The Roots of Violent Extremism and Radicalization in Azerbaijan and Georgia

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Research Paper

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Research Team:

Georgian Researcher - Giorgi Gobronidze
Azerbaijani Researcher - Anar Valiyev
Research Assistant - Hajar Huseynova
Research Assistant - Afag Alizada
Research Assistant - Giorgi Modebadze

Chief Editor-Levan Dolidze

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FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

Abstract

This report represents the analysis of qualitative research findings on the major challenges of Azerbaijan's and Georgia's policies on countering violent extremism and radicalization. Desk research was conducted in the case of Azerbaijan to uncover the root causes of violent extremism, while the research conducted in Georgia covered the following regions: Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli and the Autonomous Republic of Adjara.

The paper covers the involvement of Azerbaijani and Georgian citizens in international terrorist groups operating on the territory of foreign states, as well as reviews other manifestations of radicalization and violent extremism, including right-wing and ultranationalist group activities.

The main objectives of the research are to study and analyze the main push and pull factors of involvement of the citizens of the mentioned countries in activities of various extremist organizations, study the strategic documents which lay a foundation to the countries' counter violent extremism programs, and examine the counter-extremism activities of the governments of Azerbaijan and Georgia.

To summarize the main findings of the paper regarding Azerbaijan -poverty and unemployment, and the activities of outside religious and extremist groups act as the main push and pull factors of violent extremism and radicalization. The current analysis shows that violent extremism and radicalization pose more of a danger to Azerbaijan than international terrorist organizations. However, the government is trying to connect the surge of radicalization in Azerbaijan with foreign influence. Meanwhile, the analysis of the main push and pull factors of radicalization suggests that, to some point, an explanation for the fast-paced radicalization can be found in the relative deprivation theory.

When it comes to Georgia, the research indicates that the problem of violent extremism and radicalization should be studied through the prism of the synergy of external and internal factors. This synergy creates a fertile soil for the main push and pull factors of radicalization in the country, particularly a feeling of frustration, limited economic opportunities, low access to quality education and alienation from political processes.

As in the case of the Azerbaijani government, the government of Georgia should develop comprehensive strategy of countering the root causes of radicalization in the country. The actions taken by the authorities should not be fragmented and oriented to deal with particular problems.

Based on research findings, the paper provides specific recommendations for the governments of Azerbaijan and Georgia to support the establishment of a complex and systemic approach to the problem of violent extremism and radicalization with an emphasis on developing a community-oriented approach to counter violent extremism.

Appendix 1 - Glossary

Violent Extremism – "holding of extreme political or religious views, often advocating illegal, violent, or other forms of extreme behavior."[1]

Radicalization – "a process by which an individual becomes increasingly extremist in their political, religious, or social ideologies."[2]

Homegrown Violent Extremist – "citizen or long-term resident in a western country who has rejected western cultural values, beliefs and norms in favor of a violent extremist ideology. The homegrown violent extremist intends to commit terrorism inside Western countries or against their interests."[3]

Push Factors of Violent Extremism and Radicalization – "conditions of the individual or their own life situation that pushes them away from mainstream society and causes to become more susceptible to violent extremism and radicalization."[4]

Pull Factors of Violent Extremism and Radicalization – "factors that drive individuals towards the acceptance of violent extremism and radicalization with positive incentives."[5]

Counter Violent Extremism and Radicalization – "activities and strategies undertaken by government, law enforcement, non-governmental organizations, and others to challenge and oppose the violent extremist ideology and the processes of radicalization to violence."[6]

Prevent Violent Extremism and Radicalization – "using non-coercive means that seek to address the drivers and/or root causes of violent extremism and radicalization."[7]

Community-oriented Approach to Violent Extremism and Radicalization – "counter violent extremism and radicalization objectives, policies and measures that are pursued through locally driven, co-operative initiatives, tailored to local contexts, to increase effectiveness."[8]

Islamic Extremism – "an ideology that advocates the reorganization of society around fundamentalist Islamic principles opposing tolerance, diversity of thought, and individual liberty."[9]

Islamism – "a belief in the need to establish a political order organized around sharia (Islamic law). Islamists may advocate the establishment of a sharia-based society through violent or non-violent means."[10]

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[1] The Counter Extremism Project, https://www.counterextremism.com/glossary (accessed July 28, 2018).

[2] See note 1 above.

[3] IACP Committee on Terrorism, Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Working Group, http://www.theiacp.org/portals/0/pdfs/IACP-COT_CommonLexicon_Eng_FINALAug12.pdf (accessed July 28, 2018)

[4] Louisa Tarras-Wahlberg, "Promises of Paradise? A Study on Official ISIS-Propaganda Targeting Women" (Master thesis, Swedish Defence University, 2016), http://fhs.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:942997/FULLTEXT01.pdf, 13

[5] See note 4 above.

[6] See note 1 above.

[7] See note 3 above.

[8] Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Community-Policing Approach*, https://www.osce.org/atu/111438?download=true (accessed July 28, 2018).

[9] See note 1 above.

Salafism – "a fundamentalist Islamic movement that strives to practice Sunni Islam as it was practiced by Muhammad and his closest disciples."[11]

Wahhabism – "a sect of Islam originating in Saudi Arabia in the early 18th century. Wahhabism dictates a literal interpretation of the Quran and introduced the concept of takfir, whereby some Muslims could be classified as kuffar (non-believers) and thereby subject to execution."[12]

Islamic Ummah – "a single group that shares common religious beliefs, specifically those that are the objects of a divine plan of salvation, according to Ummah. The Arabic word "Ummah" refers to the wider Muslim community. In the context of Pan-Islamism and politics, the word can be used to mean the concept of a commonwealth of the believers."[13]

Islamic Eschatology – a branch of Islamic theology concerning the end of the world, and the "Day of judgment."

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[10] See note 1 above.

[11] See note 1 above.

[12] See note 1 above.

[13] The European Parliament, *Radicalization and violent extremism - focus on women: How women become radicalized, and how to empower them to prevent radicalization*, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/596838/IPOL_STU(2017)596838_EN.pdf, (accessed July 28, 2018).

Azerbaijan's Security Environment: How to Tackle Violent Extremism and Radicalization in the Country?

Introduction

After gaining independence in 1991/1992, Azerbaijan has faced several main challenges that are still haunting the young republic. Even after almost 30 years of existence, Azerbaijan is still struggling with some significant problems. It is worth mentioning, that in many cases the perceptions of major threats and challenges may differ between the establishment and the people. The Caucasus Barometer survey conducted in Azerbaijan from 2008 to 2013 identified several critical issues the county is facing.[14] According to the study, for a significant majority of Azerbaijanis, the Karabakh conflict or unresolved territorial conflicts represent the biggest challenge. Poverty and unemployment serve as the second major problem, while a minority cite others. From the government's perspective, though, outside radical groups and homegrown extremism is the biggest headache for the society.

IMPISS1: Most important issue facing Azerbaijan (%)
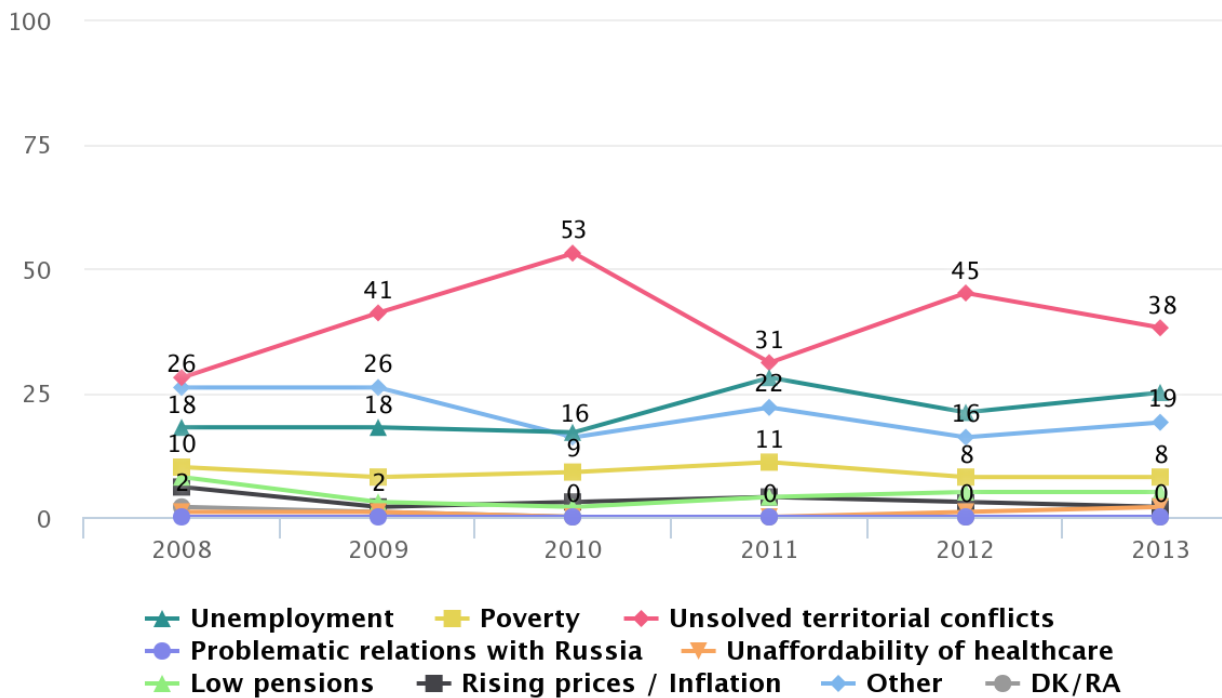
Caucasus Barometer time-series dataset Azerbai
Retrieved from http://caucasusbarometer.o

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[14] The Caucasus Research Resource Centers, *Caucasus Barometer Survey: 2008-2013*, http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb-az/IMPISS1/ (accessed June 20, 2018).

The primary push factor mentioned by such surveys, driving people to radicalize, is the possible deterioration of the economic situation, which may lead to rising poverty and unemployment, thereby, making the efforts of the government unsustainable. Azerbaijan had a broad and diversified economic base until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Nevertheless, a significant part of its industry was dependent on imports from other Soviet republics, and the bulk of its exports were produced explicitly for consumers inside the USSR. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the Karabakh conflict worsened Azerbaijan's economic ties with the other republics. Subsequently, the country's industrial sector and other sectors of the economy collapsed. In 1995, Azerbaijan's real GDP only totaled 37% of the 1989 level, while the average Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) level amounted to 58% of the mentioned year. On average, Azerbaijan's real GDP decreased by 15% per annum from 1992 to 1996.[15] This precipitous decline of the economy had a disastrous effect on employment too. Many jobs became dispensable and massive layoffs took place due to deindustrialization. At the same time, the collapse of the social protection system impoverished a large group of the population. The closure of many enterprises, industrial transformation, economic restructuring and the changing character of employment left employees without social protection and deprived them of general benefits. Despite the significant improvement of the social situation between 2008 and 2014, two devaluations and the low price of oil still affected the economic conditions of the people.

Along with the mentioned push factors, the influence of radical groups acts as one of the vital pull factors driving people, and especially the youth, into violent extremism and radicalization. The fall of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the communist ideology have played a significant role in the transformation of Azerbaijani society. The country has been slowly recovering from a seventy-year totalitarian regime and beginning to enjoy the benefits of democracy. Transformation, however, has had its side effects. Thanks to the country's favorable geographical location – in-between Iran and Turkey and sharing a border with the volatile Northern Caucasus – as well as weak law-enforcement agencies and gaps in legislation in the early 90s, Azerbaijan faced challenges from religious missionaries and charities from Turkey, Iran, Arabic world and Northern Caucasus, which came to the country to spread their ideologies. Some allegedly were linked to militant organizations. Several radical groups started to gain ground in many regions of Azerbaijan and thus, threatened the secular statehood of the republic. The War on Terror announced in 2001 had a significant impact on Azerbaijan's fight against its radicals. If in the early 1990s the state was relatively weak and could not efficiently resist the activities of some extremist groups, after the 9/11 attacks and joining the anti-terror coalition, the country became more efficient with regard to using hard power against extremists i.e. arresting, sentencing and deporting them.

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[15] World Bank Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Unit, *Azerbaijan - Country Economic Memorandum: A New Silk Road - Export-led Diversification, Report No. 44365-AZ* (2009), https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/3154/443650ESW0AZ0P1IC0Disclosed01161101.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (accessed June 20, 2018);
World Bank, *Doing business 2009: Country Profile for Azerbaijan* (2008), http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/229201468209666695/pdf/457020WP0Box331091AZE0Sept029102008.pdf (accessed June 20, 2018).

Last but not least, the Karabakh conflict might be mentioned as a quasi-factor of radicalization in Azerbaijan. It can hardly be regarded as a push factor with the same impact as the weakened socio-economic environment. However, since the conflict continues to haunt the Azerbaijani society, it can become a whole push factor in the nearest future. The April 2016 military clashes in the North and South of Karabakh showed that Azerbaijani society is getting more militant and revanchist in the resolution of Karabakh conflict, and losing hope of regaining the territories peacefully. It affects the threat perception in the society and raises the expectations and pressure on the government to act boldly and decisively. For example, only in the last couple of years, Azerbaijan has imported about $3.35 billion in arms, 80% of which has come from Russia, including two S-300 missile systems, 94 T-90S tanks, 20 Mi-35M helicopters and 100 BMP-3 armored vehicles. Azerbaijan has also purchased 25 Su-25 planes and 93 T-72M1 tanks from Belarus, Russia's ally.[16]

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[16] Anar Valiyev, *Azerbaijan's Balancing Act in the Ukraine Crisis, PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 352* (2014), http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/azerbaijans-balancing-act-ukraine-crisis (accessed June 20, 2018).

1. Push and Pull Factors of Radicalization in Azerbaijan

As stated in the previous chapter, it can be distinguished two main push and pull factors of violent extremism and radicalization in Azerbaijan: poverty and unemployment leading to the radicalization of people, especially the youth, and the activities of outside religious and extremist groups in the country. Additionally, the Karabakh conflict should be mentioned while reviewing the determinants of violent extremism in the country. This chapter analyzes how these factors affect the radicalization of society and impact the actions of the government.

1.1 Socio-Economic problems: Raising Tide

For much of the decade, Azerbaijan experienced a financial windfall due to high oil prices. The influx allowed Baku to spend money on many areas previously ignored, especially regional development. As a result, the annual growth rate of average monthly real wages was well over 14% on average from 2003 to 2011 and then dropped to single digits. Since 2011, the government of Azerbaijan has also been gradually increasing the minimum wage and minimum pension – bringing it closer to the minimum subsistence level over the last several years. This government policy played a significant role in reducing official poverty by pulling many households with pensioners out of "the officially poor" status and by mitigating the intensity of the poverty.[17]

However, most of the programs and development initiatives were short-term and did not achieve long-lasting effects. Given its substantial resources, Azerbaijan stopped looking for international assistance regarding economic restructuring. As in many countries of the former Soviet Union, Azerbaijan's small business sector is not very well developed since the state pays more attention to the development of large corporations and companies, which usually belong to some public officials. Thus, government decisions are very often taken and implemented for the benefit of large businesses making it impossible for other companies to compete. Azerbaijan began to experience severe economic difficulties in early 2015. After the shocking devaluations of February and December 2015, when the Azerbaijani Manat depreciated by almost 100 percent, the government turned its attention to efforts that might mitigate the crisis and alleviate the situation by promoting more business activity. Dozens of licenses for entrepreneurial activities were eliminated, while tax and customs authorities were rendered more transparent. At the macroeconomic level, the government established the position of the Presidential Assistant on Economic Reform tasked with creating a roadmap for economic reforms. The team began by prioritizing the sectors of Azerbaijan's economy that they deemed best positioned to create jobs and attract investments.

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[17] Anar Valiyev et al., "Social protection and Social Inclusion in Azerbaijan," *European Commission* (2011), https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anar_Valiyev/publication/281371904_Social_Inclusion_in_Azerbaijan/links/55e425ce08ae6abe6e8e909a/Social-Inclusion-in-Azerbaijan.pdf?origin=publication_detail (accessed June 20, 2018).

The aforementioned economic situation in Azerbaijan, as such, does not systematically lead to a condition where mass protests arise. So far, most cases of such protests were mainly directed towards a single incident related to the abuse of power by some public official, issues of injustice from private corporations, etc. Since 2012, half a dozen protests happened in various parts of Azerbaijan with most of them linked to power abuses that deteriorated the economic situation for local people. In those instances, people protested against low compensation for houses being demolished, the absence of electricity or running water, increases of rent in the markets, etc. The most severe social protest happened in the cities of Guba and Ismailli. Such demonstrations may have a multiplier effect if combined with other irregularities or injustices from the government.

A worsening of the economy can be taken advantage of by specific groups, who monopolize some social issue and use it for their purposes. The case of social unrests in the Nardaran village serves as a perfect example of this. In the summer of 2002, the inhabitants of the village of Nardaran, located 35 km north of Baku, took to the streets chanting religious calls and protesting difficult socio-economic conditions. They expelled local government bodies and prepared for a confrontation. On June 3, 2002, after a stalemate, police and law enforcement agencies stormed the village killing one and wounding over 30 people. Since the settlement is known in the country for its strong religious beliefs, it was easy for the government to regard the events as a fight against international Islamic extremism. Despite statements from international and local experts that the threat of Islamic fundamentalism is minimal for Azerbaijan, the events showed that the threat of homegrown religious radicalism was in fact underestimated.[18] In-depth analysis of the events made it clear that religious rhetoric and slogans were covering some challenges related to the socio-economic situation. The majority of the population of Nardaran is unemployed and lacks basic education. Moreover, Iranian soft power is very strong in the region and has a multiplier effect. These two conditions made the local population vulnerable against involvement in religious activities that further led to violence. Moreover, some cases of widespread dissatisfaction with governmental policies combined with social and religious elements. In December of 2011, the Ministry of Education banned wearing hijabs in public schools. Immediately, protests against the informal hijab ban in public schools kicked off on the Shi'ite holy day of Ashura, with about 1,000 religious activists, shouting "Hijab is our honor" and "Freedom for hijab," and blocking the road outside the Ministry of Education for nearly an hour. 15 protestors were arrested, 7 of whom were sentenced to up to 10 days in prison. Even thoughthe ban on hijab affected both the Shi'a and the Sunni communities (including Salafis), it was the Shi'a community that opposed the decision and technically monopolized the issue, using it for its benefits. For some governmental experts, the campaign to lift the ban on wearing hijab in schools launched afterward – which gathered tens of thousands of signatures – might be regarded as an example of the growing influence of Islamism in the country. The political establishment considered such protests as a sign of extremism since protesters used some violence during the assembly. It can be concluded that due to weak social and economic conditions, a part of Azerbaijani society is vulnerable against the threats of violent extremism

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[18] Arif Yunusov, *Islamic Palette of Azerbaijan* (Baku: Adilgoli, 2012).

and radicalization. Under certain circumstances – like the growing influence of foreign extremist groups (discussed in detail below) – it can negatively affect state security.

1.2 Religious Extremism: Foreign Influence or Growth of Domestic Radicalism?

Once Azerbaijan gained independence from the Soviet Union, it became the most appropriate target for various religious streams. As discussed in the introduction, for particular reasons, Azerbaijan became the target of religious and radical movements vying for influence. Missionaries and charities from Turkey, Iran, Arabic world and the Northern Caucasus came to the country to spread their ideologies, some of which were allegedly linked to militant organizations. Today, there can be distinguished two main challenges before Azerbaijan regarding religious extremism. The first one could be nominally called the Iranian influence in Azerbaijan. Tehran had continuously been propagating Islamic values and ideas of Islamic statehood in the republic. Iranian authorities spent millions of dollars for this purpose. Nonetheless, Tehran's attempts have not been successful enough because of an effective anti-religious policy instituted during the Soviet Union. The inability of Iran to establish an active mass political party to influence Azerbaijani public life forced its government agencies to rely mostly on radical clandestine organizations. As early as 1993, many Iranian humanitarian agencies and organizations launched their activities in Azerbaijan, especially in poverty-ridden refugee camps. Along with providing humanitarian aid and religious literature, Iranian agencies recruited Azerbaijani youth to study in religious schools in Iran.[19] Starting in 1995, Azerbaijani law-enforcement agencies unveiled several groups and arrested some people connected with Iran. Repeated attempts by Iranian special services to establish a network of radical groups in the country show the significance of Azerbaijan in its Southern neighbor's plans. Alarmed by the active penetration of Western capital and the influence of this small South Caucasian republic, Iranian authorities try to secure its northern borders. The decision to establish radical groups or cells are not necessarily done with the aim of conducting immediate terrorist attacks. In fact, Iranian special services hardly wish to draw the attention of Azerbaijani law enforcement agencies to the activities of their cells. In reality, local radical groups and/or sleeper cells are designed to be activated in case of hostile actions by Azerbaijan or the country's decision to join a potential U.S. attack on Iran.[20] The Islamic Party of Azerbaijan is one of the organizations through which Iran influences domestic politics in the country. The party that usually consists of marginalized elements of poverty-ridden areas is active enough in its constituencies. They hold rallies from time to time, and their leaders have become quite popular. The party, while not

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[19] Anar Valiyev, "Azerbaijan: Islam in Post-Soviet Republic," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 9, no. 4 (December 2005): 1-13, http://www.rubincenter.org/2005/12/valiyev-2005-12-01/.

[20] Anar Valiyev, "Foreign Terrorist Groups and Rise of Home-grown Radicalism in Azerbaijan," *HUMSEC Journal* 2 (2008): 95–112,
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anar_Valiyev/publication/52010785_Foreign_Terrorist_Groups_and_Rise_of_Home-_grown_Radicalism_in_Azerbaijan/links/09e41513377216e643000000/Foreign-Terrorist-Groups-and-Rise-of-Home-grown-Radicalism-in-Azerbaijan.pdf?origin=publication_detail.

registered, maintains its influence throughout several parts of Azerbaijan even while its leaders are constantly under arrest.

The second threat, which is very often overlooked, is connected with the Salafis and their organizations in Azerbaijan. Many articles and news reports have been published about the activities of the Salafis in Azerbaijan, but most of them tend to be biased and superficial. This carefully planned smearing campaign, notwithstanding the numbers and influence of Salafis, is in fact steadily growing in Azerbaijan. Salafi ideas are becoming increasingly popular among the younger generations of Azerbaijan in particular. In Baku alone, which is the ultra-secular capital of Azerbaijan, the number of Salafis has reportedly reached 15,000 people.[21]

The first Salafi missionaries arrived in Azerbaijan from the northern Caucasus in the mid-1990s. The majority of them came from Chechnya and Dagestan where the Salafis had some influence, in large measure due to the Russian-Chechen wars. For a short while, Salafis made some inroads in Chechnya and were even able to create their own self-ruled area in the Dagestani villages of Karamakhi and Chobanmakhi. However, Salafis did not stop in Chechnya and Dagestan but rather extended their activities into Azerbaijan. Initially, they did not gain extensive support among Azerbaijanis, as nationalism and pan-Turkism were much more popular than Islamism. Moreover, in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the USSR, Azerbaijani society was not so deeply impoverished and divided as today. Also, the majority of Azerbaijanis adheres to Shi'a Islam and hence have little regard for Salafi ideas. The Shi'a Muslims of Azerbaijan, for both historical and cultural reasons, are heavily influenced by Iran – a country whose government is widely regarded as the archrival of the Salafis. Given Azerbaijan's Shi'a complexion, the religious Sunnis of rural Northern Azerbaijan form the primary constituency of Salafism in the country.

The second wave of Salafi expansion started in 1999 with the beginning of the Second Russo-Chechen war. The Russian military command tried to push Chechen rebels, particularly those of Salafi orientation, out of the northern Caucasus into neighboring Georgia and Azerbaijan. Thus, some of the 8,000 Chechen refugees that arrived in Azerbaijan in 1999-2000 were persecuted Chechen Salafis. Meanwhile, missionaries from the Persian Gulf countries dramatically increased their activities in Azerbaijan. By 2003, 65 new Salafi-controlled mosques had been established in Azerbaijan.[22] One of the largest Salafi mosques in the country is the Abu Bakr mosque. The Imam of the Abu Bakr mosque is Gammet Suleymanov, a graduate of the World Islamic University of Medina, which is a leading center for the study and export of Salafism.

There are three essential factors driving the expansion of Salafism in Azerbaijan. Firstly, the overwhelming majority of indigenous Salafis are Sunnis and from the ethnic minorities. This constituency considers Salafism as a counter-balance to the growing Iranian influence in Azerbaijan. Secondly, the rapid polarization and impoverishment of Azerbaijani society have led to a pervasive disillusionment with traditional institutions and modern Western democratic ideas.

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[21] See note 18 above.

[22] Julie Wilhelmsen, "Islamism in Azerbaijan: How Potent?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32, no. 8 (2009): 726-742.

Salafis have cleverly tapped into this pool of profound discontent, frequently criticizing the government, the decline of morality and traditions, as well as the rise of criminality in the country. Thirdly, Salafis tout the universalistic qualities of their ideology and the fact that it supposedly transcends all Islamic sects and traditions. This is particularly appealing in Azerbaijan, where sectarian rivalry between Shi'as and Sunnis has been on the rise. Experts believe that Salafism in Azerbaijan poses several serious challenges to the Azerbaijani establishment. Azerbaijan is a Muslim country where roughly 75% of the population is Shiite, while the remainder is Sunni. Decades of co-existence between the two branches of Islam in Azerbaijan created a fragile balance that neither mainstream Shiites nor Sunnis wish to break. Moreover, Soviet repression against all branches of Islam put the Shiites and Sunnis of Azerbaijan in similar predicaments, providing them with shared experiences. Meanwhile, after centuries of development, Islam in Azerbaijan became a culture and a tradition rather than strictly areligion. Although most Azerbaijanis zealously call themselves Muslims, they hardly observe any pillars of Islam. Local people visit sacred places called Pirs, along with graveyards of "saints," rather than mosques, where they give money and offer sacrifices. The clergy do not discourage such behavior since it benefits them in various ways, including financially. The appearance of Salafis in the country, however, broke this delicate balance. Salafis first started to preach against the pirs and saint worship, calling such practices acts counter to Islam. They do not recognize the official Shiite clergy and accuse them of acting in ways conducive to Iranian policy. Moreover, they consider Shiites to be heretics and call for the purification of Islam in Azerbaijan. In many instances, some Salafis employ violence to bring attention or to show their adherents the "right" path. Thus, in the last couple of years, Salafis have attacked pirs and destroyed them on several instances, thereby angering the local population. Meanwhile, the proliferation of Salafi ideas among religious and ethnic minorities could create powerful centrifugal forces that will in due course threaten the national unity of Azerbaijan. Contrary to their propaganda, Salafis exacerbate sectarian tensions in the country. In the very worst-case scenario, serious violence directed toward the majority Shia community may provoke some form of Iranian intervention, not least because the Iranians are anxious to curtail Salafi influence in Azerbaijan. More alarmingly perhaps in the meantime, the Salafis' skillful exposure and manipulation of the establishment's incompetence, coupled with the increasing impoverishment of the country, may make them a powerful political force. This will inevitably lead to a harsh security crackdown, which might, in turn, provoke serious acts of terrorism in the country.

Currently, only a small share of Salafis tends to resort to violence and militancy. Although Salafi teachings very often contradict the Shi'a interpretation of Islam that is followed by up to 80% of Azerbaijan's population, the majority of Salafis in Azerbaijan do not support violence and do not get involved in criminal activities. In Azerbaijan, the Salafis can conditionally be divided into two groups: non-militant Salafis that comprise the majority of the Salafi community, and radicals. The actions of non-militant Salafis are usually limited to preaching, discussions and centered on Salafi mosques or charismatic leaders. Militant Salafis, however, organize themselves into radical groups and very often get support from abroad. In contrast to classical terror groups, militant Salafis do not have a typical pyramidal structure in their organizations. They are weak, loosely connected and gravitate around the leader. The majority of Salafi mosques where

radicals can be recruited are under tight surveillance by law enforcement agencies. Thus, any creation of a strong radical Salafi organization is prevented already at its embryonic stage. Meanwhile, the absence of funds, training, and equipment limit the activities of Salafi organizations. The militant Salafi organizations have higher chances to survive and successfully operate if they have significant assistance from abroad. Until now, militant Salafis did not bother Azerbaijani law enforcement agencies. Accused mostly in aspirations to fight in Chechnya, militant Salafis did not see Azerbaijani secular government as a target.[23]

With the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS), the government of Azerbaijan had to deal with one more external threat. Many radicalized elements in society left the country and decided to join ISIS. By 2018, more than 900 Azerbaijani citizens joined the ranks of terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq.[24] Most of the Azerbaijanis who joined ISIS and other terrorist groups did it through the internet or through relatives, who were continually indoctrinating them from Syria and calling to emigrate to the newly established "caliphate." However, local jihadist preachers were active not only in the social media – predominantly on YouTube – but also in teahouses and underground apartments of Sumgait, Baku and other cities, especially in the Northern part of Azerbaijan. It is worth mentioning that not all of them were fighters, since the number mentioned above also includes family members, wives, children as well as people who worked as civil professionals such as engineers, doctors, etc. For instance, according to some research papers, the number of fighters joining ISIS from Azerbaijan was more than 200 as of 2015.[25]

Even though the majority of Azerbaijani fighters joined ISIS, many fighters also joined al-Nusra or other small organizations. Initially, Azerbaijanis found their way to Syria with the help of old networks. While in Syria, they mainly joined Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar, the jihadi organization that comprises fighters from Northern Caucasus and Central Asia, and subordinated to the Caucasus Emirate. However, in 2013, after the emergence of ISIS and its conflict with al-Qaida, Jaysh also split into two parts, one of which joined ISIS, while the other remained loyal to al-Qaeda and the Caucasus Emirate. Accordingly, the Azerbaijani fighters also split into two warring groups. Thus, in 2013-2014, an Azerbaijani battalion that pledged alliance to ISIS was operating in Iraq and Syria consisting mainly of people from Azerbaijan and the North Caucasus. The battalionwas nearly destroyed in battles with Assad's troops. However, Azerbaijani fighters usually participated in military operations within various jihadi detachments without establishing their own "ethnic" units. For example, in comparison with Uzbeks, who formed the Imam Bukhari battalion, or Uighurs, who formed the Syrian branch of the Turkistan Islamic Party, Azerbaijani jihadis never created or operated a large and organized military group.

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[23] See note 20 above.

[24] "About 900 Azerbaijani Citizens joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq," APA News, 2017, http://en.apa.az/azerbaijani-news/developments/sss-chief-about-900-azerbaijani-citizens-joined-terrorist-groups-in-syria-and-iraq.html.

[25] Efraim Benmelech and Esteban F. Klor, *What Explains the Flow of Foreign Fighters to ISIS?* (Evanston, Illinois: The Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University, 2016), 16, https://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/benmelech/html/BenmelechPapers/ISIS_April_13_2016_Effi_final.pdf.

Despite the fact that a large number of Azerbaijani citizens joined terrorist groups, this figure is still small in comparison with Russia, or Central Asian countries like Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. The reason or this is the fact that the majority of Azerbaijanis are Shi'a and therefore their ideology is incompatible with that of ISIS. Moreover, the fighters were considerably scattered and ideologically divided. Beyond that, Azerbaijan is not in the interests of ISIS due to several reasons. Firstly, the Shia'a and secular nature of Azerbaijanis make it difficult to recruit locals to ISIS. And second, the active work of law enforcement agencies as well as family involvement makes it difficult for ISIS recruiters to operate. Finally, Azerbaijan is not in the interests of ISIS as a recruiting ground but rather as a transit territory for bringing recruits from the Russian North Caucasus, Tatarstan and other Muslim Republics of Russia. Thus, ISIS tried not to commit any criminal activities or conduct any recruitment in Azerbaijanso as tonot endanger the transit route through Azerbaijan.

1.3 The Karabakh Conflict: No Danger Yet

The Karabakh conflict continues to be the major external threat for Azerbaijani society and establishment. Events of April 2016 have shown that the conflict is not only far from settled, but that it could also turn into a full-blown war. The conflict can be seen as Damocles' sword hanging over the public in Azerbaijan, making them susceptible to manipulation. The government and society are trapped in a vicious cycle of "no peace, no war" while this "frozen" conflict drains economic resources and political energies from their already weak and impoverished societies. The conflict also undermines the path of the South Caucasian countries toward Euro-Atlantic integration and diminishes their chances of becoming part of Europe. The conflict will exert a tremendously negative impact on the future of the country, from the perspective of both democratic and economic development. The years of Western disengagement from the problems of the region created a vacuum into which an increasingly aggressive Russia has inserted itself. Rather than seeking peaceful resolution of the conflict, Moscow saw an opportunity to use the conflict to bolster arms sales and to meddle in the respective countries' foreign policy agendas. By 2016, neither the United States nor the EU had the same degree of leverage in the region as Russia. In fact, the involvement of the Russian establishment has increased the chances of the countries going to war.

Beyond the external threat, the conflict and its pressure on Azerbaijan make the government very sensitive to issues of security. The limited success of the Azerbaijani Army in Karabakh during the April 2016 escalation led people to believe that a military solution could be the only choice and further militarization is justified. Moreover, the presence of more than one million refugees from Karabakh and surrounding occupied territories further pushes the establishment toward militarization. Azerbaijan continuously increases spending on military and arms purchases. For example, thanks to windfall oil profits, military expenses increased from $135 million in 2003 to almost $3 billion in 2011 and were kept on the level of $1.5 billion.[26] These

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[26] Trade and Economics, *Azerbaijan's Military Expenditures 1992-2018* (2017), https://tradingeconomics.com/azerbaijan/military-expenditure (accessed July 1, 2018).

resources could be otherwise diverted towards institutional capacity building, education, social security, economic reforms and infrastructural projects, allocated to the needs of internally displaced persons, and in this way, mitigate the impact of the main push factor of radicalization in Azerbaijan, the socio-economic impoverishment of the society. It is worth mentioning that IDPs remain one of the most vulnerable groups in society. Despite certain benefits from the government such as free education and free housing, many IDPs are still under the poverty line. Deterioration of their economic conditions could negatively affect society even further since they would experience devastation a second time after their deportation.

2. Analysis of Azerbaijan's Counter Extremism Policy and Operations

This chapter reviews Azerbaijan's strategic documents and government reports which lay a foundation to the country's counter violent extremism programs, and analyzes the actions of the government of Azerbaijan toward perceived threats, and the main push and pull factors of radicalization discussed above.

2.1. The State Approach to Countering Violent Extremism

Analyzing Azerbaijani legislation and government's regulationswith regards to combatting radicalization, it has to be mentioned that its current approach pretty much resembles the methods of countries that mainly focus on using hard power in fighting against violent extremism and radicalization. Counter-terrorism operations in Azerbaijan aresupported by the law "On the Fight against Terrorism" of June 18, 1999. This is the main domestic legal document for combating terrorism. This law determines the legal and organizational guidelines for combating terrorism in the Republic of Azerbaijan, the mechanism for inter-agency cooperation between the state bodies in charge of anti-terrorism operations, as well as the rights and duties of those bodies and individual citizens. In 2014 the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan was amended with a clause on "public appeals to terrorism." It stipulates five years imprisonment for public appeals to commit offenses or the creation of armed formations or groups, which are not provided by legislation, diversion as well as the distribution of materials with similar content.

In 2015 President Aliyev signed a decree splitting the Ministry of National Security, the main actor in the fight against terrorism, into two agencies – the State Security Service and the Foreign Intelligence Service. Among other duties, the State Security Service is charged with identifying and preventing criminal activities by terrorist groups and countering international terrorism and transnational crimes. According to a US Department of States Report, "authorities effectively use terrorist and criminal watch lists and biographic/biometric information to screen travelers at ports of entry. Azerbaijani security services effectively share information within the government and with other countries. Collection of advanced passenger information and passenger name records on commercial flights occurred on some flights."[27] At the same time, law enforcement agencies use the law to persecute those involved in terrorist activities. In this way, in 2016, the government terminated the citizenship of 58 individuals accused of involvement in terrorist activities outside the country. They were connected to ISIS.

Finally, looking at the National security concept of the Azerbaijani Republic, it can be observed that the issue of violent extremism and radicalization does not hold a significant place. Instead, outside threats related to violation of sovereignty areportrayed as primary challenges. Article 3.3

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[27] U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2016, Chapter 2, Country Reports: Europe* (Washington, D.C., 2017), https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2016/272231.htm.

mentions ethnic and religious extremism as "capable to undermine the foundations of the State and society and constitute a potential source of serious threat to country's national security." Meanwhile, article 3.4 notes that "terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are potential security threats.[28] It is also interesting to mention that clause 3.8 of the concept mentions economic destabilization as one of the threats to national security. It states that there are risks of overdependence on the fast-growing oil and gas revenues, which may disrupt macro-economic stability and subsequently leave the country vulnerable to the impact of the global and regional economic crises.

Reviewing the country's strategic documents and government reports which lay a foundation to Azerbaijan's counter violent extremism programs, it can be concluded that the government of Azerbaijan focuses only on restrictive policies to fight against radicalization rather than using soft power-oriented methods. This approach questions both, the effectiveness and the efficiency of the state policies with regards to fighting against violent extremism and radicalization.

2.2. The Counter-Extremism Actions of the Government of Azerbaijan

As mentioned in the previous chapter, socio-economic problems act as the primary push factor that drives individuals to radicalize in Azerbaijan. To diminish the challenges coming from it, the government of Azerbaijan launched an important program in 2006, called Targeted Social Assistance (TSA). It is a tested program run by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population. It is completely financed by the state budget and meant to help specific groups avoid falling into poverty. The level of social assistance given in Azerbaijan was defined by the level of need. This was set at €42.56 per capita in 2008 and €57.4 for 2010. The number of people receiving such aid has been increasing every year. In 2007, only 48,705 families or 2.5% of the population received this aid, and by the end of 2009, 163,409 families (749,965 people) or 8.4% of the population were eligible to receive it. The average amount of assistance for one family in the country is €86.81, and it is €19.06 for one person. The program was cut in finances back in 2014-2015 due to the economic crisis, but initial estimates showed that the program impacted those people in desperate poverty. It allowed people, especially living in the rural regions, to improve their living conditions.

The major pull factor driving individuals towards radicalization under the particular circumstances, and the biggest headache for the government of Azerbaijan, is religious extremism. For the last 25 years, the Azerbaijani government has been using mostly law-enforcement methods to curb the influence of religious organizations. Having encountered a number of unexpected problems, such as missionary activities and Salafi and Iranian propaganda, the Law on Freedom of Worship underwent several changes. The amendments introduced limited the missionary activity and subordinated independent religious communities to semi-state control. The religious department was also restored to a cabinet-level ministry.

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[28] National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan Republic 2007 (2007), https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/154917/Azerbaijan2007.pdf (accessed July 14, 2018).

The contemporary government policies aimed at suppressing the influence of religious organizations are mainly directed at diminishing the impact of Iran in and on Azerbaijan. One of the examples of the government of Azerbaijan's set of actions to tackle Iranian propaganda is the policy of restriction of the import of religious literature from the Islamic Republic of Iran. For years, Iranian missionaries, as well as various organizations, could easily import and sell the religious literature in specialized shops as well as straight on the streets. Translated into Azerbaijani language, this literature was able to close the hiatus in religious affairs. From almost 1992 till 2010, much of the literature explaining Islam and religious issues came from Iran. Most of the Azerbaijanis got their knowledge of Islam from Iranian religious literature. However, since the establishment of State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations, it became harder to import such literature freely. In this way, by 2010, the committee reviewed more than 18,000 books and banned around 348 titles from sales in Azerbaijan.[29] Unsurprisingly, much of the banned books still get to Azerbaijan from Iran. Meanwhile, the parliament adopted the law stating that the purchase of illegally acquired religious literature and other productions outside specialized sale shops shall also be considered an infringement of the law.

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29 "Over 15,000 books examined in Azerbaijan, "News.az, November 29, 2011, https://news.az/articles/society/49711 (accessed July 11, 2018).

3. Conclusion and Recommendations for the Government of Azerbaijan

Today's trends and current analysis show that violent extremism and radicalization pose more of a danger to Azerbaijan than international terrorist organizations do. Yet, the Azerbaijani government is trying to connect the surge of radicalization in Azerbaijan with the foreign influence. There are several reasons behind this. The government of Azerbaijan, as well as many countries in the Middle East, falsely interprets the issue of religious extremism. They believe that terrorist attacks occurring in their countries, as well as the establishment of radical Islamic organizations' cells, are attributable to some "nerve" center headed from the outside. Likewise, it is easier for the Azerbaijani government to connect the radicalization phenomena in the country with outside forces rather than to look at the real factors leading to the emergence of domestic extremist organizations. The core of these radical extremist organizations is usually a low-income group of religious young men, who are mostly unemployed and dissatisfied with the government of their country. They tend to see a theocratic state as the only alternative to a secular state. Meanwhile, to some point, the explanation for the fast Islamization and radicalization of the youth can be found in the relative deprivation theory. Paraphrasing Gurr and Mandaville, it can be said that various programs and schemes through which Azerbaijani government initially sought to provide some form of participation for the young generation very quickly came to be a synch with the pace of societal development.[30] It is often possible to see educated people among the religious youth disappointed with a government that failed to provide this aspiring middle class with decent jobs. The few and much-coveted positions available within the private sector, mostly in the oil sphere, tended to be reserved for those elites whose patronage propped up the state. Far from opening new paths for participation and social mobility, the Azerbaijani system seemed to have done no more than re-entrench existing patterns of social influence behind a new modern façade. In many cases, the gap between the rich and the poor actually widened, with the meaningful political enfranchisement of the young generation. What Azerbaijan is experiencing now is a classic case of "relative deprivation" caused by rapidly rising economic and political expectations that are not being met by material conditions. Historical experience shows that cracking down on radical cells in the country will hardly bring long-term benefits. Instead, it could further alienate religious minority groups and lead them into the trap of radical organizations.

In order to prevent violent extremism and radicalization in the country, the government of Azerbaijan has to establish a complex and systemic approach to the problem. Emphasis should be placed on developing a community-oriented approach to countering violent extremism that focuses on public support and participation to increase accountability and effectiveness.This approach is based on the idea of involvement of local municipalities, various organizations, and social groups in counter violent extremism activities in cooperation with law-enforcement agencies. For example, there were several cases in Azerbaijan when the cooperation of law-

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[30] Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969);
Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam* (London: Routledge, 2007): 98-99.

enforcement agencies with families of some jihadists made it possible to interrupt kidnapping for terrorist reasons. Moreover, there are several governmental organizations such as Scientific Fund or Multiculturalism Center, which actively work in the regions to enligthenpeople on dangers of violent extremism. However, the work should be strengthened and coupled with other initiatives. If Azerbaijan could incorporate this approach into its social and political system, it would contribute to the creation of a more tolerant environment. Otherwise, Azerbaijan may soon be faced with the threats of radicalization as well as terrorism that could endanger the secular statehood of the young republic.

Particular actions the government of Azerbaijan should take to diminish the threats of radicalization in the country linked to weak socio-economic conditions:

- Implement an active economic policy oriented on sustainable development;
- Make the youth population of Azerbaijan the primarybeneficiaryof theinitiatives mentioned above;
- Addresscritical issues such as youth employment, youth participation in the governance and state management;
- Increase state investments in the areas of health and education;
- Provide equal access to quality employment to all strata of the population;
- Develope rural areas.

The actions the government of Azerbaijan should take to prevent violent extremism and radicalization in the country linked to the increased influence of religious organizations:

- Promotereligious dialogue;
- Putt greater efforts into the formal religious education of citizens and aspiring clerics;
- Gradually diminish the impact of radical ideologies through tight control over foreign missionary work;
- Promote Salafi/Sunni-Shi'a dialogue to reducesectarian tensions in society;
- Organize a national public debate involving independent and official clerics, scholars,and NGOs to define the form of optimal relations between the means to more effectively guarantee religious freedom;
- Encourage independent religious communities, in particular, Salafi groups, to warn their members of the risks associated with terrorism and militantism;
- Prevent the work of organizations recruiting Azerbaijani citizens to fight inSyria and Iraq;
- Involve local religious organizations to propagate against joining the terrorist groups;
- Create rehabilitation programs for those returned from Syria and Iraq to bring them back to society and normal life.

Analyzing Georgia's Security Environment regarding Radicalization and Violent Extremism: Challenges and Response Mechanisms

Introduction

Georgia has a traumatic memory of conflicts based on its political background. The first decade of Georgian independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union might be evaluated as a period of eruption of "romantic and messianic nationalism." Political points of view that were different from the ideas of the ruling elite were not tolerated and often met with radical resistance. This reality became the determinant for the most dramatic parts of Georgian history, namely the civil war in the early 90s. Unfortunately, the political elite was not ready to ensure an efficient democratic transition of the country. Hence, fragmentation of society and the incapacity of building efficient government institutions led the country to a near condition of a "failed state."

Even today, while at first glance it seems the country has overcome these problems, the "shadows of the past" still lurks, causing fear in Georgian society and the political elite. Unfortunately, no public dialogue has ever taken place in the country to evaluate the events that took place in the first decade of Georgian independence. Even the academic sector tries to stay away from a deep and comprehensive analysis of the first years of Georgian independence.

The problem of violent extremism based on the ideological and religious background is a relatively new challenge for Georgia's security agenda. It acquired significance after 2014 when the rise of the Islamic State in the Middle East brought Georgia to the ranks of the countries from which people left for Syria and Iraq to join the terrorist groups. This process brought to light a number of problems previously tabooed by the state and society. Consequently, discussions about violent extremism and religious radicalization have begun between various political, academic, and media circles for the first time since the independence of Georgia. It is worth mentioning that along with radicalization based on religious related background, Georgia faces severe challenges from the radicalizationbased on political backgrounds as well.

The following chapters analyze the push and pull factors of radicalization in Georgia. The first part of the study provides an overview of the Georgian security environment with regards to the threats of violent extremism and radicalization. The subsequent chapter examines Georgia's counter-extremism policy and operations. Based on the findings of the study, the document provides recommendations to the government of Georgia.

This analytical document is based on desk research and in-depth interviews conducted in Tbilisi, Adjara, Kvemo Kartli, and Kakheti regions.

4. The Problem of Radicalization based on Ideological and Religious Background

4.1. A General Overview

According to various reports, significant number of Georgians have left the country to join ISIS and other terrorist organizations.[31] In general, the outflow of alleged terrorists took place from regions where religion is traditionally strong, and significant parts of the population are followers of the mentioned religion: Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Guria, and Adjara. The numerous cases of recruitment of the citizens of Georgia by various terrorist organizations, mainly by ISIS, made the state recognize the problem of violent extremism and the need for a counter-violent-extremism strategy.

The Georgian Muslim community comprises approximately 11% of the country's total population.[32] Islam has a long tradition of existence in Georgia. The first Muslim community appeared in the 7th century A.D. as a result of Arab expansion to the Caucasus. In early medieval times, Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia used to be an Arab semi-independent emirate. According to historical sources, King David the Builder liberated the city from Muslim conquerors in 1125. The second wave of Islamization of the country started in the 15th century, when the Eastern and the Western parts of Georgia became vassals of the Iranian and Ottoman Empires, respectively.[33] Besides those waves, Tamerlane's Caucasian campaign played a significant role in strengthening the positions of Islam in the Caucasus region. Thus, historically, Islam was imported to Georgia not only from the Middle East but the Central Asia as well.

Georgian Muslim community is not a homogenous entity but rather a fragmented and decentralized conglomerate varying in different regions of the country. For example, Hanafi Madhab of Sunni Islam is widespread in Adjara and Guria, which is a direct result of the Ottoman and lately, Turkish influence on the indicated parts of Georgia. In the Eastern part of Georgia, which has historically been under the vassalage of the Iranian empire, it can be observed that significant number of followers of the Shia branch of Islam. Mostly, they are ethnic Azerbaijani citizens of Georgia living in Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti regions. One more Muslim group in Kakheti are Kists, an ethnic minority of the North Caucasian origin residing in the Pankisi gorge and representing Hanafi'i Madhab of Sunni Islam, which was allegedly imported to the North Caucasus by Tamerlane in the 14th century. Currently, a significant part of Kists represents the Salafi branch of Sunni Islam.

[31] The State Security Service of Georgia, *The State Security Service of Georgia Report 2017* (Tbilisi), https://ssg.gov.ge/uploads/%E1%83%90%E1%83%9C%E1%83%92%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98%E1%83%A8%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%98/SSSG%20Report%202017.pdf.

[32] National Statistics Office of Georgia,*2014 General Population Census* (Tbilisi, 2016), 9, http://www.geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/english/population/Census_release_ENG_2016.pdf.

[33] Library of the Public Defender of Georgia, *Religions in Georgia* (Tbilisi, 2008), http://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/8483/1/Religiebi_Saqartveloshi.pdf.

4.2. External Factors Promoting Violent Extremism

One of the main external factors of violent extremism is the direct foreign influence on various Muslim groups in Georgia. As it has already been mentioned, the collapse of the USSR triggered a so-called process of "re-Islamization" of the Caucasus region.[34] The representatives of the North Caucasian diaspora in the Middle East, especially in Turkey, used the opportunity created by the demolition of the "Iron Curtain" to go back to their historical homeland and help their fellow members of the Islamic Ummah to return to the roots of pure Islam damaged during the Tsarist regime on the one hand, and the Communist repression on the other. The collapse of the USSR gave an opportunity not only to the Caucasian muhajirs but also to the various fundamentalist foundations and groups based in various countries in the Middle East translate their goals into actions. The new generation of Sunni and Shia clerics, with high-quality religious education, proper skills for preaching and support from their foreign sponsors could easily win the hearts and minds of young Muslims. Firstly, the older generation of Muslim clergy was not capable of influencing their followers anymore. The competition between the old and the new generation of clergy was unequal from the very start. The older generation of clergy couldn't provide answers to sensitive theological questions raised by the young generation of clerics, who returned from the Middle Eastern countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey and Iran, due to a lack of religious education. They didn't have opportunities to receive higher Islamic theological education. Therefore they were positioned as incompetent by the younger clergy.

The situation varies in different regions of Georgia. Kakheti region might be considered as an area of Gulf States' religious influence. As already mentioned, representatives of the young clergy have received religious education in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, and Jedda University is the main hearth of religious education for representatives of the Caucasian Sunni Muslims. Since the end of the second Russo-Chechen war, Salafism spread hastily toPankisi from Chechnya. It gave certain fundamentalist Arabic foundations an opportunity to enhance their presence in the Caucasus, particularly in Georgia. Closed community living within the critical level of poverty and criminal, a total absence of state authority and a high level of social frustration created fertile soil for aggressive proselytism. As a result, today, approximately 75% of youth between 18 and 35 identify themselves as the representatives of the Salafi community.[35]

Those people who identify themselves as the members of the Salafi community say that they share the same values and ideas preached by the Salafi clerics. They are more conservative than representatives of so-called "traditional" Islam. Salafism itself is a conservative teaching of

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[34] Ruslan Baramidze,*The Islamic State and the Muslim Societyof Georgia* (Tbilisi: Heinrich Boell Foundation, South Caucasus Regional Office, 2015), https://ge.boell.org/ka/2015/07/07/islamuri-saxelmcipo-da-sakartvelos-muslimuri-temi.

[35] Participants of the discussion held in Pankisi Gorge (June 3, 2018), Research on the root causes of violent extremism and radicalization (Giorgi Gobronidze, interviewer).

Hanbali madhab of Sunni Islam, which teaches to pray "in the manner of ancestors. "Otherwise Salafism tries to clean Islam from the traditions or rituals adopted as a result of ethnic, cultural, political and other influences. Pankisi Salafi Muslims also claim that ethnic and cultural traditions have secondary meaning as everything that is not described in Holy Scripture. It is one of the reasons for concern on behalf of the older generation towards them. The representatives of the older generation are concerned that the Salafi influence might cause a loss of the Kist's unique identity.

It is also worth noting that almost every person involved in the process of recruitment of young individuals for terrorist purposes was educated in religious centers of the Gulf States and nearly all of their recruits are identified as the representatives of the Salafi community. However, as already mentioned above, it would be unwise and groundless to claim that the Salafi community is wholly radicalized or every cleric with the religious education received in the Middle East preaches radical ideology. Conversely, a vast majority of the Salafi community condemns any forms of violent extremism and terrorism, although they admit the existence of radicalized groups among the Salafi community, who sympathize with various terrorist organizations.[36]

The Autonomous Republic of Adjara has always been a natural area of interest for various religious organizations based in Turkey. Most of them do not represent the position or national interest of the Turkish state. A certain number of Turkish religious organizations and foundations are actively represented in the mentioned region, particularly when it comes to donation to boarding schools existing in Mountainous Adjara. As interviews in Adjara revealed, most of the attendees come from socially vulnerable families, which means that absence of the terms for substance drives parents to send their children to boarding schools to provide them with food, basic education, and primary living conditions. An opportunity to travel and study abroad is also considered an additional benefit.

The state has limited instruments to monitor textbooks, teaching plans or the curricula of those educational facilities. Furthermore, the state does not have enough information about the teachers or the values they share with their students. Only several boarding schools open doors for non-Muslim visitors and even fewer share information with representatives of civil society organizations, academic sectors or the media.

The representatives of clergy and religious organizations based in the Islamic Republic of Iran, in their turn, try to create a base for further implementation of their political agenda by supporting various groups among Shia Muslims of Georgia, who, in general, are citizens of Georgia with Azerbaijani origins living in Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti regions. The actions of Iranian religious organizations are evident in the rural areas of Marneuli and Gardabani Municipalities, where the asymmetry between the regional centers and the periphery is vivid. Notwithstanding the unequivocally positive steps from the government of Georgia, like sending teachers of Georgian language in the region and implementing the program "4+1" at higher education facilities, the problem of accessibility to quality education, a linguistic barrier, and an exclusion from political, social and cultural life still makes the region vulnerable…

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[36] See note 35 above.

4.3. Internal Factors Promoting Violent Extremism

In addition to being vulnerable to external factors of radicalization, Georgia faces severe challenges from internal factors promoting violent extremism in the country. As such, theological, social and cultural, economic and informational factors should be underlined.

The theological factor of radicalization entails the issue of interpretation of religious norms. More specifically, what is implied here is the contextual and textual definitions of religious studies. The former implies the modern surroundings in which religious normsare defined in accordance to existing social and cultural context. This form of definition is popular among the followers of moderate Islam who are more inclined to give importance to not only what the religion teaches but also how these teachings can be reflected in the modern world. In other words, religion follows the development of society. This definition of religious norms is more open and provides sufficient space for maneuvering freely in the modern world.[37]

Among a plethora of instruments for textual interpretation of religious dogmas and teachings, the advent described in the Holy Scripture enjoys the absolute priority. It means that dogmas are interpreted in a manner that ignores the contemporary context in which the society exists. The teachings of the holy scripture are provided directly and ignore any hermeneutic approaches to the Holy Scripture.[38] Conservative clergy, whose teaching bear a fundamentalist nature, usually employ such an approach to the interpretation of dogmas. One of the characteristics of such teaching is that it is against de-sacralization of culture. It also bans a diversity of expression as relativism, in other words, the possibility of several truths to exist. Such an approach nurtures fruitful ideological foundation for radical clergy who reject the integrating tendencies of the modern world, globalization, and the requisites of civil society. Textual interpretations of the religious teaching display the contemporary world as the evil every believer must fight against.

The presence of the noted factor in Georgia is mainly caused by an absence of mechanisms for regulation and monitoring religious education. As already mentioned, a significant part of the religious educational facilities are closed for the state and the public alike.[39]

Economic issues are an additional significant factor among the other determinants of radicalization in Georgia. However, it should be noted that Georgia's regions with densely populated ethnic religious communities share the same social and economic problems with the rest of the country. Under these circumstances, low standards of living and inadequate access to quality education coupled with socio-cultural factors characteristic to the regions resided by

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[37] Giorgi Gobronidze, *Problems of Islamic Radicalization: State Policy and Perspetives of the Regional Cooperation - Prospects from Georgia* (Tbilisi: Caucasian House, 2017), http://regional-dialogue.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/mar-GE.pdf.

[38] See note 37 above.

[39] The Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, *National Qualifications Framework* (2010), https://www.tsu.ge/data/file_db/xarisxis_martvis_dep/charcho.pdf.

the representatives of ethnic and religious minorities nurtures favorable conditions for radicalization within the public.

This context creates a perception that the persons who left Georgia for Syria and Iraq achieved success in the Middle East. While opportunities for self-realization available to the youth are limited, such "success stories" nurture radical sentiments among young people. Engagement of young people in the activities undertaken by terrorist organizations is believed to be an instrument for acquiring advanced social status or a way to a better future. Information plays an important role in such cases. Not only social, but also mainstream media often promotes the dissemination of such "success stories."[40]

4.4. Push and Pull Factors of Radicalization in Georgia

The synergy of external and internal factors discussed above creates fertile soil for push and pull factors of radicalization and violent extremism in Georgia.

Push and Pull Factors based on Socio-cultural Determinant of Radicalization

The interviews in the regions of Georgia, particularly Pankisi Gorge, Adjara and Guria, and Kvemo Kartli, revealed that one of the main determinants of radicalization for young people is a frustration.

A feeling of frustration was easily detected during the interviews in Pankisi. Interviews revealed that there is a perception that the youth feels little attention from the state. Research also showed there is a lack of conditions for self-realization as well as less engagement in political and social life enhances the frustration. "We have to explain every day that we are not terrorists but ordinary citizens, with ordinary lives and problems," "the state looks at us as the threat that is humiliating," - state the respondents.[41] The lack of perspective might also be discussed as one of the push factors promoting violent extremism in the region.

Meanwhile, the representatives of the young generation consider emigration to Syria and Iraq as a solution, and an opportunity for gaining respect and social status. One of the reasons behind such perceptions is the so-called "success stories" of Georgian members of the terrorist organizations in the Middle East. Radical groups use the factor of Georgian terrorist leaders to make the membership of their cells attractive to the youth. The aforementioned was stated as a primary reason for two Pankisi schoolchildren joining ISIS.[42] "They were poisoned by stories of heroism of Georgian field commanders in ISIS. They believed that these people fought for the

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[40] Gerard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin, *The History of Terrorism from Antiquity to Al Qaeda,* trans. Enward Schneider, Kathryn Pulver, and Jesse Browner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

[41] See note 35 above.

[42] See note 35 above.

right causes, and they simply left their bags at school and joined the terrorist organization directly from the desks of their classroom," – note the respondents.[43]

Interviews in Adjara and Guria also revealed that frustration is among the top push factors of radicalization of the local Muslim community. During the interview, there were mentioned several cases where members of the community have been oppressed at workplaces in both, private and public sectors.

All of the above-mentioned leads to a feeling of injustice, alienation, and vulnerability. It was noted during the interviews, that a small part of the youth already feel as though this kind of injustice can only be defeated by force. Although the problem of radicalization on religious ground in Adjara is not on the top of security agenda, the existing perceptions and concerns (including the requests to build the mosques) needs specific attention from the state and proper communication with the society.

The issues related to the construction of new mosques or rehabilitating the old ones are severely present in Kvemo Kartli as well. The respondents mentioned that several mosques that represent monuments of cultural heritage with their historical meaning are the belonging of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development. This raises the risk that one day these buildings might be sold as ordinary real estate plots and used for other purposes.

Other determinants of frustration in Kvemo Kartli are more socio-political and ethnocultural than religious. The region is distinguished by its context as far as its population simultaneously represents an ethnic and religious minority. Most of the population of the region is ethnic Azerbaijani; confessors of Shia Islam. Even though the Georgian Azerbaijani community has a long historical tradition in the country, the full-fledged integration of this group into Georgian society is still problematic. This problem is generally caused by the linguistic barrier. According to the latest studies,[44] only 31% of the ethnic minorities of Georgia speak Georgian language.[45] Hence, these people face obstacles in trying to find a job in the public sector. Likewise, the linguistic barrier reduces opportunities for them in the private sector. The mentioned problem is also reflected in the electoral and political behavior of the local community. Many people, especially the youth, are indifferent towards political processes.

Limited economic opportunities, low access to quality education, alienation from political processes and limited opportunities to express themselves create a perception of inequality among the ethnic Azerbaijanis of Kvemo Kartli. This kind of disintegration alienates not only the ethnic minority from the rest of Georgian society, but also causes a feeling of injustice, which, in-turn may become one of the main determinants of radicalization on the basis of frustration.

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[43] See note 35 above.

[44] Jonathan Wheatley, *The Integration of National Minorities in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli provinces of Georgia* (Tbilisi: European Centre for Minority Issues, 2009).

[45] It is to be noted that the information mentioned here is hard to access due to the lack of relevant data. The state does not have exact info when it comes to the number of ethnic minorities who can speak Georgian language.

Almost every respondent in different regions of Georgia agrees that the important factors behind so-called "terrorist migration" are religious and ideological. Distorted perceptions of jihad and Islamic eschatology became primary motivators for a significant part of people who left for Syria and Iraq.

The main problem behind the theological factors of radicalization lies in the controversy of contextual and textual interpretations of religious dogmas, discussed above in detail. According to perceptions employed by the radicals, before the judgment day, the Mahdi will come to an end the disintegration of the Muslim world that can be reached only by a creation of the Muslim caliphate, the ideal model of the Islamic state. The concept of the caliphate is understood as something like a "kingdom of heaven on earth." The so-called "caliphate" established by ISIS was perceived as the last caliphate mentioned in hadiths by many of those who joined its ranks because of religious or ideological points of view.

The respondents in Pankisi name Beso Kushtanashvili as an example of joining the terrorist organization solely on the basis of religious and ideological motivation.[46] A similar point of view has been supported in the case of Adjara and Kvemo Kartli as well, where the most significant number of respondents had doubts in the financial motivation of those who joined the terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq.

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[46] Eka Kevanishvili, "The Road – from Syria to Pankisi," *Radio Liberty*, September 26, 2014, accessed July 11, 2018, https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/pankisidan-siriamde/26607262.html.

5. The Problem of Radicalization on Ethnic and Political Background

Even though today Georgia doesn't face serious and direct threats regarding nationalist extremism, the first signs of a severe challenge are clear and alarming for the state. The increasing popularity of right wing narratives among the public already indicates that certain sentiments of the 1990s' "romantic nationalism" movement are still alive in Georgian society and might become an additional factor of radicalization in the middle and long-term perspectives.

The problem of radicalization of the ethnic and political background should be analyzed through the prism of political, social and economic and informational factors.

5.1. Political Factors

As mentioned in the introduction, radicalization based on political factors belongs to the ranks of problems that had been voiced neither by the mainstream political groups nor within the Georgian community, even though it is becoming more and more vivid. Recently, the capital of Georgia witnessed several rallies organized by Georgian ultra-nationalist groups. These demonstrations were attended by approximately a couple of thousand people.

In addition to ultra-nationalist groups and populist narratives, a lack of interest by existing political elites towards researched regions, namely Kvemo Kartli populated by ethnic or both ethnic and religious minorities, and the absence of strategic vision regarding the needs of the minorities, to some extent, intensifies the issue of fragmentation of Georgian society. Since the border regions populated by Azerbaijani ethnic minorities have been steretotapicly perceived as supporters of the ruling elite no matter which political group is in power, in many cases opposition is less motivated for allocating limited resources for electoral campaigns or enhancing their presence in those regions. Almost none of them propose special programs or strategies directed at addressing the primary needs of the ethnic minorities, namely involvement in country's political and civic life, accessibility to quality education, and overcoming the existing linguistic barrier.

Such distorted social constructions, in return, cause a loss of trust towards the political process. This kind of indifference towards the political process, mostly from the youth, is one of the main pre-requisites for further skepticism towards the state and its institutions. These conditions leave space for the populist, ultra-nationalist groups to strengthen their positions in the future and act as determinants for possible radicalization on the basis of ethnicity.

According to the aforementioned, it can be concluded that although there is no direct threat of violent extremism on nationalist and political basis, the current situation in the country requires attention from the state.

5.2. Informational Factors

Problem related to the limited access to information of Georgian information sources has been permanently discussed in the country. A linguistic barrier on one hand, and the weakness of local media on the other, represent severe challenges for ethnic minorities in receiving comprehensive information about various processes in the country. The Georgian public broadcaster provides several shows in the languages of ethnic minorities, but they are mostly news broadcasts and take a minimal share of the channel's net programming. Information provided by the public broadcaster hardly reflects the needs of ethnic minorities and does not cover the topics relevant for the target regions.

Linguistic barriers and the weakness of local media not only limit access to information but also create a dualistic information reality for Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities in Georgia. Currently, ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani populations of Georgia receive information from Armenian and Azerbaijani information sources respectively, which, in most cases, are antagonistic towards each other. During the interviews, respondents expressed their concern about the effects of such kind of media influence on the local population. Controversial information channels could support the development of hostile attitudes between the mentioned groups. The respondents noted that the first signs of such tension are apparent.[47]

Based on the aforementioned, it can be concluded that the informational factor of radicalization is even more complicated than it seems at first glance. On the one hand, there is widely recognized problem of access to Georgian media and exclusion of ethnic minorities from Georgian information reality, which creates additional challenges for those minorities in realizing themselves in the state and, subsequently, acts as a driving force to radicalization in perspective. On the other hand, the problem of influence of foreign information sources easily fill the existing vacuum in the information environment and have a negative influence on the perception of different ethnic groups towards each other.

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[47] Participants of the discussion held in Kvemo Kartli (December 12, 2017), Research on the root causes of violent extremism and radicalization (Giorgi Gobronidze, interviewer).

As long as the threat of violent extremism and radicalization remains an unusual challenge for Georgia's national security agenda, Georgian authorities face serious obstacles in the process of development of a complex counter extremism strategy.

The first step that the government has taken is to tighten anti-terrorist legislation. International terrorism has been disjointed with the new amendments. Furthermore, recruitment for terrorist organizations, participation in terrorist activities abroad or membership of a terrorist organization backed up by a third state has become criminalized. Any forms of director in direct calls for terrorism have been penalized notwithstanding the information sources used for this purpose.[48]

These changes in Georgian legislation were a step forward as a comprehensive definition of terrorism was clarified. In addition to it, the new amendments separate international terrorism from other types of terrorism that give more flexibility to the Georgia legislative system.

Meanwhile, Georgian authorities decided to strengthen border control. Complex steps have been taken for this purpose. First of all, the mechanism for granting citizenshipwas tightened. Additionally, the level of protection of travel documents hasbeen increased. The Border Police adopted the sanction lists of the United Nations, and additional equipment was acquired to ensure better monitoring of the border.[49]

Despite the limited sustainable institutional mechanisms, specific positive steps taken by the Government of Georgia are noteworthy. These actions were directed at supporting the integration of ethnic and religious minorities that might partially influence the reduction of push factors of violent extremism in the country. First of all, it has to be mentioned that the ease of access to state services and the amendments in Georgian legislation that provided additional guarantees of social protection for the residents of mountainous regions of the country. These amendments had a positive impact on the standards of living and social conditions of the populations in the case of Adjara, Guria, and the Pankisi Gorge.

Actions taken by the Ministry of Defense of Georgia are worth noting as well. In 2016, the ministry held complex activities in Pankisi Gorge. Pankisi residents were offered military service for their country. On February 16, 2016, the registration of military recruits began. After February 22, the ministry started the process of opening mosques for Muslim soldiers at military bases. In April 2016, the ministry took patronage of one of the sports clubs in the village of Omalo. Additional measures of social assistance to families of soldiers from Pankisi were also provided.

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[48] Law of Georgia on Combating Terrorism, https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/21796?publication=9 (accessed July 14, 2018).

[49] Giorgi Goguadze and Sergi Kapanadze, *Daesh and Challenges Facing Georgia* (Tbilisi: Georgia's Reforms Associates, 2015).

As already mentioned, unfortunately, such steps do not reflect the whole picture. Pankisi residents, especially the representatives of so-called "Salafi minority" underline that meetings held by the Ministry of Defense and other governmental institutions were selective and only the representatives of so-called "traditional Islam" were invited. According to the interviews, there is an impression that authorities are trying to establish effective state control by creating and strengthening preferred groups that in general hurts the attitudes of the local population. The same kind of problem was underlined in Adjara and Kvemo Kartli as well.

In 2015, the government adopted the State Strategy on Civil Equality and Integration.[50] The strategy is oriented towards creating equal opportunities for the representatives of ethnic minorities of Georgia. Its goals include full engagement of the representatives of ethnic minorities in the nation's political and social life, the creation of equal economic and social conditions and opportunities for them, improvement of access to quality education, and preservation of the culture of ethnic minorities and encouragement of a tolerant environment in the country.[51]

The adoption of the strategy is a way forward. However, this document lacks a systemic approach and, in general, it is focused principally on ethnic minorities. Problems related to the integration of religious minorities are left unattended.

The objectives of the strategy and action plans attached to it are hard to realize in practice though, as the document does not reflect the driving force behind the challenges the state is facing regarding the integration of minorities. In other words, the state does not deal with the causes but rather the effects. For example, in order to fully engage representatives of ethnic minorities in the country's political and social life, the strategy sets the following objectives: enhancement of political involvement, improvement of civic participation, increase of access to media and information, increase awareness about ethnic minority rights.

In order to create an equal electoral environment and ensure political involvement of ethnic minorities in the political life of the country, it is crucial to engage not only the state but other political actors as well. According to information provided by the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association and the Public Movement Multinational Georgia within the framework of the research project related to electoral behavior of ethnic minirities of Georgia, no political party has considered problems related to ethnic minorities in their strategic vision and program documents.[52] Furthermore, political actors are not highly interested yet in recruiting young political leaders from the regions of residence of ethnic minorities. For instance, as the respondents mentioned in Pankisi, no ethnic Kist was represented in party lists during the latest local elections despite the will of many representatives of socially active youth to be engaged in the political process.[53]

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[50] Decree of the Government of Georgia № 1740 (August 17, 2015), On Approval of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and ActionPlan for 2015-2020, http://smr.gov.ge/Uploads/esen_55b90432.pdf.

[51] See note 50 above.

[52] Giorgi Gobronidze (February 26, 2018), Discussion on Electoral Behaviour of Ethnic Minirities.

[53] See note 35 above.

The increase of access to media and information – another objective outlined in the strategy mentioned above – also sounds hard to achieve considering the current status quo. According to the strategy, the problem of accessing information from Georgian media sources discussed earlier is to be dealt with the help of the Georgian Public Broadcaster. Obviously, the Georgian Public Broadcaster might play a positive role in increasing the access of ethnic minorities to media and information, but it can be just one of the many actors and not the flagship of information policy of the country in the target regions.

With regards to increasing awareness about ethnic minority rights, the strategy considers conducting information campaigns for ethnic minority groups as well as the rest of the society as a way to achieve this objective. Based on existing practice, it might be considered that such measures are less effective as the campaigns have a non-systemic character, and are generally conducted with the involvement of local government, which, on its behalf, relies on party activists. Accordingly, access to the relevant segment of society is limited. Additionally, the government does not have a proper instrument to measure the effectiveness of such campaigns. The primary indicator according to which campaigns are evaluated is their outreach.

Creation of equal social and economic opportunities for representatives of ethnic minorities – which is one of the four main goals of the strategy mentioned above – has a particular significance for the reduction of push factors of violent extremism in the country. To achieve this goal, its importance should be reflected in other documents and state policies as well. It is crucial to establish a synergy between different governmental institutions and include the mentioned goal in other strategic documents, such as the National Strategy for Social and Economic Development.[54] The state needs to review its strategic approach to reflect the issue of the creation of equal social and economic opportunities for ethnic minorities. Otherwise, there might be an impression that different governmental institutions develop their visions separately and the approach to critical challenges is fragmented.

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[54] Government of Georgia, *Social-economic Development Strategy of Georgia: Georgia 2020* (Tbilisi, 2014), http://www.mrdi.gov.ge/sites/default/files/1_sakartvelos_socialur-ekonomikuri_ganvitarebis_strategiis_-_sakartvelo_2020.pdf.

Government activities should follow a systemic approach that is necessary to produce effective and efficient counter extremism policies. To achieve effective results, authorities should implement inclusive programs reflected in different governmental strategies and the sustainable development policy of the country. The emphasis should be placed on developing a community-oriented approach to counter violent extremism that focuses on public support and participation.

The counter-radicalization policy should be based on the development of local communities. Under this, it is considered the activities such as the enhancement of quality education, implementation of socially oriented policies, and adoption of steps to improve the economy. Meanwhile, local community should be involved in decision-making process without selective approaches. A synergic approach that involves various governmental institutions is also crucial for the implementation of an effective counter extremism policy.

Adoption of the recommendations noted below will create fertile soil for the further improvement of Georgia's counter violent extremism policy. The country will receive an inclusive, comprehensive strategy that is focused not on the eradication of the symptoms of the problem, but more importantly, its causes.

Particular actions the Government of Georgia should take to diminish the threats of violent extremism and radicalization in the country:

- First of all, an inclusive policy document, counter violent extremism strategy is to be adopted, which will consider every push and pull factor of radicalization in detail and provide an exact vision on how to deal with each of them;
- The level of synergy between various actors of the security sector should be enhanced. Establishment of mechanisms of coordination and information exchange has strategic importance with this regard, as the country has no body responsible for determination of state's security policy and coordination of specialized services;
- Georgia's counter-extremism and counter-radicalization policy should become more complex and systemic. Various governmental institutions responsible for education, sustainable economic development and civic reconciliation, as well as civic actors, need to be involved in the development of a community-oriented approach to counter violent extremism that focuses on public support and participation to raise effectiveness and accountability;
- Ensuring the mechanisms of policy implementation is crucial. For this aim, a regular analysis of the security environment of Georgian and systemic evaluation of particular activities outlined in the strategy should be provided;
- Parliamentary oversight of the implementation of the counter violent extremism strategy should be established. The heads of governmental institutions responsible for the

implementation of the particular programs under this strategy should consistently report to the Parliament of Georgia.

- The State Strategy on Civil Equality and Integration has to be revised:
  o Firstly, the strategy should also reflect issues related to religious minorities;
  o Secondly, it should better display the ways to deal with the problems related to the political engagement of minorities;
  o In order to increase politicalengagement of minorities, measures ought to be taken to encourage the recruitment of young politicians representing ethnic minorities by the political parties;
  o It is essential to establish more of a systemic approach and reach the grassroots to increase public awareness about minority rights and address the challenge related to civic consciousness in society. One of the options is a revision of course of civic education at public schools, where more attention is given to minority rights. Moreover, it is important to organize multiple joint educational, sport and entertainment events for youth representing ethnic minorities and dominants groups of society.

- The state has to revise its regional development strategies, and in particular, the Strategy on Social and Economic Development:
  o The document has to reflect the needs of ethnic minorities and consider the specific characteristics of the target regions mentioned above.

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