



SUMMARY OF THE SURVEY

The purpose of the survey was to give an overview of human rights in Georgia. The study consists of three parts. The goal of the first part was to get an overview of the human rights situation by describing the opinions and views of the population of Georgia. The quantitative method was used – specifically, face to face interviews conducted throughout the country. The responses were analyzed according to place of residence, different age groups, educational attainment and various economic situations. The second, qualitative part of the study focused on expert opinions. The objective was to determine how the experts saw the human rights situation in Georgia and to gain an overview of the activities of NGOs, government institutions, higher education institutions and the media in ensuring and covering human rights. Recent changes and future plans were also studied. The qualitative part was meant to complement the survey conducted on the same topic among the population. The last part of the study summed up various opinions from international and regional human rights organizations on the Georgian human rights situation. The positions of freelance experts were used as well to supplement the data.

According to Thomas Hammarberg, the EU special adviser on Georgian constitutional and legal reform and human rights, Georgia is undergoing a second transition process after independence. It started with the 2012 parliamentary elections, which were the first peaceful transition of power after independence. The new government inherited a large number of human rights problems and has started addressing them. Experts say that a number of forward strides have been made, but they have not been sufficient and some regression can be seen as well.

Awareness of human rights is not very high among the Georgian population. Experts emphasized the poor state of education, especially in the field of human rights, and said civic education was lacking in Georgia. As a result, the term “human rights” was unclear for the Georgians and 14% of respondents failed to define the term. The most

frequent response (24%) was simply “protection for people’s rights in all walks of life.” Yet the predominant opinion was that human rights are not respected in their country.

Women were more negatively inclined than men on this issue, which is presumably because of the complicated situation faced by women in Georgian society. Experts cited several problems in relation to violence and harassment and described women as being socially excluded as women are seen as mainly homemakers and not equal members of society, and that they lack adequate financial support after giving birth. Several international organizations also expressed concern about the situation of women in Georgia. Problems emphasized by the ombudsman were the low level of social and political engagement, high dropout rate at schools and widespread violence against women.

In general, the biggest problem for Georgian society is social, economic and material safety net, which is not actually considered one of people’s fundamental freedoms. This shows yet again that the term “human rights” is not understood clearly and the complicated socioeconomic situation faced by Georgia is leading people to prioritize other values. At the same time, in response to the question of universality of human rights, fundamental rights were also mentioned, and with regard to social rights, the right to work was mentioned. The experts were also concerned about workers’ rights, as there have been a number of cases in Georgia where employees were misused or not provided with a safe working environment.

Although problems with the rights of children or sexual or religious minorities were not mentioned in the population survey in general, these fields were of great concern for inhabitants with higher education attainment as well as for the experts and international organizations. The large number of street children is a problem. According to UNICEF, 1,500 children lived on the street in 2012. There is also concern over the state of children’s homes, which have fortunately improved thanks to the construction of new family-type children’s homes.

Violations of the rights of sexual minorities were mentioned more than once in the qualitative study. An example cited was a demonstration held by the LGBT community on 17 May 2012, which turned into a violent conflict between the demonstrators and members and supporters of the Orthodox Church. This event led to

the passage of an anti-discrimination law in Georgia. It was originally to establish a position of inspector who would have the right to accept and investigate accusations and complaints but this was left out of the final version of the act. A special clause about the Georgian Orthodox Church that establishes a special relationship between state and church was added to the law as well. This development was criticized by Amnesty International, which called on the government to use the new law more effectively.

The strong position of the Orthodox Church in society has also led to discrimination against religious minorities. Although only 17% of the population said that Georgia had problems ensuring religious liberties, the problem was a good deal more serious in the view of experts and international organizations. Human Rights Watch noted a number of cases where Orthodox communities have prevented Moslems from holding worship service. In addition, in a number of state schools, students of other faiths than Orthodox are indoctrinated by teachers. Cases of harassment and shaming take place.

There are a surprising number of people who said they were concerned by the rights of persons with disabilities, which can be attributed to the recent activity of human rights organizations in this field. The financial support from the government has increased, but is not sufficient. A report from the United States also stated that the discrimination against people with disabilities continues in several fields.

When asked who they would contact if their rights were violated, one-fourth of the respondents said they would contact the Georgian courts. This figure is not very high, and the reason may be the problems within the judiciary. International organizations have criticized the Georgian court for not being autonomous enough, as a result of which citizens find it hard to trust the judiciary. The same question also reflected a second serious problem in Georgian society. The response was that prisoner rights advocacy organizations would be contacted in the case of violations. A number of international organizations and the Georgian ombudsman have criticized the situation of prisoners and a number of cases of abuse of prisoners have been identified. Fortunately, cases of torture of prisoners have declined significantly, according to the US report.

The main source of information on human rights is the media (85%). Thus it is positive that a package of amendments to Georgian media laws democratized public

broadcasting and established the requirement that cable networks and satellite channel providers transmit all news channels. This allows people to access more information. At the same time, experts are concerned about the quality of journalism, as scandal is preferred to informed and balanced discussions. As a result, the media does not present an adequate picture of developments in the country.

The main recommendations made by the experts pertained to reform of laws so that they would not contravene the Constitution and provide adequate protection for people's fundamental rights. The need for increased general awareness was underscored, with a role envisioned for the media and NGOs, who were encouraged to be more active. The government should also make sure that their economic activity would be directed to relevant ends. Economic activity to remedy social problems would have a positive effect on the shaping of an egalitarian society that is free of discrimination.