Georgian Orthodox Church and Human Rights: Challenges to Georgian Society

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Abstract The collapse of the Soviet Union and radical socio-political changes in Georgia affected the role and function of religion in the society considerably. Religious factors encounter in many political issues, cultural identity, values, and social activities. The purpose of this paper is to identify the characteristic trend of the interrelationship between religious resurgence and human rights in Georgia. The paper explores ongoing tendencies in the field of human rights in post-communist Georgia from the perspective of religious and political transformation. The extremely high levels of public trust toward religion and the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) influence the formulation of public discourse. Assessment of different events, processes, and the attitude of the Church towards human rights indicate the risks in relation to human rights. Ambivalence towards religious pluralism, challenges of acceptance of freedom of religion, the rise of religious fundamentalism, controversies on the separation of religious and political spheres can create tensions in society. The nationalization of religion, anti-modernism and radical tendencies make it hard for the Church to find its place and rethink its role in a modern society. Post-communist political and religious transformation is a serious challenge to GOC. First and foremost, it is about freedom of religion.

Introduction

The rise of religiousness is an important characteristic of Georgian society in the post-communist period[1]. Following the fall of the communist regime, this "rise of religiousness" could be observed in all East European countries (Pollack 1998).

[1] According to a 2002 census, 83.9% of the Georgian population identified themselves as Georgian Orthodox, 9.9% Muslim, 3.9% Armenian Apostolic Church, and 0.8% Roman Catholicism, 0.1% Judaists, Other Denominations 0.8%, Not believing any religion 0.5% Georgian territories under the central government's control totaled 4,375,535 citizens. The three biggest ethnic

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Though the religious boom in a number of these countries has since diminished, a "religious renaissance" is still apparent in Georgia. The purpose of this paper is to identify the characteristic trend of the interrelationship between religious resurgence and human rights in Georgia. The paper explores ongoing tendencies in the field of human rights in post-communist Georgia from the perspective of religious and political transformation. In the secular and "de secularized" world too, it is important to identify the ideological foundation of a modern state. A modern state is non-confessional but the principle of neutrality does not imply that it should be value-neutral (see Bielefeldt (2013). The main value and achievement of liberal democracy is the notion of human rights.[2]

The extremely high levels of public trust toward religion and the Georgian Orthodox Church have an influence on the formulation of public discourse. The paper focuses on the role of religion as an institution, since one of the specific aspects of religious resurgence in today's Georgia is the growing popularity and influence of the Church (and religious leaders). In contrast, Karl Gabriel (1996) draws attention to the opposite tendency—the deinstitutionalization of the church. Assessment of different events, processes and positions could indicate the risks and prospects of the Georgian Orthodox Church in relation to human rights. Any theological base analysis will not be attempted as that is a subject meriting separate research. It is therefore sufficient to simply mention that the Orthodox Church has rather pluralistic views, largely due to the diversity of the theological discourse, the unique history of Orthodox Christianity (which was untouched by the reformation movement), its autocephalous (autonomous) status (which led to a cultural difference), and a different institutional structure (the absence of a supreme leader, for instance a Pope) (Delikostantis 2008).[3]

The paper also examines attitudes of the youth towards human rights. The values, social activities and ambitions of young people can be viewed as important indicators of the ongoing tendencies in a society.

groups in Georgia are at present: Georgians (83.8% of population), Azeris (6.5%) and Armenians (5.7%). The remaining 4% includes smaller groups (Abkhazians, Ossetians, Russians, Ukrainians, Kurds/Yesids, Greeks and other). http://www.geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/georgian/census/2002/I%20tomi%20-about religious pluralism Georgia see: Fleischmann-Bisten, W. (2005), Religiöser Pluralismus in Georgien. In: Schröder, B. (ed.): Georgien – Gesellschaft und Religion an der Schwelle Europas. St. Ingbert: Röhrig, pp. 71–88.

[2] Although the notions of human dignity and freedom of expression can be traced back to antique writers and philosophers, the modern understanding and meaning of human rights is a product of modernisation. All contemporary international conventions on human rights are based on the 1776 Bill of Rights and rights and liberties produced by the 1789 French Revolution.

[3] There is pluralistic theological discourse, also in relation to human rights. As in other Orthodox countries, there are some modernist theologians whose discourse is quite consistent with human rights. On the other hand, there are also theologians and priests who are skeptical and even suspicious of the benefits of Enlightenment.

Georgian Society in Transition

Political Transformation in Post-communist Period

The history of the current statehood of Georgia starts with the fall of the 70-year-old Soviet regime and the country gaining independence in 1990.[4] The democratization process in Georgia is a complex transformation process affecting political and social spheres, and causing radical changes, including the formation of a new economic model, and cultural and personal identity (see Kopaleishvili 2013). In the early 1990s Georgia faced civil war (1992) and two ethnic conflicts (in Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Samachablo).[5] Since 1995 the country has started to develop in a relatively stable environment: internal political tension was reduced and international support rose, having a positive effect on the country's development. Though this period is referred to as "from stability to stagnation", it is the period of the formation of democratic institutions, political parties, independent media and non-governmental organizations. In 1995 the Constitution of Georgia was adopted, guaranteeing protection of human rights and liberties, including political and social rights. Georgia also joined major international conventions on human rights.[6] In 1998 Georgia became a member of the Council of Europe, illustrating the harmonization of the Georgian legal system with the European. This membership had legal as well as cultural importance. The political elite as well as the wider population believed that Georgia is a part of Europe and is committed to European values. The period from 1990–2002 was a one of establishing a new country that had the characteristics of a defected democracy: election fraud and a high level of corruption. Public trust toward state institutions started to rise after the 2003 Rose Revolution. The Rose Revolution itself was a reaction to electoral fraud and can be considered a victory of democratic values and a protection of political rights. The period between 2003 and 2012 can be termed a "force majeure modernization" process. The major political message communicated by the government was to build a "western democratic state". Public trust toward a number of state institutions (including the police and army) rose as a result of successful public sector reforms, the fight against organized crime, corruption and radical extremism; though harsh social conditions remained unresolved. As of 2007 the political elite that had managed to push through some successful reforms and policies before, now faced a crisis. The number of cases of human rights violations increased (including punishment of political opponents and imposing restrictions on media freedom).

[4] The protection of human rights was a major demand of the national independence movement of the 1980s, alongside the demand for Georgia's independence. They called for: the release of political prisoners, the protection of religious rights, the freedom of speech and expression.

[5] Following the 2008 August War, territorial integrity of Georgia remains an open and unresolved issue.

[6] Georgia is a signatory of a number of international treaties and conventions that guarantee religious freedom. In particular, in 1994 Georgia ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966. In 1999 Georgia joined the European Convention on Human Rights of 1950.

In 2012 the political balance changed and a new political power won the parliamentary elections.[7] Since Georgia gained its independence, the political elite in government has changed three times by way of revolutions, and it was the very first time that the opposition came to power through elections.

Legal Framework of Church and State Relations

From the viewpoint of legal regulation, Georgia represents an intermediate form of the separation of Church and State (see Robbers 1995).[8] The Constitution of Georgia recognizes secular governance, and is also the most important legal document that guarantees freedom of religion. Article 9 of the Constitution states:

1. "The State shall declare complete freedom of belief and religion, as well as recognizing the special role of the Apostle Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia in the history of Georgia and its independence from the State".

Equality of people regardless of their religious beliefs is guaranteed by Article 14 of the Constitution of Georgia:

> Everyone is free by birth and is equal before law regardless of race, color, language, sex, religion, political and other opinions, national, ethnic and social belonging, origin, property and title, place of residence.

In 2002 a *constitutional agreement* was signed between the State and the Georgian Orthodox Church. According to this agreement, the Georgian Orthodox Church is a *legal entity under public law* and enjoys a number of benefits.[9]

The 2002 constitutional agreement between the State and the Georgian Orthodox Church is the second most important legal document after the Constitution of Georgia, and has priority over other national and international legal documents; but it is important to mention that point 2 of Article 9 *declares superiority of international law in the field of human rights over the constitutional agreement*.

[7] The United National Movement that had been in power since 2004 was replaced by a coalition of six political parties: Georgian Dream.

[8] Gerhard Robbers has proposed three degrees of the separation of the church and the state: *full separation* (France), partial or *intermediate separation* (Germany), and an *established church* (England).

[9] The Patriarch has immunity, the Church has tax privileges, all churches and their land, as well as the church ruins are declared the property of the Church, the government undertook responsibility to reimburse all damages incurred by the Church during the soviet regime. There are disagreements among experts on several articles of the agreement as they consider them discriminatory. For instance, they argue that restitution should be offered not only to the Orthodox Church, but to others as well. Also there are disputes over items belonging to cultural heritage, icons, relics that are currently placed in museums. The constitutional agreement recognizes mutual ownership of the state and the Church over these items, but their placement as well as the issues related to their management is a subject of disagreement.

The General Education law of 2005 guaranteed the establishment of a neutral and non-discriminative environment in Georgian schools (Article 13)[10] and the protection of religious rights of pupils, teachers and parents (Article 18).[11]

The need to legally regulate activities of religious organizations by adopting a respective law was one of the many challenges Georgia faced in the post-independence period. However such legal regulation proved a very difficult task, as the subject of religion was too sensitive and because the activities of religious organizations were viewed with much skepticism in the 1990s.

After 2005 religious organizations were registered in Georgia as legal entities under private law. Far from being content with such a status, however, such organizations preferred to register as a foundation or a non-profit organization (Abashidze 2007). That is why the national legislation was amended in 2011 to change the status of religious organizations in Georgia. On July 5, 2011, the Parliament of Georgia adopted an amendment to Article 1509 of the Civil Code of Georgia, thus enabling those religious organizations that had historical links to Georgia or were registered in any member state of the Council of Europe to register as legal entities under public law.[12]

Religious Transformation

Contemporary secular theories try to explain the *comeback of religion* (Riesebrodt 2000) in modern society with the transformation of religion (Luckmann 1993) and deinstitutionalization of religion (Gabriel 1996). Religions have acquired new forms and have become increasingly influential actors in society in recent times. The concept of the privatization of religion, as a sine qua non for successful modernization, gained a new meaning and importance in the 1960s. New forms of religion and religiousness that emerged in modern (secular) societies led Luckmann (1963) and Berger (1973) to reflect on the changing role and function of religion in a modern society. The "trace" of religion can be found in political processes and cultural identity and values. More importantly, religion has become a major actor of public life (Habermas 2001; Casanova 1994; Taylor 2007). The return of religion to the public space is a phenomenon which has clashed with the paradigm of secularism. Along with the classical theory of secularism, "Disenchantment of the World"

[10] Article 13, 6:6 Schools are responsible for protecting and supporting tolerance and mutual respect among pupils, parents and teachers; regardless of their social, ethnic, religious, linguistic and ideological affiliation.

[11] Pupils, parents and teachers enjoy the freedom of faith, belief and conscience, and have the right to choose and change their faith.

[12] As a result of 2005 amendments to the Civil Code of Georgia, religious organizations can be registered as non-profit organizations with the status of legal entities under private law. Besides this amendment, religious organizations expressed dissatisfaction with registering religious organizations as NGOs. The 2011 amendment is a step forward, but quite superficial as it only changes the name of the status and does not provide religious organizations with all benefits that can be offered with the status of legal entities under public law.

in the sense of Max Weber, there is now an actual new paradigm "De-secularization of the World" (Berger 1999).

Religion largely determines and reinforces the identity of a modern Georgian and therefore, religious opinions and related issues have played a significant role in the national discourse. Apart from the growth of individual religiousness, the increasingly active involvement of the Church in social and political processes is another sign of religious resurgence. The extremely high level of trust in religion and the Georgian Orthodox Church does not indicate 'deinstitutionalization' as in western society. We assume there are other processes of transformation of Religiosity, Differentiation and Secularization occurring in Georgia where the process of rising religiousness and the increasing role of the Church was supported by the "breakout" from secular soviet ideology, the *ideological vacuum* in the post-communist period and the distrust toward the new political system. In Soviet times religions were stigmatized. The fall of Communism gave them independence and opened up opportunities for recovery and revival (Pollack et al. 1998).[13] In addition, religion was considered an important part of *national identity* in Georgia. In the post-independence period the Church has played an increasingly important role in the national discourse. The fact that religion and ethnic identity are closely intertwined has bolstered loyalty towards the Church, which has accumulated a substantial symbolic capital: the Georgian Patriarch, the Orthodox clergy, religious and national traditions are highly respected by a considerable number of Georgian citizens nowadays.

Alongside other factors the above can explain the dominance of religion in self-identification both during and following periods of crisis.[14]

Religion is visible, as seen in the increased number of people participating in religious services, the majority of which are young people, religious education becoming an area of intense academic and public interest (especially during the 1990s), the increased authority of religious leaders, the closer alignment of the Church and the State, the use of religion as an instrument in political affairs and the increased influence of religion (the Church) on different spheres of public life.[15]

One of the specific features of this religious resurgence is the upsurge of religiousness at both the individual and institutional level. All recent surveys indicate that the Church is the most trusted public institution (86% approval rate), while the Patriarch is the most respected leader (90%) in Georgia.[16]

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[13] The theory of modernization predicted that Eastern European countries would adopt the western model of modernization. In post-communist countries, however, this process led to the resurgence of religion and the rise of nationalism.

[14] The merging of religious and national identities arose in the post- communist period and the formula of national identity became: "Homeland, Language, Religion"

[15] All recent surveys show that the Church is the most trusted public institution (86%) and the Patriarch is the most trusted person (90%) in Georgia. National Democratic Institute (NDI), Public attitudes towards elections in Georgia: Results of an April 2010. http://www.ndi.org/files/Georgia_Public_Opinion_0410.pdf

[16] ib.

Today the Church is the most "visible" actor in Georgia's public life. Its role is the topic of frequent discussions in media and social networks. The rising role of religion is gradually taking on the characteristics of a *public religion* (Casanova 1994). But this process has brought both risks and opportunities. The Patriarch's willingness to act as a mediator to calm political tensions in the county is one example of the Church's positive role in society. However this is controversial as the Church and the State have become more closely aligned in Georgia in recent times, the Church has managed to gain dominance in certain spheres (in Georgia),[17] such as the protection of cultural heritage and the issue of religious associations.

Protection of Human Rights—the Path Towards Democratisation

Successful democratization and the protection of human rights are interdependent themes—one is the prerequisite of the other. In the early post-independent years Georgia was engulfed in social and political turmoil, which plunged the country into deep crisis. Public awareness of human rights and democracy, as well as public confidence in democratic institutions, was very low at that time. This period saw the greatest number of human rights violations in Georgia. Since the country embarked on a path towards stability and democratization, however, human rights have been given increasingly greater attention.[18] As mentioned above, dramatic political change, including in the field of human rights (especially with regard to freedom of religion), took place in Georgia after the Rose Revolution. From a legislative viewpoint, the law on gender equality, approved by parliament in March 2010, was a significant positive development (Law on Gender Equality of Georgia 2010).

Two dimensions of human rights are especially important, namely whether the level of public awareness is sufficiently high, and whether the country's legislation includes laws to protect the civil rights and liberties of its citizens. In the past 2 years Georgia has made noticeable progress in this respect. Recent sociological surveys have shown that public awareness of human rights has clearly risen in the country, as has public confidence in the ombudsman's office, which is now more trusted than the government, parliament and political parties. But the Georgian Orthodox Church remains the most trusted institution (Sumbadze 2012, 40). The general public, especially young people attach greater significance to human rights today than they did in the past (South Caucasus Bureau of Konrad Adenauer Foundation 2008). The latest events are a good illustration of this change in attitude. The leaked video

[17] While in Russia the state has a certain amount of influence on the Church, particularly on the Synod's decision-making, the Georgian state seeks to be loyal to the Church, aware of its popularity in society and ability to influence public opinion.

[18] Georgia's admission to the Council of Europe in 1999 was the first positive achievement. It became possible due to successful preceding efforts to harmonize the national legislation and improve the human rights record.

evidence of prison torture, broadcast by leading Georgian TV channels, triggered mass protests across the country. The large-scale protest campaign "No Torture", spearheaded by university students, lasted several days.

Despite some positive developments, however, there is still a long way to go before human rights are adequately protected in Georgia. Human rights watchdogs have repeatedly reported the following human rights violations in the country: ill-treatment of prisoners in penitentiary institutions, the government's brutal crackdown on peaceful demonstrators in 2007 and 2009, and restrictions on media freedom, right to freedom of assembly and expression, The failing of protection of activists on International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (17 May 2013) (Amnesty Internationalt 2013) (Georgian ombudsman's annual report 2011; Human Rights Watch 2013). However, the position of religious leaders and the Church towards the protection of human rights is mostly ambivalent. Quite often, radical statements made by Church representatives become the source of social tension. The general public called for the Church to be more critical and active in protecting human rights and condemning homophobia and religious radicalism even in clerics.

Freedom of Religion—A Challenge both to Church and State

Freedom of religion is the central theme of the ongoing public debate about human rights in Georgia. It is actively discussed in the mass media, social networks and the blogging community, especially by young people.

Religious pluralism is the biggest challenge to the Georgian Orthodox Church in the modern world. After Georgia gained independence, new religious groups, including protestant groups of Evangelists and Baptists, started to emerge parallel to the process of revitalization of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Church representatives have often expressed resistance toward the proselytism carried out by protestant groups, as they believe that "religions financed by the west" constitute a "threat to the national identity". Religious fundamentalist groups are also formed as a reaction to pluralism and modernization. A radical extremist wave consolidated under the message "orthodoxy and national identity" hit Georgia in the 1990s. Up until 2003, freedom of religion was one of the top issues in the sphere of human rights.[19] For years national and international human rights activists were critical of the situation in terms of freedom of religion in Georgia (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Dept. of State, 2006; International Religious Freedom Report 2008, 2011, Report of Human Rights Centre n.d.). Though the Church tried to separate itself from radical extremist groups,[20] its attitude toward religious pluralism and religious freedom remained skeptical and ambivalent. This attitude

[19] Extremist groups were mostly attacking Jehovah Witnesses, Baptists and human rights activists fighting against violation of the rights of religious minorities.

[20] In 1997 the Holy Synod expelled a leader of a radical extremist group—Basil Mkalavishvili from the Church.

only served to further encourage growing fundamentalist tendencies in Georgian society.

In society as a whole, there were a range of different attitudes toward religious minorities, as there were within the Church. Indeed the Church was quite open for dialogue with religious groups historically represented in the country, while considering 'non-traditional religions'[21] and their missionary activities as a threat (Vashakmadze 2011).[22] Until 2003 the State was quite reluctant to fight against extremism. By 'closing its eyes' to cases involving violations of religious freedom, the Church was reflecting the mainstream public attitude of that time. Failure to sign the concordat between the Vatican and Georgia in September 2003[23] is a vivid illustration of the dominant public attitude toward 'other religions' (Tarkhnishvili 2006, p. 22).[24] Due to the position of the Orthodox Church and (student) protests, President Shevardnadze was reluctant to sign the prepared document. (cif. Fleischmann-Bisten 2005, p. 79)

The relationship between Church and State was transformed following the Rose Revolution of 2003. The national discourse began to refer not to a "national state", but rather to a "modern state", placing emphasis on the promotion of liberal values and civic awareness. Tension between the State and the Church mainly developed around the following issues: freedom of religion, the status of religious organizations and the protection of cultural heritage. All these issues are linked to the legal and symbolic public role of the Georgian Orthodox Church.

The protection of religious freedom and the integration of religious and ethnic minorities became one of the main concerns in the sphere of human rights for the new political elite, as well as a personal one for President Saakashvili. A leader of a radical extremist group was arrested and expression of religious extremism restrained.

The Holy Synod's resolution (14.12.2004) demonstrates how sensitive the theme of freedom of religion, expression and speech is for the Church. On the one hand, it condemns radicalism and intolerance, actually acknowledging the importance of human rights, while on the other hand, it is skeptical about the activities of human rights organizations, emphasizing that human rights, democracy and freedom

[21] Non-traditional religions are considered to be denominations that entered Georgia in the twentieth century, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, for example, Protestant denominations and Jehovah's Witness. "Traditional religions" are: Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, and Armenian Gregorian Church. In other words, traditional religions are considered to be those religions that have been present in Georgia for several centuries.

[22] The 1995 Synod Decree requested the state to impose restrictions on the activities of different religious groups as they were "financially supported from abroad", and constituted a threat to the dominant religion in Georgia. The same decree emphasized the peaceful cohabitation among major traditional religions.

[23] Dominance of ambivalent attitudes in the Church illustrates a discrepancy between internal conservative and modern groups that resulted in failure to arrange a meeting between the Patriarch and Pope John Paul II in 2002.

[24] Results of surveys illustrate public trust toward traditional religions. The highest index of distrust is expressed toward Jehovah Witnesses. In general, more than half of respondents support the idea of imposing restrictions on activities of other religions.

of speech are no excuse for defying the Church's rules, traditions and hierarchy (Vashakmadze 2011, p. 127).[25] The Church supports the democratization process in Georgia, as exemplified by the Patriarch's hailing of Georgia's acceptance to the Council of Europe in 1998. However, various aspects of the democratization and modernization process remain a challenge for the Church.

One of the most recent public disputes was sparked by a proposal to rebuild a mosque in Batumi. The issues related to reconstruction of Aziziye mosque in Batumi brought the stereotypes and problems of integration related to Islam to the surface. Two opposing views were expressed regarding the reconstruction of an old mosque that was destroyed during the Soviet regime.[26] One was voiced by the Church and its supporters, who strongly objected to the proposal,[27] arguing that the emergence of a new mosque could provoke a conflict between the Orthodox and Muslim communities of Georgia. Some of them went even further by stating that the mosque would become a symbol of "Ottoman dominance", (Tsuladze n.d., Georgian Patriarchat n.d.) The other view, shared by cultural workers, human rights organizations and the government, was that Georgia should respect freedom of religion, arguing that along with Orthodox churches, mosques were also part of the Georgian cultural heritage.[28] This protest from certain groups of the Church and public is seemingly strange, considering the fact, that in Georgia, were Muslims reside, mosques are functioning and are also built. In this case, the wave of protests stemmed out from the efforts of the Georgian Orthodox Church to be included in the decision making process related to such issues on the one hand, and echoed the religious-nationalist-radical tendencies gaining momentum in the broader Georgian public, on the other.

Freedom of religion came to the fore again in July 2011, when Article 1509 of the Civil Code was amended to allow religious organizations to register as legal entities under public law. Public debates over the adoption of laws concerning religion, as well as granting the status of a legal entity under public law to religious minorities are vivid illustrations of the ambivalent position of the Church. The Georgian Orthodox Church requested a postponement of the adoption of the law on religion that in practice meant its cancellation. The Church Representatives felt that the law might threaten and diminish the dominant role of the Georgian Orthodox Church ("no other religion should be equal to the religion of majority"—Orthodox

[25] Sinod's resolution was in fact the Church's response to those priests and anti-clerical campaigners who criticized the Church's anti-modernist policies.

[26] The construction of a new mosque is the subject of negotiations between Georgia and Turkey over the parity agreement. According to the agreement, Georgia was given the opportunity to restore four early Christian Georgian churches on the territory of Turkey, while Turkey was given the right to restore three mosques and build one new mosque in south western Georgia where the majority of Georgian Muslims are concentrated.

[27] Cf. debate on whether to build a cultural center and mosque near Ground Zero in New York (Tarkhnishvili 2006).

[28] "Those who argue that a mosque should not be built in Batumi argue that 10% of Georgian population should not be living here"; President Saakashvili stated in a Georgian TV-Project (GPB) on Jan. 26, 2011.

Christianity).[29] The public debates revealed fundamentalist ideas that were enrooted in society in July 2011. Radical groups organized protests against the adoption of the law.

In an effort to ease the tensions representatives of the Patriarchate met with a group of Georgian MPs to discuss potential solutions to the problem. As a result of the talks, the Synod issued a compromise resolution on July 11, 2011, which said that

"Whilst the Georgian Orthodox Church accepts and respects universal norms and values enshrined in international conventions and the Constitution of Georgia, it declares that all Georgian citizens regardless of their religion, as well as every religious organization, are equal before the law. Religious freedom shall not depend on the membership of a congregation. According to the Constitution of Georgia and the Concordat, which represents the will of the Georgian people, the exclusive legal status of the Georgian Autocephalous Orthodox Church by no means restricts or denies freedom of worship and equality before the law of other religious associations." (Statement of Holy Synode 2011)

This clarification could be seen as the recognition of freedom of religion and equal rights of all religious organizations. This statement was a step forward. But its implementation remains a serious challenge to the Church itself, and is causing additional tension in Georgia's social-political life. In a modern pluralistic society it will be put to the test every day.

Though nowadays radicalism is less articulated than in the 1990s dissent by radical young people and fundamentalist religious leaders are increasing parallel to increased secular tendencies. Such dissent is directed against homosexuals, human rights activists and religious minorities (Sumbadze 2012, p. 42).

Youth and Religion

The period after the Rose Revolution may be termed a time of 'culture struggle' between traditional and modern ideologies, as well as between religious and secular values.[30] Current affairs look quite eclectic when observing the social and political development of the country together with the system of values held by the majority of the population. There is a mixture of traditional, secular and post-secular tendencies and characteristics (Zedania 2006; 2007). Religiosity among the Georgian youth is quite strong. As illustrated by the latest surveys, religion occupies a significant place in social life and is important for their identities (Sumbadze 2012). Religion

[29] Church leaders claimed that this process could harm the Church's interests. "… just the state is to be held responsible for negative consequences the law will bring very soon", "About Changes in Civil Code " http://www.ambioni.ge/sakanonmdeblo-cvilebebis-sesaxeb, last access: 10.02.2013

[30] Lately the Church has been less loyal toward the state due to its secular policy. But religion remains a source of legitimacy for Georgian politicians and the state tries to maintain "good relations" with the Church. The inauguration of the president in the cathedral by the Patriarch is one of the symbolic representations of this tendency.

is very important for young people, a significant majority of the respondents believe in God (96.7%) and in sin (83.0%). Most of the Georgian churchgoers are young people. Their lifestyle is greatly influenced by religion. They strictly adhere to religious practices and traditions (regularly attend religious services, make confession, and observe religious fasts and holidays). They tend to think that religion is not only a private matter, for them it is an essential element of their social status. It is a source of their self-identification. The majority of respondents (65.9%) believe that being Christian is more important for their self-identification than being a citizen of Georgia (34.1%) (Sumbadze 2012, 55).

Georgia is an obvious case of the "*de-privatization of religion"* (Casanova 1994). In 2010 a group of students requested the creation of a space for prayer at Ilia State University. The rector denied the request on the grounds of the university being a neutral, secular public institution. The denial was followed by protests organized by the students.

Religion is a sphere of social activism and engagement for young people. It should be noted that all active public groups whether promoting human rights or a particular religion are mainly composed of young people. The active role taken by young people in the protest demonstrations of September 2012, sparked by the prison abuse scandal, is a good case in point. It is important to mention that the different groups expressing secular and religious fundamentalist ideas are mainly composed of young people.

Young people were also actively involved in the 2012 and 2013 International Day against Homophobia campaign in Tbilisi, denouncing violence, harassment and discriminatory treatment of the LGBT community. The event in the 2013 was cut short by a throng of angry counter-protesters. The attackers of the May 17th event were accompanied and encouraged by the religious authorities from the Georgian Orthodox Church. In recent years young people have actively participated in the country's social and political life. Research indicates that young people tend to be more radical and intolerant towards the LGBT community and religious minorities than older generations (Sumbadze 2012, p. 42). At the same time, it should also be mentioned that youth participation in demonstrations and campaigns against human rights violations has risen strongly in recent times. They actively socialize online and comment on ongoing political processes using various social networks. Religion plays a pivotal role in youth mobilization, both for radical young people and advocates of freedom of religion.

Recent studies have shown that gender equality and tolerance toward minorities is higher among young people, however acceptance of religious minorities proves to be the exception. Here young people are less tolerant (ibid.). Whether the rising religiousness of young people is a kind of defense mechanism against modernization, or an attempt by religion to adapt to the realities of the (post)modern era requires a more in depth-analysis.

Conclusion

After regaining independence Georgia began a systemic transformation, a process that was at times turbulent and painful. Democratization required that the old Communist system be dismantled and replaced with a completely new political and economic structure, and a new, different set of values.[31] As in the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe, the process was accompanied by the revival of nationalism and old traditions. The clash between the old and the new, traditionalism and modernism is still reflected in Georgian society today. The results of surveys indicate a strengthening of democratic values. Young people are keener on anticlerical and secular ideas. We are witnessing the process of the transformation of values, but religiousness re-mains a dominant feature of Georgian youth. It is expressed in diminishing collective orientation and strengthening individualistic values (Sumbadze 2012, p. 61).

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the country's unique historical and cultural background, specific relations between the Church and the State have had a strong impact on the ongoing process of modernization and secularization in Georgia (cf. Beck 2008, p. 58; Eisenstadt 2002). Religion has gained dominance in the national narrative and filled the ideological vacuum caused by the fall of communism. The nationalization of religion, so tempting for Orthodox churches (Kallis 2008, p. 162),[32] and anti-modernism tendencies make it hard for the Church to find its place and rethink its role in a modern society. Post-communist political and religious transformation is a serious challenge to religions. First and foremost, it is about freedom of religion. Every religion claims to be the only truth and the only universal value. But this makes it difficult to adopt the principle of pluralism. The Orthodox Christian Church's attitude towards human rights is eclectic and it requires in-depth analysis. In a pluralistic and secular society, religion is only one of the actors, not a monopolist, though it may be offered the roles of peacemaker and advocate of social, ethnic and human rights.

The development of Georgian society has been a heterogeneous process. The latest processes in the country demonstrated that there are both radical and moderate (pro-human rights) groups of religious young people in the country. The Georgian Orthodox Church has accumulated significant symbolic capital, and has a strong influence on the public discourse, and especially on the mentality and behavior of young people. It is noteworthy that although young people define their ethnic identity on the basis of *religion, language and history*, their awareness of human rights and democracy has substantially increased in recent times (South Caucasus Bureau of Konrad Adenauer Foundation 2008).

[31] This period can be described as the "second wave" of modernization (the first wave refers to Soviet-time transformation: industrialization and urbanization), aimed at building new political institutions and a functional civil society.

[32] The nationalization of religion and phyletism are incompatible with the Orthodox theological tradition.

From this viewpoint it becomes more relevant whether and how religion promotes and encourages respect for human rights (Clement 1997).[33] The mentioned ambivalence can be traced to the social transformation, the ambivalent nature of modernism itself (ibid.; Baumann 1991) and the Church's mixed attitude towards the new realities. According to Patriarch Leonid (1918–1921), personal freedom is the chief Christian value (Georgian Patriarchs 2010). The views and values of the Georgian church leaders of the early twenteith century should come to the fore again today, especially regarding their stance on the relationship between the Church and the State, according to which religion has its own foundation and, therefore, the Church and the State should be regarded as two different institutions, independent of each other, with each of them having its own sphere of action (ibid.). It remains to be seen whether the views of the Georgian Patriarchs will prevail over radical tendencies.

It can be concluded that today's Georgia is a vivid illustration of the ongoing clash of the values of pre-modern (traditional) and modern (individualized, secularized) and at the same time post-modern (pluralist, religious revivalist) society. This challenge concerns both the Church and the State, religious and non-religious citizens.

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[33] The French Orthodox theologian Olivier Clement attached great importance to Patriarch Bartholomew' s view that respect for "others" and freedom of the soul and all other positive values of a pluralistic democracy are rooted in a biblical understanding of the human person. (quoted on the basis of a Georgian translation of the original text).

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