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Seminar
»Democracy, Federalism and Multiculturalism
– the Example of Switzerland«

Final Report and Reflections by
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Summary

FUEN (Federal Union of European Nationalities) invited 25 people from Georgia, including three representatives from Abkhazia and two from South Ossetia to a study visit to Switzerland. The visit took place from 17 to 27 June 2003. The program and a list of the participants are attached.

The aim of the study visit was to offer the participants of Georgia and especially representatives from the regions Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Adjara and of national minorities the possibility to study and discuss the political system of Switzerland on the spot, especially issues regarding federalism, decentralization of power, participation of national minorities in public life, multi-lingual education, media in multicultural states, the Council of Europe's standards regarding the protection of national minority rights and regional or minority languages.

The above mentioned aim and objectives of the study visit were obviously reached. Based on the feedbacks of the participants we are even inclined to speak of a success story, since they stated that the program and the lectures were useful, the big majority of them even very interesting, although some issues have been addressed by several speakers (the Raeto Romansh Language, the four language regions, etc.). One member of the group said at the final evaluation: I really needed this seminar. The participants also appreciated the professionalism of the speakers and their methods of presenting complex themes.

Although the participants found Switzerland's political institutions a successful, extremely complex and even sophisticated model of great interest for other states, they unanimously agreed that it can not be copied as a whole by other states. Nevertheless, according to the opinion of the participants some of its elements should be taken over by Georgia and adapted to its situation.

More important may be that the participants concluded that the discussion initiated here in Switzerland should continue in Georgia and that the group should meet again there. Several participants made more or less elaborated proposals how to collaborate and set up common programs in Georgia and the autonomous regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (see chapter 'follow up'). Another important result is that the participants from different regions of Georgia really used the seminar as a platform for discussing issues regarding the conflicts Georgia-Abkhazia and Georgia-South Ossetia and that these issues became the main topics of reflection in several discussions, although this was not always directly stated.

Finally it can be added that some of the participants overcame the dividing boundaries inside of Georgia and became friends, a promising factor for the future.

The final report summarises the achievements of the study visit, reflects on them and indicates some possibilities of follow-up activities. It is mainly based on the discussions and contributions of the participants at the evaluation sessions during the study visit, the report of Gigi Tsiklauri and the personal reflections and impressions of Romedi Arqunt and Murezi Michael, who organised the study tour.

Federal system and decentralisation

The historical approach to the subjects by former ambassador Claudio Caratsch was of great value, since it showed how the existing federal system of Switzerland developed out of the confederation of former mainly sovereign cantons and communes with a high degree of autonomy. He and Professor Daniel Thürer stressed the characteristic features of Switzerland, namely that the political areas (cantons) do not correspond with areas of religion or language and therefore belonging to one language group does not mean that you belong also to the same religion. Thus, in the canton of Grisons people speak three languages and mainly adhere to two religions; in other words, people speaking Romansh belong to the catholic or protestant church and the same goes for German speaking people. This is one of the main reasons that “ethnicity” never played an important role in Switzerland, and “citizenship” is much stronger developed. However, Professor Thürer mentioned the “Jura conflict”, a conflict between a historical catholic and French speaking region of the mainly protestant and German speaking Canton of Berne and explained how this conflict was solved at the end due to sophisticated and long democratic procedures. Professor Thürer addressed also the competencies - although limited - of the Swiss cantons regarding foreign policy which are an exceptional element of a federal state.

The lectures of the representatives of the municipalities of Samedan, Ardez and Scuol gave a detailed inside in the functioning of the federal system on the lowest level. The reactions of the participants showed that the strong decentralised system of Switzerland is attractive, but can not easily be transferred to another country. We quote some of the opinions: “The decentralisation of power is interesting. For Georgia it would mean empowering of the local structures. / Most interesting is the division of power on local, cantonal and federal levels. / The Swiss system from bottom up is very positive. In the Soviet Union the same system existed, but only on paper. In reality, it was extremely centralised. / In Georgia the people should be stronger involved in decision-making about local issues and in the implementation of projects by the local authorities / In Georgia, the election of teachers is not possible as it happens in the municipalities of the Canton of Grisons. A first step would be that the headmasters (school principles) would be elected by the teachers or teachers’ and parents’ councils instead of being appointed / In Georgia no distinction between property of state and municipality exists. The Swiss model could contribute to simplify and accelerate processes”.

The guests stressed that the federal system of Switzerland could be a basis to find in Georgia solutions for “defining the status of the so-called ‘lost territories’ and for the autonomous regions / Regional conflicts could be solved by taking over elements of the Swiss federalism and adapt them to Georgia / The study visit showed that federalism is a system that can serve to solve problems and strengthening of the state”.

A guest, who is a specialist in federalism and is elaborating together with experts new constitutional proposals for the regulation of the Abkhazian – Georgian conflict, stated that the seminar offered new insights into federalism and that some elements of the Swiss federal system will be included in their proposal. He mentioned as an example the distribution of competences and division of power between the various levels of government and added that Switzerland shows that the – in Georgia widespread - maxim: “Federalism weakens the state” is incorrect.

Nevertheless, the participants remained realistic: “The Swiss model of federalism is a unique one. It can’t be mechanically copied. It is a result of Swiss history whereas it’s difficult to overcome the stalemate in the relations between Abkhazia and Georgia and between South-Ossetia and Georgia.”

The main conclusion for the participants was: “The issues of federalism and decentralization have to be on the agenda in Georgia. The study of other countries with federal models must be continued. The main issue is – make local governments stronger.”

Ethnicity, Swiss model and values

Time and again the guests mentioned the characteristic, but for them surprising fact that Swiss people have a strong feeling of Swiss citizenship and define themselves through the language and not through ethnicity. They reflected about the subtle differences in the political culture: “Whereas ethnicity plays a minor role in Switzerland, it is extremely important in Georgia. To reduce its importance Georgia should strengthen the sense of citizenship and the role of civil society without losing its own cultural / In Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia we are ethnocentric, whereas in Switzerland one of the main principles is solidarity between the majority and minorities respectively that the stronger culture protects and supports the weaker culture / Swiss people seem to have a high sense of community, and therefore do not fight over issues but speak together and try to solve their problems in a peaceful way like the question of the canton of Jura.”

At the meeting with the members of Parliament one of the main points of discussion was the question of privileges and immunity. Obviously, the participants did not expect that Swiss parliamentarians do not enjoy privileges like cars, apartments or public funded offices and that immunity covers only activities in the parliament.

In the context of creation of the new canton of Jura the participants were surprised by the complicated and sophisticated democratic process that was applied to solve the problem on the constitutional level and create a new canton. They concluded: “The Georgian or Abkhazian ethnocentrism hampers the development of democratic structures, whereas the Swiss model with its principle of listening to others and respecting other opinions and the democratic history contributed to an acceptable solution of the Jura conflict and thus an open armed conflict was avoided.”

The participants pointed also to “other elements of the Swiss democratic system as political awareness and civic responsibility that should be developed in Georgia.” One of the main questions for the participants remained unsolved: “How can some of the elements of the Swiss model be applied in Georgia, Abkhazia or South-Ossetia”. A participant used a beautiful metaphor to illustrate this statement: “A freshwater fish can not be released to the sea.” More critical or pessimistic members stated: “The example of Switzerland is not applicable in the Caucasus, since the Caucasus people are backwards oriented and the social and economical development lower than in Switzerland / The Swiss model may be ideal for Switzerland, but it can not be exported.”

Nevertheless, a more optimistic participant concluded: “All these days I was comparing what we have at home with what we have seen and heard. I am certain that a lot of things can be done by us (without external funding) / In Georgia, we should learn to balance interests and than we will find new ways.”

Language

Several speakers dealt with the multilingual Switzerland, and especially with the situation of the Romansh language, bilingual education, use of languages in Federal Parliament and Federal Administration and the protection of minority or regional languages.

The participants showed their surprise at the comments of Markus Nussbaumer, Federal Chancellery, regarding the use of language in the Swiss Parliament: in the National Council a translation system exists whereas in the State Council and in all commissions and committees all members speak their own language. In the Federal Administration all employees speak their own language without interpretation. Since our guests were eager to know the representation of the national languages in the federal administration, we repeat it here: German 71.8% (population: 63.7%); French 20.4%

(20.4%); Italian 6.7% (6.5%); Romansh: unknown (0.5%); 8.9% of the population speak another language (like Serbian, Croatian, Albanian, etc). German still prevails in the federal administration, and of roughly 350 translators only 25 translate from French and Italian into German.

Nevertheless, the main conclusions of the participants were: “The freedom of language in Switzerland is a positive experience / Switzerland shows that you can speak your own language in your own region. If you want to communicate with people from a different language you have to learn and know its language. But important is that it’s not compulsory to learn another language / Nevertheless, the conclusion for Georgia would be that young people should be required to learn Georgian in order to have a language of communication within the country, whereas the elder generation could continue to use Russian.”

One participant found it extremely strange that in the valley of the Lower Engadine (Engiadina bassa) traffic signs were in Romansh and assessed it as an offence towards tourists and German speaking people.

The bilingual school lessons in Samedan showed in an impressive way that schoolchildren are able to study without difficulty subjects in two languages. In his lecture Professor François Grin confirmed this impression by citing results of education research which prove that students’ abilities increase in a bilingual education system and that they profit also economically in the future. Thus many of the participants comment the bilingual method of Samedan and draw lessons for Georgia: “The Swiss model of language policy is outstanding / The language teaching model of Samedan is good. Bilingual schools on primary level are a good example that should be followed in Georgia. Also the high school exchange programs throughout the country (which are proposed in the draft of a new Swiss language law) would be an important step for Georgia / The Georgian state should pay more attention to the questions of language, language of instruction and teaching of foreign languages in the schools.”

European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

The lectures on these two documents by experts of the Council of Europe met an interested public since both documents have been signed but not yet ratified by Georgia. The reactions were not at all unanimous:

A member of Parliament stated that the present parliament will not ratify these two documents, but possibly the new parliament which will be elected in the fall. He considers a thorough discussion about both documents in Georgia more important and hopes that the people learn about them. He added that the Parliament is working hard on the issues regarding minorities, but that any progress will be slow, “step by step”.

However, one participant criticised the time gap between signing of the Charter and its ratification. In his opinion the direct impact of the Framework Convention is comparatively low whereas the ratification would be good for Georgia’s image. More urgent is that Georgia needs a concept on the integration of nationalities (national minorities) that guarantees an adequate political representation of minorities at all levels and that will become practice in all everyday affairs.

The second member of the Parliament stated that “the Charter was signed in a hasty manner and at the same time the Georgian Chamber of Languages drafted a new language law, which stated that Georgian will be the state language and that all citizens of Georgia have to know Georgian. The draft was not accepted by the representatives of minorities, because many members of national

minorities do not speak the language and because it can technically not be realized at present (lack of Georgian teachers, of schoolbooks, of funds). Nevertheless, if Georgia wants to build a common society and follow the principle of civil integration, it has to strengthen and modernize the teaching of Georgian in minority schools, respecting at the same time the rights of minorities.”

Other participants argued that out of 100 Azeris only three speak Georgian and that Georgian is a language that can only be learned with great difficulties. Therefore a balance has to be found between the interests of a modern state and possible discrimination of elderly people who do not know and can not learn the state language / Also civil servants should not be forced to learn the state language / Whatever the case may be, a new law will only be accepted if it foresees a long introduction phase.”

Another participant added that the will of people not to learn Georgian has to be accepted, but that this people can not claim that they don't understand Georgian and ask for actions of the state. He is favouring the signing of the Charter, since it's possible to make so many reservations.

Finally, one of the participants warned that a discussion about the state language in Georgia could also strengthen the tendencies of secession among minorities.

Sri Lanka

Many of the participants were enthusiastic about the inspiring lecture on Sri Lanka given by Markus Heiniger from the Ministry of Foreign affairs. The participants argued that the people of Georgia could learn from this example and avoid making the same mistakes. The participants draw parallels to their own conflicts, for instance regarding the role India played in the conflict in Sri Lanka and Russia is playing in Georgian conflicts. Also the fact that the international community was always against a separate Tamil state was considered carefully by the participants from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. All learnt with some surprise, that the Government of Sri Lanka did not give up all its obligations in the Tamil area and for instance paid salaries to teachers, health staff, etc throughout the war.

One participant even meant that the whole group changed after this lecture. His main conclusion was that the people themselves must wish to live in peace and by doing so will find a mediator who can facilitate the peace process.

Media in multilingual states

Bernard Cathomas, the director of the Romansh radio and TV focused on media and multiculturalism in Switzerland and explained the complex Swiss system of supporting radio and TV for the French, Italian and Romansh people. Although the participants tried to understand our sophisticated system of redistribution of the public radio and TV (SRG) income between the four language regions of Switzerland, they did not see any possibility of adapting this system. The main reason is that the budget of the Georgian state amounts to approximately USD 750 million, whereas the budget of the Swiss Radio and Television Corporation comes to USD 1.15 billion! Moreover, no radio or TV station in Georgia can rely on licence fees (which in Switzerland contribute to 71% of the income of the public radio and TV network SRG).

One participant could not conceal her surprise over the fact that the Romansch community has no own TV station, since in Georgia nearly all, even tiny minorities have their own station (in fact, the Romansh radio and TV corporation has its own studios, but is broadcasting its daily (10 minutes') TV programme on the channels of the German, French and Italian TV). The participants draw the following conclusions:

- Whereas the situation and conditions of the radio stations are satisfactory in Georgia, the State TV should support minorities by putting at their disposal broadcasting possibilities, for instance 15 minutes each day for minority programs.
- Similar to Switzerland, where the public property is split between the central state, cantons and municipalities, it would be of advantage for Georgia to split the public property between the central state and the communities (In Georgia the central state is the owner of all public property).
- Another participant supported this idea and added that the Georgian state TV should broadcast programs in all languages spoken in Georgia, because the dissemination of correct news is extremely important and also minority members should be in the picture about the information disseminated about them. But one participant noted that the state should – similar to Switzerland – as well control private stations, since those disseminate rumours and bad news sometimes.

Civil society and democracy in new democratic societies

The two lectures given by the members of the Swiss and Council of Europe Parliaments, RuthGabi Vermot-Mangold and Andi Gross, were received with enthusiasm by the participants of the seminar. They introduced several new and inspiring themes and pointed at the importance of a stronger cooperation between state institutions and civil society, since the latter has the better expertise in many fields. The lecture on democracy opened new dimensions for the participants, since - based on their own experiences - they relate democracy mainly to elections and parliament. Andi Gross stressed that in a democratic culture the people have to become the subject of and have to be involved in all political processes. “Being silent you can’t be a democratic citizen. Changes are only possible if the citizens get involved”.

Based on own experience Ruth Gabi Vermot-Mangold showed various fields of activities where organisations of civil society are extremely qualified and active. Her lecture was especially liked by female participants and had an unifying effect on them. One man even concluded: This talk should have been given at the beginning of the seminar and the women from Abkhazia would have found the contact with their colleagues much faster. One of the Georgian experts on federalism stated that he will disseminate in Georgia some of the ideas presented by the speakers.

Excursion to Geneva

The visits to the ICRC and UNHCR were of special interest for the participants of the seminar, since the representatives of the two institutions gave a professional and comprehensive insight in their activities and the problems they are facing nowadays. One of the mayor problems is that the operations in Georgia and Abkhazia started many years ago and a solution of the conflicts is not in sight. The so called donor fatigue is growing and due to this the risk that the operations have to be reduced. A lasting solution for displaced persons is urgently needed.

A platform for discussions for the participants

One of the main goals of the seminar was to offer the participants a platform outside of Georgia to discuss their conflicting themes and explore the possibilities of common ground of durable solutions.

This goal has been reached. The atmosphere among the group changed during the visit in Switzerland. Indicative is that at the beginning of the seminar the participants from Abkhazia and - to a lesser degree - those from South Ossetia were inclined to form their own group and to isolate themselves from the rest of the group, although some of them communicated more freely with their colleagues. The informal events and the sharing of the hotel room of one member from Abkhazia with her colleague from Tbilisi played an important role for the improvement of the relations between all participants. The two open minded women, who are genuinely interested in an improvement of the relations between Georgia and Abkhazia, discussed common issues and discovered that they often had wrong imprints and ideas about the other side of the conflict. They became friends and decided to take up urgent issues and develop common activities over the dividing lines.

Some of the statements made at the last evaluation session illustrate and reflect the changes which took place inside the group: “The group has developed a common understanding of the issues and now sees a way to freedom and decentralized system / We citizens from the state of Georgia are together here. This is a good feeling / I had a feeling of comfort in the group, and we communicated a lot / What we learnt and how we behaved may be little compared to the problems facing us, but it was good and we formed a good group / We used the time for genuine discussions with real people from Abkhazia and from South Ossetia. This is for me the first time / The seminar is only the first step / I will tell about my experiences on our radio network”.

Of course, more could have been done and some participants voiced also critical points: Abkhazian and Georgians were separated in groups, we should thoroughly discuss many difficult issues, but both sides were afraid. 15 years ago the seminar would have had a greater impact.”

However, the following statements show the way to the future: “The dialogue must continue / We met each other today and shoots of trust emerged / People of different ethnicities became one “commune” that forms the basis for future cooperation.” (see also the chapter ‘follow up’)

Organisation of the seminar

The quality of the speakers’ contributions was in general excellent and highly appreciated by the participants, although some lectures were assessed as too detailed (mainly those regarding the role of the municipalities) or too theoretical and interesting only for specialists (the first part of the contribution “benefits of multilingualism”) or too specific Swiss (media in Switzerland).

The feedback of the participants was excellent:” It was a good seminar and we were learnt to know many issues: from history to federalism, to bilingual education and multilingual communication on federal level / We heard how the Swiss federalism is connected to history, and the lecture about democracy was very interesting. We should popularise these ideas / I did not agree with all opinions of the speakers but they showed a high level of professionalism / All speakers were very tactful.” Some of the participants found the program too tight and tiresome and that it did not allow for enough recreation and relax.”

Follow up

Although evaluations sessions were conducted throughout the seminar it is too early to draw a program for follow up activities. One participant made it clear: “We need time to understand, and we can assess the outcome of the seminar and decide upon new activities later. I have been here in Switzerland 15 years ago, and Switzerland has not changed in the meantime. But in Abkhazia we went through terrible times.”

All the same, many mentioned new ideas, projects and planned activities. Given the importance that dialogue continues and common activities are taken up, we summarise here some of the intentions:

- I am rather optimistic that we will find common ground. Many things can be taken over from the Swiss model, for instance things like citizenship, bilingual education, the handling of multilingualism;
- We can build up networks in different fields, for instance regarding language policy, federal models of state building
- We can found a NGO-Governmental network for cultural and educational exchange between the separated regions;
- The group can organise meetings for all participants in Adjara, which is a kind of neutral venue;
- We can organise a follow-up seminar in Tbilisi and invite representatives of local authorities and discuss with them our experiences regarding local self government and economic issues;
- I got ideas for organising common radio stations with South Ossetia and Adjara;
- The seminar participants may create a working group that would work for adoption of the acceptable version of the Law on Language, ratification of the treaties and conventions.
- It would be useful to compare laws and regulations of the Swiss Cantons with those of the administrative units of Georgia;
- The seminar participants should create a working group that would work for the adoption of an acceptable version of the Georgian Law on Language and for the ratification of the Framework Convention and the European Charter of the Council of Europe;
- It's necessary to establish a nucleus group in order to coordinate all activities.
- The group should have a long term vision: find alternatives for Abkhazia. The parallels between multiculturalism and federalism are inspiring.
- Good relations have been established between the Georgian, Abkhazian and Ossetian participants and we have mutual respect. Based on these relations we will implement joint projects and have already plans for them.
- It's necessary to continue such meetings and seminars, but we must do also something ourselves. NGOs must be engaged more actively in the process of reconciliation.
- We should form a pressure group and promote our ideas on both sides of the dividing lines.
- We should lobby for a modern language law and a minority law. Meet again and have a dialogue on future.
- We should proceed as our ancestors did who sat together and discussed about peace after a war was over.
- The ethnic minorities must be engaged in the regulation of the Abkhaz conflict.

- I will show the results of the study visit in Kvemo Kartli.
- I got many ideas and developed concepts regarding language and minority policies in Georgia. I will publish the results of my experience.”

The future will show how effective the seminar was and which activities will be undertaken. In any case, the organisers of the seminar are prepared to support activities that can contribute to stabilise the political situation in Georgia, especially also in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Thanks

All of our guests were satisfied with the logistics and the organisation of the study visit. We have to pass on this positive feedback to all the people who assisted us in one way or the other, especially to Madame Burnod who was in charge of the arrangements for all flights, ambassadors Heidi Taglavini and Stefan Speck, Volker Jacoby from the OSCE and many others who assisted us in the selection of the participants, to Arnold Stepanian who coordinated the journey in Georgia and had to struggle with many inconveniences.

We would also like to thank all the lecturers for their excellent contributions and all institutions for their generous reception of the group.

We would like to thank all participants for their interest in the presented themes, their motivation to learn and their engaged discussions and the pleasant atmosphere they created.

Last but not least we would like to thank all the institutions that made contributions to the seminar in Switzerland, namely:

Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (PA IV and Présence Suisse), Bern
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 Canton of Ticino, Bellinzona
 Migros Kulturprozent, St. Gallen
 Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)

Attachments:

- Evaluation Report by Gigi Tsiklauri, Political Researcher, Tbilisi State University
- Program of the Seminar
- List of Participants
- Follow up activities (only attached to the report to the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs)

Attachment 1 **Evaluation Report by Gigi Tsiklauri, Political Researcher**

“Democracy, Federalism and Multiculturalism – the Example of Switzerland”

Seminar organized for Georgian participants, including Abkhaz and South Ossetian representatives, in Switzerland

From 17 to 27 June, 2003 twenty-four participants from Georgia, including Abkhazia and South Ossetia, were brought together in Switzerland to participate in a seminar funded by the Swiss Government organized on the initiative of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) with organizational support provided by the Public Movement Multinational Georgia.

The experience of this kind is of great importance for the country like Georgia, which regained its independence a decade ago, encountered the obstacles of different nature, including civil wars, on the way to formation of a viable state, and in the late 1990s expressed its strong will to become a worthy member of the united Europe. When at one of the seminar sessions the participants were asked to put down major obstacles that appeared in the first years of Georgia’s independence, lack of knowledge and experience in the spheres of state building, democratic development, solving conflicts, and inability to apply cultural diversity

The experience of this kind is of great importance for the country like Georgia, which regained its independence a decade ago, encountered the obstacles of different nature, including civil wars, on the way to formation of a viable state, and in the late 1990s expressed its strong will to become a worthy member of the united Europe. When at one of the seminar sessions the participants were asked to put down major obstacles that appeared in the first years of Georgia’s independence, lack of knowledge and experience in the spheres of state building, democratic development, solving conflicts, and inability to apply cultural diversity for the welfare of the people were the most frequent answers.

The Georgian Constitution in its Article 2.3 says that “the internal territorial arrangement of Georgia is determined by the Constitution on the basis of the principle of division of power after the full restoration of the jurisdiction of Georgia over the whole territory of the country”. Therefore the familiarization of the Georgian participants with various forms of state structure, particularly federalist models, is very important. Although the Swiss model of federalism is a unique one and cannot be automatically copied, its examination is definitely worthwhile for finding new institutional approaches in Georgia to solve existing regional conflicts and prevent potential complications in other areas.

The organizers gave the participants the perfect opportunity to learn from well-known scholars in this field about the theoretical basis of federalism, and get first-hand practical knowledge when meeting with members of the Swiss legislative body and representatives of the executive branch. Members of the group learned about the basic structure of the federalist system, the mechanisms and details of its functioning, potential threats and the ways to solve arising problems. As one of the participants noted in his comments, “the example of Switzerland demonstrates that the maxim widely spread in Georgia ‘Federalism weakens the state’ is incorrect. On the contrary, it offers multiethnic states a well-organized mechanism for troubleshooting”. This shows the need to continue activities of this kind.

Visits to the smaller towns of the Canton of Grisons and meetings with the heads of the communes were especially important to see how the decentralized system functions at a lower level. One of the main principles that the participants were stressing after these trips was that more freedom means more responsibility. The sense of civil responsibility that has been inherited by the Swiss from their ancestors is something that must be fostered in Georgia. The need to engage the public in the process of decision-making was emphasized by the heads of the Georgian communities that participated in the seminar.

The new visions of the processes of democracy building and civil participation presented by Swiss MPs Andreas Gross and Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold significantly increased participants' awareness in these fields. Both speakers facilitated the interactive style of the meetings and were open to the dialogue. Probably one of the main lessons learned through these lectures is that both governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations should spare no effort to increase the level of their cooperation through collaboration and implementation of joint projects in various spheres. Such cooperative projects would promote the dialogue and mutual understanding in the society. The projects could be aimed at combating corruption, organized crime, trafficking in persons, illegal trade of arms and drugs, environmental issues, etc.

Examples of other countries show that strong civil society and the existence of independent institutions do not guarantee and are not sufficient for the creation of a democratic state. The cooperation of these two sectors, while maintaining an adequate level of differing views, would promote societal stability and diversity. In this regard the governmental agencies have to define the priority areas and provide necessary resources. The NGOs, on their part, must show the will to act in coordination using the influence and knowledge they obtained through their active involvement in all vital spheres of public life.

The Swiss exceptional approaches to bilingual education and the protection of minority languages serve as a model worthy of emulation. Although there are schools in Georgia offering education in different languages to younger generations, the idea of bilingual schools seems to be very attractive, at least for trying to run it as an experiment during the reforms being carried out in the Georgian educational system. Studies conducted by Swiss specialists show that children who attended bilingual classes are better educated, and tend to be more interested in continuing education after completing secondary or high schools. This model allows representatives of national minorities retain their languages and study the main language of the state.

With regard to the protection of multicultural and multiethnic diversity the interactive lectures given by the CoE members were very informative. However further discussions are needed on a number of documents developed by the Council of Europe, including the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The organization of explanatory seminars in Georgia, at which the European experts would present the main principles and interpret the essence of the documents, would be very helpful. Through such seminars a larger group of interested participants from various spheres would get a better understanding of these international conventions.

One of the objectives of the seminar was to help the participants develop new approaches to solving the existing conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In this respect the visit of the participants to the Swiss Peace Foundation was very successful. A manager of this peace-research institution made the general overview of the projects implemented by the Foundation and gave the floor to representative of Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, Mr. Markus Heiniger, who presented the case of Sri Lanka. The participants drew a parallel between the situation in their home country and war-torn Sri Lanka. The conflict that had lasted for decades caused enormous problems to country's political, economic and social development. When the parties decided to start peace talks, the Norwegian Government acted as mediator. Although the sense of distrust between the sides is still present, currently the world community is taking further steps to assist them in the finding final resolution of remaining problems.

The participants noted that although mediators can provide assistance and promote a dialogue, and their support must be appreciated, good will must be showed by the people of both sides, as the ultimate solution rests with them. Along "the Geneva process" and the positive role played by the Group of Friends of the Secretary General of the United Nations - activities at a higher level, the open dialogue between the people representing different sides must be continued. Meetings and joint discussions on wide variety of themes between Georgian, Abkhaz and South Ossetian participants can play an invaluable role for establishing personal and institutional relations based on mutual understanding.

Visits to donor agencies, the SDC, ICRC and UNHCR, funding in the regions of Georgia various

programs, in fact turned into interactive discussions. High-level officials provided the seminar participants with the first-hand information on the plans of their organizations in Georgia. On their part, the group members were given a chance to ask questions and offer their suggestions.

During the evaluation conducted at the end of the seminar, the participants expressed a desire to proceed with the process that started in Samedan. Some of the group members noted that the seminar helped them meet people from other side of the “dividing line”, learn more about each other, make friends and elaborate plans for future joint projects. Others stressed the need to preserve a team spirit that had formed among the group members in Switzerland and organize cultural and educational exchange programs. One of the participants proposed to establish a working group that would work for adoption of the acceptable draft law on language, ratification of international treaties and conventions by providing necessary expertise to relevant Parliamentary Committees.

In two-three weeks upon arrival of the group, would be useful to arrange an additional evaluating meeting, which would consider all the directions of possible follow-up activities. At this point, the organization of a follow-up seminar in Georgia at the end of 2003/ beginning of 2004 on the themes that were under discussion during the group’s trip to Switzerland (democracy, federalism, multiculturalism) is welcomed by all participants. At such a seminar international experts in the areas of democracy, federalism and multiculturalism may be invited, and a larger group from Georgia consisting of individuals interested in related subjects could take part. It can be divided into themes with joint and separate sessions. Most of the group members promise to report on tangible results they will achieve in these months by applying the experience they acquired in Switzerland in June 2003.

The seminar and its organization can be evaluated as great success. As one of the participants put it, “in these ten days the people of different ethnic backgrounds became one commune – that is a basis for our cooperation in future”

Gigi Tsiklauri, Political Researcher

Attachment 2 **Programme of the Seminar** **Democracy, Federalism and Multiculturalism** **- The Example of Switzerland**

Dates 17 June – 27 June 2003 (Tuesday to Friday)

Venues Samedan, Berne, Geneva

Tuesday, 17 June (Welcome day)

09.30 Arrival in Zurich and continuation on to Chur
12.00 Reception by Mr. Engler, President of the Government of the canton of Grison, in the Staatskeller Chur
14.30 Journey to lodgings in Samedan
18.30 Dinner
20.00 Introduction to the seminar

Wednesday, 18 June (Principles of Federalism – Switzerland as an Example)

09.00–12.00 Switzerland and its institutions by Claudio Caratsch, former ambassador
12.15 Lunch
15.00–18.00 Federalism as a state model by Prof. Daniel Thürer
19.00 Dinner

Thursday, 19 June (Language Policies - A Local Municipality)

09.00–12.00 Education and the Benefits of Multilingualism by Prof. François Grin
12.00 Authentic Engadin lunch prepared by a school class
14.00-15.00 Visit of the local school
15.00-16.15 Presentation of the bilingual school model by Stephan Hug, headmaster
15.30-17.00 Samedan - a local municipality, introduction to the workings and duties of a local authority by its Ramon Zangger, deputy of the mayor
17.30-18.45 Evaluation
19.30 Dinner

Friday, 20 June (Raeto Romansh: A Minority Language)

09.30-17.30 The canton of Grisons - a region with three languages. The Raeto-Romansh language and culture. Introduction by Chasper Pult, and visit to the municipalities of Guarda, Ardez and Scuol. The latter will be presented by Men Janett and Jon Domenic Parolini.

Saturday, 21 June (Media in a Multicultural State - Democracy building process)

09.00–12.00 The media in a multicultural state by Bernard Cathomas, Director of Raeto-Romansh Radio and Television
12.00 free lunch
15.00–18.00 Program of democracy building in the new democratic states by Andi Gross, Member of Swiss and Council of Europe Parliament
19.00 Dinner in Muottas Muragl

Sunday, 22 June (Civil Society - Media)

09.00–11.45 The role and importance of the civil society in a democratic state Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold, Member of Swiss and Council of Europe Parliament
12.16 Departure for Chur
14.00 Visit to the radio e televisiun rumantscha in Chur
16.00 Transfer to Berne

Monday, 23 June (The Council of Europe: Minority Rights' Standards - Regional and Minority Languages)

- 09.00-12.00 The European Charter for Regional or Minority languages, by Mrs Regina Jensdottir, Council of Europe
- 12.15 Lunch
- 14.00-17.15 The Framework Convention on the protection of national minorities, by Mr Hano Hartig, Council of Europe

Tuesday, 24 June (Switzerland: The Confederation and its Institutions – Swiss Development Cooperation and Swiss Peace Policy)

- 10.00 The Swiss Confederation and its use of languages by Markus Nussbaumer, Federal Chancellery;
- 11.30 Meeting with MPs Remo Galli, Andrea Haemmerle & Ulrich Siegrist
- 13.00 lunch
- Afternoon free
- 17.00-19.00 Federal Department of Foreign Affairs: Swiss Peace Policy - Swiss Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid in Georgia. Reception by Mrs. Theresia Adam, Deputy Director SDC and presentations by Markus Baechler, Marc Georges, Hans Peter Maag and Philippe Zahner,

Wednesday, 25 June (Conflict Resolution and Peace Building in Multicultural States)

- 09.30-13.00 Introduction to the activities of the Swiss Peace Foundation by Cordula Reimann - Conflict Resolution and Peace Promotion: The example of Sri Lanka by Markus Heiniger, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs;
- 18.00 Meeting / dinner with members of the Swiss-Georgian Society
- 21.00-22.15 Evaluation

Thursday, 26 June (Switzerland as host of International Institutions)

- 08.47 Departure for Geneva;
- 12.45-14.15 Visit of ICRC; presentation of ICRC's activities in Georgia and Caucasus by Isabelle Barras;
- 14.30-16.30 Visit to UNHCR: Welcome by A. Montillot, Presentation of a film on UNHCR; Information by Mr. Rob Robinson, Deputy Director, Bureau for Europe; Presentation of UNHCR's work in Georgia by Iryna Korenyak, Bayisa Wak-Woya and Kirsti Floor;
- 17.00 Geneva Centre for Security Policies: Presentation by Mr. Balian, Director of Special Programs; Address by Alexander Chikvaidze, Ambassador of Georgia to United Nations;

Friday, 27 June (Evaluation and Departure)

- 10.00 Departure for Stapferhaus
- 12.00 Visit of the Stapferhaus-Foundation in Lenzburg; information about its activities by co-director Beat Haechler
- 13.15 Lunch
- 14.00-16.00 Assessment of the visit / implications for Georgia
- 19.30 / 20.45 Departure from Zurich Airport

Attachment 3 List of Participants

Parliament

Besik Lagvilava MP, Head of the Civil Integration Committee
Gela Kvaratskhelia MP

Civil Service

Alexei Gerasimov Assistant to the President of Georgia on Interethnic Relations
Alexander Nalbandov Deputy Head of Service of Human Rights Issues of National Security Council

Local Self Government

Juri Grigorian Shaumiani in Kvemo Kartli
Israfil Bairamov Marneuli in Kvemo Kartli

Abkhazia

Isida Chania Nuzhnaiva Gazeta
Manana Bzhani Director Human Rights NGO in Gali
Dalila Pilia Lecturer at Abkhaz State University

South Ossetia

Asa Kokoeva political scientist; SO delegation
Fatima Turmanova NGO Association of Journalists "South Caucasus"

Adjara

Sophio Shakarishvili New Rights Party, Batumi

Minorities

Zaur Khalilov Azeris' Community
Marat Baratashvili The Union of Georgia Repatriates (Meshketian Turk)
Agit Mirosev President of the Congress of Yezids of Georgia (Kurd)
Valeri K. Svarchuk International Humanitarian & Charitable Union "Nadezhda" (Russian)
Madonne Savidi Union of Greek Communities of Georgia
Alexander Pfandt Member of the Association of Germans of Georgia „Einigung“

Media

Maka Jakhua, Director Radio Green Wave

Human Rights

Tamar Kaldani Deputy Chairperson Georgian Young Lawyers' Association
Konstantine Kublashvili Expert on Federalism

Interpreter

Nana Chkoidze English-Russian
Karlo Tskitishvili English-Russian and German-Russian

Coordinator and Evaluator

Arnold Stepanian Coordinator
Gigi Tsiklauri Evaluator, Tbilisi State University, Department of Political Sciences

Organization and Management

Romedi Arquint President of the Federal Union of European Nationalities FUEN
Murezi Michael Consultant

Bern, 16 June 2003 / mm