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THE EUROPEAN UNION
FOR GEORGIA

Hedayah
countering violent extremism

Diversity:
Social, Cultural
&
Gender diversity

CtC
Empowering
People for
Change

A curriculum titled *Towards a Culture of Peace is an initiative designed under the* EU supported STRIVE GLOBAL programme. The project is being implemented by the Centre of Training and Consultancy in partnership with Civic Education Teachers Forum.
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A goal of the project is to ensure an early detection of nascent signs of conflicts in Georgian education establishments. These conflicts may stem from violent and discriminatory grounds and further fuel up radicalization and intolerance among students.

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Table of content

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Diversity of Society

The modern society is a rapidly changing system. It constitutes the unity of various public groups and institutes which, in addition to comparatively stable units encompasses those which appear and disappears under various circumstances. Communities formed as a result of shared activities including peasantry, scientists, medical workers are characterized with greater sustainability. Social groups such as age groups, are also characterized with resilience. Most of them have existed in any given time and in any society. People may differ from each other by gender, ethnicity, economic standing, religious belief, profession, age etc (for more information about Georgia's ethnic composition see (1)).

We should differentiate between the social institute and social group. **Social institute** is a social structure established with a specific purpose or a function. For instance, religious institutes represent a social structure the function of which is to perform religious rituals. There are also political, entrepreneurial, sport or other social institutes. **Social group** is a unity of individuals sharing basic characteristics, for example, occupation or other economic, demographic, ethnic or psychological features.

Therefore, religious establishment is a social institute, while the clergy qualify as a social group.

New associations emerge on a regular basis in the society. Some of them are destined for long-term existence. These groups include, for instance, unions and associations whose members share profession or occupation.

In addition, there are interest groups, or individuals with shared specified (political, public or other) interest or those mobilized around specific public or political problems. The presence of such a complicated system in a unified social body is regulated by law and historically developed traditional norms.

Society is a very complex system consisting of parts organized in multiple layers whereby major principles of connection, as a rule, are defined by law. However, it is also evident, that there are no such society where legal or traditional mechanisms regulating relations between its parts are permanent. New interest groups – small and large unions whereby membership is based on various characteristics, emerge on a permanent basis in any given society. And we must constantly rethink and revise those legal and moral principles that lay foundation for shared life in order for the society to sustain values and forms of life which help its members maintain their collective identity on the one hand and allow individuals to live their lives as they wish, on the other. Obviously, nobody can restrict fundamental rights of others by living a certain lifestyle. Nor should behaviour of any individual be destructive to the rest of the society.

Identity is of utmost importance for the society. For instance, for our society everything that makes them 'Georgian' is very important. However, those communities, institutions or individuals who represent any kind of minorities should not be excluded from society This is both unacceptable and impossible. Individuals should be able to live decent lives regardless of their economic standing, gender, ethnic background, religious believes or membership to any group.

The diversity within the society is so huge and the fact that the modern world is changing rapidly, questions are often raised as to how we can overcome challenges and attain harmonious consent of this diversity in a way to ensure that capacity of every member is restructured to the least extent possible, while society develops progressively so that the core foundation on which this society was historically developed is also sustained.

We have all seen consequences brought about by the abundance of radical sentiments in the society. We constantly raise questions as to how radical sentiments can be overcome and harmonious society developed. It is naïve to believe that there is a universal recipe to solve this puzzle. On the other hand, every such attempt results in disastrous outcomes. More specifically, such attempts often lead to what we call a totalitarian society in which world outlook and behaviour of its members are subjected to strict limitations. Human being is a free

creature and cannot get used to such an absolute homogeneity. Totalitarian rulers can be successful only for a definite period. At the same time, such success is illusory. The fear of repercussions and punishment may create an illusion of 'harmonious' society, however, this illusion is usually temporary since the human aspiration for freedom usually leads to finding a way out. However, our Soviet experience suggests that these ways are not always appealing and acceptable. A criminal ideology deeply rooted in the society and widespread corruption were the result of many people resorting to criminal path towards political, economic and ideological freedom. This had led to the establishment of well-organized and popular social institute of 'thieves in the law' with a strong criminal ideology. According to available data the number of so-called thieves in the law in the Soviet Union in the 1950s totalled approximately 10.000 – 15.000 which is 10 times more than the number of thieves in the law in today's Russia.

Impossibility to bring down the whole society to the single common denominator was confirmed not only by the Soviet experience, but also that of China, North Korea, Cuba as well as recent history of some of quasi-socialist African states. Instead of establishing an ideal society, such efforts have resulted in societies living in two realities: the one portrayed by media as a great achievement and real life of people living in such societies. In every such society authorities went out of their way to structurally simplify communities and expel those social institutes and groups who allegedly prevented others from living 'happy life'. Lots of social and professional groups, and everyone who would qualify as unfit for an order designed by rulers, fell victims to repressions which resulted in the mass destruction of millions of lives.

It should be noted that this is the direct way towards moral destruction of members of society. During the repressions of 1937 alone, law enforcement agencies reportedly received more than 2 million letters of denouncement each of them authored by an ordinary member of the society.
At the same time, society would immediately start restoring its diversity as soon as repressions started to fade away.

There is a widely shared view among social scientists which suggests that the major factor hampering the acceptance of diversity in the society is a principle of quintessential monopoly. Quintessential monopoly is an artificially created situation whereby a public institute or a group of individuals hold a monopoly over the truth while rest of the society is forced to silently follow holders of truth.

In the Soviet era the Communist Party and its leaders were holders of the truth while any attempt to confront the 'truth' preached by the Communist leadership would result in severe punishment. During the period of regaining independence and constructing of the new Georgian society such attitudes have been recurrent and still occur to this day. New types of leaders had claimed monopoly over the absolute truth. There have been politicians who cannot even imagine that there may be political views different from those of their own while some members of the clergy not only declare other confessions evil, but also allow themselves to interfere in political and economic life often with very little (if any) knowledge of these spheres. We have seen liberals who never allow the existence of conservative views and try to fight off such views with moral or psychological duress. Likewise, there are conservatives who preach new forms of totalitarianism under the disguise of saving traditional forms of life. Such psychological climate is very likely to result in widespread confrontations within the society and unless consent and consensus is sought after, this situation may end up in a revolutionary change of the authorities.

Principle of the quintessential monopoly suggests that a good will and truth may be ascribed to a single group of individuals which means that opponents to such groups are not merely rivals but enemies of the society who must be expelled and defeated together with their supporters. This is well illustrated by the presence of radically negative attitudes towards people with dissenting political views, religious beliefs etc. In extreme cases ethnic differences and 'not pure enough blood' or belonging to some other minority groups are often used as grounds for isolating groups and individuals from public life.

This principle easily generates political, public and everyday extremism and ultimately undermines the major goal of public life, that is to create harmonious and progressive live environment.

History has shown us that the most effective way to escape from radicalization is to engage in dialogue and partnership over matters concerning public life. A dialogue is a situation whereby two persons are open to each other's views rather than being convinced in their truth and trying to persuade the other. This is a situation whereby members of the public try to create their environment based on the principle of dialogue and cooperation in spheres of culture, economic and politics.

When a conversation evolves around democracy as the best form of public and political life, it concerns this very notion. Democracy does not mean only the right of every individual to have an opinion, rather it means that every such individual is also able to engage in a dialogue and cooperate with other persons. Such partnership cannot be established only by order or a law. It requires routine efforts of every member of the society.

The process is long-term, but it also yields sustainable outcomes. That is why democratic societies stand out with their sustainable and progressive development of their cultural, political and economic life. Importantly, it is the democratic conduct of individuals public behaviour that creates safe environments and adequate conditions for harmonious life.

That is why teachers have the obligation to nourish habits necessary for dialogue and cooperation in their pupils in addition to conveying knowledge. It is from families and teachers that pupils come to learn an important principle: we all together create the world that we live in, and we do this not by virtue of a miraculous leader, but through dialogue and cooperation. Public life is not created by high rank officials, but rather in every place whereby members of the public share their lives.
No one shall be expelled from our public life, unless they bring harm by committing crime or their mentality.

Religious diversity

There are just few societies in the modern world that may be characterized as religiously homogenous. In reality a great majority of societies are religiously diverse even when there is one dominant religion. In any case, the major question raised concerns the coexistence of these religious in a diverse society. Even in strongly theocratic state of Iran authorities try to secure a leading role for Shia Islam on the one hand and protect religious minorities from isolation and intimidation. In Georgia only few are aware that further to a special governmental decree an Orthodox church was built in the north of Tehran just few years ago.
Ensuring peaceful coexistence of religious confessions because of specific features of religion itself, is no easy task. Everyday events demonstrate that sentiments can be radicalized, and conflicts fuelled up overnight.

The risk of radicalization has increased along with globalization which has challenged the compatibility of concrete cultures and religions as well as their uniqueness. Because of growing pace of migratory processes representatives of various religions have come to face a series of objectives and challenges which raised few concerns, if any, in previous centuries. Religious conflicts have become frequent and radical groups perceiving the rest of the world as enemies have become stronger. While a geographical scope of such groups was quite limited just few centuries ago, today they have a considerable influence over global processes. Concerns with religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence of religions have become one of pressing problems of the modern world which is regularly highlighted in reports prepared by international organizations (2 and 3). Even though Orthodox Christianity plays a key role in Georgia, the country still remains as religiously diverse (1). This diversity requires the development of optimal forms of peaceful coexistence of religions by the Georgian society.

International documents reflect on extensive experience of the mankind. Radicals often try to persuade others that spirit of such documents is unfamiliar to our spirituality. Therefore, in order to transfer their spirit to our

public life, we need to recollect those forms of peaceful coexistence of religions which were developed by our culture over the course of many centuries. For instance, a religious celebration of Alaverdoba, introduced by Joseph of Alaverdi in Kaketi, which is held in St George's cathedral. As recently as in the 1970s and 1980s it was celebrated by both Christians and Muslims. The celebration lasted three weeks at the end of September. The first and the third weeks (Bruni) were celebrated by Christians, while Muslims celebrated the second week. They had a shrine of their own close to the walls of the Alaverdi. Wrestling competitions and horse races held during the celebration played an important role to defuse tension among people of various religious beliefs.

Religious tolerances was such a striking feature of our culture, it turned out to be 'infectious' for representatives of other religions. In a Sunni mosque of Tbilisi both Shia and Sunni prayed together separated by just a curtain. This is a remarkable fact considering hostilities existing between these two denominations of Islam in the Middle East countries. Sadly, globalization has affected our environment as well resulting in the emergence of various groups of radical aspirations.

Every religion with just few exceptions claims to be the holder of the only truth. This belief excludes the possibility of the existence of other religions. A situation whereby representatives of any one religion perceive other confessions as personification of evil, is called religious exclusivism. Religious radicalism, religious wars and persecution on grounds of religion are all results of religious exclusivism. Mankind remembers all atrocities brought about by this persuasion. These memories include the Inquisition in Europe, witch hunts and persecution of Jews in Russia as well as terror attacks by the Islamic State and other radical groups.

At the same time, however homogenous any society may seem, differences often emerge within a single confession and a chase of an enemy that ensues never ends. It is impossible create a condition whereby followers of a religion understand and serve it the same way.

This understanding has led to pro-inclusivist attitudes in many societies. According to inclusivist views every religion carry elements of truth, however, the truth in its fullest form can not be held by just one religion. Therefore, other religions are not merely a manifestation of the evil, but something that needs to be tolerated, understood and acknowledged.

This appeared to be a great achievement towards civic peace and for the aversion of permanent civic confrontations based on religious conflicts.

Russian Communists tried to eradicate challenges of religious life by the complete elimination of religious life. However, it turned out that religious requirements are inherent to human nature. Religion can bring peace to humans and provide answers to questions of death and life, suffering and joy. Forceful eradication of religion leads only to the replacement of religious cult with the political one while religious rites are replaced by artificially created civic rituals. As soon as the state's repressive policies start fading away, people go back to religious life.

On the other hand, we have already mentioned earlier, religious life may contribute to fuelling up extremist sentiments and civic confrontations unless it is balanced with moral and rational dispositions. Under such circumstances individuals or groups may demand not only that the society live a life strictly determined by religious laws, but also transferring such sectors as healthcare, education, and political and economic life to the realm of religion. The beginning of the 1990s saw many public figures who promoted praying and fasting as a cure to all sickness rejecting the significance of secular education and interfering actively in political life. There were few who believed trade to be the origin of all sins. Such individuals, as a rule, have either no religious education or have no understanding of what is written in religious literature. Prototypes of modern communication and banking systems, as well as health, education and scientific systems were created by Christian orders and monasteries. The contribution of Arab Muslims to the development of math and medical

sciences is immense. In general, it is difficult to fully acknowledge the role that world's religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism) have played in the development of the world's culture and public relations.

Also, it is easy to underestimate the role played by religions in developing progressive societal ideologies, and advancing many fields of science and art. There has been a long-lasting consensus among scientists that there would be no modern European civilization without three pivotal foundations: Christian religiosity, Roman Law and Ancient Greek scientists.

At the same time, many extremists would be opposed to scientific and humanitarian inquiries since they see it as a risk of revival of pagan thinking in science and art. Many found it difficult to reconcile theological and scientific truths. This was more likely if a representative of the clergy lacked relevant education and would therefore understand given religious truth as verbatim.

Threats induced by religious radicalism, religious wars and delay in the process of public relations together with other causes, led European Christian communities to realize that they had to find a place in the public realm for the religion that would protect it from dangers of fundamentalism and clericalism. Secularisation is the very outcome of this quest and it denotes the emancipation of public life and science from religious imperatives. Importantly, secularization does not imply denial of moral norms or deprivation of the right of every individual to lead their lives as they wish. Rather secularism denies the authority of religious leaders to dictate people how to live and think. The goal of the European communities was not to eradicate religion but to define its place in the public and political life. Believers and atheists should both have the right to enjoy public good and participation in the public life while public life should be based on rational and fair principles and freed from radical forms that were set forth by religious fundamentalism.

Secular society does not mean atheist society (as it is often wrongly understood), but the one in which religious or atheist beliefs of any group have no influence over lives of others, legal procedures, economy, healthcare, politics, education, development of science etc (more information on this topic can be found in Annex 2).

Public life should not be associated with the interests of any religious group or be an instrument of any single religion. Rather, it should represent a form of unity of individuals with different religious beliefs and origins, where no one will be perceived as a second-degree citizen due to their religious beliefs.

Government should not interfere in religious life of its citizens. Nor should they try to impose any religion. Rather, governments must maintain impartiality towards faith issues and interests while making decisions on political, economic and social matters. Of course, this does not mean that representatives of authorities are not allowed to live religious lives. However, in state and public matters they should be guided by principles of justice and equality. Decisions must be made on facts, analysis rather than religious truth as perceived by members of the government otherwise incorrectly understood religious truth may lead to disastrous outcomes befalling many people.

Reaction of fundamentalists in the modern world often resembles an attempt to escape from it, and in extreme cases, religious terror. Fundamentalists are found in every country of the world including the U.S. where radical conservatives are united under so called *Christian Fundamentalist Movement.*
Fundamentalism and religiosity should not be understood as the same concepts. Fundamentalism undermines interests of the very religion in the name of which it acts. Interests of fundamentalists are often in conflict with state interests. Numerous examples from the recent history suggest that fundamentalists often challenge stability and social progress of their host society. Eventually fundamentalism may become the biggest threat to state-building processes.

In extreme cases fundamentalists reject any forms of secular life and try to 'correct' every sphere of life in accordance to their belief. By verbatim understanding and poorly understood religious concepts they, sometimes without intention, may stand against moral norms. There were cases whereby, 'believers' welcomed

the killings of Muslim Chechens during the Second Chechen War. Similarly, some 'believers' in Georgia argued that Russian aggression against Georgia was beneficial for the country as it aimed to free us from 'Americal Massons'.

Religious extremism and radicalism may emerge in any society. A radical wing of Christian identity carried out several terrorist attacks claiming dozens of lives in the US in the 1990s. Up to 5000 individuals fell victim to a poisonous gas terror attack in Tokyo subway carried out by Aum Shinrikyo cult (5). It is obvious, that such radicalism has nothing in common with tolerance and acceptance that lie in the heart of religions.

A goal of religious radicalism is religious totalitarianism which implies that individual freedom should be brought down to the minimum. It suggests that individuals should internalize 'the truth' even by duress if necessary.

Gender diversity

The concept of gender is different from sex. While gender is a natural and innate characteristic, sex is related to social order and cultural traditions. This term is referred to when it comes to social roles of either of sexes (more information on this topic is provided in Annex 3).

In an underdeveloped society, gender roles are largely determined by the person's sexual belonging. Traditional roles assigned to men and women are being altered along with political and economic development. While the role of the woman in a patriarchal society was limited to taking care of children and the family, men were involved in public spheres. However, in modern societies this approach has been drastically changed. Technical progress on the one hand, and economic development on the other, has led to the emancipation of women from family chains.

It appears that women, just like men, can play active social role. This revelation has been coupled with dire scarcity of human resource in a rapidly developing and dynamic society which, in turn, creates the situation whereby people with skills and capacities cannot be moved backward just because of their sex.

Female doctors, teachers, entrepreneurs, MPs and state figures are a common phenomenon in the developed societies.

Therefore, in addition to fair distribution of roles, the idea of gender equality has a very pragmatic ground – societies try to utilize women's experience, energy, knowledge and intellect.

In addition, there are certain areas whereby roles of men and women are comparatively sustainable and shaped by biological traits.

Traditional dominant understanding of and attitudes towards roles of sexes creates a serious problem in many societies. These attitudes often prevent women from increasing their social roles. Early marriages among girls is one of the examples of consequences of the dominant public opinion which suggests that being a wife is the only role that the woman can play.

In a dynamic and developing societies gender stereotypes are fragile enough to break easily. Therefore, gender roles are subject to natural and periodic 'revisions. Women took initiatives and the role of a bread-winner in the beginning of the 1990s when severe economic crisis affected the incomes promoting more women to the role of supporting their family. As a result of this initiative, considerable part of economic resources was transferred to women. This situation influenced the current status of gender roles which are being further developed.

We should differentiate between feminism and a world outlook focusing on the necessity of changes within gender roles. Feminism is an extreme form of some sorts of the latter. Feminism gains momentum when men

are no longer able to perform their original social roles but are trying to maintain high social status at any costs. Yet, followers of feminist and masculinist ideologies represent just a small part of the society while the course of the development of the society is informed by the epoch and fairness.

Obviously, these processes need to be thoroughly thought-through by the society. Discussions and deliberations around these topics may contribute to increasing women's role as well as to defusing radical sentiments.

Now we must touch upon rather delicate issue which is a hot topic in our society – attitudes towards sexual minorities. Past few years have seen simmering sentiments with respect to this issue, particularly after the adoption of the law on the elimination of all forms of discriminations by the Parliament on 2 May 2014 (see Annex 1). Many radically disposed individuals perceived the law as an attempt to promote an unacceptable form of life. However, if we read the law, it will become evident that it is all about the impermissibility of discrimination and eventually, the fight against the adoption of the law came to resemble the fight for the right for discrimination.

Laws have one specific trait: they cannot be put in the same position as religious belief or moral norms even though historical roots of the law were based on morale and faith. Laws only define what is permissible and impermissible in order to ensure the protection of human rights, public order and state's sovereignty and integrity from imminent and tangible danger. Laws, as philosophers say, should reflect the minimum of morality rather than it's maximum. As soon as the law demands from individuals to abide by the highest standards of morality, the execution of laws will become dubious. Everything which lies beyond the minimum morality must be regulated by human morality and free will. The law may prohibit discrimination or violence, but it cannot legalize either of them except for cases which concern human life, health, fundamental human rights, public peace or state's sovereignty and integrity.

A person may admire a lifestyle of the other person, or on the contrary, may despise such lifestyle. However, unless the latter violates the law, the former has no right to call on the state or other individuals for discriminatory treatment against this individual. Every life should be valued even when we do not like lifestyle of individuals who have exactly same right to public good as we do.

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