduced to new technological achievements, the so-called Western culture. Usually, with the funds sent by migrants, they purchase the necessary communication equipment, mainly mobile phones and new-generation computers. Even elderly people, who until recently belonged to the so-called closed cultural community and were less interested in what was happening outside their society, now use the Internet and Skype or social networks to communicate with each other and with relatives abroad. In modern labour migration, social networks, which act as a bridge between migrants and their relatives who have remained in the country have a decisive influence on the decision of those wishing to go on labour migration, help migrants settle in new places and find jobs.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ K. Koryakin, The role of social and ethnic networks in migration: theoretical aspects. The concept of a social network; Humanitarian culture and ethnic-identification; Works of young scientists. Issue. 2; Moscow 2005. p.25 (in Russian)

¹¹⁷ Ibid.p. 25

Thus, the population of the region under study is mainly engaged in agriculture, the leading place is occupied by grain growing, greenhouse farming and animal husbandry. Part of the population is engaged in viticulture, hired labour is practised in the gardens of walnuts, almonds and other plant species. The level of labour migration is high. Labour migrants keep in touch with members of their community through modern communication systems, even participating virtually in traditional rituals and celebrations. At the same time, on the one hand, labour migrants introduce foreign cultural values to their family and social group, and on the other hand, they inspire new people to labour migration.

§3. Interreligious relations and ethnic and state identity

The intensification of intercultural relations is characteristic of the modern era and is the main factor causing a qualitative change in the ethnosocial situation. The information society is expanding intensively and cultural homogeneity is growing.¹¹⁸ Under these conditions, religion, language, traditional culture, etc. remain important factors in the preservation of cultural conservatism and ethnic identity in ethnic groups.

Strengthening the cultural identity of these groups is perceived by the majority as a certain problem, and therefore, according to part of society, the existing challenges are also related to the threat from the ethnic minorities living in the country; This determines the attitude towards them to some extent. On the other hand, a certain confusion of the value system occurred in these ethnic groups, because the preservation of their ethnic identity requires the preservation of language and traditional culture, and the integration processes, on the contrary, push them to accept the cultural elements of the nation that created the state. Ethnic groups living in the region under study have a vague comprehension of the state. The situation is complicated by the influence of the neighbouring states of Azerbaijan and Armenia, where people related to them live.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ K. Chichinadze, *Nationalism and Globalization: Systematic Approach, Civilizational Searches*, #2, Tbilisi, 2004, p. 16

¹¹⁹ L. Janiashvili, *Perception of the state by the population of Kvemo Kartli*, *Ethnological collection of the Caucasus XIX*, Tb., 1999, p. 165 (in Georgian)

An important tool for preserving ethnic identity is the religion which is a complex, diverse and multidimensional system. The influence of faith on everyday life is manifested in social ties and relationships, rules of behaviour, religious motivation of individuals, etc. Confession acts as a national symbol under certain conditions and the main identifying marker of the group, it becomes a means of social and political manipulation of ethnic groups in extreme situations.

After the collapse of the Soviet atheistic state, the number of followers of traditional religions and worshipers increased, and at the same time, a fertile ground was created for the introduction and spread of new religious movements, proselytism being its important tool. Confessional affiliation became the most important sign of identification with certain groups, which led to the growth of negative attitudes towards members of different movements. In this situation, the penetration of previously unknown religious movements from abroad caused not only a significant complication of the confessional structure, but also, in some cases, a rupture of religious and socio-psychological relations, and the growth of internal contradictions. The sense of danger was aggravated by the fact that religious movements coming from abroad were perceived by foreign political or religious forces as a kind of means of realizing their interests in the country.

In the region under study, a historical perspective was added to this situation. In recent times there have indeed been more attempts to consider the negative attitude towards Islam as a phenomenon of searching for an enemy icon, mainly from academic and artistic circles. But the fact is that the long relationship with the Eastern world is naturally considered through a religious prism. In particular, with the conquest of Iran and Turkey, the importance of the Islamic factor in politics and the radical ethnodemographic measures carried out under the auspices of Islam led to the formation of a strong negative stereotype towards Muslims among the Christian population of the border region. more often a Muslim (the same Tatar for Christian groups) was perceived (today it is partially perceived) as an enemy, a robber and a violent person. Islam is perceived by Christians as a threat also because of the destructive actions of the followers of Salafi and fundamental Islam, which became widespread against the backdrop of

intensive re-Islamization that began in the post-Soviet space at the end of the last century. The border region under study, where in addition to Orthodox Georgians there are also followers of other religions (Muslims, Gregorians), is mainly inhabited by Christians, and Muslim Azerbaijanis.

Most of the Christian churches and chapels in the border area with Azerbaijan are quite old. In the late Middle Ages, there were many Christian monuments in the deserted region of Kakheti. For example, on the territory of the Lagodekhi municipality, there are currently about 40 historical monuments, of which only two (the churches of the Kazan Mother of God and Vardisubani) were built during the time of Tsarist Russia, and the rest belong to the period from the early Middle Ages to the 17th century.¹²⁰ According to residents, there are ruins of a basilica in the vicinity of the village of Matsimi. There is also a church named after St. George of the 12th century. Their shrine is located 300 meters from the border. In the village of Sabatlo, populated by Armenians, there is also an old Georgian church where Armenians from Sabatlo pray. Church holidays are celebrated according to the Georgian Orthodox calendar. Residents say that, despite this, the influence of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the Armenian community is gradually increasing. At one time, a priest of the Armenian Apostolic Church came from Avlabari (a district in Tbilisi - L.J.) and baptized the whole village; after that, they go there to baptize children.

In the 1990s, there were several hotbeds of tension between the Christian and Muslim communities of the region, but then this tension did not develop into an open conflict and existed only in everyday life between specific individuals. The confrontation in the village of Samtatskaro, Dedoplistskaro municipality, between the Adjarian community (Muslim Georgians) and the Ingiloys, who moved here earlier from Azerbaijan, became more widely known to the public. Adjarians wanted to build a mosque in the village and faced resistance. Because of this, the situation became extremely tense several times. It was for religious reasons, because of the Christian faith, that the Ingiloys emigrated from the Kakhi region (present-day Azerbaijan) to Samtatskaro. According to them, in Azerbaijan, they were subjected

¹²⁰ Idem, Historical monuments of Lagodekhi Municipality, p.19, (in Georgian)

to religious persecution and therefore were forced to move to the opposite side of the Alazani River. Part of the Adjarians living in the municipalities of Dedoplistskaro and Signaghi are followers of the Muslim religion and want to build mosques in the villages where they live, although they meet objections from local Christians.¹²¹

Christians are annoyed by the attitude of Muslims towards churches, the arrival of Islamic clerics from other countries, the mass construction of mosques, etc. The situation is complicated by the fact that some terms related to religious affiliation cause a negative attitude among non-Muslims. For example, “Shahid”, which means “defender of the faith”, has become a term for an extremist-terrorist in the light of the terrorist acts that have developed in the world.

The majority of local Azerbaijanis and part of the Georgians (Adjarians) are Muslims. Adjarians are Sunni Muslims and among Azerbaijanis, there are both Sunnites and Shiites. Both in Iormuganlo and Kabali, the settlement areas are arranged according to religious principles. For example, Shiites live in the upper part of the village in Kabali, while Sunnites live in the lower part. Muslims themselves are less aware of the difference between Shiites and Sunnites. If you ask a 40-year-old Sunnite, he will tell you that Shiite means an unbeliever. The Shiite community still performs traditional rituals, such as Moharram, the tradition of almsgiving, etc. The national orientation of the ethnoconfessional group of Azerbaijanis living in Georgia is mainly to the Turkic-Turkish world, and the religious orientation is the Shia and Sunni branches of Islam. Today, both the strengthening of traditional Islam and the penetration of new trends are observed. The religious influence of Azerbaijan, Iran, Turkey, and Arab countries is noticeable; the age of believers has greatly rejuvenated. The field material shows that even some children in the region observe Muslim rules and fast.

The Azerbaijani population receives political and religious impulses from the neighbouring states of Azerbaijan and Iran, and the processes taking place abroad are reflected in this contingent. The fact that Georgia is more or less within the zone of the spread of political

¹²¹ A. Chankotadze. Samtatskaro a remote village/internet version, available at: 25.09.2022/http://liberali.ge/articles/view/3228/?fbclid=IwAR0husToely5qH_Xr34VuLRQzMXDnL2XFtLXIAAgZ57ZF9OzzqXFL1ocKg

Islam creates unfavourable prospects for the country.¹²² This puts on the agenda the need for a comprehensive analysis of current and expected processes and obtaining appropriate conclusions. Moreover, the threat from Georgian Islamists involved in the events in Syria, which was widely reported in the Georgian media, caused a great stir in society.¹²³

Making Islam an instrument of political struggle was impossible under Soviet rule. Firmly closed borders protected the country from religious impulses emanating from the Islamic world, and the control system fundamentally suppressed any alternative to the Marxist-Leninist ideology. In the new situation, the ongoing process of re-Islamization, the construction of Islamic religious institutions in the region and the threat of the introduction of political Islam cause dissatisfaction among the local Christian population (Georgians, Armenians). The complication of the confessional structure in some cases leads to a rupture of religious and socio-psychological relations, and the activation of internal contradictions. It must be said that the new phenomenon—the spread of Wahhabism, is perceived negatively by adherents of traditional Islam.

Differences in the groups under study are observed in many aspects of their life and culture. Especially in such social institutions as the family, kinship, weddings, etc. The “Others’” customs and peculiarities of life are often reflected in the crooked mirror of stereotypes of the opposite group. Such stereotypes are entrenched in the mentality of religious and ethnic groups. For example, Christians are characterized by Muslims in a negative context as alcohol lovers, disobedient to the law, lazy, thieves etc. Christians characterize Muslims in a negative sense as followers of polygamy, homosexuals, disempowering women and youth, cowards, untidy, thieves, etc. Besides, each group has positive autostereotypes. In the course of social self-identification, a person tries to instil respect for his personality, characterizing his group only with positive features.

As mentioned above, the settlement of the ancestors of

¹²² N. Aleskerova. Islam in Azerbaijan: history and modernity. (.08.2022); Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, available at: <https://sacfamilysearchlibrary.org/wiki>

¹²³ Is teaching the Quran extremist? /Internet version is verified 11.09.2022/ available at: <https://www.amerikiskhma.com/a/isis-georgia/3071479.html>

Azerbaijanis in Kakheti in the 1770s is associated with the name of King Erekle II. Mechanisms of coexistence of different groups and integration into a single cultural-political system were created and improved in Georgia over a long history. Particular attention was paid to the border areas. The Georgian kings tried to turn the population of this zone into a support force of state policy. Therefore, during the existence of national state institutions, the people living in the border areas were always the object of concern of the royal government.¹²⁴ At the current stage of development, this historical experience has also acquired a practical purpose, as social, economic and political changes have intensified disintegrative impulses in society.

In the scientific literature, the opinion is expressed that the compact settlement of national minorities makes their integration difficult and creates fertile ground for the development of disintegration processes in the state.¹²⁵ In the region under study, until recently, contradictions of an ethnoreligious nature rarely arose, and here the problems are of a more existential and economic type. Field work revealed certain nuances when people see manifestations of ethnic discrimination in various state measures (allocation of land, transfer of leased land to foreigners, restrictions in the border zone, etc.).

It is symptomatic that the ethnicity of the Azerbaijani population of the region has not been clearly determined. The ancestors of the population living in Georgia, who call themselves Azerbaijanis, did not live in the Azerbaijani state and did not participate in the ethnogenetic processes based on which the Azerbaijani people were formed. Therefore, they have a relatively vague idea of their own ethnic identity, although they see an ethnic difference from the main population of the country in their Azerbaijani-Muslim affiliation. In a conversation with us, an inhabitant of Iormughanlo said: "Here we call ourselves Azerbaijanis, in other countries we say that we are from Karachof but we tell Georgians that we are from Iormughanlo."

If a separate group living in the region under study is classified

¹²⁴ L. Melikishvili, *Conflict as a social event, conflict situations in a polyethnic society*, (author of the project and responsible editor of the book L. Melikishvili) Tb., 1998, p. 44 (in Georgian)

¹²⁵ S. Cornell, *Autonomy as a source of conflict*, *Dialogue of Civilizations*, #2, Tbilisi, 2004, p. 42-43

hierarchically according to certain characteristics, for example, privilege, comfort, economic or political perspective, etc., it will turn out that there is a certain number of individuals who, depending on the frequency of their social contacts, are characterized by partial assimilation and partial psychological identification with the dominant group. They are in a marginal position, on the border - they belong partly to one group, and partly to another. Such connections of a marginal are reflected to a greater or lesser extent in his views, lifestyle, self-reflection, career, social status, etc. There is a kind of personal splitting. This kind of dualism may not be as dramatic, since a person can have many sociocultural affiliations, could be a member of many social groups, and perform a variety of social functions.¹²⁶ People who gradually abandon the cultural characteristics of their ethnic group and join the mainstream unity for their career, economic or other goals are more likely to be found in official, political positions or business circles. Such persons play the role of intermediaries between their group and the dominant society. In extreme conditions, if the interests of these two societies contradict each other, such “neophytes” are characterized by a kind of aggression, their cultural, psychological and intellectual insecurity increases and, based on their past, they are forced to resolutely refuse to belong to any party.

Relations between non-dominant ethnic groups are a separate issue. Relations between the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities are partly determined by the geopolitical situation in the South Caucasus since they correlate with the dynamics of the Karabakh conflict. Representatives of these groups living in Georgia do not show an aggressive attitude towards each other, although they do not deny that they provided some assistance (mostly monetary) to their congeners in the war.

Manipulation of the historical past becomes especially relevant in the period of interethnic confrontations. Opposing parties use it to satisfy territorial or other political claims. At this point, history becomes dependent on the political conjuncture. As P. Burke notes, the work of historians is not necessarily a harmless act of remembering, it is an attempt to shape

¹²⁶ 3. Sergeeva. Marginal personality: evolution of concepts, Kazan, 1998, pg. 4 (in Russian)

the memory of others.¹²⁷ Since the end of the 1980s, when the tension in Georgia reached its peak, speculation about the past has become more frequent in almost all groups. Continuous attempts to instrumentalize history lead to different interpretations of reality, which causes restoring cultural, social, historical, psychological and other structures.¹²⁸

Intergroup relations in the region have both positive and negative development prospects. The research revealed that a group with traditional culture, different from the dominant ethnic group, often a priori evaluates the attitude of the authorities negatively, and believes that it acts with discriminatory approaches, which leads to alienation, the formation of negative stereotypes and slows down the integration process.

In general, the region of compact residence of “national minorities” is considered a hotbed of disintegration processes and, therefore, carries a high conflict potential. In this regard, great importance is attached to the implementation of preventive measures by the state. Two different strategies can be used: I. Ethnic assimilation, which occurs through the erasure of internal ethnic identity (at this time, the main emphasis is on the radical transformation of their ethnocultural characteristics); II. Activation of integration processes by increasing intergroup solidarity and tolerance, when the state acts as a guarantor of the protection of the distinctiveness and cultural identity of groups.¹²⁹ An important step towards the consolidation of Georgian society and the integration of various groups into a single state body was taken when the government recognized not ethnic, but civil identification as the main way of the country’s development. With this approach, all citizens of Georgia are “Georgians”, regardless of their ethnic origin. This proves that the Georgian state has taken the path of the second strategy.

¹²⁷ M., Toria, the role of the understanding of the past and the politics of memory in the formation of conflict identities, (an example of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict), *Dialogue of Civilizations*, #4, Tbilisi, 2006. p. 25 (in Georgian)

¹²⁸ M. Kukartseva, E. Kolomoets *Vestnik of the Moscow University. Series 7. Philosophy*. M. 2004. p. 31 (in Russian)

¹²⁹ B Tishkov. How to update the concept of national policy? *Bulletin of the Network of Ethnological Monitoring and Early Warning of Conflicts*, N48. 2003, pg. 48 (in Russian).

CHAPTER III

ETHNOCULTURAL PECULIARITIES OF THE BORDER POPULATION AND PROSPECTS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

§ 1. Problems of the Georgian-Azerbaijani border through the political prism

In the introduction of the book, it was already mentioned that Georgia and Azerbaijan are strategic partners, which largely determines the policy of relations between them. As Svante Cornell points out, these two countries form an east-west axis that connects the Black Sea with the Caspian Sea. This east-west corridor also connects NATO to Central Asia and Afghanistan; besides, major infrastructure projects — the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project — have brought the two countries closer together. However, recently, there has been unprecedented tension in Azerbaijani-Georgian relations. According to the analyst, the deterioration of bilateral relations is partly the merit of those external forces that are trying to alienate the two partners, in whom he equally sees Russia and the West.¹³⁰ For Russia, control over Georgia and Azerbaijan means control over the East-West corridor. That is why Moscow supported ethnic separatism and coup attempts against pro-independence governments in these countries in the 1990s. However, Moscow's actions further strengthened the aspirations of the leaders and citizens of Georgia and Azerbaijan for independence. Since Georgia, as a state with a less centralized political system, is more vulnerable, Russia perceives it as a weak link in the Georgian-Azerbaijani chain and manipulates it more.¹³¹

In addition to external factors, there are unresolved issues between the two countries that allow a third power to use it for its own interests. These are, first of all, several sections of the Georgian-Azerbaijani border, which have not yet been delimited.

¹³⁰ S. Cornell, Are Georgia-Azerbaijan Relations at Risk? 02/08/2019, available at: Civil.ge

¹³¹ *ibid*

As is known, Azerbaijan and Georgia have a common border of 446 (according to some sources, up to 480) kilometres, the third of which is still to be determined. The Georgian-Azerbaijani intergovernmental commission on delimitation and demarcation of the state border, established in 1996, agreed on almost 70 % of the border, but since 2007, due to the obstacles that have arisen since then, the territories of David Gareji and the village of Erisimedi remain controversial.¹³² 19.6% (415.15 km) of the perimeter of the state border of Georgia passes through 23 large and small rivers. From here, the longest section (190.25 km) falls on the Alazani river. This section of the river comprises 40.2% of the modern border of our country with Azerbaijan (478.42 km).

The Alazani River is characterized by well-defined meandering on the plain. Alazani meanders in the territory bordering the agricultural lands of the municipalities of Dedoplistskaro and Signaghi; The meander neck is surrounded by waves on the right and left sides that gradually erode the base. Therefore, if the slope of the meander from which the river damages the bank is not protected, it is likely that its neck will become narrower and narrower over time, eventually, the river will cross the meander neck and continue to flow in a straight direction. As a result, the remaining territories on the other side of the coast become disputed and in many cases are considered lost. The border department of Georgia cannot control the land on the Azerbaijani side. Comparing the old and new maps, it can be seen that the Alazani River has significantly changed its location and shape, therefore it violated the border; hence, meandering on the Alazani section of the Georgian-Azerbaijani border is of particular importance.¹³³

In the Alazani section of the border zone, 69 places of territorial change were identified. In 42 of them, the border was moved towards Georgia and only in 27 - to the detriment of Azerbaijan. Georgia's territorial losses amounted to approximately 293 hectares. From the Azerbaijani side, these data do not exceed 224 hectares.¹³⁴

¹³² L. Khechoshvili, Insecure borders, available: <http://www.humanrights.ge/index.php?a=text&pid=6158&lang=geo>; U. Murghulia. available at: <http://umurgulia82.blogspot.com/2017/11/293.html>

¹³³ N. Chabashvili, Georgia remaining beyond Alazani. Newspaper Voice of Kakheti, 2011

¹³⁴ <https://www.ghn.ge/news/38363-sakartvelos-teritoriulma-danakargebma->

According to official data, “given that the banks of the Alazani River are extremely prone to erosion, a breakthrough of the meander neck is expected soon. As a result, up to 300 hectares of land may end up on the left bank of the Alazani River, on the territory of Azerbaijan. This problem is complicated by the fact that after the Soviet period the process of delimitation and demarcation of the Georgian-Azerbaijani border was not completed and the state border is not defined by geographical coordinates. The agreements only state that the border runs along the Alazani River. As a result, the state boundary runs through water and changes with the rerouting of the river”.¹³⁵

According to international law, the border of the country that runs through the river will not change when its banks or the water level changes, as well as when the river bed shifts. That is, the state border should not change when the river bed changes.¹³⁶ But, in the reality of Georgia, the border of the state moves following the change of the riverbed (I mean the prospect of losing territory). Even in political documents, not to mention the academic literature, the above formulation can be traced.

It is because of the change of course of the Alazani River that some part of the territory of the village of Erisimedi remains disputed until today; Azerbaijani border guards do not allow Georgian citizens to go there. Years before the village was built, the river changed its course, and about 1000 hectares of land ended up on its other side, in the territory of the Belakan region of the Republic of Azerbaijan; the land was exploited by the citizens of Azerbaijan all that time. At the initiative of the leadership of the Signaghi region, bridges were constructed across the Alazani and Belakani Rivers, and 50 residential buildings were built on the territory belonging to the Signaghi region remaining on the Azerbaijani side; so, in 1989, the village of Erisimedi was founded. However, until now the Georgian-Azerbaijani border in this area remains disputed. According to experts, part of the village is

azerbajjantan-293-hektari-sheadgina

¹³⁵ Municipal assessment report, Dedoplistskaro, August 2020, p.98

¹³⁶ K. Khutsishvili, *State Borders*, Almanac 9, International Law (II), Tbilisi 1999 <http://www.nplg.gov.ge/greenstone3/library/collection/period/document/HASH018ff22560b46b9530f1cded;jsessionid=6D2877B72F93BDCE961FB658257C4A89?ed=1>

located in the territory of Azerbaijan. This issue was discussed at the level of delimitation commissions. Negotiations between the parties began in 1998, although the matter dragged on. This issue was not discussed at all until 2010; there was talk of exchanging territories between Azerbaijan and Georgia for the disputed land, but the agreement could not be reached. The problem is still unresolved; In a village divided in half, on those streets that are located on the territory of Azerbaijan on the map, residents cannot register either a house or a land plot as property.¹³⁷ According to the resident of Erisimedi: “Alazani changed its bed and this area ended up on the Azerbaijani side. The temporary border was marked with barbed wire; on the map taken from space, the border divides the village in half. In fact, this is our territory, but the houses beyond are not registered. It is a disputed territory and a problem even today. (Erisimedi, 2022)

In 2010, Azerbaijani border guards killed a 16-year-old boy in Erisimedi because he tried to bring out the cows that crossed the conditional border. The facts of the detention of citizens of Georgia by Azerbaijani border guards were repeatedly recorded.

There are problems in the village due to the unresolved border issue: limited conditions for economic activity, lack of the possibility of legalizing property (for part of the population), and lack of local employment prospects, which is likely to lead to an irreversible migration process in the future.

As it was said, another officially disputed territory with Azerbaijan is David Gareji, a Christian monument, the establishment of which is connected with the holy father David Gareji and his activities since the 6th century. The Georgian monastic complex, which includes more than 20 monasteries spread over 2.5 kilometres, is divided between two countries. It is one of the main obstacles in the long-term negotiations on the demarcation of the Georgian-Azerbaijani border.¹³⁸

The problem of belonging of part of the Gareji monastery complex to Azerbaijan dates back to the 1920s. “Azerbaijani shepherds, grazing their sheep in the Karaiya valley, requested the painstakingly built and

¹³⁷ Erisemidi, split in half, 21:16 - March 10, 2022. available at: <https://mtisambebi.ge/news/item/1486-shuaze-gaybopili-erisimedi>

¹³⁸ Z. Shiriyev, K.Kakachia, Azerbaijani-Georgian relations, the foundations and challenges of the strategic alliance, Baku 2013, pg.26

painted centuries-old David Gareji and Udabno monastic complexes as winter camps; They attacked the Lavra, plundered the monasteries, destroyed the crosses, burned the place, and demolished the buildings with pickaxes. At that time, this vandalism was prevented; in a later period, the then government of Soviet Georgia, in violation of all the rules, by a special decree Of January 28, 1922, transferred to Soviet Azerbaijan a significant part of Karaiya and the Gareji desert (as pastures, not cultural monuments!). On these “pastures” there were Bertubani and Udabno (უდაბნო) monasteries... The Lavra became a refuge for nomadic shepherds.”¹³⁹.

On October 17, 1925, at a meeting of representatives of Georgia and Azerbaijan in Tbilisi regarding the disputed sections of the borders of the Sighaghi and Zakatala districts, it was decided to leave the border along Alazani, and the surrounding pastures of Gareji were annexed to Azerbaijan “under the principle of labour utilization” since they “actually used them.” According to the decree of the Central Executive Committee of the Transcaucasian SFSR of October 6, 1925, the protection of cultural monuments of David Gareji Monastery was entrusted to the Tbilisi Regional Executive Committee of the Georgian SSR, for which armed guards were appointed. There were several clashes between the guardians of the monument and the Azerbaijani shepherds, who wanted to use the monastery buildings as a wintering ground for their cattle. In January 1926, the Transcaucasian Regional Committee of the CPSU legally recognized the 1922 agreement on pasture use. On February 18, 1929, Tsak of the Transcaucasian USSR adopted a new resolution “On the winter pastures of Gareja and the Eldar Samukhi winter pastures”. The border between Georgia and Azerbaijan passed along Mount Chichkhrituri and the tower located on it.¹⁴⁰ 3 historical monuments of Gareji (Bertubani, Chichkhrituri, Udabno) ended up in Azerbaijani-controlled territory.

Since then, the Georgian authorities have tried several times to reassert their jurisdiction over the entire monastery complex. During

¹³⁹ R. Metreveli, Davitgareji belonged to Georgia from time immemorial, Georgian National Academy of Sciences, October 19, 2020, available: <http://science.org.ge/?p=4440>

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

the Soviet period, in the 1970s, there was an attempt between the republics to agree on the exchange of territories for Gareji, which ended in vain.¹⁴¹ After the Soviet republics declared their independence in 1991, their borders were recognized by the international community as existing at the time. As a result of such a redistribution of territories, one section of the Georgian-Azerbaijani border ran along the crest of mount Udabno, and the three monasteries of the David Gareji complex surely went to Azerbaijan.¹⁴²

The commission has been considering the issue of delimitation of this section of the border with Azerbaijan since 1996, but so far to no avail. For more than 20 years, a kind of moratorium has been operating between the two countries, thanks to which pilgrims and tourists can move freely throughout the entire territory of the monastery complex. The disputed territory is important for both states. For Georgia, this is its historical, cultural and religious heritage, which today is one of the most important spiritual centres of the Georgian Church; And for Azerbaijan, this is a strategic height from which it is easy to monitor neighbouring territories, which official Baku considers essential in maintaining the country's security. Thus, it is difficult for both sides to find a compromise. At the same time, since the Azerbaijanis consider themselves the heirs of the Albanians, the Azerbaijani side is making every effort to present the Gareji complex as an Albanian monument.¹⁴³

The presentation of the complex by Azerbaijani historians as belonging to historical Caucasian Albania causes particular indignation among Georgian clergy, historians and experts, and they try in every possible way to prove its groundlessness. They believe that this issue should not be raised at all. The problem must be solved from political, legal, religious and historical points of view. There are corresponding maps from the times of the Soviet Union, according to which David Gareji and its environs are part of Georgia unconditionally.

“Garjeja cannot be a monument of Albanian culture. Since the

¹⁴¹ <https://www.factcheck.ge/ka/story/38140>

¹⁴² N. Samkharadze. Davit Gareji in the Georgian national narrative and the agenda of the political elite: how can the problem be solved? GIP Policy Essay, October 2019 / Issue #32, p.2

¹⁴³ Idem, Azerbaijani-Georgian relations, the foundations and challenges of the strategic alliance, pg. 27.

Albanians were assimilated, these Albanians are not the ancestors of the Azerbaijanis. The Albanians were first assimilated by the Arabs, and then by the Seljuk Turks and the migrated Muslim tribes who occupied the area. It is with them that the final assimilation of the Albanian population is connected. There are many Georgian inscriptions in the disputed Udabno Monastery! There are about a thousand inscriptions, among which there is not a single Albanian one. If this monument represents the heritage of Albanian culture, then why did they make these inscriptions in Georgian? There are also inscriptions in Armenian, Assyrian and other languages. These inscriptions were made by pilgrims who came and prayed because Davit Gareja was considered a very powerful sanctuary.”¹⁴⁴

G. Cheishvili addresses this question in a critical letter in which he analyses the opinion of academician Makhmudov.¹⁴⁵

In the analytical paper, which deals with the strategic aspects of the Georgian-Azerbaijani relationship, we read that “part of the complex located on Azerbaijan’s sovereign territory sometimes causes misunderstanding between Georgian pilgrims and the Azerbaijan frontier guards. While a simplified border control regime allows monks, Georgian pilgrims and tourists to travel to the part of the complex located on Azerbaijani territory unimpeded, reportedly “bureaucratic procedures” for access sometimes prove troublesome. From time to time, this issue has sparked diplomatic rows between Baku and Tbilisi. The most recent controversy was caused after the repositioning of Azerbaijani border guards on May 6, 2012, along a disputed border section running through the monastery complex, preventing visitors from Georgia from accessing some of the sites. When emotions ran high, the two presidents discussed the issue on the sidelines of a NATO summit in Chicago. As anticipated, they agreed that Georgian citizens, as well as foreign tourists, would be allowed onto the whole territory of the complex without any restrictions, until

¹⁴⁴ Interview with "Khronika+", Giorgi Ochmezuri: "Historical truth is so much on our side that we cannot give up Davitgareji under any circumstances", available: <http://qonikaplus.ge>

¹⁴⁵ G. Cheishvili. « For not to mislead and not to be misled", Matsne" Series of History, Archeology, Ethnology and Art History, 2019, #2

the delineation process is finalized".¹⁴⁶

The paper mentions that, officially, Baku and Tbilisi do not regard the border issue as a dispute. The two governments do everything possible to avoid any tensions over the monastery complex. Both sides understand that irresponsible comments on the issue might serve the interests of third parties, who, are likely to benefit from strained relations on the Georgia-Azerbaijani border.¹⁴⁷

In April and May 2019, Georgian society was once again gripped by the excitement around the David Gareji issue, which was preceded by several significant events. On April 20, President Salome Zurbishvili published a video on the social network, where she spoke about the need for an urgent solution to the issues related to Davit Gareji and the state border passing through it. The next day, Azerbaijani border guards closed the access road to the three monasteries located on the territory of Azerbaijan for visitors. The introduction of restrictions coincided with the pre-Easter period. For three days, Azerbaijani border guards posted prohibitory signs on the paths.¹⁴⁸

This fact was accompanied by the excitement of the Georgian society, the Patriarchate expressed its displeasure, and rallies were organized. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Georgia-Azerbaijani border delimitation-demarcation commission did not work, and the issue remains open; It will not be excluded that the topic of undefined borders, if necessary, will again become a tool of manipulation by internal or external forces.

As for the border of the Lagodekhi section with Azerbaijan, the last border village here is Matsimi, where the Lagodekhi Customs Post is located near the bridge over the Matsimi River. In the past, the Silk Road passed here, and this section is one of its highways. Lagodekhi Customs was closed during the pandemic, traffic was strictly controlled, and only cargo was allowed through.

Official information about this section of Georgia's border with Azerbaijan is very scarce. According to local respondents, in the late 1990s, uncertainty arose between the Georgian and Azerbaijani sides

¹⁴⁶ Idem, Azerbaijani-Georgian relations, the foundations and challenges of the strategic alliance, p. 27

¹⁴⁷ ibid, pg. 28

¹⁴⁸ available at :<https://www.factcheck.ge/ka/story/38140>

on the issue of the delimitation of this boundary. This coincided with the arrangement of the Bazaar at the Matsimi bridge which was not destined to open due to the failure to reach an agreement on border issues.

Local respondents emphasize that years ago the population had serious problems related to border crossing. For example, because of the violation of the Lagodekhi border section in 2003, an Azerbaijani border guard killed a young man while trying to cross the boundary. Cases of abduction of Georgian citizens (shepherds) were frequent; However, today the situation has changed. According to the respondent:

“Nothing like this has happened in recent years. Even if you really want to, you can’t violate the border now. Over the past 5 years, we have not had any contact with Azerbaijan. The border is completely closed.”

From available sources, we learn that the introduction of state-imposed regulations, which consisted in limiting the amount of cargo carried by passengers, caused some discontent among the citizens of both states. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the ban on entry into Azerbaijan stopped such incidents, although, after the opening of the Lagodekhi checkpoint, clashes between customs officers and citizens still had a place.

Thus, it can be said that due to the still undefined borders, the related problems create the ground for tension between the two countries. However, the historically existing friendly and good neighbourly relations, as well as strategic ties do not allow the border problem to escalate into a conflict and conditions stability.

§2 Intercultural communication and the life of the border population

The ethnocultural diversity of Georgia has largely determined the policy of the state towards non-dominant ethnic groups and the strategy of intercultural communication. The diverse ethnic composition of the population of the border area has led to a different course of ethnocultural transformation in ethnically different communities in post-Soviet Georgia.

As already mentioned, in the villages of Kakheti directly bordering Azerbaijan, representatives of the dominant nation and minorities live both isolated or mixed. Two of the border villages of Dedoplistskaro municipality - Samtatskaro and Pirosmeni - are inhabited by Georgians, while Sabato is settled by Armenians. In Samtatskaro, Ingiloys and Adjarians live separately. They have also separate cemeteries. The current situation shows that these groups have easily integrated and today live together harmoniously, however, several years ago the Adjarians' attempt to build a mosque in the village caused tension between them and local Ingiloys, which, fortunately, did not turn into a serious conflict.

Today almost 80% of Adjarians in Samtatskaro are Christians; This fact is one of the vivid examples of the cultural transformation of the post-Soviet period. The situation is similar in the village of Pirosmeni, inhabited by Adjarians. Often in the same family, the older generation is Muslim, and the younger generation is Christian. It should be noted that when changing religious identity, young people do not face opposition from the older generation. In general, a similar tendency can be observed among the Adjarians settled in Kvemo Kartli.

The Ingiloys of Samtatskaro have relatives in Saingilo, that is, in the territory of Azerbaijan, where there are graves and shrines of their ancestors. During the Soviet era and after, for a certain period,¹⁴⁹ they often visited each other crossing the bridge on the Alazani River, which is not functioning today; the population had intensive contacts, not only with relatives and friends, but they also went shopping and vice versa.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, due to the crisis of the 1990s and difficult living conditions, the residents of Samtatskaro and Pirosmeni sold or abandoned their houses and mostly moved to Rustavi or returned to Adjara. The outflow of the population from the border villages continued in the first decade of the 21st century, which, in addition to the above reasons, was also affected by the closure of the Samtatskaro bridge connecting with Azerbaijan. As

¹⁴⁹ Since 2006, the border has been periodically closed, and due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was completely closed.

a result, the residents of Samtatskaro could no longer contact their relatives, family members, and friends living in Saingilo and visit the shrines and graves of their ancestors. According to media reports, the village of Samtatskaro, located near the Georgian-Azerbaijani border, was facing a serious threat. After the closing of the bridge connecting with the historical Hereti, the living conditions of the population deteriorated sharply. According to statistics, out of 480 families living in Samtatskaro, about 200 families left the village. Farmers left to work in Turkey, Azerbaijan, and other countries.¹⁵⁰

Because of this situation, the Ingilo population of Samtatskaro began to think even about obtaining Azerbaijani citizenship, but as they said: “Returning to live in Saingilo is a problem for us because even today there are restrictions on worship in the Georgian language, on the naming of Georgian names and communication in our native language.”¹⁵¹

Although the bridge was opened for pedestrians in the spring of 2006, it still lost its function and is closed today. Since independence, even though Azerbaijan and Georgia enjoy free visa travel to each other's country, border crossings have been carried out through checkpoints. Due to the covid pandemic, traffic between the two countries was completely halted; Since 2020, air traffic has been restored, but land borders have been closed, which caused particular discontent both on the part of the Azerbaijani community in Georgia and the Ingiloys living here and in Azerbaijan.

The process of population outflow from the border regions of Georgia was somehow stopped by several infrastructural, economic, and other projects implemented by the state in the region in recent years; Roads were built, gas was supplied, and electricity supply was adjusted. Villages are provided with the Internet. All this contributed to the improvement of living conditions and, according to the narrators, led to the return of the population. The same processes occur in the village of Pirosmeni.

¹⁵⁰ V. Mtivlishvili. The population of the border villages moved out, 07, 2007, available at: <http://www.humanrights.ge/index.php?a=main&pid=6624&lang=geo>.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

However, although the population has taken up agriculture, there is still a problem with local employment. Speaking with us about the problems of migration of the local population, the representative of the organization LAG focused on the issue of employment and considered the creation of jobs as an important condition for the population to stay in the village: “If the government decides to have some benefits by accepting the border status, as the highland regions have, it will be good at some level. For example, we can develop trade relations with Azerbaijan. There was a bridge in Samtatskaro, it will be very good if it is restored. A customs checkpoint or terminal can be set up; cargo can be moved. There were many discussions on obtaining cross-border status” (field material, Dedoplistskaro, 2022).

As a result of the study, it turned out that the population of these border Georgian villages rarely creates ethnically mixed families; Although they very rarely marry non-Georgians and thus rarely establish kinship ties, they have a very good relationship with each other; The tradition of mutual assistance is still preserved, they help each other for free in various economic activities. As they say, it is embarrassing to take money for help from neighbours and relatives. For earnings they go as hired day labourers; according to them, the proximity between the population of the border villages and the neighbourhood relations lead to the fact that thefts hardly ever occur. Living next to each other led to the interpenetration of their traditional cultural elements, primarily economic traditions; For example, like the Kakhetians, the Adjarians also began to grow vineyards and produce wine.

As for the border village of the Sighnaghi municipality, Erisimedi, its Adjarian population coexists harmoniously with the Kists and Kakhetians living in the village. Part of the Adjarians, mostly the younger generation, gradually converted to Christianity. So, the village is ethnically and religiously mixed. There is no opposition on religious grounds and they have very good relations with each other, as they say, they attend each other’s religious holidays, celebrate weddings together, drink wine, etc. (Samtatskaro, 2022).

During the Soviet period, and for some time afterwards, the population of Erisimedi had free access to Azerbaijan. According to

our respondent: “We had friends there, we visited them with families and they also came to visit us, we invited each other to our weddings. Then there were trade relations, they transported fuel, and for some time they took out sugar and butter from here. In those years when there was a famine, we used to bring corn from there. However, when they set the boundary, our relationship ended. The roads have been completely closed for years.”(Samtatskaro, 2022).

The difficult economic situation of the 1990s and harsh living conditions (plus isolation from neighbouring Azerbaijan) forced the residents of Erisimedi to leave the village and look for work elsewhere to improve their lives. Today, about 75 families live in the village, where the state once built 150 houses.

Later, infrastructure projects implemented by the central government or the Signaghi municipality generally improved the situation in the village (drinking water was supplied, the problem with the roads was solved, there is a club and ambulatory, Geocell and Magti towers were installed, there is no longer a problem with the Internet, Georgian TV channels function); however, there are still unresolved issues that most likely threaten the existence of the village (there is no gas; as border residents, they do not have any advantages and benefits; they have neither a shop nor a pharmacy).

The Adjarian population of Erisimedi, like all the Adjarian communities that migrated to different regions of Georgia from Adjara, has maintained its connection with their native region. They have relatives there, and they visit them whenever possible. They establish marriage ties mainly with the inhabitants of nearby villages, preferably with Adjarians. There are few families with many children. On average, women give birth to 3-4 children. Young people do not have job prospects locally and leave the country en masse, mainly either to Western Europe or within the country - to Adjara, Rustavi, etc.

As for Udabno, a border village of Sagarejo municipality, it is mainly inhabited by eco-migrant Svans, there are also a small number of Azerbaijanis. The local Svans have kept in touch with their native region and preserved their traditions in Kakheti as well. They are mainly engaged in cattle breeding and dairy production. Here, too,

the problem of youth employment and its outflow from the village usually arises. However, “Udabno Farm”, which covers 15,000 hectares in their neighbourhood, has partially solved the issue of unemployment.¹⁵² Udabno Farm, which includes almond, plum, and other fruit orchards, berry and vegetable plantations, cattle and poultry farms, etc., employs a total of about 500 people, among them about 100 people from the village of Udabno. According to our respondents, the local population works here seasonally (for 8 months); apart from Georgians, Azerbaijanis from the Iormuganlo community also work here. The farm near the Georgia-Azerbaijani border, which claims to have the largest almond orchards in Europe, has the function of strengthening the state’s border strip, in addition to its economic importance.

In the border Georgian villages of the Lagodekhi municipality, the living conditions of the population are more orderly, but unemployment forces part of them to labour migration. Relations between Georgians and ethnic minorities are normal here.

In terms of ethnocultural transformation, the situation is different in the border villages inhabited by national minorities. As known, in the post-Soviet period, these settlements became a kind of ethnolinguistic islands, partly marginalized groups that faced serious communication problems due to ignorance of the state language. These groups still retain their native language, religion, cultural traditions, and customs as defining markers of their identity.¹⁵³ The state and public organizations have done a lot of work to develop a strategy for the reintegration of border non-dominant ethnic groups in the state system. The main emphasis is on the education of minorities and teaching them the state language.

Sabato is an Armenian village, whose population moved to Georgia from Karabakh after the conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis (1918-1920). During the Soviet period, local Armenians had the best relations with the population of neighbouring Azerbaijan. As they recall: “We had very good relations with the Kakhi population

¹⁵² For information about farming, see: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100066577521036>

¹⁵³ L.Melikishvili, N.Jalabadze, *Language and Ethnic Boundaries in Multiethnic Georgia* in „Linguistic Construction of Ethnic Borders“, Frankfurt, 2015, pp. 83-94

on the other side of Alazani. Almost all of us had kunaks¹⁵⁴ there. They respected our people, and we respected them too. Our people went to trade there for it was difficult to get to Dedoplistskaro, due to the badly damaged roads; it took three hours before we got there. We took out string beans, vodka, and wine to the market in Azerbaijan. From here they took mulberry leaves for silkworms, from there they brought nuts, walnuts, and fruit. They also brought rice and sugar from there. After the Karabakh war (which has been going on intermittently since 1988), relations have become tense and changed significantly (Sabatlo, 2022)

The Armenian population regrets very much that they cannot move there (to Azerbaijan). During the recent Karabakh conflict, Armenians from Sabatlo condoled with Armenians from Karabakh. Although no one from Sabatlo fought there, many of their relatives and friends living in Armenia died in this war. However, it should be emphasized that the Armenian and Azerbaijani population living in Georgia, despite the Karabakh conflict, is not hostile to each other. There was even a case when an Armenian girl from Sabatlo married an Azerbaijani.

During the Soviet period, Armenians from Sabatlo knew Georgian poorly or did not know at all. Today, the younger generation knows Georgian, and part of the middle-aged population also has elementary knowledge of the state language. The younger generation is more focused on Georgia, which is primarily evidenced by their desire to continue their education at Georgian universities.

As for the Azerbaijani communities in the Lagodekhi and Sagarejo municipalities, due to their large number, the situation is different in comparison with the Armenian community. Azerbaijanis living in Georgia have a supporter in the face of the Azerbaijani state and private companies located there, which, first of all, provide economic and cultural assistance to Azerbaijani communities densely residing in Georgia; they build and repair schools, kindergartens, teahouses for them, print books, pay for the education of Azerbaijani students; for example, *Sokar* pays 1,200 lari to Azerbaijani students who study in Tbilisi; they have built a kindergarten in Kabali, which, according

¹⁵⁴ Kunak- a sworn brother

to residents, costs 4.5 million lari, etc. As respondents told us, they even wanted to open Aliyev's cabinet at the school in Kabali. As it turned out, many people from Azerbaijani villages in the Lagodekhi region went to work in Kazakhstan, mainly in Almaty, they set up their businesses there and live comfortably. They periodically visit Georgia and help their people financially, organize cultural events, etc.

These actions cause a certain dissatisfaction in a part of the local Georgian society. They consider it excessive interference from Azerbaijan and see it as some kind of political calculation.

Care of the Azerbaijani side for its compatriots living in Georgia has increased, in a way, the feeling of oppression among one part of local Azerbaijanis and the perception of Azerbaijani being their patron. After all, the local Georgians say that if they didn't like something, they immediately ran to the Azerbaijani embassy. Such a mood generally is mainly characteristic of representatives of non-dominant ethnic groups. Even today the Lagodekheli Azerbaijanis notice that they and the Georgians are in an unequal position; they complain that they have less land compared to the Georgians; that there are more ethnic Georgians in the administration; that the salaries of Azerbaijani teachers are lower, and so on. However, for some reason, they do not want to understand that during the division of the land, the land fund belonging to the village was divided into farmsteads and, naturally, the 3,000th population of Kabali got less than the villagers of Sakobo with 600 population. According to the narrator, "if these attitudes exist today, it is the fault of the older generations; however, the situation among young people has obviously changed for the better, children are closer to Georgians, they love Georgians more, they always emphasize and honestly say this. They are more friendly. Self-awareness and self-perception are now higher. Changing these attitudes is largely the fault of state policy." (Kabali 2021).

Ethnically Georgian respondents do not deny that there is a kind of hidden rivalry between Azerbaijanis and Georgians, and to some extent mistrust, which probably stems from their hetero-stereotypes. This is well seen in interviews with Georgian teachers of Azerbaijani schools: "It seems that there is such an attitude among the population that something bad can come from Georgians. If you listen to their

conversation, you may already feel bad expectations; these feelings come from parents who experienced the events of the 1990s, and such predisposition comes from there. And such expectations are bad for the young generation” (Kabali, 2021).

Most likely, such attitudes are the result of inter-ethnic tensions or confrontation in the 1990s, which formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the declaration of independence of Georgia. In our case, I mean the conflict between the Georgian and Azerbaijani population of Kvemo Kartli, as a result of which many Azerbaijani families left Georgia.¹⁵⁵ This issue is addressed by one of the publications of the Tolerance and Diversity Institute, where it is emphasized that “after the 1990s, the problem of alienation, disagreements, phobias, and negative stereotypes emerged between the ethnic Georgian and Azerbaijani population.”¹⁵⁶

It should be said that in the post-Soviet period, the attitude towards education has generally changed in the Azerbaijani communities of the region under study.

“Before girls were not allowed to study, today almost all children go to school. Today, a lot of people go to high school in Tbilisi, and girls also do. Now we have opened our eyes. (Lagodekhi, 2021)

Different Azerbaijani communities of Kakheti still have different attitudes towards education. For example, field material confirmed that a large number of livestock farms in Kakheti, bordering Azerbaijan, are owned by Azerbaijanis or work as hired workers. These people live on farms with their families, while their children are engaged in labour and do not study in schools.

The non-uniform aspiration of the Azerbaijani population of Kakheti towards progress is also expressed in the transformation of their traditions. For example, as is known, Azerbaijani girls were given in marriage at an early age and they had no prospect of getting an education. According to the narrator, “Now you cannot marry a girl under 18, a guy over 20. Previously, Azerbaijanis had many children,

¹⁵⁵ Ethnic aspects of social security in polyethnic society, ethnic minority and civil society in Kvemo Kartli, ed., L. Melikishvili, Tb., 2011, p. 185-200

¹⁵⁶ O. Kazumov, G.Sordia. What do we need to know about our compatriots of Azerbaijani origin? <https://tdi.ge/ge/page/ra-unda-vicodet-tanamokalake-etnikuri-azerbaijanelebis-shesaxe>

but now they have few children, 3-4 on average. They need to grow up, they need to learn.” (Kabali 2021)

Today, the family does not resolve the issue of the marriage of their children with such intensity as before. According to the respondent from Mughanlo, parents used to interfere in the marriage of their children, but today the situation has changed. “Now, if you don’t ask your son and ignore his opinion, later, the couple could get divorced. Today they take into account the desire of their children, and parents ask their children’s opinions and solve the issue of marriage in this way. But in those communities where work is considered more important than learning, the old tradition is still practised” (Mughanlo, 2022)

As a rule, Azerbaijanis still marry mainly Azerbaijanis. They often chose citizens of neighbouring Azerbaijan as their partners, mostly their compatriots who emigrated from here to Azerbaijan. Today, however, due to movement restrictions, this practice is being diminished. Marriages with local Georgians are rare. Previously, mixed families were more often created. According to the narrator, there are cases when Georgian girls marry Azerbaijanis, but, Azerbaijani girls seldom marry Georgian guys.

The levirate and sororate marriages, which were once widespread in the past, are not observed today among the border Azeri communities. As they say, “this custom is no longer followed, it was more common 50-60 years ago and it happened because the family did not want the widowed daughter-in-law to become the wife of a bad person. “Beşik kertme” (when the engagement was done while children were yet in their cradle) is no longer in practice. Polygamy has been one case in a thousand for the last 10-15 years. The cases of marriage between relatives have also diminished and are likely to disappear in the next 10 years. People have changed”. (Mughanlo, 2022).

In the social relations of Azerbaijanis and Georgians, such a form of artificial kinship as a christening for Georgians and religious male circumcision for Azerbaijanis is practised. Although it doesn’t happen very often, it is of great importance in terms of the integration of the Azeri community; At the same time, it plays a special role in the positive dynamics of intercultural communication between these people. Circumcision involves “kirva”, an analogue of the Christian

godfather, which, in our case, Muslim Azerbaijani chooses from Christian Georgians. It is these processes that determine the positive dynamics of intercultural communication and increase mutual acceptance. Azerbaijani respondents emphasize that Azerbaijanis do not choose Armenians as “Kirvas”.

According to local respondents, today “the whole celebration costs about 10,000 lari. One needs to spend money on everything. Those who are invited to the ceremony donate money, it used to be 50 lari, and now it is at least 100 lari. On the table, we have all kinds of Georgian cuisine. (Kabali, 2021). The change of time was also reflected in the circumcision rules. According to the respondent from Lagodekhi, this procedure used to be performed by barbers, but today it is done by a doctor and the price is 150 GEL, which is officially paid in the hospital.

Georgian respondents especially emphasized the diligence, avarice and thriftiness of Azerbaijanis when characterizing them. According to field material, even children from wealthy Azerbaijani families go to the brigades as hired workers in the summer for about 40 GEL per day. It also turned out that Azerbaijanis buy and then rent apartments in Rustavi, or Tbilisi. This is a source of additional income for them, which they then use for their local business.

As for the involvement of border ethnic minorities in the political life of the country, their political participation is limited, both in the local and central governments.¹⁵⁷

The two-year quarantine due to the pandemic and the suspension of contacts with neighbouring Azerbaijan turned the orientation of local Azerbaijanis towards Georgia. The need for knowledge of the Georgian language has increased. This is mainly observed among young people who intensively study the Georgian language at school or study in Georgian schools or plan to enter the universities of Georgia and work here.

We can conclude, that the part of Kakheti bordering Azerbaijan is represented by an ethnically diverse population. Azerbaijanis are the largest non-Georgian group here. During the Soviet period, the non-Georgian border population was in close contact with the

¹⁵⁷ Idem, What do we need to know about our compatriots of Azerbaijani origin?

population of neighbouring Azerbaijan. They had a family, friendly, business, and economic relations.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union due to the lack of household and living conditions the border population was enabled to leave their place of residence. In the subsequent period, many infrastructural and economic projects implemented by the state brought people back. Conditions have indeed improved significantly, but there are still factors that can contribute to the outflow of the population.

In the post-Soviet period, certain difficulties in intercultural communication were created by the ignorance of the state language by minorities. The language barrier and the compact and isolated life of minorities contributed to the marginalization of these groups at the initial stage of this period; in addition, ethnic conflicts and tensions between groups emerged. At the next stage, the effective policy carried out by the state (initiation of state language teaching, promotion of integration, public involvement, etc.) brought intercultural communication to a new stage and helped to gradually remove existing barriers between ethnic groups. However, the non-Georgian communities of the border zone are, on the one hand, still conventionally closed, in the sense that ethnic boundaries have not been completely opened (language barrier, limited choice of a marriage partner, different religion) and, on the other hand, they are not completely closed (knowledge of the Georgian language, higher education in Georgia, Georgian cultural influences).

§3 The problem of education of ethnic minorities in the border zone

After Georgia gained independence, the current situation with the integration of minorities in regions inhabited by ethnic minorities highlighted the need to transform the education system and form a new educational policy. As is known, knowledge of the state language is one of the necessary conditions for the civil integration of national minorities; intercultural communication is impossible without the knowledge of the state language, which contributes to the inclusion of minorities in the ethnocultural and socio-political contexts of the dominant nation. The non-Georgian population of the Kakheti region

bordering Azerbaijan faces difficulties caused by ignorance of the state language to a greater or lesser extent.

As is known, in Soviet Georgia, as in the entire Soviet Union, Russian was the only official administrative language and lingua franca. For national minorities, favourable conditions were created through educational institutions for the use and preservation of their native languages, especially since the 1950s. primary education and general secondary education were also available in minority languages. In the Georgian SSR, knowledge of the Georgian language was not a priority for national minorities, since the Russian language served as a binding language in interethnic relations. Even though education in higher educational institutions was conducted in the official state language of the republic, in Georgian, Russian-speaking sectors also functioned in most higher educational institutions of Soviet Georgia; Because of this, during the collapse of the Soviet Union, the bulk of national minorities spoke Georgian at a very low level or did not speak at all; especially in regions of compact residence of national minorities.¹⁵⁸

After the events of April 9, 1989, on August 15, the Government of Georgia adopted a special resolution that approved the state program for the development of the Georgian language. The program included the establishment of the status of the Georgian language as the state language in all party, administrative, scientific, cultural and public institutions; control over the functioning of the Georgian language as the state language; For those citizens who did not know the Georgian language, the creation of favourable conditions for teaching and learning the Georgian language, etc. However, the state program of the Georgian language did not restrict the linguistic rights of ethnic minorities living on the territory of Georgia.¹⁵⁹

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, rather complex problems arose in terms of conducting a cultural dialogue with minorities, which, first of all, manifested themselves in the disruption of communication between groups. The language barrier has become an obstacle in

¹⁵⁸ S. Mekhuzla, E. Roche, Education Reform and National Minorities in Georgia, ECMI Working Report # 46, 2009, p.6.

¹⁵⁹ D. Matsaberidze. Conflict in the region of Abkhazia: the confrontation between Georgian and Abkhaz nationalisms in 1989-2012. (analysis of institutions and institutional actors), doctoral dissertation, vol. 2014, p.80 (in Georgian)

relations between Georgians and minorities, especially among young people, given that the Russian language has lost its function as the main language of interethnic communication. The younger generation, in particular the Georgian youth, could no longer speak Russian satisfactorily. Georgian language programs aimed at minorities were disorganized and ineffective, largely due to the inability of the state to implement a proper educational policy.”¹⁶⁰

Our respondent from the village of Kabali, inhabited by Azerbaijanis, recalls that period and considers the fact of almost universal ignorance of the Georgian language today among middle-aged Azerbaijanis as a consequence of the situation at that time.

It was precise because of the ignorance of the state language after the declaration of independence of Georgia that it was difficult for national minorities to integrate into the social and political life of independent Georgia. Therefore, most young people left for neighbouring countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia) or Russia to continue their studies, and often stayed there after graduation. This factor, along with economic migration, was one of the reasons for the outflow of representatives of non-dominant ethnic groups from Georgia.

Lack of communication and targeted propaganda by a third force has become the basis of conflicts that arose in the 1990s in predominantly border regions inhabited by ethnic minorities.¹⁶¹ Such was the confrontation between Armenians and Georgians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians, Greeks and Georgians, which, fortunately, did not develop into a serious conflict.

According to a respondent from Lagodekhi, “confrontation between different ethnic groups is caused by the fact that they do not understand each other’s languages. In general, when there is no communication, alienation occurs by itself and this is just what causes conflict. The hardest problem is when a person does not understand what you are saying and there is a great chance that he will misunderstand what is at stake, especially when there is a psychological expectation of something bad” (Lagodekhi, 2021).

In Georgia, reforms were gradually carried out in the direction

¹⁶⁰ J. Wheatley, *Defusing Conflict in Tsalka District of Georgia: Migration, International Intervention and the Role of the State*, ECMI Working Paper #36, pg.11

¹⁶¹ Idem, *Ethnic aspects of social security...* pg. 185-200

of education, and in the state language policy of Georgia, special attention was paid to the development of programs for teaching the state language to national minorities.

There are currently 208 non-Georgian Secondary Schools in Georgia. 89 schools also have non-Georgian language sectors, where studies are conducted in Russian, Armenian or Azerbaijani.¹⁶² As for Kakheti, according to the official data of the Ministry of Education and Science⁵, there are 5 Azerbaijani (Lagodekhi-3, Sagarejo-2), one Russian (Khornabuji) and one Armenian (Sabatlo) schools.¹⁶³

Since 2004, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia has launched several educational programs for the non-Georgian-speaking population: “The Future Starts Today”, “Let’s Learn Georgian as a Second Language”, “Georgian for Future Success”; the School of Public Administration named after Zurab Zhvania, “Georgian language clubs” were opened. State language study centres, for parents, members of the community and other interested persons were established.¹⁶⁴

As a result, the growth of interest in learning the state language among young people in minority settlements of the district has been observed especially in recent years. According to respondents from Lagodekhi, those parents who do not know the Georgian language and cannot do without an interpreter, try to teach their children the Georgian language, because they saw the need for knowledge of the state language. Although there are Georgian sections in Azerbaijani schools and the teaching of the Georgian language is relatively intensive, some Azerbaijani families send their children to Georgian schools:

“They built a big school; 300 children are studying there. Studies are in Georgian and Azerbaijani, but now more people want to study in Georgian. My daughter studies in the Georgian sector; my wife does not know Georgian and wants her children to know it. I Learned Georgian in a store while communicating with Georgians. Now they

¹⁶² R. Amirejibi, K. Gabunia. Georgia’s Minorities: Breaking Down Barriers to Integration. June 2021. pg.4, available at: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Amirejibi_Gabunia_Georgia_Minorities.pdf

¹⁶³ Catalog of the educational institution, available at: <https://catalog.emis.ge/main>

¹⁶⁴ M. Dalakishvili, N. Iremashvili, Systemic challenges of the education policy towards the ethnic minorities in Georgia, Human Rights Education and Monitoring (EMC), 2020, pg.26-28

teach Georgian better in schools, and we prefer to bring our children to the Georgian sector. “ (Kabali 2021).

A similar trend is observed in the municipality of Sagarejo, where there are 4 Azerbaijani communities. Knowledge of the Georgian language has become prestigious among the population here, and some Azerbaijanis send their children to Georgian schools.

Recently, many scientific works have been written on the propagandistic nature of elementary school textbooks and the ideological-propagandistic messages contained in them.¹⁶⁵ Textbooks in non-Georgian language schools, except for language and literature, are published in Georgia. Native language textbooks are imported from neighbouring states, which causes dissatisfaction among representatives of local education structures, who assume the presence of propaganda messages in them.

The compactly residing Azerbaijani communities in the border region are represented in the municipalities of Lagodekhi and Sagarejo and Azerbaijani schools operate in these municipalities; in other municipalities bordering Azerbaijan, they live scattered and study in local Georgian schools.

Like the Azerbaijani community, there is a growing desire to learn Georgian among the population of the densely populated Armenian village of Sabatlo. Ethnic Armenians make up 75% of the population. There is one Armenian school in the village, which also has a Georgian section. According to local school teachers, the need for the Georgian sector in the school is because Adjarians have been living in the village for 20-25 years. Along with Adjarians, Armenian children also study in the Georgian sector. Children know each other's languages because they communicate daily. Both local Armenian and visiting Georgian teachers are working at the school. If earlier, 2 hours were allotted for

¹⁶⁵ M. Hodges, *Textbook Propaganda: Education or indoctrination?* London, 2017; J. Wojdon, *Primary school textbook Propaganda*, 2017 available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345587873_Primary_School_Textbook_Propaganda; S. Mkrtchian, *Religion in Armenian schools: from the first steps of the presentation of religion in the 1990s to modern aspects (content, iconography, ritual and interpretation)*, *Anthropological Researches*, #3, Vol., Tbilisi 2017, p. 94-110. (in Georgian)

teaching the Georgian language, 5 hours for Armenian and 5 hours for Russian, now it is the other way around - 5 hours for Georgian, 5 hours for Armenian and 2 hours for Russian from the fifth grade. Parents want their children to learn the Georgian languages and continue their studies in Tbilisi. However, young people from the Armenian families of Sabatlo still prefer to go to Armenia for higher education, as they have relatives there and will not have problems with housing. According to them: “Our children want to study in Georgia, the cross-border status provides a benefit for passing, but they have no place to stay. Living conditions are a problem.”

According to the information of the respondents, almost all families have the Internet, and during the Covid-19 pandemic, online lessons were organized. However, still there are no youth organizations, and no educational or sports sections in the village; local children love football and organize competitions with children from neighbouring villages on their initiative. Respondents note that young people in Sabatlo combine study and work well, they work physically as employees, go to herd the flock, etc. It is obvious that agricultural traditions have been passed on to the younger generation, which, in the case of state support, will become one of the guarantees for population retention; the strengthening of border villages is fully in line with the strategic interests of the State.

Program 1+4, carried out since 2010, is considered one of the most successful in the education system. Its goal is to make it easier for youth from among ethnic minorities to obtain higher education in a simplified manner. Instead of 4 exams, they take only Skill Tests (respectively in Armenian, Azerbaijani, Ossetian or Abkhazian languages) for admission to a higher education institution. After this, they pass the annual preparatory course in the Georgian language, which is free for 100%-grant- winners (the quota of free places changes every year), and the rest pay a standard fee of 2250 GEL. In case they accumulate 60 credits, young people continue to study in 4-year undergraduate programs (enrolment without exams, paid education). According to official data, since 2010, the number of students of this category in Georgian universities has been increasing annually.

There is an unequivocally positive opinion in society that this

program is successful, and this is confirmed by representatives of ethnic minorities. However, later, among some national minorities, there was some dissatisfaction with the fact that only some people were allowed to learn the state language for free. At the beginning of 2022, the campaign “Teach me Georgian for free” was launched on the social network. This was a protest of representatives of non-dominant ethnic groups (and not only them) regarding the fee for the course of the Georgian language educational program 1+4. They believe that this is an additional barrier and it needs to be solved as quickly as possible. Also, the Azerbaijani population of the border area is dissatisfied with the employment of graduates of the 1 + 4 program not in their speciality. It is clear from interviews with respondents:

“Our girls recently graduated from the Faculty of Georgian Philology — Mustafaeva, Alakhverdova, Gulbanova. All three received higher education in Georgian, but they do not work in their speciality. One works as a music teacher, and the other is a resource officer, they know Georgian and Azerbaijani, but they cannot work in their speciality, they are not allowed. It’s a tragedy, it’s very bad for us. There are no professional teachers in schools. They employ “someone’s” relatives. Certified teachers are also a problem. To get out of this crisis, it is necessary that a knowledgeable teacher of literature work as a teacher in the classroom and not as a resource officer. Such things need to be evaluated, they need to be paid attention to” (Field material, Lagodekhi district, Kabala village, 2021).

As for the schools of the border Georgian villages, here, education is carried out according to the standard program established by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, although there are some problems - shortage of personnel, lack or failure of proper infrastructure (eg Internet during distance learning), transportation issue, etc.

It is also worth noting that the youth of neighbouring border villages inhabited by different ethnic groups are in contact with each other, get to know each other, and organize sports competitions, which brings them closer and contributes to the integration of these communities. The fact that these children communicate in each other’s languages is saying a great deal.

Finally, despite the effective reforms carried out to solve the

education issues of the non-dominant ethnic groups, the local population has certain claims, which should be taken into account in their integration policy in the future. I will try to formulate the wishes expressed by the narrators in the form of points:

- Georgian teachers working in non-Georgian language schools should preferably know the language of the non-dominant ethnic groups in which schools they teach (in our case, Azerbaijani, Armenian).

- The salaries of teachers should not be differentiated (Narrator: Georgian teachers have higher salaries in Azerbaijani schools. Only teachers of the Georgian language and history receive the additional payment, the rest do not. If the Georgian language is taught by an Azerbaijani teacher, he will also get extra pay. Only Georgian teachers are certified, if there is a senior teacher, then they are mainly the Georgian language teachers, an Azerbaijani can also be, but, say, only 2-3 out of 42)

- The problem of transportation of students should be improved (there are often not enough vehicles to transport children to schools in neighbouring villages or at long distances).

- Parents ask to improve the teaching of the Georgian language at the local level. (Narrator: I want my children to complete all twelve grades in Georgian, I will even pay for that).

- The Ministry of Education should pay more attention to schools in terms of preserving the cultural heritage of minorities, through creating new sports and creative circles/centres or expanding and improving existing ones (narrator: we do not have a centre of culture, a gym, there were youth organizations before, but they were reduced. Children go to a neighbouring Georgian village to a music centre and a dance circle. They don't teach Azerbaijani dances and songs, there is no teacher).

- Make the study of the Georgian language free of charge on the 1+4 program for students representing the minorities of Georgia (campaign - "Teach me Georgian for free").

The issue of education of the young generation in the minority-populated villages of the Kakheti region bordering Azerbaijan is one of the main directions of the state's strategy, the successful solution of which will ensure their full and equal participation in the political and social life of the country.

CHAPTER IV

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE BORDER SETTLEMENTS OF KAKHETI

§ 1. General Overview

The present chapter considers the activities of community organizations in the municipalities and villages of Kakheti, their role, and their development trajectory. Taking into account the perspective of community and civil society organizations, it is important to observe the modalities of cooperation and self-organization in border settlements and search for analogies that lead to important discoveries of the experience of community unification a century ago.

The intersections identified between late 19th century and modern community organizations are discussed in terms of community engagement, accountability and civic responsibility - to what extent have historical community models been preserved and have these forms been able to adapt to the present? How are modern media and communication tools used? How effective are the new possibilities of community organization and what technological factors influence the processes of community formation? These are the questions we tried to answer in this chapter.

Based on the geographical focus of the project, the emphasis was on the border settlements of four municipalities of Kakheti, of which nine villages directly fall into this category. Information about border villages was obtained both at the local level through personal conversations with residents including face-to-face and online interviews; quantitative public information was requested from municipal bodies. An important resource for research was the map of community organizations developed by the “Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia.”¹⁶⁶ In addition to surveying the population in the region, interviews were conducted

¹⁶⁶ The first three editions of the mentioned series include examples of social and civil self-organization before the Sovietization of Georgia, and the fourth edition examines in detail the modern experience of self-organization, including all regions of Georgia, which is an essential resource for studying this issue.

with representatives of municipal administrations and local public organizations with experience in implementing specific projects/activities in border settlements. To obtain quantitative data and comprehensive coverage of public organizations in regions under study, an online questionnaire was sent to the identified organizations.

The cycle of publications issued by the Community Development Center dedicated to the study of the history of community and civil self-organization in Georgia has a special place in creating an ideal picture of the community experience; These publications, based on specific examples, shed light on the historical experience of various civil and community self-organization.¹⁶⁷ Based on these publications, the current research makes it possible to draw parallels between traditional and modern processes by rethinking forgotten experiences.

Among the multi-ethnic settlements I have studied are: the village of Sabatlo of the Dedoplistskaro municipality (355 inhabitants, 300 of which are ethnic Armenians, 55 are eco-migrants from Adjara who moved here in the 1980s); the Kabali community of Lagodekhi municipality, populated mainly by ethnic Azerbaijanis; it consists of four villages (Kabali, population - 3955; Karajala, population - 2880; Uzuntala, population - 2615; Ganjala, population - 2810); the village of Mughanlo, Sagarejo municipality (1830 inhabitants) and the village of Ilyatsminda, Signagi municipality (Former Ulyanovka; 637 inhabitants), where there live the ethnic group of Molokans, who make up about 11% of the local population.¹⁶⁸

As part of the project, I studied the infrastructure situation in the settlements, including the rate of Internet access, problems with road and household infrastructure, etc. In recent years, the road infrastructure in all four municipalities has improved. The road problem was especially acute in three villages on the border of Dedoplistskaro municipality - Sabatlo, Pirosmeni, Samtkaro and the village of Erisimedi in Signaghi municipality. This was one of the

¹⁶⁷ The map of community organizations developed by the Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia has been collecting data on community organizations in Georgia since 2011, and this information is presented online on their website. Available at: <https://www.cdrc.ge/ge/organizations>

¹⁶⁸ Public information provided by municipalities. Requested 25/08/2022

main factors forcing the population to leave the village; along with the regulation of the infrastructure, opposite processes have recently been observed that residents have noted in numerous interviews. For example, according to the assessment of the resident of the village of Pirosmeni, *“The road from Dedoplistskaro was very bad, from Tbilisi to Chalaubani it took 1 hour and 20 minutes, and from there up to here - 4 hours. From the turn to Signaghi, the road was no longer there. Until 2012, this village was half-empty. 75 families left the village, including me. The reality was that they paid 2000 GEL for cutting down the vineyard. Now, if you ask around in Pirosmeni, you won't find a single house for sale. Now they are starting to build, I know one (resident) who does not want to leave the village, the house is not for sale anywhere, and he wants to build it. Now 156 households live there. The people have returned. The improvement in the economic situation caused this, of course.”* (Pirosmeni, 2022).

As noted in the border settlements, the solution of the road problem and the introduction of public transport over the past 2-3 years has contributed to the intensification of economic activity, the return of the population and, in general, the revival of villages. Except for the village of Erisimedi, most of the border villages were supplied with gas, and drinking water was supplied to the population daily, although a 24-hour water supply system is planned to be implemented in the next year (Firosmani village, Sabatlo village, 2022).

Concerning Internetization in border settlements, in this direction, we are faced with a mixed picture. Among the surveyed municipalities, the lowest Internet density¹⁶⁹ rates are in Lagodekhi (38.32%) and Sagarejo (36.66%) municipalities, and the highest in Signaghi (57.33%), followed by Dedoplistskaro (41.24%). In terms of broadcast transit, Signaghi is leading (44.57%), while the other three municipalities have almost the same figures (Dedofliskaro - 24.19%, Lagodekhi - 25.6% and Sagarejo - 25.8%).

¹⁶⁹ Density is the number of individual subscribers divided by the number of households (families) or population in the country/region/village.

Table 1 - Statistics of Internet and broadcasting transit density in the surveyed municipalities, data for July 2022.¹⁷⁰

Region	Population	Family	Physical subscriber (Internet)	Physical subscriber (Broadcasting)	Legal Subscriber (Internet)	Legal Subscriber (Broadcasting)	Physical subscriber (Internet)	Physical subscriber (Broadcasting)
Dedoplistskaro district	30 811	8 752	3 609	2 117	171	4	41.24 %	24.19 %
Sighnaghi district	43 587	12 384	7100	5 519	239	6	57.33 %	44.57 %
Lagodekhi district	51 066	14 510	5 560	3 715	231	21	38.32 %	25.6 %
Sagarejo district	59 187	16 813	6 164	4 337	238	5	36.66 %	25.8 %

¹⁷⁰ Data on Internetization and broadcasting density are based on the information and analytical portal of the Communications Commission. available: <https://analytics.comcon.ge/>

As for the statistics of the Internetization of border villages and the transit of the broadcaster, it looks like this:

village	Popu- lation	Family	Physical Subs- criber (Internet)	Physical Subs- criber (Broad- cast)	Legal Subs- criber (Internet)	Density (Inter- net)	Density (Broad- cast)
Dedoplis- tskaro district - Sabatlo	508	144	70	3	2	48.61	2.08
Sighnaghi district - Iliatsminda	637	181	82	0	2	45.30	0.00
Dedop- lists-karo district - Firosmeni	759	216	78	2	2	36.11	0.93
Lagodekhi district - Rachis- ubani	100	28	10	8	0	35.71	28.57
Lagodekhi district - Karajala	2576	732	243	16	1	33.20	2.19
Sighnaghi district - Erisimedi	340	97	25	2	4	25.77	2.06
Lagodekhi district - Ganjala	2745	780	188	5	1	24.10	0.64
Lagodekhi district - Matsimi	819	233	54	46	4	23.18	19.74
Lagodekhi district - Uzuntala	2333	663	146	9	1	22.02	1.36
Lagodekhi district - Kabali	3654	1038	185	11	4	17.82	1.06
Dedop- lists-karo district - Samtats- karo	1466	416	12	15	2	2.88	3.61

Table 2 - Statistics of Internet and broadcasting transit density in the studied border settlements, data for July 2022

According to the above statistics, the lowest rates of Internet access, despite the availability of infrastructure, are in the villages inhabited by ethnic minorities: Kabali, Uzuntala and Ganjala. Internetization in the village of Samtatskro began in 2021, which causes a very low (2.88%) level of density. The available data, at first glance, indicate a disparity in digital and Internet access, but it is worth noting that residents of those villages that, according to statistics, are characterized by high rates of Internet access, were more likely to report technical shortcomings in the full use of the Internet connection in the course of surveys: delays connections, incomplete coverage of villages, etc.

Respondents highlighted the difficulties during the pandemic when students had difficulty attending online classes due to lack of Internet access or poor communication in villages; The problem was also caused by the lack of material and technical base (lack of personal computers, tablets, mobile phones). In the absence of an Internet connection, the solution was to use a mobile Internet connection, which was not always available to the local population.

In addition to the educational and distance learning needs that the Covid pandemic has made clear, the Internet and fast, two-way communication have become vital in terms of informing the population in the regions. Although the rate of Internet access in the target municipalities has increased in 2020-2022, due to many reasons, the rate of access and use of the Internet as a factor of social and economic development is still insufficient for the population of the region.

§2. Community and civil society organizations

Traditionally, the community is understood as the unity of people living in the same geographical area, sharing common socio-economic and cultural conditions and having similar interests, problems and needs (we should also note the concept of “developed community”, which is based on the main characteristics of the community’s development process and its results).¹⁷¹ Although the initial concept of community

¹⁷¹ The main features of a developed community are: a) there is a civil group in the community b) the community has a vision and a long-term development plan/strategy c) the community is aware of its rights and needs and protects

is the principle of geographical coexistence of people, it can also be considered in a broader sense, beyond territorial unity, especially in the presence of modern communication technologies. Accordingly, more precisely community can be defined as a unity of people with a common geographical perspective and/or common interests, values, social conditions, and priorities.¹⁷²

As for community organizations/groups, they bring together people with common interests, the purpose of which is to solve current issues, work on the problems of the village, district, and community following the principle of democratic participation and improve the conditions of its members and the environment. Community organizations based on common interests, so-called Thematic Community Organizations, include units that bring together people with similar goals around a particular area or issue who are engaged in social activities (for example, youth clubs, women's rights groups, farmers' associations, cooperatives, etc.).¹⁷³ The community units and organizations in the studied border regions are mainly united by geographical/rural principles.

What is the difference between community and public organizations? Despite many similarities, the main characteristics of community organizations are micro-level, often self-organizing community initiatives that locally respond to existing community needs, while community organizations usually cover a wider geographical or thematic area. The main difference between them is that the field of action of the former is limited and focused on local, and community issues, while public organizations, as a rule, operate on a wider scale - in the region, and even on the scale of Georgia.¹⁷⁴ Another difference lies in the fact that public organizations are directly involved in the

(protects) them d) the community has the ability to identify problems and respond to them . Community Service and Community Development Support Guide; Community Development Coalition Publication, vol. 2012, p. 6..

¹⁷² Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia. available: <https://cdrc.ge/ge/khshirad-dasmuli-kitkhvebi>.

¹⁷³ Guidelines for Community Organizations; Association for Protection of Landowners' Rights , Vol. 2004, p. 10 -11.

¹⁷⁴ Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia. available: <https://cdrc.ge/ge/khshirad-dasmuli-kitkhvebi>.

implementation of initiatives and projects, therefore, changes or benefits directly affect them, while public organizations are often not even direct beneficiaries of their own projects. Community and public organizations registered under the current legislation of Georgia have the status of a non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity. In essence, community organizations were founded voluntarily, and perhaps such delimitation may be controversial, however, fieldwork revealed the diversity of forms of community organization in Kakheti, which made it necessary to specify the issue.

The history of community organizations in Georgia begins in the second half of the 19th century and forms an important stage in the formation of independent public initiatives before the Sovietization period. The acquisition and recovery of the information preserved in the mass print media about this very important movement or union allowed for its analysis. A comparative study of old and existing community associations allows us to rethink historical experience; Sovietization led to the levelling of communal traditions, which not only banished the culture of amateur performance and public initiative from memory but also replaced it with distorted and violent forms of Soviet social organization (eg, the abolition of existing cooperatives and collectivization in the 1930s). The result of this was the abolition of existing community movements, the prohibition of independent initiatives and the destruction of the established culture of democratic self-government. Public organizations have appeared in Kakheti since the 19th century. Studying the work and activities of them and the modern organizations operating here today makes it possible to identify certain parallels.

Just the experience before the Soviet occupation is an example that reflects the high culture of the work of public associations in the local context. This is a public memory of how the unity of the community in Georgia was able to develop itself and act independently on complex issues. This was not a one-time and isolated event but was a pattern of the general educational and social movement that took place at that time. The argument is supported by the fact that public/community movements were scattered throughout the regions of Georgia and included agricultural and trade unions, educational and cultural initiatives, women's industrial or educational groups, and others. This period is characterized by the

diversity of public movements in terms of their organizational structure and arrangement, management models, forms of taxation, achieving economic sustainability, types of communication and engagement with the community - including ways of using print media and infrastructure (namely post offices, railways, etc.).

The search for past community organizations and initiatives in the municipalities of Kakheti reveals a rather diverse and important history. Despite the many differences and temporal distance, there is an important convergence of values between modern and century-old community initiatives. It is also essential to highlight the similarities that will allow us to talk about the first shifts of self-government and democratic governance and the national experience, which will present the forgotten traditions of joint efforts, initiative and solidarity for rural welfare in a new light.

A vivid and more or less well-preserved example of the mentioned history is the commune of the village of Gulgula, founded by Ivane Kolelishvili in 1906; its members were up to 120 households.¹⁷⁵ The economic association “Brotherhood and Unity”, whose goal was to improve the production and social life of the inhabitants of the village of Gulgula, despite its short existence, was based on far-sighted and innovative principles. Under the leadership of Ivane Kolelishvili, it was possible to unite the agricultural lands of the farms belonging to the commune and cultivate them with joint efforts, which soon brought results; This increased the credibility of the commune. There was even interest in neighbouring villages who wanted to share Gulgula’s experience and asked for help. It is noteworthy that the fund, which belonged to the commune, financed the education and medical care of its members; the source of accumulation of finances, in addition to agricultural activities, was visiting theatrical performances, the income from which was collected in the fund.¹⁷⁶

Another rural initiative concerns the unification of the inhabitants

¹⁷⁵ Online portal "It's time for self-government", Gulgula - a village revived by the initiative of one man; Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JV6Z3W-a6H4>

¹⁷⁶ Online portal "It's time for self-government". Two stories of rural development 113 years apart – Gulgula Commune – 1905 and Ruispiri Rural Development Movement – 2018. Available at: <https://droa.ge/?p=33056>

of the village of Kvemo Machkhaani in the historical Kiziki. From the last decades of the 19th century until the Soviet occupation, Kvemo Machkhaani, as one of the exceptionally rich settlements, was the centre of trade, crafts and agricultural life. From the history of Machkhani, it is worth noting the involvement of its population and joint, solidarity actions to improve the life of the village, which was followed by the rise of social and cultural life.

In addition to the fact that the history of the village is known for the Machkhaani Theater built by its major residents and opened in 1899 (for which they collected money for nine years), it is also worth noting the experience and efforts of the population in the development of the village, which was expressed in several initiatives. The community activity of the population was special, which was manifested in the determination of development priorities, the collection of funds at the local level and the implementation of various initiatives. Of course, this was also facilitated by the fact that this village was the cultural and economic centre of Kiziqhi, where workshops and trading shops were concentrated. The economic upswing was followed by a high degree of public participation and revitalization of cultural life in the village.¹⁷⁷

Along with the opening of the theatre, the Machkhaani residents through their joint efforts laid the foundation of a public book depository, which was followed by the opening of a library, a pharmacy and a hospital, a workshop, a girls' school, etc.¹⁷⁸

As a result of Soviet collectivization and centralized management, diverse experiences that were a vital component of modern rural development were forgotten along with the disappearance of rural and community associations. Accordingly, it is necessary to restore, develop and introduce those approaches that will compensate for the age-old stagnation and backwardness.

¹⁷⁷ T. Sikharulidze, "Machkhaani village - cultural and economic center of Kiziki"; Initiative for changes, experience of community self-organization and cooperation in Georgia, before the Soviet occupation, book one. Community Development Center and Contemporary Art Center, Tbilisi edition, Tb. 2015, p. 49.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*pg.55

§ 3. Challenges and activities of community organizations in border villages

According to the latest data, there are about 185 community organizations in Georgia. True, there is a noticeable trend in quantitative growth, but it has not been determined how much their qualitative increase is proportional to their quantitative growth, including the share of active organizations, how widely community initiatives are implemented directly in villages (compared to cities and municipal centres), what is the duration of the existence of community organizations, etc.

The range of tasks facing the community and public organizations largely coincides; However, it should be noted that initiatives in regions and villages often have much less access to financial, educational, human, technical, and other types of resources compared to organizations located in central cities or the capital. The lack of financial resources and the associated organizational instability is a universal problem and a weak point of public initiatives. At the same time, organizations operating in the regions face the issue of finding, attracting and maintaining qualified and motivated human resources, which is caused by unstable and limited access to financial resources. Community organizations also face problems related to working infrastructure, such as lack of space, scarcity of technology and equipment and, in some cases, their absence.

The quality of organizations' activities is negatively affected by the heterogeneous perception of their role by local municipalities and communities. Community organizations act as intermediaries between the community and local government, so the existence and quality of mutual trust is crucial. The weak degree of community cohesion and mutual trust, the social practice of self-organization falling out of the memory of the community, significantly affects the efficiency of community organization. Orientation to the needs of the community maintains the social significance and legitimacy of the organization and instils a collective sense of its attractiveness and importance.

Informing the community about the vision and action plans of the organization, as well as ongoing activities, contributes greatly

to creating the organization's positive, accountable image, which is capable of raising and solving important issues in the community. While the issue of accountability greatly helps to hold the community together, economic hardship, indifference, a low culture of collaboration, and distrust continue to negatively affect the activities of community organizations.¹⁷⁹

Despite the mentioned difficulties, which community organizations face, there are examples of actions on a voluntary basis, which creates a healthy precedent for carrying out activities useful to society at the community level.

Local organizations that intensively implement various community activities and play an important role in improving rural life were identified in the investigated municipalities. It is worth noting the "Knowledge Cafe" in the city of Tsnori, which operates throughout the Kakheti region. As the founder of the organization declares, their role is "to combine, connect and exchange knowledge and resources". The organization responds to community challenges and includes activities aimed at a wide age segment. Its members implement projects aimed at strengthening educational, civic and community engagement. Thematically, their projects include entrepreneurship strengthening, healthcare, agriculture, and general education, for which they try to mobilize local human resources and involve invited specialists. The organization, in addition to the deep knowledge of community issues, has data on local human resources, which facilitates the establishment of links with the community. An example of this is the mentoring program, which the founder of the organization described as follows:

"We implement mentor-type programs, among young people we determine who has difficulties, who needs what, and then we group them with those who already have experience. This works best for both individual empowerment and making new connections in the community."

The factor determining the effectiveness of this approach is the high confidence factor.

¹⁷⁹ Initiative for changes, examples of community and civil self-organization in modern Georgia, book four. Publication of the Community Development Center, Vol. 2022, p. 231

During the pandemic, the Knowledge Cafe in the village of Erisimedi held information campaigns on vaccination against Covid-19. In the same period, based on the need for online learning, a few selected students of the local school received computer equipment, through which they were able to participate in the educational process. At the initiative of the organization, the book fund of the school was also replenished and the infrastructure of the library was improved.

An example of a local organization is the Local Action Group of Dedoplistskaro (Dedoplistskaro LAG), which is not a typical community organization, but within the framework of grant programs, it actively strengthens individuals in the mentioned municipality, as well as purposefully helps various types of formal and informal associations. The organization was founded with the support of the European Union and UNDP, within the framework of the European Neighborhood Program for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD). In 2016-2020, 110 business and social projects were financed, which employed up to 300 people. The target areas of the project were the diversification of economic activity, the strengthening of agriculture, tourism and small business, and social services, including the improvement of education, healthcare, culture, sports and municipal services.

Within the framework of the project implemented in the border settlements, a positive relationship was identified between the activities of the LAG and the beneficiaries of the settlements in terms of improving economic opportunities. Project beneficiaries received targeted technical support based on their needs; for example, beneficiaries living in the village of Pirosmeni were given modern ploughing machines, tractors, etc.

With the support of LAG, a vegetable greenhouse has been set up in the village of Pirosmeni. Residents of the village, who have migrated from Adjara, are very grateful for this project.

For sustainable development of agriculture, public organizations carry out work to disseminate knowledge, including in the direction of introducing modern innovative methods and approaches. For example, in the village of Samtatskaro, they supported the initiative “Recycling waste for the production of alternative fuels”. In the same village,

with the support of LAG, the irrigation system of the walnut orchard, planted on 83 hectares, was improved, a small sewing workshop was organized, etc.

The success of these initiatives is largely determined by innovative, internationally proven methodology of the projects and sustainable and long-term financial support.

In interviews, representatives of public associations talk about unresolved social and organizational problems. From an organizational point of view, limited access to financial support/grants was cited as the main problem; in the case of the availability of funding, a small budget and short deadlines for the implementation of projects were noted, which does not make it possible to fully work on systemic problems in a wide geographical area. In this regard, the Dedoplistskaro LAG is an exception.

Community organizations also noted the lack of their own working space, which puts them in an unstable position and makes long-term strategic planning and development difficult. Against this backdrop, a successful example is the Tsnori Knowledge Cafe, which has chosen the path of public funding (so-called crowdfunding) and launched a successful “Lay your brick” campaign. Within the campaign, the organization was able to attract financial funds, through which the Tsnori Knowledge Café in the centre of Tsnori continues to work in its private building.

Relatively experienced community organizations, that have implemented many projects with the support of donors, have the appropriate material and technical base, although its absence is a problem for relatively new and start-up organizations.

The weak community involvement of the border population of Kakheti remains an actual and urgent issue. The challenge is to find community leaders at the local level who will be able to take the initiative, take charge of shaping a social movement, engage youth, women and vulnerable groups and organize them to be more active.

Representatives of the border population and organizations emphasized ongoing migration processes in the region; The main factor in the outflow of predominantly young people from the countryside is the economic situation associated with a high level of unemployment.

This process was observed with particular intensity in the village of Erisimedi, where, in addition to economic difficulties, there were cases of young people leaving the village to continue their education; social type of motivation was also mentioned - marriage, return to Adjara, etc. The difficult life was caused by years of unresolved problems: off-road, lack of regular transportation infrastructure and natural gas, difficult access to medical care and faulty or non-existent internet. Although the road problem, in this case, was resolved, many other issues remain unresolved.

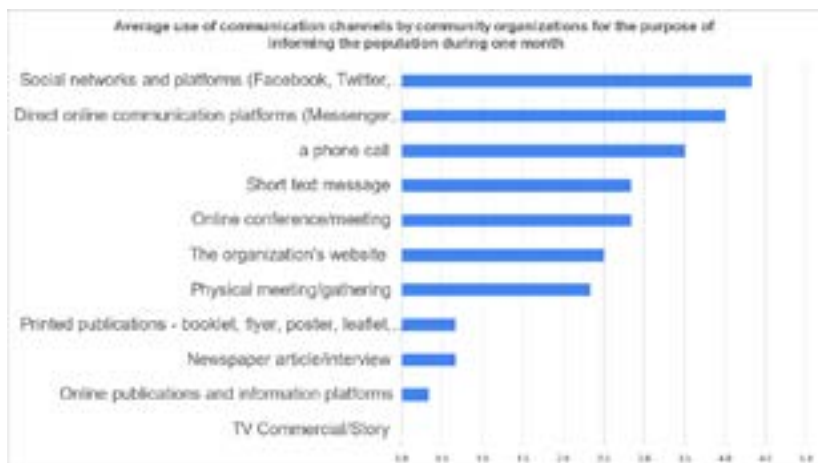
A striking example of how road infrastructure renewal affected the return of the rural population is the village of Pirosmani.

The lack of cultural and social spaces for youth and students, which would create better opportunities for them to participate in educational, recreational and sports activities, has been repeatedly noted by public organizations.

Community organizations focused on border settlements implement educational programs that contribute to the development of professional skills of the local population. And this is relevant for the local labour market (eg, business production, agricultural direction, textile processing, computer services, etc.)

Although community organizations are actively working on the mentioned problem, they believe that the self-government has little interest in encouraging and supporting the public sector.

Local organizations use a variety of ways to inform and interact with the community. According to quantitative data, the following communication channels are most often used:



From the point of view of simplicity and flexibility of communication, representatives of community organizations single out social networks but point out the shortcomings that, despite their simplicity, accompany them. It should also be noted that most civil society organizations are realistic about the current picture regarding access to communication technologies in the community. Accordingly, a variety of approaches have been identified that organizations purposefully and consciously use to communicate. The representative of the organization in the Sighnaghi municipality is describing a diversified communication approach for informing society as follows:

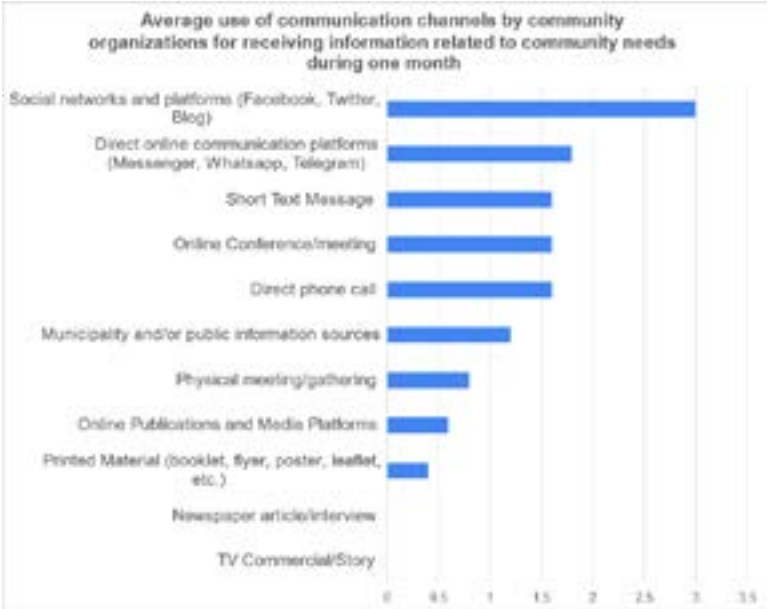
“There are people who don’t have digital skills, don’t have internet or technical resources of the appropriate capacity. In this case, we use such communication channels as messages, telephone communication, leaflet, poster and others. Those target groups who have digital skills, internet and technology, get information accordingly through digital platforms, etc.”

The organization of both physical and online group meetings is associated with more difficulties. On the part of community organizations, the uneven possession of digital skills among community representatives was emphasized, especially noticeable among the age categories, which is especially noticeable among age categories.

The lack of qualified personnel who would be directly responsible

for interaction and communication with the public was also cited as a deterrent; All this is due to scarce financial resources; community associations do not have the opportunity to have a separate staff for the implementation of these activities. Lack of suitable space for organizing physical gatherings and/or infrastructural failure has been identified by organizations as a problem that is an obstacle to community activities and supporting economic activities.

Concerning the main sources of information about the needs of the community, it is distributed as follows:



Community organizations claim that face-to-face consultations, meetings and questionnaires are effective in terms of obtaining information because the involvement and quality are low when using online tools - *“a direct meeting with citizens is accompanied by emotion, which is lacking in online meetings; this even determines the fate of the issue,”* however, they also note the social advantages of bilateral communication and interaction through the network, when the community member can directly exchange information with the representatives of the community association - *“Social network as*

a direct connection with the person living in the community is very useful.”

Among the problems associated with obtaining information was the lack of a single platform that would facilitate the collection of community needs; Insufficient openness on the part of public structures was noted. The latter will play an important role in initiating and implementing the mentioned issue.

As community organizations point out, digital competencies and appropriate internet infrastructure are developing in municipalities, which in turn is demonstrated by the increasing statistics of internet access, however, having the appropriate skills remains a challenge.

Based on the above, the representatives of the organizations believe that the following factors will have a significant impact on increasing community involvement:

- In parallel with the development of digital skills, raising the awareness of the population about the ways, platforms and approaches of active community involvement through the Internet;
- Identification and training of community leaders, which will contribute to the horizontal distribution of community responsibilities;
- Improving communication with public structures, searching for effective, alternative ways of interaction and cooperation. Support for results-oriented projects of municipalities, advocacy of community issues, as well as the introduction and dissemination of bilateral communication mechanisms;
- Increasing the competence of representatives of local organizations in terms of effective community accountability and civic engagement, including through the use of modern media.
- Development of communication infrastructure and acceleration of the speed of

It can be said that the local community organization plays an important role in retaining the population, developing settlements and improving rural life.

Based on the interviews conducted with community organizations and the provided quantitative data, the trend of internalization and development of digital skills in the border settlements is quite clear; however, at the same time, the mentioned process is characterized by insufficient intensity and is often accompanied by technical or infrastructural challenges, lack of public education, retraining and qualification raising programs or innovative approaches. Although public organizations use social networks as the main way to receive and provide information, they are aware of the limitations and risks associated with this process.

Examples of the activities of public organizations in the border municipalities of Kakheti demonstrate the importance of the function of these organizations, however, observations revealed that these interventions are often not of a systemic nature. Successful public organizations strive to achieve financial sustainability through various mechanisms, including social entrepreneurship, crafts, educational programs, etc. Involving community members and caring for their development and education has a positive effect on increasing the level of trust in organizations; This is quite consistent with the existing local model of democratic self-government, created centuries ago by communities in different parts of Georgia (including Kakheti).

Reinforcement of community organizations, the introduction of various mechanisms for their promotion, support from municipalities, and diversification of funding sources are important elements for further development and strengthening of border settlements.

CONCLUSION

Kakheti is located in the extreme east of our country and includes the basins of the Iori and Alazani rivers. It is geographically and historically an organic part of Georgia. According to written sources, on the territory of present-day Kakheti there were several small “countries” (namely, *Kakheti*, *Kukheti*, *Hereti*, *Tsuketi*, *Sujeti*, *Kambechani*), with a population of the same ethnic origin or more or less related tribes. From time to time, this or that “country” expanded at the expense of others and a new political or administrative unit was formed. Naturally, such changes contributed to the activation of ethnogenetic and ethno-political processes.

People have lived on the territory of Kakheti since ancient times. Paleoanthropological studies have unequivocally proved that, at least since the Bronze Age, this historical-geographical region of Georgia was inhabited by indigenous tribes. In this population, as in the entire Caucasus, the presence of the Mediterranean type of the South European race, which is characterized by a certain polymorphism, is confirmed; the cranial material of late antiquity has also confirmed that it has not changed over thousands of years; the stability of the anthropological features over such a long period indicates that the substrate of the ancient population of Kakheti withstood various infiltrations and mixing with migration flows; the mentioned population and its Caucasian neighbours had the same genetic origin. The study of DNA genetic markers further strengthened the conclusions drawn from anthropological research.

Archaeological material testifies to the continuous economic and political life of the ancient population of Kakheti. Sites of all archaeological epochs, starting from the Lower Paleolithic, have been found here. It is extremely important that every archaeological culture is genetically related to its predecessor, and one can trace an unbroken chain of development without hesitation. This lends itself well to the findings of anthropologists.

The work, based on historical sources, presents the long history of the formation of the historical-ethnographic region of Kakheti and its separate stages, ethnohistorical processes that developed as

a result of the policy since the late Middle Ages, especially of the Russian Empire or the Soviet state in the territory adjacent to today's Azerbaijan.

Historical events had a painful impact on the region and it was completely depopulated. The Russian Empire, which dominated the Caucasus, tried to create a favourable situation for itself through ethnomigration processes and turned this territory into a place of settlement for retired soldiers, sectarians, participants in various rebellions, or persons undesirable for the Empire. Later, from the end of the 19th century, the Georgian population, Armenians and Turkic-speaking groups settled here, who migrated from the villages of the mountains of Eastern Georgia, Western Georgia (Imereti, Racha) and Kakheti.

The main source of income for the population of border villages is agriculture and animal husbandry. Both Georgian and non-Georgian groups have adapted to the local ecological environment, whose activities have changed following the needs of the times.

Despite a kind of external calm in the region, the ethnoconfessional situation is rather complicated. After the collapse of the Soviet atheistic state, the number of followers of traditional religions and believers increased, and at the same time, the fertile ground was created for the introduction and spread of new religious movements. Confessional affiliation has become the most important sign of identification with certain groups, which increases the negative attitude towards the representatives of different religious movements.

In the conditions of the Russian hybrid war, it is important to maintain stable relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan, since the existing problems could be used as an instrument of political manipulations, especially when up to 450 km section of the common border between these two countries has not yet been established. For both sides, the issue of belonging of the territories adjacent to David Gareji and the village of Erisimedi is especially problematic.

Today, part of Erisimedi village is on the side of Azerbaijan. The reason for the uncertainty related to the border is the change of the course of the Alazani River; this is facilitated by the well-

defined meandering that characterizes Alazani when it flows on flat land; Despite numerous attempts, no agreement on this issue can be reached yet. If embankment works are not carried out on time, there will always be a danger of the river bed changing.

The issue of delimitation and demarcation of the Davit Gareji section of the Georgian-Azerbaijani border also remains open. For more than 20 years, there has been a sort of moratorium between the two countries so that pilgrims and tourists can move freely throughout the monastery complex. The disputed territory is important for both states. For Georgia, this is its historical and cultural-religious heritage, and for Azerbaijan, it is a strategic height from which it is easy to monitor the surrounding territories. At the same time, the Azerbaijani side is making every effort to present the Gareji complex as an Albanian monument, which causes particular indignation in the circles of Georgian clergy, historians and experts. Nevertheless, the historically established good neighbourly and strategic ties between the two countries do not allow the border problem to escalate into a conflict, and the situation remains stable.

In the post-Soviet period, certain difficulties in intercultural communication were created by the ignorance of the state language by minorities. The language barrier and the compact and isolated life of minorities contributed to the marginalization of these groups at the initial stage of this period; this was accompanied by conflicts of an ethnic nature and the emergence of intergroup tensions. A similar situation was on the Georgian-Azerbaijani border. At the next stage, the effective policy pursued by the state (initiating the teaching of the state language, promoting integration, public involvement, and other programs) brought intercultural communication to a new stage and contributed to the gradual elimination of existing barriers between ethnic groups. However, the Georgian and non-Georgian communities of the population of the border zone are, on the one hand, a partially closed society, in the sense that ethnic borders are not completely open (language barrier, limited choice of a marriage partner, religion), on the other hand, they are not completely closed. (knowledge of the Georgian language, higher education in Georgia, Georgian cultural influences, etc.).

In the post-Soviet period, education reform was carried out; in the state language policy of Georgia, special attention was paid to the development of programs for teaching the state language to national minorities. As a result, among the non-Georgian (Azerbaijani and Armenian) population of the villages bordering Azerbaijan, mainly among young people, there has been an increase in interest in learning the state language, especially in recent years. Parents try to teach Georgian to their children, and they realized the necessity of knowing the state language, and knowledge of the Georgian language became prestigious; Some representatives of ethnic minorities enrol their children in Georgian schools. Despite the successful reforms carried out concerning the education of non-dominant ethnic groups, the local population has certain complaints:

- Georgian teachers working in non-Georgian language schools should preferably know the language of the non-dominant ethnic groups in whose schools they teach.

- Teachers' salaries should not be differentiated;
- The problem of student transportation should be improved;
- In non-Georgian language schools, parents demand better teaching of the Georgian language;

- In terms of preserving the cultural heritage of minorities, the Ministry of Education should pay more attention to schools, establish new or expand and improve existing sports and artistic circles/centres;

- Make learning Georgian free of charge on the 1+4 program for students representing minorities in Georgia;

- Publish Azeri and Armenian textbooks in Georgia.

The issue of education of the younger generation in the minority-inhabited villages of the Kakheti region bordering Azerbaijan is one of the main directions of the state's strategy, the successful solution of which will ensure their full and equal participation in the political and social life of the country.

Local community organizations, which intensively implement various activities, play an important role in keeping the population in place, in the development of settlements and improvement of rural life. The community organization *Knowledge Café* in the

city of Tsnori, operates throughout the Kakheti region. Its principle is “uniting, connecting and sharing knowledge and resources”. The organization responds to community challenges and includes activities aimed at a wide age segment. Its members implement projects aimed at strengthening educational, civic and community involvement. Thematically, their projects include entrepreneurship strengthening, healthcare, agriculture and general education, for which they try to mobilize local human resources as well as involve invited specialists. In addition to in-depth knowledge of community issues, the organization has data on locally available human resources, which facilitates the establishment of community ties.

Of great importance is the public organization *Nukriani Workshops*, which operates in the Signaghi municipality and has the profile of a social enterprise. The public organization promotes the employment of local youth, especially women, and their economic and social empowerment through the study of traditional handicrafts. The organization also has work experience in the direction of involvement of different ethnic groups.

The Local Action Group Dedoplistskaro (Dedoplistskaro LAG) actively supports and strengthens both individuals and various formal and informal associations within the framework of its activities. The target areas are the diversification of economic activity, agriculture, tourism and small business, and the strengthening of social services.

Within the framework of the project implemented directly in the border settlements, a positive relationship between LAG activities and the improvement of living conditions of the beneficiaries of the settlements was revealed. Project beneficiaries, based on their needs, received targeted technical support.

For sustainable development of agriculture, public organizations carry out work to disseminate knowledge, including in the direction of introducing modern innovative methods and approaches. The success of these initiatives is largely determined by innovative, internationally proven methodology of the projects and sustainable and long-term financial support.

Thus, most of the problems identified as a result of the study were caused by the frontier location of the region under study. Today,

between Georgia and Azerbaijan, there is still a question of border regulation. We believe that the solution of the problem is a difficult task since history has repeatedly proven that the establishment of a clear border between countries and its observance is an indispensable condition for good neighbourliness and peace. We hope that the process will go as it should for neighbouring partner countries.



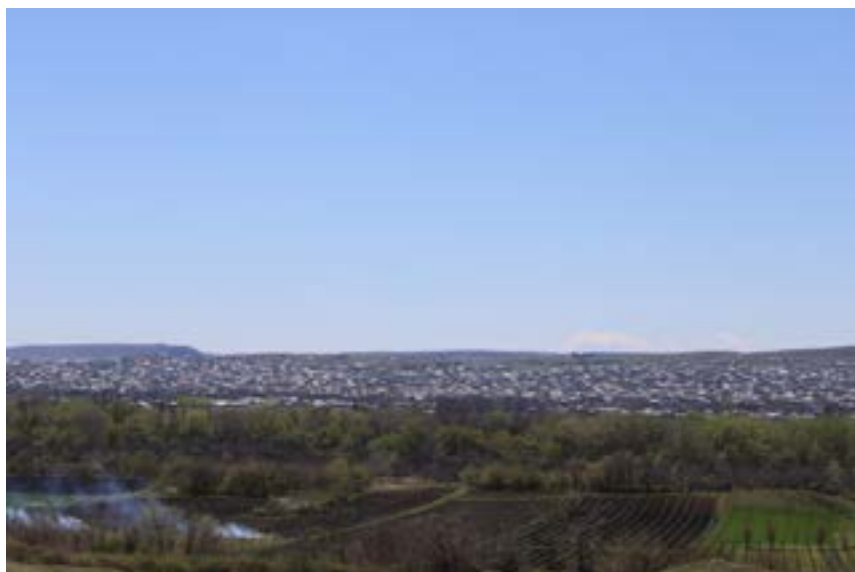
Church, the village of Udabno



Cemetery, the village of Kabali



Armenian public school, the village of Sabatlo



The village of Iormughanlo



A flock of sheep from the village of Iormughanlo



The village of Pirosmani



Mosque, the village of Kabali



Border on the Alazani River, the village of Samtatskaro



Church, the village of Samtatskaro

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