



საქართველოს სახალხო დამცველი  
PUBLIC DEFENDER (OMBUDSMAN) OF GEORGIA

## **ECRI's 2020 Seminar with Equality Bodies**

### **Joining Forces to Communicate the Equality and Diversity Message**

**28-29 September 2020**

#### **Speech Delivered by Ms. Ekaterine Skhiladze**

##### **Deputy Public Defender of Georgia**

Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to participate in this event and address you today to discuss the importance and examples of successful communication, along with the lessons learnt in this regard by the Georgian Equality Body.

Let me begin by underlying that communication occupies a very important place in our everyday work and it largely preconditions the success of our daily activities. For this reason, we try to keep our webpage, as well as Facebook page active and interesting. Besides, our experience has demonstrated that it is essential to formulate the content of public statements in plain language, which we also do follow on a daily basis. I would like to underline that, media is our key partner in this process and we pursue tight cooperation with such outlets, including, proactive communication. One must also note that quite recently our office has updated its PR strategy and developed a document aimed at successful communication with media and other external actors. This was done due to the essential role of communication with the public and the need of employing new tools and mechanisms, especially as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

In terms of specific issues related to equality, we undertake various activities, including, preparation of videos and conducting trainings for the special target groups, such as law enforcement authorities, representatives of self-governing bodies, teachers, journalists and other groups.

For the purpose of enforcing our recommendations or advancing particular issues, we frequently undertake formal or informal meetings with relevant decision-making bodies and officials. In light of our

several successful examples of communication, let me share with you the most effective ones, which had a greater outcry in the public and allowed us to advance important issues at a policy level:

- Firstly, since 2014 the Public Defender has actively stressed the need for formulating a unified policy on hate-motivated crimes. Identification of discrimination motives, basically, remained beyond the attention of investigative authorities and the prosecution process revealed many flaws. Along with recommendations of international organizations and institutions, including ECRI, we constantly urged Georgian authorities to formulate a unified vision and establish a special structural unit dealing with the investigation of alleged hate-motivated crimes. In response to this, at the beginning of 2018, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia established a Human Rights Protection Department that monitors, inter alia, investigation of discriminatory crimes and provides relevant consultation and training for investigators and inspectors. Unfortunately, the Department lacks the prosecution functions, however, the establishment of such a Department, was a success, since the issue of hate-motivated crimes was relatively advanced on the policy level and the unit became an important focal point for us and other actors. Through the Department, our office receives important information regarding individual cases, as well as other issues, such as legislative amendments;
- In addition to that, I would like to emphasize the process of adoption of legislation prohibiting sexual harassment. Many years back, the part of the society, including the legislative body and other decision-makers, failed to realize the harmful nature of sexual harassment and were skeptical about regulating the issue. As a result, in 2015 Georgian lawmakers fall short of adopting the bill on sexual harassment. It's worth noting that since 2016, regardless of the absence of respective legislation, our office has been examining alleged facts of sexual harassment, based on the best international standards. It has found violations in many cases. Since then Georgian Public Defender started to advocate for the adoption of anti-sexual harassment legislation. In light of negative attitudes of the public which was responsible for shaping the decisions of MPs, we started to publicly illustrate actual stories of victims of sexual harassment, in order to demonstrate the seriousness of the issue and reject the stereotypes surrounding it. Besides, we started intensive cooperation and held face-to-face meetings with selected MPs, who seemed to be aspired to contribute to this process. As a result of such actions, in February 2019, this led to amendments in anti-discrimination legislation, which outlawed the sexual harassment in Georgia. Despite the fact that, negative attitudes towards this issue still persist and continue to influence society, this amendment proved to be crucial as it was followed by the increase of application before the Public Defender. Shortly, we started to cooperate with public and private entities to assist them in developing sexual harassment prevention mechanisms. Currently, we are actively involved in raising awareness on sexual harassment among different groups;
- And final example of successful communication is that the Public Defender continuously recommended inserting denial to reasonable accommodation as a form of discrimination. Irrespective of the ratification of UN CRPD in 2013, Georgian authorities have failed to implement the clause in Georgian legislation. Despite the absence of relevant domestic legislation, the Public Defender found facts of violation of the principle of denial to a reasonable recommendation against public entities and developed national standards in this regard. Recently the Law on "the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" was adopted. We decided to use the possibility and started

advocating before the Georgian Parliament to correspond amendments with anti-discrimination law. We were successful in this direction and as of 1st January 2021 denial to reasonable accommodation will become part of anti-discrimination law.

These were the issues I wanted to highlight and share with you today. We continue to advocate for changes on different issues regarding equality. Effective communication with decision-makers and other actors remains a crucial tool in our work.

Despite the fact that I tried to cover some of the most important activities and initiatives of our Office, it is not comprehensive and therefore, I am ready to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you for your attention!