

Georgian Public's Knowledge of and Attitudes towards the EU in Georgia

2019 Survey Report

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Introduction

In 2019, Europe Foundation (EPF) conducted a sixth wave survey to study the knowledge and attitudes of Georgian population towards the European Union. Previous waves have been conducted bi-annually since 2009, using questionnaires which are as identical as possible to allow for the comparison of results from various years and to observe changes in the knowledge and expectations of the population towards the EU, the EU-Georgia relationship and the EU integration process. The longitudinal findings suggest that the majority of the population maintains an overall positive attitude towards the EU and Georgia's EU integration. However, this enthusiasm does not often rest on a deep knowledge of the specificity of the EU-Georgia relationship or of the EU as an institution.

In addition to assessing the general attitudes of the Georgian population, the survey also tracks changes in the attitudes of the population of different settlement types (the population of the capital, other urban settlements and rural settlements), as well as the Georgian-speaking population and ethnic minorities. The ethnic minority population has been targeted as a separate stratum since 2013, thus enabling the comparison of the attitudes of the Georgian-speaking population with those of ethnic minorities.

The first chapter of this report assesses the population's level of knowledge and perceptions of the EU as an institution, the EU-Georgia relationship, and the EU's support of Georgia. It also discusses the sources through which the population receives information about the EU, as well as the expectations of the population towards the process of European integration. For over ten years now, the survey findings have shown the stability of the positive attitudes of the Georgian population towards EU integration and the high hopes they have for this process. However, these positive expectations tend to rest on a somewhat superficial knowledge of the EU as an institution and of the key stages in the EU-Georgia relationship. The survey results also suggest a lack of available information for ethnic minorities. Overall, the Georgian population views the EU as a desirable political and economic partner and, despite the understood risks and difficulties, it firmly supports Georgia's integration into the EU.

The second chapter of the report examines the changes in the population's general political views and values, its trust in political institutions and the level of political maturity. According to the results gathered over the past 11 years, the population continues to remain loyal to traditional values while, at the same time, gradually losing trust in key social and political institutions such as the office of the president, the prime minister, parliament and political parties. There are also conspicuous differences between the values of ethnic minorities and the Georgian-speaking population. Similar variations are found between the residents of the capital city and the country's rural population.

The datasets of all survey waves conducted by Europe Foundation can be accessed through CRRC-Georgia's online data analysis portal: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/datasets/>.

Georgia and the EU

Knowledge about the EU

According to the surveys conducted by Europe Foundation, the level of the Georgian population's knowledge of the EU, the EU bodies and the process of European integration is generally unchanged. An example of this is the knowledge of the Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU which was signed in June 2014 and which entered into force on 1 July 2016.¹ In 2019, as many as 42% of the Georgian population is aware of the Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU. However, the corresponding share of ethnic minorities stands at 14%. In general, the higher the level of education obtained, the greater the chance that the individual will be aware of this Agreement. For example, 60% of those with a master's degree knows about the Association Agreement. In terms of yearly fluctuations, the highest level of awareness was recorded in the 2015 survey, in which: 62% of the population reported that they had heard of this document. This result seems logical as this agreement received extensive coverage before the 2015 survey was conducted.

Among those who have heard about the Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU, 81% believe that it will have a positive impact on the possibilities of selling Georgian products on the EU market. Among the areas² discussed during the interviews, positive expectations are the highest with regard to the quality of healthcare and higher education. In each case, 78% of respondents expect improvements following the AA implementation. The expectations of ethnic minorities are similar to those of the Georgian speaking population.

Expectations are quite high with regard to other areas too: the majority of those who have heard about the Association Agreement think that it will have a positive impact on the accountability of public institutions (70%), the effective usage of energy resources (69%), the independence of courts in Georgia (68%) and on the employment (66%). The share of those who do not think that the situation will improve as a result of the Georgia-EU Association Agreement never exceeds 25%, and is often lower.

The observed changes in the answers to the question of whether or not Georgia is a member of the EU are striking. The period between 2009 and 2015 saw an increase in correct answers. However, the 2017 and 2019 surveys showed the highest share of incorrect answers: in both years, 16% of the Georgian population thought that Georgia was an EU member state. This result does not differ by type of settlement or ethnic group. One should note two more observations: in 2019, almost equal proportions of the Georgian population answer that neither Georgia nor Russia is an EU

¹ https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia_en/9740/EU/Georgia%20Association%20Agreement

² The question concerned 13 areas: Georgia's security, quality of Georgian agricultural products, working conditions in small and medium enterprises, Quality of secondary education, quality of tertiary education, freedom of the media, healthcare, independence of courts, effective usage of energy resources, accountability of public institutions, sale of Georgian products on the EU market, employment, and simplification of the process of issuing long-term visas to Georgian citizens to visit EU countries.

member state (75% and 73%, respectively). According to another observation, an increase is seen in the answers of ethnic minorities that Russia is not an EU member state: in 2013, as many as 19% of ethnic minority representatives believed that Russia was an EU member state, although in 2019 this share decreased to 7%.

In 2019, only 27% of the population knows how many countries are currently EU member states; the corresponding share among ethnic minorities is 17%.³ Since 2013, this indicator has shown an insignificant fluctuation. Compared to 2017, the share of correct answers to the question of whether Georgia is currently an EU member state has decreased (from 43% to 37%).

Since 2017, there is a slight increase in the share of correct answers to the question regarding the activity of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia: in 2017, 19% of the population said that EUMM supports the stabilization of the situation in the areas affected by the August 2008 war, while in 2019 this share increased to 25%.⁴ At the same time, it is alarming that only 3% of ethnic minorities answered this questions correctly.

The latest results of the survey show that the Georgian population’s level of knowledge about the EU and its bodies remains similar to what it was in 2017. The majority of the population provides correct answers to questions about the key facts and events related to the EU. At the same time, the survey results suggest that the population is better aware of the Georgia-EU relationship than it is of the EU as an institution. Yet another noteworthy point is that, compared to the Georgian speaking population, ethnic minorities are less aware of key facts and events related to the EU.

Sources of information

As in previous years, television remains the population’s primary source of information about the EU. Using a five-point scale in which “5” corresponded to the answer “A lot of information” and “1” corresponded to “No information at all,” 29% of the population said in 2019 that they receive much or a lot of information about the EU from television (the sum of the 4th and 5th positions on the proposed scale), whereas 22% of the population reported that they do not receive information from this source at all (1st position on the scale). Social networks are the second most common source of EU-related information: 13% of the population reported receiving much or a lot of information from this source.

The situation is different with ethnic minorities, although this group also names television as the most frequent source of information. Some 20% of ethnic minorities answered that they receive

³ It is important to note that respondents were not required to name the exact number of EU member states. A card was used for the question: “How many countries are currently EU member states?” with the following answer options: “Up to 10,” “From 11 to 20,” “From 21 to 30,” “From 31 to 40” and “More than 40.” The share of correct answers would have been lower without the card that was shown to the respondents.

⁴ A card was used during the fieldwork.

much or a lot of information about the EU from television, although almost twice as many (37%) reported that they do not receive any information about the EU from television.

The Information Center on NATO and EU, other governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, the EU Delegation to Georgia, embassies and international organizations as along with radio, newspapers and magazines are barely named by the population as sources of information about the EU.

The share of those who would like to receive more information about the EU has been steadily increasing since 2013. In particular, according to the 2019 findings, the population is especially eager to learn about Georgia-EU trade relations (34%), the EU's educational programs (30%) and the role of the EU in conflict settlement (30%).⁵ Topics such as EU institutions (bodies) (4%), the EU's cultural programs (10%) and ways of obtaining a visa to the EU countries (11%) attract less interest.

As many as 72% of those who want to learn more about the EU would like to receive this information from television. Social networks are the second most frequently named source (30%).

Even when it comes to current affairs in general, the results of the 2019 survey once again show that the Georgian population most frequently turns to TV channels to receive information about politics. As in 2017, Imedi and Rustavi 2 remain the most watched TV news channels in 2019: around half of the population gets information about political developments from these TV channels on a daily basis.⁶ It is noteworthy, that about 23% of the population stated that they do not watch Rustavi-2 at all, despite having access to the channel. The same was noted by and 20% stated the same about watching Imedi TV Channel. Imedi and Rustavi 2 are daily sources of information for only 10% of ethnic minorities.

Compared to 2017, TV Pirveli has increased its viewership of daily political programs from 4% to 16%, while Georgian Public Broadcaster programs are watched daily by 17% of the Georgian speaking population and 9% of ethnic minorities.

In 2019, 27% of ethnic minorities said that they watch political news on a Russian TV channel on a daily basis. As many as 77% of ethnic Armenians watch an Armenian TV channel daily while 61% of ethnic Azerbaijanis watch an Azerbaijani or Turkish TV channel.

It is not a novelty that television is the most widespread source of information as well as being in the highest demand. The survey results suggest that this medium needs to be used more effectively for spreading information about the EU. There is a possibility that the ethnic

⁵ The question: "What information would you like to get about the EU?" was answered by those respondents alone who answered "Yes" to the question: "Would you like to get more information about the EU?" The provided data shows the share of positive answers by this group.

⁶ Please note that the fieldwork was conducted in March 2019, before the events that unfolded around Rustavi 2.

minorities’ widespread use of non-Georgian daily news programs contributes to lower awareness among these populations as compared to the Georgian speaking population.

Perceptions of the EU

Positive perceptions of the EU continue to be commonplace in Georgia. Approximately a quarter of the population views the EU as, first and foremost, an international organization (27%) or a political union (25%) while for an additional 18%, the EU is an economic union.⁷ Ethnic minority population names these three answers at almost equal frequency (13%, 18% and 15%, respectively), though one should emphasize that 42% of them found it difficult to answer the question. Interestingly, in the 2013 survey, “an international organization” was the most frequent answer of the Georgian speaking population (35%), but since then the frequency of this answer has decreased to 27% (see Table 1). The EU is rarely perceived as a military bloc, a cultural union or a non-governmental organization.

Table 1.

In your opinion, first and foremost, what does the EU represent?⁸ (%)

	2013	2015	2017	2019
A military bloc	4	5	3	4
An international organization	35	30	30	27
An economic union	19	16	21	18
A political union	22	24	27	25
A nongovernmental organization	1	1	1	2
A cultural union	1	2	2	3
<i>Other / None from this card</i>	0	1	2	2
<i>Don’t know / Refuse to answer</i>	18	20	15	18

Differences between the opinions of the Georgian speaking population and those of representatives of ethnic minorities are frequent. This is especially conspicuous in the assessment of specific aspects. For example, 80% of the Georgian speaking population agrees with the statement that “the EU is a source for peace and security in Europe”⁹ whereas a corresponding share of ethnic minorities stands at 44%. Some 36% of ethnic minorities found it difficult to answer this question compared to 8% of the Georgian speaking population.

The population of Georgia overwhelmingly agrees with the statements that the EU is a democratic union (72%), that it supports the development of democracy in non-member countries (71%) and

⁷ The aim of this question was not to assess the level of knowledge about the EU and therefore, the question does not have “correct” and “incorrect” answers. The question: “In your opinion, first and foremost, what does the EU represent?” aimed at identifying the Georgian populations’ perception of the union; how this union was seen by the population.

⁸ This question has been included in the questionnaire since 2013. A card was used for the question. The answers “Other,” “None from this card,” “Don’t know,” and “Refuse to answer” were not on the card.

⁹ The sum of answers “Fully agree” (24%) and “More agree than disagree” (56%).

supports the economic development of non-member countries (66%). It would be correct to reiterate that, for the majority of the Georgian population, the EU is associated with peace, security and democracy.

In the past few years, particular attention has been paid to the population's views on whether the EU threatens Georgian traditions. In 2019, as much as 46% of the population disagrees with this statement; however, the share of those who agree with it is also high (42%). Considering the margin of error, the difference between these two groups is infinitesimal.¹⁰ Interestingly, according to the Europe Foundation survey results, the share of the population which disagrees with the statement that the EU threatens Georgian traditions has not really changed since 2009 (45%-49%). The only exception was in 2015 when 34% of the population disagreed with this statement; however, this share increased to 49% in 2017. On the other hand, in 2015 the share of the population who agreed with this statement increased: in 2015, 45% of the population agreed (including 19% which "fully agreed") that the EU threatened Georgian traditions. In the following waves this indicator did not change substantially: 41% agreed with this statement in 2017 and 42% agreed with it in 2019.

The share of those who think that the EU is a new form of empire has increased from 17% in 2009 to 33% in 2019. However, the share of those who disagree with this statement is still higher (40%). Assessing this statement proved to be especially difficult for the population of Georgia: 26% of the Georgian speaking population and 42% of ethnic minorities found it difficult to answer this question.

The Georgian speaking population most frequently names the EU as well as the US as the unions with which Georgia should have the closest political and economic cooperation.¹¹ Much like in 2017, in 2019, 56% of the Georgian speaking population named the EU and 58% named the US as the preferred unions for political cooperation. These shares are somewhat smaller compared to 2016: six years ago, the EU was named by 69% and the USA was named by 64% of the Georgian speaking population. With regard to economic cooperation, the EU and the USA were each named by 50% of the Georgian speaking population in 2019. Russia is the third by frequency (39%), though this share has been steadily decreasing among the Georgian speaking population: Russia was named by 65% in 2013, by 53% in 2015, and by 48% in 2017. The picture is different in the case of ethnic minorities: in their opinion, Georgia should have the closest political cooperation with Russia (57%), followed by Azerbaijan (44%), Turkey (35%), the EU (23%), the USA (16%)

¹⁰ Given that a representative sample of the universe of interest gets interviewed during the surveys, the results are never absolutely precise but are, rather, influenced by the so-called "sampling error." Hence, survey results should always be discussed with this error in mind: for example, when a survey finding is 43% while the margin of error is +/-2%, this means that a corresponding indicator in case of surveying the entire universe of interest would be between 41% and 45%. For this reason, the difference between, for example, 43% and 44% is not to be trusted, because in case of interviewing the entire universe these indicators may not differ from each other. Thus, when discussing survey findings, only the differences exceeding the margin of error are to be trusted.

¹¹ As for other reasons listed in the questionnaire, 56% of the population agreed that "The EU supports all developing countries, and Georgia is among them;" in the opinion of 53%, "The EU is interested in the stability in Georgia in order to use our territory to transport oil and gas to Europe;" 41% agreed with the opinion that "Georgia is an exemplary new democracy in the world, and the EU wants it to develop further."

and Armenia (12%).¹² However, the frequency of naming Russia has been decreasing in this stratum too: in 2013, Russia was named by 71% of ethnic minorities.

According to the longitudinal findings of the EF surveys, the population’s perceptions of the EU remain positive and for the majority of the population of Georgia the EU is associated with peace, security and democracy. The Georgian speaking population sees the EU and the USA as Georgia’s most desirable economic and political partners. In contrast, ethnic minorities still see Russia as Georgia’s most desirable economic and political partner, although the frequency of naming Russia has been decreasing in this stratum too.

EU for Georgia

According to the EU Delegation to Georgia, over the past few years the EU has allocated 100 million euro every year to support projects implemented in Georgia.¹³ These projects are designed to support the development of various fields such as agriculture and energy, the education system, local self-government, justice, human rights, etc.

The share of those who state that EU aid is not important at all remains extremely low (3%). Five percent of the Georgian speaking population and 26% of ethnic minorities found it difficult to answer this question. More striking is the difference between the shares of these two groups who assess this aid as either “important” or “very important:” in the case of the Georgian speaking population this share totals 85%, with 34% assessing the EU aid allocated for Georgia as “very important.” As for ethnic minorities, 53% of them evaluate the EU aid as important, including 15% who thinks that it is “very important.”

The general distribution of answers to the question “Who can currently best support Georgia – the EU, USA or Russia?” remains similar to previous years with the EU named most frequently again (35%). The frequency of naming the USA has not changed since 2017 (23%). The frequency of naming Russia has decreased (in 2017, Russia was named by 24% of the population while in 2019, by 18%). The Georgian speaking population and the ethnic minorities answer this question differently: in 2019, ethnic minorities named Russia three times as frequently as the Georgian speaking population (45% and 15%, respectively). However, compared to 2017, the ethnic minorities named Russia less often (54% and 45%, respectively).

Opinions vary as to why the EU supports Georgia. Six possible opinions were tested during the interviews.¹⁴ In 2019, 75% of the population agreed with the opinion that the EU supports Georgia

¹² The picture is similar with respect to economic cooperation.

¹³ For details see https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/50014/projects-georgia_en

¹⁴ Following six opinions were tested during the interview: “The EU supports all developing countries, and Georgia is among them,” “The EU is interested in the stability in Georgia in order to use our territory to transport oil and gas to Europe,” “Georgia is an exemplary new democracy in the world, and the EU wants it to develop further,” “The EU wants stability in its neighborhood,” “The EU wants to reduce the flow of migrants to the EU,” “The EU wants to have Georgia under its influence.”

because it “wants stability in its neighborhood.” This was the opinion most frequently agreed with by both the Georgian speaking population and ethnic minorities (80% and 36%, respectively).¹⁵ The second most frequent opinion was “The EU wants to reduce the flow of migrants to the EU” with 60% of the population agreeing with it (64% of the Georgian speaking population and 27% of ethnic minorities). The smallest share of the population (36%) agreed with the opinion that, by means of its support, the EU wants to have Georgia under its influence.¹⁶

Although during the fieldwork a card with options was showed to the respondents to collect the data, 28% of the Georgian speaking population and 40% of ethnic minorities found it difficult to answer the question about the main types of assistance that the EU provides to Georgia. According to the answers received countrywide, “humanitarian aid” was named most often in 2019 (33%). The second most frequent answer is “investment in Georgia’s economy” (18%). Interestingly, the latter (“Investment in Georgia’s economy”) is also named as one of the most sought after types of assistance which 22% of the population would wish to receive; while 24% would like to receive support in restoring Georgia’s territorial integrity. Only 6% of the population said that the best way for the EU to assist Georgia would be “humanitarian aid to those in need.” Therefore, there is a partial coincidence between the types of assistance that the population would like to receive and the types of assistance that, in the population’s opinion, the country receives from the EU. Only 1% of the population said that the country does not need any assistance from the EU; and practically no desire was expressed about receiving support in areas such as the development of the media, the judicial system reform and equipping the armed forces.

The population’s opinions on how purposefully EU aid is spent has not changed. According to 20% of the population, it is not spent purposefully at all, while in the opinion of 40%, it is spent “more pointlessly than purposefully.”¹⁷ Similar to 2017, those who think that EU aid is spent completely purposefully represent an absolute minority (3%). Received answers do not differ significantly by key demographic indicators.

It is important to study the population’s opinions regarding who benefits most from the EU aid allocated to Georgia.¹⁸ A card used for this question listed the following answer options: students living in Georgia, retired people, the unemployed, the skilled workforce, the unskilled workforce, businessmen, politicians and/or high-level officials, journalists, the entire population of Georgia, NGOs working in Georgia, and high-level EU officials.¹⁹ The distribution of answers to this

¹⁵ The sum of the answers “Agree” and “Completely agree.”

¹⁶ As for other reasons listed in the questionnaire, 56% of the population agreed that “The EU supports all developing countries, and Georgia is among them;” in the opinion of 53%, “The EU is interested in the stability in Georgia in order to use our territory to transport oil and gas to Europe;” 41% agreed with the opinion that “Georgia is an exemplary new democracy in the world, and the EU wants it to develop further.”

¹⁷ This question was not answered by those respondents who in response to previous questions said that the EU was not currently providing aid to Georgia or who found it difficult to answer the question about types of current support (37% in total).

¹⁸ This question was not answered by those respondents who in response to previous questions said that the EU was not currently providing aid to Georgia or who found it difficult to answer the question about types of current support (37% in total).

¹⁹ Each respondent was allowed to choose two answers.

question has been stable over time: as in previous years, politicians and/or high-level officials (35%) and businessmen (23%) are named as the two groups who, in the population's opinion, benefit most from the EU aid allocated to Georgia. Students and "the entire population of Georgia" are each named by 17%. NGOs working in Georgia are named by 12%. The other groups are named by less than 10%. Interestingly, the population does not consider journalists to be a group that benefits from EU aid (1%). Overall, in 2019, Georgian and EU politicians and/or high-level officials and businessmen are named by a total of 67% while the other groups (retired people, students, the unemployed, the skilled and unskilled workforce and the population in general) are named by 60%,²⁰ which means that various strata of society are equally represented in the opinions about who benefits most from EU aid.

Although the population's knowledge about the EU aid allocated to Georgia is not complete and there are doubts about the purposefulness of the spending of this aid, the population believes that this aid is very important for Georgia. A large segment of the population thinks that politicians, high-level officials and businessmen benefit most; however, other representatives of society, in total, are also named as beneficiaries of EU aid at an almost similar frequency. Importantly, the population, first and foremost, welcomes those types of support that facilitate the resolution of the most acute problems faced by the country – economic development and the restoration of territorial integrity.

European integration

In 2019, 71% of the population would support Georgia's membership in the EU. Only 10% would not support Georgia's EU membership and an additional 7% would not participate in a referendum regarding Georgia's membership in the EU; 12% found it difficult to answer this question.

The distribution of answers received in 2019 is analogous to those of 2017. The highest support for European integration was seen in the 2009, 2011, and 2013 waves of the Europe Foundation's survey, showing 79%, 80% and 78% in support, respectively. In 2009, only 2% of the population would not support Georgia's EU membership. The 2015 survey showed the lowest support for Georgia's EU membership, with only 61% of the population in its favor, 11% against and 17% finding it difficult to answer the question. In 2017 and 2019, support for European integration increased again.

It is not a surprise that Georgian speaking population and ethnic minorities answer this question differently. In 2019, only 33% of ethnic minorities support Georgia's EU membership. Furthermore, their larger share say that they would not take part in a referendum (17%) while around one third of them found it difficult to answer this question (33%).

²⁰ This category does not include two groups: NGOs working in Georgia (12%) and journalists (1%) because it is not possible to accurately determine to which social stratum the population attributes these groups.

In general, the majority of European integration supporters represent the segment of the population which has higher education – those with bachelor’s or master’s degrees (83% and 79%, respectively). With age, the support for EU integration somewhat decreases, but even among those who are 60 years old or older, 66% report supporting Georgia’s EU membership.

Those who would support Georgia’s EU membership name three main reasons for this: “My economic condition would improve” (54%), “Georgia would be better protected from foreign threats” (21%) and “Georgia would have a better chance to restore its territorial integrity” (14%).²¹

The question – “In your opinion, would the majority of Georgian citizens support Georgia’s membership in the EU?” – was answered affirmatively by 68% of the population. In the case of ethnic minorities, however, this share is lower by almost 30%, at 39%.

Almost one third of the population could not answer the question as to when, in their opinion, Georgia will become a member of the European Union.²² Similar to 2015 and 2017, 11% of this group is pessimistic about the prospect and thinks that Georgia will never become an EU member state. In 2009, only 1% of the corresponding group thought so. According to the 2019 results, around one third of this group thinks that Georgia will become a member state of the EU in 5 years or less (15%) or in 6-10 years (19%). An additional 19% thinks that it will happen after more than 10 years. Since 2009, the share of the population which believes that the majority of the governments of the EU member states would support Georgia’s membership in the EU has increased from 38% to 50%.

In parallel to the existing optimism and the hope for support from the governments of EU member states, the population of Georgia identifies certain factors that represent barriers to Georgia becoming an EU member state. According to 39% of the population, territorial conflicts represent the major barrier to Georgia’s EU membership. Political instability is the second most frequently named barrier (25%), while Russia is the third (19%). Only 2% of the population thinks that there are no barriers to Georgia becoming an EU member state.

The survey studied the opinions of the population on whether Georgia was ready for EU membership in six specific areas: formation of democratic institutions; the rule of law; protection of human rights; protection of minority rights; a competitive market economy; and the harmonization of Georgian legislation with EU legislation. With regard to these areas, from 48% to 58% of the population reports that Georgia is not yet ready for EU membership (the sum of the answers “definitely not ready” and “not quite ready”) and the frequency of negative answers concerning all these areas exceeds the frequency of affirmative answers. The ratio of negative and affirmative answers to these questions may be viewed as a coefficient reflecting the population’s

²¹ A card was used for this question.

²² This question was put only to those who correctly answered the question of whether Georgia was a member of the EU.

opinion of Georgia's readiness for EU membership.²³ Of the areas asked about, protection of minority rights is believed to be the least challenging barrier: the ratio of negative and affirmative answers is 1,33. The formation of democratic institutions is seen as a more challenging barrier (the respective coefficient is 1,59); followed by the protection of human rights (coefficient 1,64), competitive market economy (coefficient 2,07), rule of law (coefficient 2,15) and harmonization of Georgian legislation with the EU legislation (coefficient 2,46).

Only 8% of the population hopes that if Georgia further strengthens relations with the EU, it will somewhat positively impact Georgia's relations with Russia (the sum of the answers "very positively" and "more positively than negatively"). Only one tenth of the population thinks that the strengthening of relations between Georgia and the EU will have no impact on Georgia's relations with Russia, whereas the majority (66%) thinks that the strengthening of relations with the EU will deteriorate relations with Russia. These results are analogous to the results obtained in 2015 and 2017; in 2009, 2011 and 2013, however, from 38% to 46% of the population expected the deterioration of relations with Russia as a result of strengthening relations between Georgia and the EU.

Expectations Related to Georgia becoming an EU Member State

The Georgian population's expectations about EU membership were studied by means of a multi-component question: using a five-point scale, respondents assessed their expectations concerning changes in 17 areas if Georgia were to become an EU member state. To obtain a comprehensive picture, the considered areas were quite diverse, and included: healthcare affordability, protection of minority rights, population's income, etc.

As in previous years, a prospect for EU membership raises expectations of positive changes in the majority of these areas. If Georgia becomes an EU member, 71% of the population expects an improvement in the quality of education (the sum of the answers "will increase significantly" and "will increase"). Around two-thirds expects improvements in terms of well-being: an increase in the number of available jobs (68%), pensions (65%), the population's income (65%), the affordability of healthcare (62%) and a decrease in poverty (60%). While 44% of the population expects an increase in prices of staple products, 19% expects a decrease in these prices and 19% thinks these prices will not change.

As regards social and political issues, if Georgia becomes an EU member, 64% of the population expects an increase in Georgia's security; the same share expects an increase in freedom of speech. According to 61%, there will be better chances/conditions to conduct fair elections. An almost

²³ To obtain this coefficient, the sum of the negative answers ("Definitely not ready" and "Not quite ready") was divided into the sum of affirmative answers ("Definitely ready" and "Quite ready"). For example, in the area of rule of law, the sum of negative answers is 58% whereas the sum of affirmative answers is 27%. The coefficient obtained comprises 2,15 (48%: 27%), meaning that the share of those who think that Georgia is not ready for EU membership is 2,15 times higher than the share of those who think the opposite. The higher the coefficient, the higher the skepticism of the population about Georgia's readiness for EU in a corresponding area.

equal share of the population expects improvements in the areas of protection of minority rights (59%), the independence of courts (57%) and the protection of property rights (56%). In the opinion of 54%, the level of corruption will decrease. At the same time, the expectation that EU membership will help Georgia restore its territorial integrity is relatively modest – 48% of the population is expecting this change, which is analogous to the results of the 2017 survey.

There are two other areas towards which the population has mixed expectations. If Georgia becomes an EU member, 38% of the population thinks that the number of people willing to emigrate will increase, as opposed to 34% with the opposite opinion. Considering the margin of error, these two groups are virtually equal.²⁴ This ratio has changed since 2017: two years ago, 56% of the population thought that if Georgia were to become an EU member, the number of people willing to emigrate would increase and only 21% thought that it would decrease; hence, there is a positive change in regard to this expectation. This is often backed by pragmatic motivations: the hope of improving one's own economic conditions and better protection of the country, including the restoration of territorial integrity.

Only 23% of the population thinks that if Georgia were to become an EU member, respect for Georgian traditions will increase against 22% who think the opposite and 42% who think that nothing will change in this regard. The distribution of results in the 2017 survey is similar, indicating the stability of this opinion.

Despite understood difficulties, the majority of the population continues to support Georgia becoming a member of the EU and entertains positive expectations about EU membership. This desire is most frequently backed by pragmatic motives: the hope to improve economic conditions and better security for the country, including the hope for the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity.

Visa liberalization

By the time the 2019 survey was conducted, Georgian citizens had already been enjoying visa-free travel to Schengen zone countries for two years.²⁵ However, according to the survey results, the Georgian population's knowledge of visa liberalization requirements had notably worsened in certain areas, compared to the 2017 data. In particular, a 13% decrease is seen in the proportion of the Georgian population which believes that, for visa-free travel, one needs a proof of financial means to cover the trip expenses (from 45% to 32%, respectively); an 8% decrease (24%) is seen in the proportion of those who say that, when crossing the border, a traveler must have documents certifying his/her place of residence abroad (a hotel reservation or the address of the inviting hosts). The data on other requirements of visa liberalization such as biometric passport (78%-78%), travel insurance (24%-25%) and a return ticket (24%-25%) remained virtually unchanged between 2017 and 2019.

²⁴ See the footnote 10 above.

²⁵ Visa free travel is allowed for short visits (up to three months), for 90 days within 180 days.

Similar to the 2017 survey, the results of the 2019 survey clearly suggest a lack of knowledge about visa liberalization issues among ethnic minorities. In 2017 and 2019, respectively, 42% and 37% of ethnic minorities did not know what documents Georgian citizens need to enjoy visa free travel to Schengen zone countries. The corresponding indicator for the Georgian speaking population was 16% in 2019.

Answers to the question: “In your opinion, as a result of the visa-free regime, will Georgian citizens have the right to work in EU countries?” have shown a further deterioration of knowledge in 2019 compared to 2017. In 2017, only one fourth of the Georgian population answered this question affirmatively, while in 2019 the corresponding number was 40%. In the case of this particular issue, deterioration is evident only among the Georgian speaking population – decreasing from 62% to 44%, while the level of knowledge of ethnic minorities remained unchanged.

According to the 2019 survey results, the level of knowledge about visa liberalization requirements has not improved and has even significantly deteriorated in certain aspects since 2017. A notable difference is observed between the levels of knowledge of the Georgian speaking population and those of ethnic minorities, which indicates the need to renew or enhance a targeted information campaign on visa liberalization issues.

Political views and values of the Georgian population

Political views

Both the Georgian speaking population and ethnic minorities name “jobs” as the most important issue facing Georgia (56% and 65% respectively) – this issue is the most frequently named in all waves of Europe Foundation’s survey.²⁶ Besides this issue, the Georgian speaking population considered poverty (41%) and territorial integrity (38%), while ethnic minorities - rising prices (40%) and poverty (39%) as the most important issues facing Georgia. Compared to these acute problems, EU membership has not been identified as a priority: only 8% of the Georgian speaking population and 4% of ethnic minorities have reported it.

The Georgian population’s opinions on whether Georgia is a democratic country or is developing in the direction of democracy are largely similar to those reported in 2017. In 2019, an absolute minority (2%) agrees with the statement that “Georgia is already a democratic country and needs no further improvement,” while 39% agrees with the statement that “Georgia is a democratic country, but there is still room for improvement.” According to 28% of respondents, “Georgia is not a democracy yet, but it is developing in that direction,” while 21% agrees with the statement that “Georgia might become a democracy in the future, but it is not developing in that direction now.” The share of absolute sceptics who think that “Georgia is not a democratic country and will

²⁶ A card was used with a possibility to choose up to three answers.

never be one” is small (7%). Much like the 2017 survey results, the answers to this question provided by ethnic minorities were more optimistic than the answers of the Georgian speaking population.

In 2019, equal shares of the population agree with the statements that “People are like children; the government should take care of them like a parent” and “The government is like an employee; the people should be the bosses who control the government” (48% in both cases).²⁷ The picture was similar in previous survey waves; neither of these statements was supported by the majority of the population. The share of those who agreed with the statement that “people are like children” comprised 45% in 2009, 42%-42% in 2011 and 2013, 51% in 2015, 52% in 2017 and 48% in 2019. This rather suggests that the social processes underway in the country have not yet contributed to the weakening of the paternalistic attitudes already expressed in 2009. Especially worrying is that the opinions of the youngest group of respondents (18-30 age group) do not actually differ from the opinions of the older age groups (31-60 age group): in 2019, equal proportions of respondents from the 18-30 and the 31-44 age groups (46%-46%) and 45% of respondents belonging to the 45-59 age group agreed with the statement that “people are like children.”

Male population, as well as members of the population with a relatively higher income and level of education, more frequently agree with the statement that the government is employed by the people. The same holds true for Tbilisi residents. In contrast, larger shares of the rural population and of ethnic minorities hold paternalistic attitudes. It is worth noting that compared to 2017, in 2019, the share of ethnic minority representatives who agreed with the statement that the government is employed by the people increased by 12%, though their 68% continued to think that “people are like children.”

Compared to 2009, when 57% of the population was interested in their country’s domestic and foreign policies (the sum of the answers “very interested” and “quite interested”), 2019 saw this interest decline to 46%. Among ethnic minorities, 35% is interested in domestic policy of Georgia and 33% is interested in Georgia’s foreign policy.

Changes in the answers to Europe Foundation surveys over the 11-year period show a decline in the trust of the Georgian population towards political, social or international institutions and unions. In 2019, a relatively high level of trust (the sum of the answers “fully trust” and “trust”) was reported towards only three institutions: Georgian army (77%), religious institutions (74%) and police (51%).

In certain cases, the level of distrust towards certain Georgian governing bodies and institutions exceeds the level of trust, which is clearly a worrying sign. In particular, according to the 2019 survey results, 19% of the population trust the Parliament of Georgia versus 35% which distrusts; 24% trusts the Prime Minister, whereas 37% distrusts it; 27% trusts the President whereas 37% distrusts it. The level of trust is higher towards local government than towards the central

²⁷ A card used for this question contained both statements. The respondents were to choose the one with which they agreed.

government: 35% of the population trusts local government, whereas 25% distrusts it. Nongovernmental organizations and the media each enjoy the trust of 27% of the population. However, the levels of distrust towards NGOs and the media comprise 24% and 19%, respectively. Some 37% of the population trusts the Public Defender, as opposed to 13% which distrusts it. Banks are trusted by 31% of the population and distrusted by 34% of the population. From among those 16 organizations towards which the trust of the Georgian population was assessed, Georgia's court system (17% trust vs 43% distrust) and political parties (13% trust vs 40% distrust) are the least trusted institutions.

The population's level of trust towards international associations and organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations remains similar to the results of the 2017 survey. According to the 2019 survey results, 45% of the population trusts (including 4% which "fully trusts") the EU as opposed to 16% which distrusts it. Interestingly, there is little difference between the Georgian speaking population and ethnic minorities when it comes to distrust of these institutions: 13% and 16%, respectively; however, the level of trust is lower among ethnic minorities (36%). The level of distrust towards the EU increases with the respondent's age: while 12% of the members of the 18-30 age group express distrust towards the EU, the corresponding proportion among the oldest age group (60 years old and older) is 19%. The EU is trusted by 50% of bachelor's degree holders and by 53% of post-graduate degree holders (master's or doctorate). In case of the UN, 37% of the Georgian population trusts this organization and 16% distrusts it. Demographic differences are less notable in relation to the UN. However, the level of distrust towards it also increases with age, with ethnic minorities showing a relatively low level of trust.

Trust has declined towards Georgia's main social and political institutions, such as President, Prime Minister, Parliament, political parties and courts. The highest level of trust is again reported towards law enforcement agencies and religious institutions whereas media and non-governmental organizations are trusted by less than one third of the population. The social processes underway in the country have not yet weakened the paternalistic attitudes expressed in 2009. In 2019, more than half of the population disagrees with the opinion that Georgia is a democratic country or that it is developing towards becoming a democracy. Trust towards the EU has remained stable since 2017.

Values

According to the 2019 survey data, the majority of the Georgian population believes that it is "very important" for a good citizen to follow traditions (66%) and to support people who are worse off (72%).²⁸ According to 49% of the population, it is very important for a good citizen to volunteer and to do work which is beneficial for society without any pay. At the same time, only one third of the population thinks that a good citizen should be critical towards the government or the opposition while one fifth of the population thinks that a good citizen should participate in protest

²⁸ For this question a card was used with a four-point scale: "Not important at all;" "More unimportant than important", "More important than unimportant", "Very important."

rallies. The data of the last three survey waves (2015, 2017 and 2019) is mostly identical, although some changes have been observed since 2009. The most striking change is the increase in support for volunteering: in 2009, 21% of the population considered volunteering to be “very important” and an additional 27% believed it to be “more important than unimportant” for a good citizen, against 12% who thought that it was “not important at all.” Since 2013, the proportion of those who think that volunteering is “not important at all” has decreased to 2%, though in the case of representatives of ethnic minorities, the corresponding share was 10% both in 2017 and 2019. At the same time, over the past few years almost half of the Georgian population has been reporting that volunteering is “very important” for a good citizen, while the sum of the answers “very important” and “more important than unimportant” reached 89% in 2019.²⁹

The share of the population which thinks that participation in protest rallies is important for a good citizen has almost doubled since 2009. In 2009, only 12% of the population believed participation in protest actions to be “very important” and another 18% thought it to be “more important than unimportant” for a good citizen. The corresponding shares in 2019 stood at 22% and 36%.

The share of the population which thinks that a good citizen should be critical towards the government has also increased. In 2009, only 25% of the population thought this to be “very important” and another 27% thought it “more important than unimportant” for a good citizen. The respective shares of the population in 2019 stood at 33% and 39%.

Since 2013, the share of affirmative answers to the following question has increased: “In your opinion, how justified or unjustified is sharing information with the police voluntarily, if you have witnessed a crime?” In 2019, as much as 48% of the population reported that this is always justified. This increase is especially notable in the case of ethnic minorities, among whom affirmative responses jumped from 27% to 43%.

The Georgian population’s opinion about giving bribes continues to be negative: only 1% thinks bribery is “justified,” 7% thinks it is “sometimes justified” and 90% believes it is “never justified.” Two thirds of ethnic minorities (74%) think that giving bribes is “never justified,” a share which is 20% smaller than the respective share for the Georgian speaking population (92%). Some 20% of ethnic minority representatives reported that giving bribes is always justified (6%) or sometimes justified (14%).

The traditionalism of the Georgian population is especially strong in its views of gender roles. The attitudes towards certain types of behavior observed in the 2019 survey, speak of deeply rooted prejudices regarding gender norms. In particular, men having sexual relationships before marriage is “always justified” for 25% of the population, while women doing the same is “always justified” for only 7% of the population and “never justified” for 66% of the population. It is worth noting that answers to this question have remained virtually unchanged since 2013. Similarly, extremely insignificant changes have been noted in the attitudes towards unmarried women who become

²⁹ In 2019, 41% of ethnic minorities thought volunteering to be “very important” and an additional 29% thought it to be “more important than unimportant” for a good citizen.

pregnant and give birth: in 2013, as many as 56% of the Georgian speaking population and 83% of ethnic minorities believed this to be never justified; in 2019 the corresponding indicators stood at 50% and 74%, respectively.

Since 2015, Europe Foundation studied the population's opinions on how important human rights should be in relation to the state's interests. To this end, a scale with two conflicting statements was used: "*State's interests should always prevail over human rights,*" and "*Human rights is a supreme value and should be protected above all.*"³⁰ Around half of the population acknowledges the supremacy of human rights and this result has remained stable in every survey wave conducted since 2015. Answers to this question reveal rather indicative differences between the opinions of the Georgian speaking population and those of ethnic minorities. In 2019, only 36% of ethnic minority representatives fully agreed that "*Human rights is a supreme value and should be protected above all,*" compared to 55% among the Georgian speaking population. The statement "*State's interests should always prevail over human rights,*" was fully shared by only 6% of the population.

The ownership of agricultural land is one of most charged issues in Georgia. As a rule, the population deems unacceptable not only the ownership but also the cultivation of land by foreigners. The past few years have seen many amendments to the Georgian legislation, restricting the rights of non-citizens to own or use agricultural land.³¹ The survey used a scale with two conflicting statements: "*Only citizens of Georgia should own land in Georgia, no matter how they use this land*" and "*Land in Georgia should be owned by those who will use it in the most profitable way (cultivate it, build on it, mine it, etc.) regardless of their citizenship.*"³² The share of those who believe that "*Only citizens of Georgia should own land in Georgia, no matter how they use this land*" has increased from 33% to 49% since 2015. Conversely, only 13% (in 2015) and 10% (in 2019) of the population fully agreed that "*Land in Georgia should be owned by those who will use it in the most profitable way (cultivate it, build on it, mine it, etc.) regardless of their citizenship.*" Thus, in 2019, almost half of the population vehemently opposes the sale of land to foreigners. Taking into account the opinions of those who share this position, but less vehemently (that is, those who chose Codes 1, 2, 3 and 4 on the scale), the situation has become really worrying, as their proportion reaches 70%, whereas only 18% of the population believes that land in Georgia should be owned by those who will use it in the most profitable way (Codes 6-10). The opinions of ethnic minorities on this issue only insignificantly differ from those of the Georgian language population.

Following traditions and supporting people who are worse off are considered to be very important by the Georgian population while participating in protest actions and volunteering are less important. In 2019, only 6% of the population gives clear preference to

³⁰ Respondents used a 11-point scale (from 0 to 10) where Code 0 corresponded to a full agreement with the statement that the state's interests should always be above human rights while Code 10 corresponded to a full agreement with the statement that human rights is a supreme value.

³¹ See the Organic Law of Georgia on Agricultural Land Ownership, #4848-II, 25 June 2019, Tbilisi. <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4596123?publication=0#DOCUMENT:1;>

³² Respondents used an 11-point scale (from 0 to 10) where Code 0 corresponded to a full agreement with the statement that "land should be owned by Georgian citizens alone" while Code 10 corresponded to a full agreement with the statement that "land should be owned by those who will use it in the most profitable way".

state interests over human rights. Differences between the opinions of the Georgian speaking population and those of ethnic minorities are often striking as the latter share more paternalistic opinions, especially when it comes to the sexual freedom of women. According to the results of Europe Foundation's surveys, no radical changes in terms of values have been observed in the population over the past few years.

Annex #1. Survey methodology

The sixth wave of Europe Foundation survey was conducted from 1 March to 20 March 2019.³³ To allow for as accurate a comparison as possible between the results of various waves, neither the questionnaire (see Annex #3) nor the survey's sample design has been virtually changed since 2013. The survey results are representative of adults living in Georgia, excluding the population living in the occupied territories. In addition to being representative of the general population of Georgia, the survey results are also representative of populations representing four strata: the population of Tbilisi, the population of other urban areas, the rural population³⁴ and the population of settlements compactly inhabited by ethnic minorities (ethnic Azerbaijanis and ethnic Armenians).³⁵ The average margin of error is +/-2.0%.

Primary sampling units were randomly selected in each stratum, proportional to the number of stratum's registered voters. Households were selected using random route sampling, while the respondents in each sampled household were selected using the Kish Table.

Some 2,746 face-to-face computer assisted interviews (CAPI method) were conducted using tablet computers in 2019. The average response rate was 49% across Georgia.³⁶ The interview language in primary sampling units compactly populated by ethnic minorities could be Georgian, Azerbaijani or Armenian, according to the respondent's choice.

To control the quality of the fieldwork, a control of the field was conducted from 23 March to 26 March 2019. Eight primary sampling units were selected for this reason. The control did not reveal any violations.

The results presented in this report are based on weighted data that correspond to the maximum possible extent with the position of the population.

³³ Previous survey waves within the framework of the European Integration program of Europe Foundation were conducted in 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015 and 2017. All the survey waves were conducted by CRRC-Georgia.

³⁴ Opinions of the population of these three strata are presented in the report as opinions of the "Georgian speaking population."

³⁵ Opinions of the population of this stratum have been studied since 2013. Their opinions are presented in the report as opinions of "ethnic minorities." It must be noted that, along with ethnic minorities, ethnic Georgians also live in such settlements, but in very small numbers. Within the scope of the 2019 survey of Europe Foundation, a total of 1154 respondents were interviewed in these settlements, including 574 Armenians, 487 Azerbaijanis, 78 Georgians, four Russians, one Abkhaz and nine respondents who identified themselves as representatives of another ethnic group; one respondent found it difficult to name his own ethnicity.

³⁶ Non-response differed by strata: 23% in Tbilisi, 54% in the other urban settlements, 68% in the rural settlements, 77% in the ethnic minority stratum.

Annex #2. Ethnic minorities

Since 2013, the surveys of Europe Foundation have specifically studied the views of representatives of Georgia's ethnic minorities who live in compact settlements in Georgia. Similar to previous waves, the share of ethnic minorities interviewed was 10% in 2019. This annex aims to describe basic demographic indicators of this group.

Ethnic Azerbaijanis and ethnic Armenians are the largest minority groups in Georgia. The survey aimed to, first and foremost, study the views of representatives of these groups. According to weighted data, in the settlements compactly populated by ethnic minorities (i.e. in the so-called ethnic stratum) the share of Azerbaijanis comprised 66% while the share of Armenians was 27%.³⁷ Some 64% of the questionnaires in this stratum were completed in the Azerbaijani language while 26% of the questionnaires were completed in Armenian. It is worth noting that in 2019, 38% of the representatives of this stratum said that they did not know Georgian at all. This indicator has not changed since 2017. Only 8% of respondents evaluated their Georgian language abilities as advanced. It is extremely important that no notable differences in the knowledge of Georgian by age group are observed: the change of this indicator is within the limit of the margin of error for various age groups.

Interestingly, while the evaluation of the knowledge of Russian is better, it does not starkly differ from the self-evaluation of the knowledge of Georgian.³⁸ Only 11% from this stratum evaluated their knowledge of Russian as advanced whereas 22% had no basic knowledge of Russian. The picture is absolutely different in case of English: in the settlements compactly populated by ethnic minorities, 81% has no basic knowledge of English and only 1% has advanced knowledge of English. Corresponding indicators among the Georgian speaking population are 56% and 6%, respectively.

Similar to the results of previous years, the level of obtained education differs between the Georgian speaking population and ethnic minorities. In 2019, 21% of the Georgian speaking population said they had obtained a master's degree or a higher education level against 3% of ethnic minorities saying the same. A complete secondary education was named as the highest level of education obtained by 51% of the Georgian speaking population and 34% of ethnic minorities.

Intensity of use of, and presumably, access to the Internet have been increasing in both population groups. Compared to 2015, the share of the Georgian population using the Internet on a daily basis increased from 37% to 54%. In the case of ethnic minorities only, this share increased from 18% to 38% between 2015 and 2019.

As regards the employment structure of the population, there are two notable differences between the Georgian speaking population and ethnic minorities: the share of employed people among ethnic minorities (full-time and part-time workers, including seasonal workers) is almost three times as low as the share of employed people among the Georgian speaking population (10% and

³⁷ As noted above, the absolute majority of representatives of this stratum are ethnic Azerbaijanis and ethnic Armenians although representatives of other ethnicities, including Georgians, may also live here.

³⁸ Since the share of this stratum is only 10%, the margin of error is relatively higher, ranging between 4% and 5%.

28% respectively) while the share of housewives is twice as high (24% and 11%, respectively). These differences have remained virtually unchanged since 2013. It should be noted that there is no difference in the ratio of employees by gender: in the cases of both women and men, the share of employees is three times higher among the Georgian speaking population than it is among ethnic minorities. In terms of self-employment, insignificant differences are within the margin of error. A much smaller proportion of ethnic minorities name the salary of a family member as a source of income (17%). In the case of the Georgian speaking population, this source is named by 57%, though the results differ by settlement type: 62% in Tbilisi, 67% in other urban settlements and 45% in rural settlements.

The two main sources of income for ethnic minorities are the sale of agricultural produce (46%) and pensions and state assistance (30%). Interestingly, the latter source is named by a large proportion of the Georgian speaking population – 48%. Against the backdrop of such differences it is rather surprising that, similar to the findings of previous waves, both groups evaluate the economic condition of their families almost similarly (Table 2).

Table #2

Relative to most of the households around you, how would you describe the current economic condition of your household? Is it ... (%)

	2017		2019	
	Ethnic minorities	Georgian speaking population	Ethnic minorities	Georgian speaking population
Very good	0	0	0	0
Good	7	5	7	7
Fair	70	67	70	74
Poor	16	21	19	13
Very poor	4	5	3	3
<i>Don't know</i>	1	1	1	1

Since the ethnic origin of people living in Georgia is closely linked to religious denomination, it is no wonder that the Georgian speaking population and ethnic minorities follow different religions – an absolute majority of the Georgian speaking population (90%) is Orthodox Christian, 67% of ethnic minorities follows Islam and 21% follows the Armenian Apostolic Church.