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Georgian Diaspora and Current Diaspora Policy in Georgia

Abstract

Apart from historical diasporas, over million Georgian citizens reside abroad these days. Majority of them who went abroad in search of jobs should be considered migrants. Diaspora has great importance both for their families and Georgian economy. Therefore, Georgia needs to have a well-considered diaspora policy in place.

Studying the interest spheres of diaspora members, their problems, the ways of strengthening their links with Georgia and developing the relevant policy is the biggest challenge for Georgian political parties, especially for the ruling party, which is responsible for carrying out the adequate diaspora policy. In this article we will try to look at the present day diaspora policy for which purpose we will discuss “2016-2020 Migration Strategy of Georgia”, the document developed by the ruling party (“Georgian Dream”) and carry out content analysis of 2016 election platform on diaspora of the above party and make comparisons.

Key words: Georgia; Georgian diaspora; Diaspora policy.

Introduction

Unfortunately, the State Minister’s Office on Diaspora Issues does not have any accurate data on the number of citizens of the present day Georgian diaspora, since, on their explanation, the majority of our compatriots reside abroad illegally; consequently, they are not registered with the Consular Record Division. Besides, the intensiveness of movement from country to country is rather high. Although there are no exact data on the number of Georgian citizens residing outside the country, the fact is that this figure is quite high. As it turns out, according to unofficial statistical data, the number of our compatriots residing abroad amounts to about 1 607 000. The most citizens reside in Russian Federation. Out of 800 000, 285 915 (2009) are the citizens of Russian Federation. The next country according to the number of migrants is Greece where the number of our compatriots equals to 250 000, although 100 000 out of them are ethnic Greeks. It is followed by Ukraine (150 000). Other countries accommodating big number of immigrants are: Turkey (100 000), the USA (80 000), Azerbaijan (35 000), Spain (30 000), Germany (25 000) , etc. That is why it is very important that Georgia has a well-considered, proper diaspora policy.

During Parliamentary elections, in contrast to other parties, “Georgian Dream” devoted great attention to diaspora issues in their election platform and provided the constituents with detailed information on their vision regarding diaspora policy. Some parties did not even mention migrants in their electoral programs while others only limited their program to promises such as “in case of winning, we will create all conditions in Georgia for immigrants to return to their native country”.

Migration Strategy

Taking into consideration the fact that “Georgian Dream –Democratic Georgia” was elected for the second term in 2016, we present the vision of the “Georgian Dream” and compare it with the “Migration Strategy of Georgia for 2016-2020” to demonstrate novelties.

“Migration Strategy for 2016-2020 of Georgia”¹ was designed by the state commission on migration issues. The document consists of several chapters presenting detailed steps to be made and the ways of their implementation. According to the document, the goal of the migration policy of Georgia is to create such legislative and institutional environment for migration management by 2020 which will ensure closer approximation of the country with EU, facilitate peaceful cohabitation of various religious, cultural and ethnic groups, protect migrants’ rights and their successful integration into society, promote reintegration of returned migrants, use positive economic and demographic aspects of migration to the advantage of the country’s development and increase legal migration opportunities for the citizens of Georgia.

The target group of the strategy includes different categories of citizens. Among them are citizens of Georgia residing abroad and diaspora representatives. Also, migrants returned to Georgia (State Commission on Migration Issues , 2016-2010 Migration Strategy, 2015).

Election Platform of the “Georgian Dream”

As it has already been mentioned, compared with other parties, “Georgian Dream” placed great emphasis on Diaspora issues in their election program.

¹ Migration strategy 2016-2020 is the third strategic document defining migration policy in Georgia. The first document serving the similar aims was created in 1997 which was the concept of migration policy of Georgia approved by the President of Georgia. It presented the vision of the state regarding the regulation of immigration processes, international protection, and internal migration. The concept mainly was of a declaratory character and lacked implementation mechanism of an action plan. The Migration Strategy 2013-2015 approved by the government and its Action Plan laid down the basis for the institutional development of migration management mechanisms in Georgia; important steps were made for improving the legislative framework and its approximation to EU Acquis. Currently, cooperation with the EU member states and other countries is developing at a fast pace to increase the basis for legal migration, and prevent illegal migration, and transnational and trans-boundary organized crime. A special attention is paid to the development of mechanisms facilitating return and reintegration of Georgian citizen. <http://diaspora.gov.ge/nd/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/2016-2020ww.migraciis%20strategia.pdf>

The Party pointed out the activities that had already been carried out in this direction and also made promises to be fulfilled in case of winning the elections. The program emphasized the protection of Georgian language and identity as well as the importance of strengthening the links between Diaspora and Georgian state.

The program stressed the important role of diaspora in the economic and social development of Georgia. It also indicated the necessity of carrying out substantial work the promotion of Georgia among diaspora and the plan to make an effective use of intellectual resources of diaspora representatives pointing out “Diaspora investments” that had already been made in various spheres.

Different from the strategy, the election program of the Georgian Dream addressed such issues as: supporting Sunday Schools abroad, training teachers and providing a single curriculum, developing youth projects and running summer camps.

According to the program, “Georgian Dream” is going to contribute to the promotion of Georgian language and literature abroad and develop the network of Georgian language study courses. The program also contains promises regarding the elaboration of the action plan and its implementation for Le Ville estate. As well as that, the ruling party promised the electorate to define the criteria for recognition of “Diaspora organizations” and support their structural development (“Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia, election program for 2016 Parliamentary elections).

Strategy	Platform
1. To channel the potential of remittances to the social-economic development.	1. Involvement of Georgian citizens residing abroad and their family members in Georgia in state programs supporting entrepreneurial and innovative activities.
2. To organize a sustained information campaign and awareness raising activities in Georgia and outside the country.	2. Ensure having information-consultation service in place based on a “single window” principle.
3. To improve integration policy of Georgia; it is also possible to put the revision of the relevant institutional framework and development of legal changes on the agenda.	3. Improvement of reintegration state program for the citizens of Georgia returned to their native country.
4. To renew Georgian legislation in the sphere of regulating migration to a considerable extent.	4. Revision of the legal status of citizens residing and abroad and the rule of issuance of a certificate.
5. To conclude international agreements between the states on visa free entrance and a short-term stay in contracting states observing the reciprocity principle.	5. Simplification of legal migration procedures abroad for Georgian citizens; working with partner countries to achieve beneficial immigration regimes.

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Diaspora and Georgian Opposition Parties

The review of election platforms of political parties participating in 2016 election has revealed ² that none of them had a comprehensive program regarding the relationships with Diaspora. However, several parties had certain proposals concerning the above.

In the election programs of “The United National Movement” and “Irakli Alasania- Free Democrats” nothing was said about the Georgian citizens residing abroad. In its election program, “Alliance of Patriots of Georgia” only focused on Georgian historical Diaspora in Turkey. “Nino Burjanadze-Democratic Movement” talked about the importance of creating “Georgian Houses” abroad that would be oriented at the promotion of Georgian culture. “Labor Party of Georgia” pointed to the importance of “Return Fund” that would serve the process of the return of Georgian citizens, their reintegration and adaptation.

When implementing Diaspora policy, “Georgian Dream” may take the initiatives of other parties into consideration, for instance, the idea of “Georgian Houses” and “Return Fund”.

Conclusion

„The Migration Strategy of Georgia 2016-2020” is an important document for Georgian Diaspora policy, although there are still many components that need to be improved. Relationship with diaspora is a long and complicated process requiring proper planning and taking mutual interests into account. Despite the importance of diaspora for our country, as a result of looking at the parties’ election programs it became evident that they, in frequent cases, do not have any deliberate plans on the relationship with diaspora, and many of them do not even mention diaspora issues in their programs. The ruling party “Georgian Dream” devotes the most attention to diaspora issues in their election program.

² The following parties that overcame a 5% barrier and became the members of parliament have been considered. (“Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia”, “United National Movement” “Alliance of Patriots”). Also presented are the programs of the parties that have overcome a 3% barrier (“Nino Burjanadze-Democratic Movement”; “Irakli Alasania – Free Democrats”; “Labor Party of Georgia”, “Paata Burchuladze – State for the People”. It should be noted that no reference can be found on the document of the election program by “Paata Burchuladze – State for the People”.

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