



Minority Languages in Georgia

Expressions of Cultural Wealth

ევროკავშირი
საქართველოსთვის
The European Union for Georgia



ევროპის საბჭო



“The Government of Georgia remains loyal to its international commitments. It protects ethnic minority languages in Georgia and will continue to protect them in the future.”

PAATA ZAKAREISHVILI
State Minister of
Georgia for
Reconciliation
and Civic Equality



“Minority languages are part of Georgia’s rich cultural heritage. Protecting minority languages means to appreciate these expressions of cultural wealth and to strengthen the sense of belonging of the citizens using them. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages will help Georgia to protect its minority languages. Georgia made the right decision in undertaking the commitment to ratify this unique convention when acceding to the Council of Europe in 1999.”

Professor VESNA CRNIĆ-GROTIĆ
Chair of the Committee of Experts of the
European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

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ევროპის საბჭო

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Throughout its entire history, Georgia has always been a multinational country. According to the 11th century Georgian historian Leonti Mroveli, in addition to Georgian, five languages were being spoken in Kartli (old name of Georgia) from as early as the 6th century BC: Armenian, Assyrian, Greek, Hebrew and Khazar. These languages were spoken by all of the Kings of Kartli, as well as by ordinary men and women, and symbolise the way Georgians peacefully cohabitated with different minority groups in a society that respected cultural diversity. These languages developed naturally and independently in Georgia, without any restrictions being imposed upon them, as shown by ancient inscriptions in Greek, Aramaic, Armenian and other languages found in Georgia. For example, the Armazi stele of Serapit, or “Armazi bilingual”, which, written in ancient Greek and Aramaic, dates back to the 2nd century AD, while a stone-carved calendar written in Armenian dates from the 12th or 13th century.

Today, many European countries have traditional ethnic groups living within their territories that speak a language other than that of the majority of the population. The demographic situation of such minority languages varies greatly, from a few hundred speakers to several thousand. However, what many of them have in common, to a greater or lesser degree, is the precariousness of their continued existence in the areas where they have been traditionally spoken.

Convinced that minority languages should not disappear, in 1992 the Council of Europe adopted the **European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages** to protect and promote the languages of traditional national minorities in Europe. The Charter, which is the only treaty in the world on the protection of minority languages, entered into force in 1998.

The Charter recognises minority languages as an expression of cultural wealth, and aims to maintain them in the areas where they have been traditionally spoken. It contains different promotional measures designed to enable and encourage the use of such languages in public life; in particular with regards to cultural activities, schools and the media.

The Charter does not apply to dialects of the official languages of the state or the languages

of recent migrants. However, it does apply to languages that are traditionally used within the state by a minority of nationals of that state, irrespective of their ethnicity (Article 1.a).

When acceding to the Council of Europe in 1999, Georgia committed itself to ratifying the Charter. Once ratified, the Charter will protect these traditionally used minority languages in Georgia. Thus, Georgia will be implementing European standards and accelerating its integration into Europe. A perfectly natural step forward for a European state with such a deeply rooted and historic multicultural tradition.

The respect of minority languages and the promotion of their use are not in conflict with Georgian – the official state language. On the contrary, the Charter will help these minority languages to survive while also strengthening Georgian. This is because a vital aim of the Charter’s application in Georgia is to encourage people belonging to national minorities to learn Georgian.

Recognition of minority languages and respect for their speakers contributes to social cohesion and enhances the in-country civic integration process. If Georgian media are made available in minority languages, national minorities can integrate better by becoming directly informed from Georgian sources about what is going on in Georgia. Granting national minorities internationally recognised minority protection will also give them a sense of belonging and reduce the risk of separatism. Furthermore, by maintaining national minority cultures, tourists will be attracted and inspired to explore the cultural heritage of this vibrant, multi-ethnic Georgia.

This publication aims to provide information on a range of issues concerning the traditional national minorities in Georgia. These include:

- their history
- their geographic dispersion
- their contribution to the development of the country
- the outstanding individuals that have come from these groups
- the current use of their traditionally used minority languages.



“I am Leila Avidzba from Sokhumi, Abkhazia. I teach the Abkhazian language at Tbilisi State University. Language for me is my profession as well as being a part of my identity. I think that future generations should re-establish broken bridges between Georgians and Abkhazians, and language is the first step towards this goal. We need to speak to each other in our own languages, we don’t need a third language for that. Our country is like the Italian Yards you find in some old houses in Tbilisi – the more multi-ethnic and multicultural the yard, the more interesting and friendly it is to live there.”

The **Abkhazian language** belongs to the Ibero-Caucasian family of languages and employs the Cyrillic script. Historical records from the 1st and 2nd centuries AD mention the Apsilae and Abasgoi tribes on the Black Sea littoral of present-day Georgia. Some researchers consider that they originated from South-Caucasian (Kartvelian) tribes, but others believe that they came from North-Caucasian Adyghe tribes. The majority of Abkhazian-speaking people have traditionally lived in Abkhazia. Some Abkhazians are Christians, others are Muslims. Abkhazian has state-language status within Abkhazia, leading to several state agencies in Georgia uploading documents and information in Abkhazian onto their websites. Until the conflict in the 1990s, Abkhazian had been widely used at schools, universities and in the media in Abkhazia. However, access to exact information about the current situation of this language in Abkhazia is not possible. In Tbilisi, Abkhazian was first taught at Ivane Javakishvili State University in 1924. In order to enrol into Georgian universities, Abkhazian speaking applicants can take only one entrance exam (general skills) in Abkhazian. The Georgian Public Broadcaster does schedule daily TV (Channel 2) and radio information programmes in Abkhazian. An Abkhazian-Georgian online dictionary is available on the website of the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia.



Abkhazian house at the Tbilisi Ethnographic Museum



Dimitri Gulia monument, Tbilisi

Famous Abkhazians:

- Dimitri Gulia (1874-1960), Samson Chanba (1886-1937), Bagrat Shinkuba (1917-2004) and Giorgi Sharvashidze (1846-1918), writers
- Adgur Dzidzaria (b.1953) and Constantine Lakerbaia (1889-1918), painters
- Razhden Gumba (1926-2007), composer
- Lorik Marshania (1932-2010), politician, academic of the Georgian Academy of Agrarian Sciences, famous Georgian public figure who devoted much of his life and work to the unity and mutual understanding of the Abkhazians and Georgians.
- Zurab Anchabadze (1920-1984), historian, the first rector of the State University of Abkhazia and his son George Anchabadze (b.1949), Doctor of Historical Sciences, professor
- Nelli Eshba (1928-2015), first director of the Abkhazian Professional Theatre in Sokhumi-Aqwa
- Giorgi Dzidzaria (1914-1988), historian, founder of the Abkhazian history studies
- Khibla Gerzmava (b.1970), opera singer, famous soprano
- Lydia Chkadua (b.1930), linguist, Caucasiologist.



“I am Boris Karslyan. I live in the city of Ninotsminda and I work as a journalist and photo reporter at the local radio station, NOR. Given that Ninotsminda is inhabited by Armenians, Georgians and Russians, Radio NOR broadcasts in Armenian, Georgian and Russian. Information should be easily accessible for everyone, so that the population is regularly kept up to date about what’s going on in the municipality and throughout Georgia. I love taking pictures of landscapes and birds, so I always carry a camera with me. I want to show people how beautiful Javakheti is.”

The **Armenian language** belongs to the Indo-European family of languages and has its own script, which is among the world’s main 14 alphabets. According to some historians, the Armenian population first appeared in Georgia in the 2nd century BC. Kings Erekle II and Giorgi XII established Armenian settlements in Georgia in the 17th and 18th centuries. A significant number of Armenians moved to Georgia in 1828-29, 1877-89, 1895-96 and 1915 because of the Russian-Turkish war. The Armenians, who are Christians, mostly live in Tbilisi and in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Abkhazia regions. They have been represented by many artists, scholars, doctors, sportsmen, entrepreneurs and merchants. Armenians have also contributed considerably to the architectural development of Tbilisi. Currently, Armenian is the language of instruction in up to 131 schools. There are a number of Armenian arts ensembles and cultural centres in Georgia. Newspapers, magazines (e.g. the weekly *Vrastan* and monthly *Arevik*) and literature are published in Armenian. The Georgian Public Broadcaster has daily TV (Channel 2) and radio information programmes in Armenian. Regional TV and radio stations broadcast in Armenian in Samtskhe-Javakheti. The website of the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia hosts an Armenian-Georgian online dictionary.



Surb Echmiadzin Church, Tbilisi



Residential house by Mikheil Ohajanov, Tbilisi



Monument of Sergei Parajanov, Tbilisi

Armenian contribution to Georgia’s culture:

- Sayat-Nova (1712 or 1722-1795), poet, musician and balladeer
- Aram Kachaturyan (1903-1978) and Mikael Tariverdiev (1931-1996), composers
- Givi Shakhnazar (b.1933), poet and translator
- Alexander Bashbeuk Melikov (1891-1966), Zuleika Bashbeuk Melikova (b. 1939), Albert Dilbaryan (1828-1991), Gevorg Grigoryan (1897-1976), Lev Baiakhchev (1930-1992), Robert Kondakhsazov (1937-2010) and Gayane Khachaturyan (1942-2009), painters
- Tigran Petrosyan (1929-1984) and Rafael Chimishkyan (b.1929), sportsmen
- Sergei Parajanov (1924-1990), film director
- Hovhannes Tumanyan (1869-1923), Grigor Artsruni (1845-1892), Raffi Akop Melik-Akopyan (1835-1888), Gabriel Sundukyan (1825-1912) and Ruben Agababyan (1911-1970), writers
- Vahan Teryan (1885-1920), poet. The Vahan Teryan House Museum, which opened in Gandza (Ninotsminda district) in 1957, is devoted to his works.



“I am Archimandrite Seraphime Bit-kharibi. I live in the village of Dzveli Kanda and I hold services in the Assyrian language at the monastery after Thirteen Assyrian Fathers. Assyrians in Georgia are well-known artisans, builders and painters. They painted the interior of the first building of Patriarchy in Georgia, the Supreme Court, the Opera House, Tbilisi State University and many other places. Assyrians have strengthened Orthodox Christianity in Georgia and established monasticism. I am delighted that Assyrians are once again having the opportunity to learn their native language at school. We don’t want to lose what our ancestors kept for centuries.”

The Assyrians speak **Assyrian** New Aramaic, using the Aramaic script. The Assyrian Christian clergymen, known as the Assyrian Fathers, came to Georgia in the 6th century and significantly contributed to the development of Christianity. Modern Assyrian settlement in Georgia started in the 18th century when King Erekle II settled refugee Assyrians in the Kakheti region. During the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries more Assyrians came to Georgia in several waves from Persia and Turkey. They settled in Tbilisi, Zestaponi, Kutaisi, Samtredia, Senaki, Batumi and Gardabani, and in the village of Dzveli Kanda (Georgstal in German) in Mtskheta district. The tradition of teaching Assyrian in Georgia ended in the 1940s when a number of Assyrians were deported. In 2015, teaching Assyrian was reintroduced at Dzveli Kanda Secondary School with the support of the Ministry of Education of Georgia. Assyrian is also being taught at the Assyrian Cultural Centre in Tbilisi, which was founded in 2009. Liturgy in churches is conducted in Aramaic.



Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Dzveli Kanda-Georgstal



Church of the Thirteen Assyrian Fathers in Dzveli Kanda-Georgstal

Assyrian legacy in Georgia:

- Givargiz Avdishu (Giorgiev Avdii Kasha Odisho, 1888-1946), editor-in-chief of the Assyrian newspaper Kukhva D’Madinkha, headmaster of the Assyrian school, founder of the Assyrian Printing House
- Rabi Davit Ilian (1910-2000), writer, poet and translator
- Sergo Aivazov (1926-2014), one of the painters of the Georgian Supreme Court building
- Sarah Bidbunova (b.1940), singer.



“I am Eljanat Imamizaevi. I live in the village of Tivi and have been teaching at Tivi public school for almost 20 years. My native language is my profession as well. Kids are very interested in the Avar language and it makes me happy to see that they learn it well. I love when kids know the worth of education. If anybody needs assistance in learning, I work extra hours with them. Avar is their native language and they should know it.”

The **Avar language** belongs to the Ibero-Caucasian family of languages and uses the Cyrillic alphabet. The Georgians call the Avar speakers “Khundzis”. The term “Avar” appeared in the 19th century, after the Russian Empire extended its territory to the Caucasus. The Avars are one of the most numerous ethnic groups among the Dagestanis and are mostly Muslims. Their settlement in Georgia began in the second half of the 19th century. The Avars in Georgia mostly live in the Kakheti region, in the villages of Tivi, Saruso and Chantliskure (Kvareli district). Avar was taught at Georgian schools from 1960 to 2013, and has been offered again since 2015 at secondary schools in these three villages. Most Avars speak Avar and Georgian fluently. A folklore ensemble called “Gorianka” existed in the Avar villages until 2000. There are at present no broadcast or print media in Avar.



Avar footwear



Water jug



Avar prayer house in Tivi

Distinguished Avars in Georgia:

- Ali Isaev-Avanski (b.1935), writer, poet, honorary citizen of Tbilisi and honored artist of Georgia
- Rasul Gamzatov (1923-2003), writer and poet
- Khalil Musayev (Khalil-Bek Muusaiauli, 1897-1949), first professional artist of Dagestan (Russian Federation), studied drawing at the Art School of Tbilisi
- Manaba Magomedova (1928-2013), received the titles of Public Artist of Georgia and Dagestan, honorary citizen of Tbilisi
- Abdulla Barkalaev (b.1953), European Judo Championship runner up and international sports master.



“I am Rizvan Ismalov. I am an artist and an editor of the religious magazine *Ahli-beit*. I am also interested in the history of the Azerbaijani people living in Georgia, and I have published the book *Muslim Monuments in Georgia*. Language is a blessing from God for every nation. You should know your history and literature in order not to lose your identity. That’s why, alongside our history, I try to teach my kids not only Georgian, the state language, but also Azerbaijani, our native language.”

The **Azerbaijani language** belongs to the Turkic group of Altaic languages. During the Soviet period, the Azerbaijanis used the Cyrillic script, but now the Latin script is used. There are different opinions among historians about the time of the settlement of the Azerbaijani speaking population in Georgia and the Caucasus – dates vary from the 11th to the 17th centuries. The Azerbaijanis in Georgia, who are Muslims, are mostly settled in the Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti regions and in Tbilisi. They learn Azerbaijani in families and at schools. Classes are conducted in Azerbaijani in more than 120 Georgian public schools. In order to enrol at Georgian universities, Azerbaijani speaking applicants are entitled to take only one entrance exam (general skills) in Azerbaijani, and then have to study Georgian during the first year. About 20 Azerbaijani language newspapers and magazines (e.g. the weekly *Gurjistan*, and monthly *Ozani*) are being published in Georgia. Central and Kvemo Kartli regional TV stations broadcast information programmes in Azerbaijani on a daily basis. A Georgian-Azerbaijani online dictionary is accessible on the website of the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia.



Azeri rug



Imam Hussein mosque in Marneuli



Water jug

Azerbaijani notable personalities and institutions in Georgia:

- Fazil Khan Sheyda (1784-1852), poet, teacher and diplomat
- Mirza Shafi Vazeh (1794-1852), classical bilingual poet in Azerbaijani and Persian. In 1844, he established the Divan-i Hikmet literary society in Tbilisi.
- Mirza Fatali Akhundov (1812-1878), writer, playwright, philosopher and founder of the Azerbaijanian dramaturgy
- Abbasgulu Bakikhanov (1794-1847), writer, historian, journalist, linguist and philosopher
- Mirza Fatali Akhundov Museum of Azerbaijani Culture, Tbilisi, opened in 2006
- Heidar Aliev Azerbaijani Theatre, Tbilisi, founded in 1873, one of the oldest theatre companies in the Southern Caucasus, holding performances in Azerbaijani.



“I am Natalia Parjanadze, and I have been working for the Embassy of Estonia in Georgia for almost ten years. My ancestors are Estonians from the village of Estonka, Abkhazia. I don’t speak Estonian fluently, but I understand the language and this greatly helps me at work. I work to strengthen the relationship between the Estonian and Georgian people.”

The **Estonian language** belongs to the Balto-Finnic branch of the Finno-Ugric sub-family of languages, and uses a script based on the Latin alphabet. The Estonian speaking population is Christian and came to Georgia mostly in the second half of the 19th century. The Russian administration sent a small group of Estonians to Gulripshi-Gwylryphsh district in Abkhazia. In 1882, these settlers established a village called Bagnasheni, which was later renamed Estonka. In 1884 and 1885, two more settlements, Salme and Sulevo, were founded to the north of Gagra. Some Estonians also settled with Germans in Lindava-Lindau, near Sokhumi (Aqwa in Abkhazian). In the 1990s, the majority of Estonians went back to Estonia because of the war in Abkhazia. Most of the remaining Estonians have moved to Tbilisi, where they largely live in mixed, Georgian-Estonian families.



Estonka 1960. In the front row, from left to right: Anatoli Kutmann, Leonora Kutmann, Rudolf Tido and Adolf Tido. Standing: Gustav Kutmann. On top of the car, from left to right: Elvi Kutmann and Ilvar Kutmann.



Estonka 1954. In the front row, from left to right: Gustav Kutmann, Clara Kutmann, Martin Kutmann, Eva Adler and Albert Adler. In the back row, from left to right: Laima Tido, Endel Koch, Vaige Koch, Carl Tido, Vige Tido and Valery Bezukhov.



Estonka 1973. Elza Pikhlakas and Arnold Kutmann.

Estonian highlights:

- Dolores Hoffmann (b.1937), artist, created the stained glass windows at Piazza Square in Batumi.
- Kalev Kudu (b.1961), playwright, director and actor, staged a play at the Alkhmeteli Theatre in 2014.
- Juta Palm-Bedia (1944-1996), translator, translated numerous Georgian literary works into Estonian and vice versa.



“I am Vika Schall from Asureti, also called Elisabeththal, where Germans have traditionally specialised in wine growing. One of my ancestors discovered the well-known Assurethuli grape, which is also called the Schall grape after him. A local initiative is planning to promote the German economic and cultural traditions to attract visitors. This will create job opportunities for German speakers. I speak German fluently, also thanks to the German classes at our village school. It is clearly useful to teach German in the places founded by Germans in Georgia.”

German has been used in Georgia since the beginning of the settlement of the German minority in 1817 (foundation of the village of Marienfeld). Until 1956, more than 20 German settlements along with schools teaching in German had been established. In 1941, most, though not all, Germans were deported to Kazakhstan and Siberia. Part of them returned to Georgia as of 1956. Since 1817, the German minority has made significant contributions to science, economic development and cultural life in Georgia. Many important buildings inter alia in Tbilisi have been designed by German architects. Today German is used in cultural activities, business, tourism, in the newspaper “Kaukasische Post” (since 1906), the Evangelic-Lutheran Church (church services, the “Kirchenbote” and “Brücken bauen” magazines, social care) and by the Goethe-Institut. Besides persons belonging to the German minority, many Georgians also speak German (an estimated 685,000 inhabitants of Georgia in total) as it is widely taught at schools and universities.



Kashveti Church, Tbilisi, by German architect Leopold Bielfeld



Opera and Ballet Theatre, Tbilisi, by Viktor Schröter



German house (the Walker-Haus) in Bolnisi-Katharinenfeld

Some prominent Germans in Georgia:

- Hermann von Abich (1806-1886), geologist, researched the geology of the Caucasus
- Arnold Moritz (1821-1902), astronomer, meteorologist, Director of the Tbilisi Magnetic-Meteorological Observatory
- Gustav Radde (1831-1903), ethnologist, founded the Caucasian Museum, the present Museum of Georgia
- Leopold Bielfeld (1838-1922), Johann Dizmann (1878-1923), Albert Salzmann (1833-1897), Heinrich Scharrer (1828-1906), Viktor Schröter (1839-1901), Otto Simonson (1829-1914), Paul Stern, architects
- Arthur Leist (1852-1927), writer and editor-in-chief of “Kaukasische Post”, main translator of Shota Rustaveli’s “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” into German
- Adolf Dirr (1867-1930), ethnologist, a pioneer of Caucasian linguistics, translated inter alia Georgian, Abkhazian, Avar, Chechen and Ossetian fairy tales and legends
- Theodor Horschelt (1829-1871), Paul Franken (1818-1884), Oskar Schmerling (1863-1938), painters.



“I am Evgenia Kotanidis from Tbilisi. My ancestors came to Georgia from Pontus in the 19th century. I’m proud to speak Pontic Greek not only because it’s an ancient dialect with a rich lexicon, but also because it has allowed me to take part in the scientific research of Pontic Greek which took me close to Pontic speakers in Georgian villages such as Tsikhisjvari, in Borjomi district, Tetrtskaro and Iraga, in Tetrtskaro district and Santa, in Tsalka district, as well as in Greece itself.”

The **Greeks** living in Georgia are Christians and comprise two linguistic groups: **Greek** speakers using the Pontic dialect and Turkish-speaking Anatolian Greeks (known as Urums) using the so-called Urum dialect of Turkish. The first Greek settlements emerged in Georgia in the 18th century when King Erekle II settled so-called “Greeks of Pontus” in Akhtala (Kakheti region) for iron, silver and gold mining. At present, the Greek speakers live mostly in Adjara, Borjomi, Tetrtskaro, Dmanisi and Marneuli. Greek is being taught as a foreign language at some schools (e.g. in Tbilisi, Batumi, Akhaltsikhe, etc.) and can be studied at the Institute of Classical, Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies of Tbilisi State University.

The Greeks speaking **Urum Turkish** moved from the North-Eastern territories of Turkey to Georgia during the 19th century (in three migration waves) and settled mostly in the Tsalka and Dmanisi districts of the Kvemo Kartli region. Urum Turkish has never been taught at schools or used in public life. At present, it is mainly spoken by elders in the families residing in Tsalka district. The younger generation mostly learns modern Greek.



Greek church in Azanta (Abkhazia)



Greek church in Tsalka



Berdznis church in Algeti

Greek footprints in the history of Georgia:

- The first Greek settlements on the Black Sea coast appeared in the 8th century BC: Kobuleti-Pichvinia (Kobuleti), Phasis (Poti), Dioskuria (Sokhumi (Aqwa in Abkhazian)), Gyenos (Ochamchire) and Pitiunt (Pitsunda).
- Odysseas Dimitriadis (1908-2005), classical music conductor
- Giorgi Gurdjief (1866 or 1877-1949), mystic, philosopher, established his first Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in Tbilisi in 1919
- Averlios Aqolios, architect of the Antioch Church in Mtskheta built in the 4th and 5th centuries.



“I am Shota Tsatiashvili. I live in the village of Duisi. I was in the 5th grade when I learnt carpentering from my father. I make a living with this profession now. Youngsters in Duisi don't have much work, so I teach them carpentering for free, which offers them a trade and keeps them busy. I have 20 students at the moment. My mother tongue is Chechen and I also use it in public. If you don't know your language, you will lose your culture.”

The **Chechen language** belongs to the Ibero-Caucasian family of languages and uses the Cyrillic script. The Chechens residing in Georgia are referred to as Kists and are mostly Muslims. The Kists are mainly engaged in agriculture and cattle breeding. According to historical records in Georgia, King Parnavaz of Kartli married a Kist woman from the North Caucasus in the 3rd century BC, which reflects the traditionally multi-ethnic nature of the Kartli Kingdom. The son of Parnavaz, King Saurmag, settled Kists in mountainous areas in Eastern Georgia. The next immigration of Kists into Georgia took place in the 13th century. However, the Kists living in the Pankisi Gorge area in the Kakheti region did not settle in Georgia until the 18th and 19th centuries. The Chechen language was taught in schools throughout Kist villages until it stopped in 1944. More than 70 years later, five secondary schools will once again start offering Chechen language classes from September 2016. Several Chechen folklore ensembles exist in Pankisi Gorge. The bilingual (Georgian-Chechen) radio WAY has started radio broadcasting (live streaming online) in twelve villages in the Pankisi Gorge, from villages Koreti to Khadori. Alas, Chechen is currently not used in any print media.



Mosque in Duisi-Dui



Kist musical instrument



Kist house in Duisi-Dui

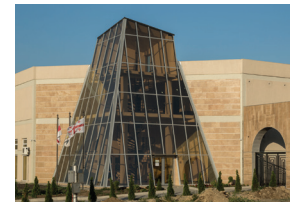
Kist and their role in Georgian history:

- Mate Albutashvili (1863-1953), writer, folklorist and educator
- Khaso Khangoshvili (b.1942), philologist and historian, author of books on the history and customs of the Kists
- Suleiman Gumashvili (b.1944), poet and translator
- Anzor Kibrotsashvili (1939-2008), Bughdan Baghakashvili (1939-2001), Taniel Mutoshvili (b.1956) and Temur Tsintsalashvili (b.1955), wrestlers
- The Ethnographic Museum of Pankisi Gorge is located in Duisi-Dui (Akhmeta district). It was founded in 2010.



“I am Natia Titali and I study tourism at Ilia State University. It has been four years since I started carving in enamel. I try to express my culture through my work. For instance, I make peacock and temple-shaped necklaces. The peacock symbolises an angel and Lalsh Temple in Iraq is the main temple for the Yezidi people. Kurmanji plays an important role in my self-identity; without Kurmanji, I wouldn’t be aware of who I am. Thankfully, my grandmother used to tell me about our history, customs and rituals, and taught me prayers in Kurmanji.”

Kurmanji is the Northern dialect of the Kurdish language. During the Soviet period, Kurdish was written in the Cyrillic script, but now it is written using the Latin script. It is presumed that Kurds/Yezidis (Kurdish nomadic tribes from the Kars-Yerevan territories) settled in the Meskheta area in the 16th century. Most ancestors of the present Kurdish/Yezidi population arrived in Georgia during three migration waves; the first in around 1770, then in the 19th century and finally in the first quarter of the 20th century. The Kurds/Yezidis brought their culture and traditions to their settlements, reflected for example in clothing, music, musical instruments and folk singing. The majority of Kurds/Yezidis are followers of Yezidism. During the 1970s, Kurdish was being taught for a few years in several schools in Tbilisi. Then, in 2015, the secondary school No. 79 in Tbilisi took up the challenge to teach Kurdish once again. The Georgian Public Broadcaster transmits a weekly radio information programme in Kurdish, and different publications and books are printed in this language.



Yezidi Cultural Centre, Tbilisi



Yezidi temple, Tbilisi



Anton Mirzoev’s Painting
“Yezidi Wedding in Tbilisi”

Important Kurdish/Yezidi personalities in Georgia and the cultural centre:

- Jardoe Asadi (1929-1993), Amine Avdali (1906-1964), brothers Baghcho and Aziz Sloev (1927-2005), writers and poets
- Base Jafarova (b.1943) and Muraz Daudi (1947-2014), painters
- Lucia Aloeva (1928-2011), first female Kurdish woman scientist, Doctor of Biology
- Lamara Fashaeva (1940-2015), historian and ethnographer
- In 2015, the Yezidis of Georgia celebrated the opening of their first temple and cultural centre in Tbilisi.



“I am Giorgi Plievi, a lawyer. I have been Head of the Young Ossetians Union for more than ten years. We provide legal assistance for Ossetians. Also, I teach human rights and European case law to students. I think it’s necessary for them to know how to defend their own rights and also those of others. I hope they will use this knowledge in practice. One’s native language is the foundation of ethnicity and part of one’s identity. That’s why, for me, it’s necessary to speak Ossetian.”

The **Ossetian language** belongs to the North-Iranian group of the Indo-European family of languages and uses the Cyrillic script. Some scholars claim that a compact settlement of Ossetians was established in the 3rd and 4th centuries, whereas others argue that it happened in the 13th and 14th or in the 17th and 18th centuries. Currently, the majority of Georgian Ossetians live in the Shida Kartli and Kakheti regions, as well as in Tbilisi. The Ossetians are mostly Christians. Ossetian was being taught in more than 50 schools in Georgia until 2012. Since 2015, secondary schools in Tsitskanaantseri (Kvareli district) as well as in Poni and Areshferani (Lagodekhi district) have resumed teaching Ossetian. Ossetian has also been taught at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University since 1918 where, in 2015, the Scientific-Research Centre of Georgian-Ossetian Relations was created. A Georgian-Ossetian online dictionary can be accessed on the website of the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia. The Georgian Public Broadcaster has daily TV (Channel 2) and radio information programmes in Ossetian. Different publications and books are printed in Ossetian, while many folklore ensembles and artistic teams use Ossetian.



Monument of Konstantin (Kosta) Khetagkati, or Kosta Khetagurov (1859-1906) national poet of the Ossetian people, Tbilisi

Eminent Ossetians of Georgia:

- Ioane Ialghuzidze Gabaraev (1770-1830), created the Ossetian alphabet on the basis of the Georgian graph.
- Vasil Abaev (1899 or 1900-2001), linguist, lexicographer, folklorist and ethnographer
- Nafi Jusoit (b.1925) and Giorgi Bestauti (b.1932), writers
- Leri Khabelov (b.1964), Zaur Kaloyev (1931-1997) and Vladimir Gutsayev (b.1952), sportsmen.



“We are brothers, Kuzma and Mikheil Oslopov. We live in the village of Gorelovka and have a cheese factory here. We produce cheese according to the traditions of our ancestors, without changing anything. This is a part of our culture and it is necessary to maintain it. The same can be said about our language. It is an integral part of our culture that we use on a daily basis in public and private life. Moreover, Russian helps us to communicate easily with Georgians and other national minorities living in Georgia, as it is one of the most widely spoken languages in the country.”

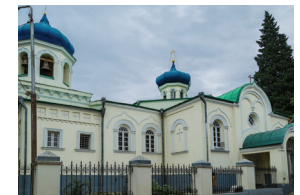
The **Russian language** belongs to the East Slavic group of languages. The long-standing Russian-Georgian relationship was enhanced through the marriage of Queen Tamar and George the Rus' (Yury Bogolyubsky, Prince of Novgorod) in the 12th century. The dense settlement of Russians in Georgia started in the 19th century when the Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti was abolished. The Russians living in Georgia have contributed to the development of science, culture, industry and other fields. In the Soviet era and today, Russian is used as a means of communication between different ethnic groups. Russian is the language of instruction at 75 schools and several universities. Furthermore, Russian is used by several Russian cultural centres and many artistic groups in Georgia. A number of newspapers (e.g. the weekly *Svobodnaya Gruzia*, and monthly *Mnogonatsional'nyaya Gruzia*), magazines and books are published in Russian. The Georgian Public Broadcaster has daily TV (Channel 2) and radio information programmes in Russian. Some places in Georgia have Russian names, for example, Gorelovka.



Orphanage in Gorelovka



IMELI Building (former Institute of Marx, Engels, Lenin), Tbilisi, by Alexey Shchusev



St. Alexander Nevsky Russian Church, Tbilisi

Russian impact on Georgia's cultural life:

- Aleksander Griboyedov (1795-1829), writer and diplomat, buried in Tbilisi
- Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930), poet and playwright
- Dimitri Ermakov (1846-1916), photographer
- Grigol Gagarin (1810-1893) and Nikanor Chernetsov (1805-1879), artists
- Nikolai Severov (1887-1957), Korneli Tatishchev (1868-?) and Alexey Shchusev (1873-1949), architects
- Aleksander Griboedov State Russian Drama Theatre, Tbilisi, founded in 1845
- Museum of Smirnovs in Tbilisi, established in 1985
- Orphanage (Sirotski Dom) in Gorelovka, built in 1847. It is the main building of the Dukhobors, a Spiritual Christian religious group of Russian origin.



“I am Valeri Mamulashvili, a 7th-grade pupil at Zinobiani public school. My grandfather told me that the Udis came to Georgia from the village of Vartasheni in Azerbaijan. When we’re at home, he teaches me words in the Udi language. This is very important for me because I really want to get to know this, my ancestral, language.”

Scholars attribute the **Udi language** to the Ibero-Caucasian language family. The Udis are one of the oldest indigenous ethnic groups in the South Caucasus and are Christians. The Udis living in Georgia migrated from the Azerbaijanian village of Vartasheni to the village of Oktomberi (current Zinobiani) in the Kvareli district. They are engaged in viticulture, agriculture and cattle breeding. Today, Udi is spoken by hardly any young people and it faces extinction in Georgia and throughout the world. Between 1934 and 1939, Udi was being taught at school. In 2003, the enthusiast teacher Mamuli (Simon) Neshumashvili began offering Udi courses at Zinobiani public school. In 2015, regular teaching of Udi at this school was officially reintroduced with the help of the Ministry of Education and the involvement of the same teacher. Different books, manuals and dictionaries are published in Udi. However, there are no broadcast or print media in Udi.



Museum of Udi Culture, Zinobiani

Cultural institution:
Museum of Udi Culture, Zinobiani



“I am Miroslava Gritsenko-Kankava, my mother tongue is Ukrainian. I assisted in the process which led to the founding of the Ukrainian School in Georgia. I became its first headmistress when it opened in Tbilisi in 1999. At present, I head the Saturday School for the *Ukrainians Living in Georgia* association which offers free language courses to students of all ages. Children are very enthusiastic about learning Ukrainian. This will enable them to study in Ukraine, which would help to establish closer economic and cultural ties between Georgia and Ukraine.”

The **Ukrainian language** belongs to the East Slavic group of languages and uses the Cyrillic alphabet. The Ukrainians, who are mostly Christians, first settled in Georgia in the second half of the 18th century when, because of disobedience, the Russian Empress, Catherine II, disbanded the so-called “Zaporozhian Sich” (a semi-autonomous Cossacks’ polity in the 16th to 18th centuries in Ukraine). In the early 19th century, Russian troops including Ukrainian soldiers were sent to Georgia. After finishing their military service, some of the Ukrainians settled in Georgia on plots of land assigned to them close to their military base. Ukrainians live in Tbilisi, Sokhumi (Aqwa in Abkhazian), Batumi, Rustavi, Kutaisi and Poti. The “Lesyaoba” folk festival, dedicated to Ukraine’s poet and writer, Larysa Petrivna Kosach-Kvitka (pseudonym: Lesya Ukrainka), is annually celebrated in Surami (Khashuri district). In 1999, the Ukrainian-Georgian Public School was opened and named after Mykhailo Hrushevsky.



Monument of Ukrainian poet, Taras Shevchenko, Tbilisi



Holy Trinity Ukrainian Church in Bakuriani



Lesya Ukrainka House Museum in Surami

Distinguished Ukrainians with links to Georgia:

- Mykhailo Hrushevsky (1866-1934), prominent historian and public figure, first President of the Central Council of Ukraine (1917-1918), first President of Ukraine, studied at the Tbilisi Gymnasium No. 1 from 1880 to 1886
- Anatoly Milchenko (1938-2012), footballer, FIFA referee in 1979, named as Georgia’s best referee of the 20th century
- Ala Tchaikovskaia (1934-2007), chess player, master of sports, champion of Georgia in 1963, 1964 and 1967, awarded the Order of Honour of Georgia
- Panteleimon Petrenko (1908-1936), poet and translator
- Lesya Ukrainka (1871-1913), Ukrainian poet, lived in Georgia from 1902 to 1913
- Lesya Ukrainka House Museum in Surami, established in 1952
- Nikolai Gulak (1821-1889), mathematician, historian, philosopher, translator, teacher, public and political figure
- Natalia Volchenko (b.1978), mezzo soprano, soloist at Tbilisi State Opera and Ballet Theatre since 1997.



The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

For more information about the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Council of Europe, please visit our websites:

- www.coe.int
- www.coe.int/minlang
- www.coe.ge

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