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# Civil Society Organizations (CSO) as a challenge to Georgia's democracy consolidation<sup>1</sup>

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ABSTRACT

In the article, we try to present the general characteristics of Georgian CSOs. To this end, we present the CSO development process in Georgia, the basic categorization, opinions of researchers of civil society in Georgia on its current state and the challenges facing further development of these organizations. We also cite the results of research on the condition of Georgian civil society conducted within the framework of: Caucasus Barometer, Freedom in the World (Freedom House) or CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia. In the last part, we present the preliminary results of the research project entitled “Civil Society Development for Participatory Democracy in Shida Kartli Region”, which verifies correctness of the theses on Georgian civil society functioning in the literature.

Democracy has not always been as widespread in the world as it is today. When the third wave of democratization began in the 1970s (Huntington 1991), research conducted by Freedom House showed that there were only 41 democracies among 150 independent states (1974). Highly concentrated in the region of Western Europe and North America, they accounted for 27% of countries (cf. Shin 2007, p. 310). In 2004, there were 122 democracies out of 192 independent states, and in 2017 – one state more. In the same year, democracy faced its most serious crisis in decades as its basic tenets – including guarantees of free and fair elections, the rights of minorities, freedom of the press, and the rule of law – came under attack around the world (Freedom House 2018). These facts lead to questions – resulting from fears – about the “strength” of democracies, especially those still on the way to consolidation. One such state is Georgia, which after the collapse of the Soviet bloc took a difficult and winding route on the third wave of democratization. On 31 March 1991, 98.91% of Georgians voted in a referendum in favour of independence, which was duly proclaimed on 9 April 1991. Given the heritage of Soviet rule and a series of intense social conflicts, the emergence of Georgian democracy was considered a specific phenomenon. Among the reasons for its “success”, the existence of a vibrant civil society was mentioned, which was seen as evidence of Georgia’s democratic credibility. Currently, after almost 15 years of observing the process of Georgian democratization, there is no unequivocal opinion on the condition of Georgian civil society. Theses are also advanced about the possibility of its weakening due to strong links with the “West” which, along with the rise of nationalist populism, can change its policy towards Georgia, in a radical scenario even terminating its financial and substantive engagement in the development of Georgian CSOs.

Accepting the premise that civil society is an important element of democracy without which development of a democratic system of government

would be hindered, and that the existence of civil society favours participative attitudes that should be a permanent element of democratic decision-making processes, we assume that it is, on the one hand, a form of participation in the decision-making process desired by society or citizens and, on the other hand, the activity of society in this process optimal for decision-makers. Adopting these two perspectives, we would like to open a discussion about risks to Georgian democratic progress resulting from the condition of its civil society.

In the article, we try to present the general characteristics of Georgian CSOs. To this end, we present the CSO development process in Georgia, the basic categorization, opinions of researchers of civil society in Georgia about its current state and the challenges facing their further development. We also cite the results of research on the condition of Georgian civil society conducted within the framework of: Caucasus Barometer, Freedom in the World (Freedom House) or CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia. In the last part, we present the preliminary results of the research project entitled “Civil Society Development for Participatory Democracy in Shida Kartli Region”, which verifies correctness of the theses on Georgian civil society functioning in the literature

### **The role of civil society in the process of democratization of the state**

Researchers of democratization processes have not reached an unequivocal consensus as to the role of civil society in their initiation. We hear opinions indicating that civil society initiates democratization processes (Linz, Stepan 1996), but also ones according to which civil society emerges only after the transition to democracy.

Democratization is described as a number of interrelated morphogenetic processes, meaning that some of its phases are conditioned by changes produced by the earlier phases of the same process. In the literature on the subject, we also find various analytical categories of the democratization process. One of them, by Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński, distinguishes the following stages of transition to democracy: (1) The “initial” phase in which “transformational” social processes are activated; the “transformative power” of a given process is characterized by its ability to change the old regime into a new social system. (2) The “inter-system” phase in which the old system no longer works, but the new one is just beginning to emerge. (3) The phase of “consolidation”, during which the democratic system of government becomes stable and, in practice, becomes the only space in public life available for the mutual play of interests and values (Wnuk-Lipiński 2010, p. 316). The author of the above concept believes that only a vibrant civil society can stop a process that undermines the consolidation.

### **The process of civil society development in Georgia**

Laurence Broers believes that the development of Georgian civil society results from two factors. First of all, from the specificity of Georgia itself – a country

which, lacking valuable natural resources such as oil or gas, has not had the economic means to either suppress or to foster civil society groups. Secondly, since its independence in 1991, Georgia has been striving to identify with Europe and has treated the development of civil society as a confirmation of the rationality of co-financing of the Georgian political transformation by the West (cf. Ishiyama, Mezvrishvili, Zhgenti 2018, p. 20).

We can distinguish three stages in the process of development of civil society in Georgia. The first one is directly related to the structuring of the independent Georgian state based on Western standards and democratic principles. At that time, independent political groups were established in the form of civil society organizations and political parties. Gemma Piñol Puig characterizes civil society organizations established in that period as strongly nationalist, cherishing anti-communist values and adhering to liberal principles. The structures of these organizations were poorly developed, and they were run by volunteers. At this stage, private armed groups were formed, which began as patriotic associations but eventually morphed to include criminal elements which used extortion as a method of raising funds. In connection with great interest of international organizations in promoting democracy through civil society organizations, they began to support financially and technically the strengthening and development of Georgian CSOs. These, in turn, adopted Western values as priorities and began to focus on the protection of human rights and democracy. This favourable situation (financial and substantive support) resulted in a huge increase in the number of CSOs and, as Ghia Nodia from Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development writes in *Civil Society Development in Georgia: Achievements and Challenges*, led to the NGO-isation of society (Nodia 2005, p. 14). Małgorzata Sikora-Gaca completes the picture of the first phase of civil society development in Georgia by stressing that, until 2005 or so, the operating objectives of non-governmental organizations in Georgia were not fully specified. An excessively global approach resulted in the rapid disintegration of the created organizational structures. Faced with the economic ruin and social catastrophe of the young Georgian democracy, a significant part of the “third sector” organizations focused on combating poverty and improving the standard of living. These organizations implemented projects primarily in the areas of education, health care and social security. Dialogue with business on these issues was most often overlooked. A characteristic feature of these organizations was that, after the end of their activities for the benefit of an external entity (state or international), they transformed into private companies providing commercial services. Thus, they assumed the character of business organizations which, according to the Caucasian mentality, begin to strive for power. Thus, their social and civic ideals disappear (Sikora-Gaca 2014, p. 418–419). Gemma Piñol Puig’s report points to Mikheil Saakashvili’s rule as to the beginning of the second stage of development of Georgian civil society. In discussing this period, the massive transition of CSO employees to public administration is emphasised. This caused some confusion among society at large, which saw no difference

between civil society organizations and the government. Development agencies, meanwhile, shifted their priorities towards supporting the new government and then significantly reduced the funding of civil society organizations. Civil society organizations were no longer as strong, and entered a period of stagnation (Puig 2016, p. 16). A change occurred when CSOs started cooperation with opposition political parties. Until the elections in 2012, CSOs focused on mobilizing citizens and ensuring peaceful democratic elections by providing independent observers. CSOs were defined as entities initiating political changes in Georgia. The third stage, covering the last few years, is called the “division” of CSO tasks. Those based in Tbilisi play an important role in promoting and lobbying for human rights and management issues; local CSOs, meanwhile, focus on providing educational, social and health services as well as on development of local communities. In all cases, it is widely accepted that Georgian CSOs depend on aid (*ibidem*, p. 17).

Georgian CSOs differ among each other in their organizational structures, the number of employees and volunteers, the scope of statutory activities, and the sources of financing for their operations. The author of the report entitled *Situation Analysis of Civil Society in Georgia* divides CSOs in Georgia into four groups. CSOs operating in towns, the main aim of which is to promote human rights and democratic governance, belong to the first group. They are referred to as “old” CSOs, created by former political leaders or boosted by the inclusion of former officials and politicians on their boards. They are perceived by Georgians as the most effective and the best in terms of their influence on the authorities in responding to situations threatening civil rights and political freedoms. The second group comprises the so-called “classic” CSOs: non-governmental organizations, social organizations, trade unions, youth and cultural associations. Their activities are focused on specific sectors such as education, health, environment, people with disabilities and civic education. Most of them operate at the regional and local levels. They have basic organizational structures, with a reduced number of employees and limited financial resources. Religious CSOs account for the third group. They operate in similar sectors as CSOs from the second group, but they are not interested in politics and political processes. Muslim organizations pursue mainly social activities, and Orthodox, Catholic and Baptist organizations are more engaged in the provision of health and education services. The last group of Georgian CSOs includes strongly institutionalized organizations with international roots. These organizations support CSOs at all levels of political decision-making processes, facilitate and help in access to financial resources (participation in project consortia) and promote the building of CSO coalitions and networks (Puig 2016, p. 16–19).

### **The condition of civil society in Georgia**

According to the National Agency of Public Registry (NAPR), in 2016 there were 23,561 registered non-profit organizations in Georgia, an increase of almost 9% compared to 2015<sup>2</sup> (NAPR 2017). Georgian civil society organizations are widely

recognised as stronger, more dynamic and more active than those operating in most countries of the region. John Ishiyama, Lia Mezvrishvili and Nina Zhgenti tried to explain whether the existence of civil society in Georgia promotes institutional trust in society. The results of their research suggest that, of the countries of the region, the most developed network of non-governmental organizations has existed exactly in Georgia. It helps in the promotion of social and institutional trust. However, a significant part of Georgian CSOs depend on the “West”. Therefore, there is a risk that, as nationalist populism rises in the West, international engagement in Georgia may weaken (Ishiyama, Mezvrishvili, Zhgenti 2018, p. 26). The problem of the impact of financing of pro-democratic CSOs by the “West” is also noted by Brian Grodsky, who explores how inclusion of pro-democracy organizations within the state after a democratic breakthrough can either enhance or inhibit democratic consolidation, arguing that inclusion can actually weaken the CSO community by creating rifts between one-time partners with suddenly disparate agendas (Grodsky 2012, p. 1684). Also Irina Bregvadze from the Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia stresses that foreign grants remain the main source of revenue for the absolute majority of the surveyed organizations. Local fundraising is attempted, but fails to generate substantial revenues for the CSO budgets (Bregvadze 2011, p. 3). Agnieszka Cianciara develops this topic in her article devoted to the Europeanization of civil society in the Eastern Partnership countries. This author’s research leads to the conclusion that civil society in Georgia is supported more by American funds than those from the EU. That said, some EU Member States are also very active, e.g. Sweden and Germany. The beneficiaries of grants are primarily large professional organizations operating in the capital city. Meanwhile, civil society in Georgia is still heavily dependent on foreign donors and isolated from social needs on the ground. Additional challenges consist in the political polarization and in the growing influence of non-governmental organizations with a pro-Russian orientation (Cianciara 2014, p. 41).

According to the Freedom in the World 2018 survey, Georgia remains a partly free state. Freedom in the World is an annual global report on political rights and civil liberties, composed of numerical ratings and descriptive texts for each country and a select group of territories<sup>3</sup>. In the 2018 report, Georgia received 64 points out of 100 possible (the same as in 2017). This results from the fact that, although Georgia holds regular and pluralistic elections and its democratic trajectory has generally shown significant improvement in recent years, oligarchic actors hold outsized influence over policy and political choices and judicial independence continue to be stymied by executive and legislative interests.

Analysis of the current situation of CSOs in Georgia can be found in the 21st edition of the CSO Sustainability Index (CSOSI) for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia<sup>4</sup>, covering developments in 2017. This year’s Index reports on the state of CSO sectors in 24 countries across the region, addressing advances as

well as setbacks in seven key components or “dimensions” of the sustainability of the civil society sector: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, sectoral infrastructure, and public image. The Index is intended to be a useful source of information for local CSOs, governments, donors, academics, and for others who want to better understand and monitor key aspects of sustainability in the CSO sector.

In 2017, the indexes for Georgia in the above areas were as follows: Overall CSO Sustainability (4.1); Legal Environment (3.3); Organizational Capacity (4.4); Financial Viability (5.0); Advocacy (3.7); Service Provision (4.1); Sectoral Infrastructure (4.3) Public Image (3.8).

The report emphasises that the legal environment for civil society in Georgia is generally favourable, although it does not provide sufficient incentives or mechanisms to support CSO sustainability. CSO registration is very quick and easy, with registration readily possible in a single one work day. Liquidation procedures, however, are lengthy and complicated, which results in many defunct organizations that exist only on paper. There are no legal impediments to CSOs competing for government or foreign funding. CSOs can engage in economic activities, but are taxed at the same rate as commercial organizations (*The 2017 CSO Sustainability Index... 2017*, p. 90).

Key challenges for the Georgian CSO sector comprise organizational capacity, which deteriorated slightly in 2017, and financial viability. Most CSOs have a defined mission, but they rarely operate strategically. As a result, they are constantly exposed to lack of continuity of financing. Only several larger, more developed CSOs are able to employ permanent staff (and not only for specific projects). That is why there are many one-person organizations relying on the services of a small number of volunteers. CSOs have poor access to modern hardware and software technologies. Foreign governments and development agencies continue to finance most CSO projects. Business refrains from engaging in this sector due to loss of confidence in civil society organizations. CSOs are concerned that state funding may become politicized and that authorities may use them to influence or manipulate subsidiary beneficiaries. Only a handful of developed organizations have formal membership and collect membership fees.

As regards the advocacy area, in which Georgia received 3.7 points, the report indicates, inter alia, that Georgian politicians and authorities are generally open to cooperation with CSOs and try to form joint working groups. These partnerships, however, often do not bring tangible results. In 2017, Georgia also began its chairmanship of the Open Government Partnership, around which the Open Government Forum – Georgia mechanism coordinated the participation of citizens by fostering dialogue between the Government, CSOs, and the public. Infrastructure supporting the CSO sector remains extremely poorly developed. Existing support centres, including USAID, are located in the capital. Companies have little or no interest in seeking partnerships with CSOs. There is a clear discrepancy between these two sectors (*The 2017 CSO Sustainability Index... 2017*, p. 94).

A worrying situation is presented in the very low level of confidence in CSOs, which amounts to 23%, just like in 2016 (Caucasus Barometer 2017). According to MDF's Anti-Western Propaganda Monitoring Report for 2017, almost 2,000 anti-Western comments were detected in the seventeen media outlets monitored in 2017. According to the report, negative comments against non-governmental organizations tripled in 2017, while negative comments about the EU have doubled since 2016. The highest share of negative comments (25.9%) were directed at the United States, an almost threefold increase since the previous year, followed by NATO (18.4%) and the West in general (14.1%) (Kintsurashvili 2017).

### **The CSO and NGO sector in the region of Shida Kartli**

Shida Kartli is a mountainous region (bordering the Russian Federation in the north) located north of the capital city of Tbilisi. The capital of the region, Gori, is located about 80 km from the capital of the country. Both cities are connected by the East-West motorway running through the region and by the main railway line of the South Caucasus. A part of the area of Shida Kartli with the town of Tskhinvali is under the control of the separatist South Ossetian authorities. The region is divided into nine administrative and territorial entities: one city of Tskhinvali, which is the capital of the Republic of South Ossetia not recognised by the international community, and eight municipalities: Gori, Kaspi, Kareli and Khashuri, under the control of the Georgian authorities, and Tigvi, Eredvi, Kurta and Javi, located in areas under the control of the separatist authorities. The population of Shida Kartli amounts to over 300,000 inhabitants, almost half of whom live in the municipality of Gori. Shida Kartli is primarily an agricultural region. The level of urbanization is only 40%, and most of those in employment, as many as 80%, work in the agricultural sector, which generates only 15% of gross added value (GAV). The quality of life in the region and the level of economic development are at a relatively low level. Social problems afflict, in particular, internally displaced persons (IDPs) who fled from areas controlled by the South Ossetian authorities as a result of the Georgia-Russian war in 2008. They constitute 4.5% of the region's population. The majority of IDPs in Shida Kartli have settled in the municipality of Gori (70% of all IDPs). The social and economic integration of internal refugees is one of the most important challenges faced by the region (*Shida Kartli Regional Development Strategy 2014–2021* 2013, pp. 5–6).

The general condition of the region is also reflected in the condition of its third sector. The low level of socio-economic development combined with the apparent low level of social trust and social apathy means that favourable conditions for development of civil society and of the non-governmental organization sector have not emerged in the region. The number of active social organizations in the region, though difficult to unequivocally estimate, is only measured in tens<sup>5</sup>. The picture of the NGO sector in the Shida Kartli region emerges from the research carried out under the already mentioned project by the associa-



tion – *Information and Social-Economic Problems Research Centre* founded by employees of the University of Gori, where it has its headquarters. The authors of the study note that:

- The non-governmental organization and civil society organization sector suffers from a lack of communication strategies and of poor communication with other entities, especially local authorities; they also have problems communicating with groups for supporting which they has been established, which results precisely from the lack of communication strategies.
- The majority of the surveyed non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations are characterized by a lack of organizational and financial sustainability; they are susceptible to changes in the environment in which they operate.
- The majority of the surveyed non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations lack the ability to create and manage projects that are of key importance to them from the perspective of their successful participation in grant competitions organized under USAID or European Union programs (*Report... 2018, p. 10*).

Observations during the study visits to Shida Kartli confirm the research of the *Information and Social-Economic Problems Research Centre*. There is a lack of proper communication, cooperation and mutual support both among the organizations themselves as well as between the organizations and local authorities. Few organizations cooperate with the local government in areas such as advocacy activities, service activities for local authorities or the implementation of joint projects. Interestingly, none of the surveyed organizations admitted to lobbying in the local community (*Report... 2018, p. 6*). Sources of the problems should be sought both on the part of the local authorities and of the organizations themselves, whose activists show low competences in the field of non-profit organization management and poor skills in the area of social communication. However, a key issue here may be cultural factors that create structural barriers to development of the third sector and to civic activity in general. During the meetings with officials in all municipalities of the Shida Kartli region, an atmosphere of distrust towards social activists and non-governmental organizations was discernible. Social relations in the region are largely based on family relationships and friendships, which makes it difficult to show trust to people from outside the circle of family or friends. This pervasive lack of trust in social relations may also be the cause of low civic involvement of the region's inhabitants. People avoid setting up not only formal organizations, such as foundations or associations, but also social committees that could contribute to improving the quality of life in the immediate neighbourhood (street, hamlet, housing estate). This leads to atomization of collective life on the one hand and, on the other hand, to confinement to one's own family-friend circles, and thus makes it difficult to undertake any collective forms of activity (Morris, Klesner 2010, p. 1260). Local decision-makers also function in such circles, which is not conducive to entrusting local tasks to

non-governmental organizations and supporting their activities aimed at solving social problems in the region. As an example, one might mention one organization working for the benefit of disabled people from the city of Kaspi, running the only social day care home in this area and offering handicraft workshops to its wards. The activities of this association have not met with interest and support of local authorities, although it is one of the most active organizations in the region, contributing directly to improvement of the quality of life of the people it cares for. However, the attitude of distrust, usually mutual, makes it difficult to create a basis for fruitful and effective cooperation, which would contribute not only to development of civil society in the Shida Kartli region, but also to generally understood social and economic development, of which third sector entities are both an indication and one of generators (Keating, Thrandardottir 2017, p. 149).

The lack of support from public, government and self-government institutions for the non-governmental organization sector leads to poor effectiveness of foundations and associations in the implementation of their missions. Only a few organizations receive grants awarded by local authorities. Out of 19 non-governmental organizations from the Shida Kartli region surveyed by the *Information and Social-Economic Problems Research Centre*, only 4 (21%) admitted to receiving financial support from local public institutions in 2015-2017 while as many as 11 organizations obtained international grants (*Report...* 2018, p. 4). By comparison, according to surveys of the Klon/Jawor Association, as many as 60% of Polish non-governmental organizations in 2014 benefited from the support of local or state donors (*Polskie organizacje pozarządowe...* 2015, p. 14). Local government authorities are not willing to subsidize the activities of non-governmental organizations in the implementation of local tasks. When meeting with local officials in Georgia, one hears opinions that this amounts to unnecessary duplication of work which can be done better by local authorities than by third sector entities. One can get the impression that, on the one hand, there is mistrust towards people from outside the circle of family or friends, but on the other hand, especially in the case of local officials, there is a belief in the omnipotence of a bureaucratic machine, not only of the state, but also of self-government. In Poland, we observed a similar tendency in the initial phase of the systemic transformation, with local levels pervaded by what might be termed local government level decision-making centralism (Modrzejewski 2006, p. 96).

In such conditions, given a deficit of trust and very low or negligible institutional support from local governments, non-governmental organizations struggle with financial, organizational and managerial difficulties. That is why the Information and Social-Economic Problems Research Centre working in cooperation with three partners from the Visegrad countries: Research Institute for European Policy from Gdańsk (Poland), the association Agria Universitas from Eger (Hungary) and Civipoliso.p.s. from Olomouc (Czech Republic) implemented the project entitled *Civil Society Development for Participatory Democracy in Shida Kartli Region* addressed to local leaders and social activists from the Shidar

Kartli region. As mentioned above, the project was financed by the International Visegrad Fund and the government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In addition to the research aspect, the project had an educational and implementation facet. The partners from the Visegrad countries prepared training programs and participated in the actual training as supervisors. The educational program covered three deficit spheres, i.e. : (1) strategy development for communication and liaison – a training course prepared by the Czech partner; (2) CSO and NGO sustainability: building on European experience – a training course developed by the Hungarian side; and (3) project development and management – a training course prepared by the members of the Polish organization experienced in creating and implementing projects. The courses were run in March 2018. A long-term result of the project will be the creation of a *Virtual Social Platform for Cooperation*, joining local organizations into a cooperation network as well as providing a space for communication between non-governmental organizations and local and regional authorities and institutions (<http://www.iseprc.org>).

Of course, the long-term effects of the project will not be instantaneous, and one can not immediately expect a radical change in the reality of the third sector in the Shida Kartli region. However, activities of this type will gradually strengthen the non-governmental organizations community, hopefully contributing to changes in the mentalities which pose a major barrier to development of the third sector. At the same time, more attention should be devoted to education of children and youth in this area, because changing mentalities takes a vast amount of time and requires specific work which will prepare the young generation for life in a civil society of which non-governmental organizations are a constitutive component. The creators of the project “Civil Society Development for Participatory Democracy in Shida Kartli Region” were aware of this as they formulated the last of the main project goals: “Empower youth and the society at large to become more actively involved in decision-making in the region for civil society development by improving awareness of the civil society development in the Shida Kartli region at large at the grassroots level” (<http://www.iseprc.org>).

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Among the countries that chose the path to democracy under the influence of the third wave of democratization, Georgia is a specific phenomenon. Although it not yet in the group of countries that have managed to join the Euro-Atlantic structures, it still has such aspirations. The Georgian democratization strategy is extremely difficult. The ongoing “struggle” between the West (the USA/the EU) and the East (Russia) over the possibility of affecting the shape of political development in Georgia is a difficult challenge for the consolidation processes of Georgian democracy. Visible disappointment with the West and the growing influence of Russia exert a particularly negative impact on the possibility of prompt

strengthening and independence of Georgian CSOs. The current condition of CSOs in Georgia is stable, but without a significant increase in the existing level of democratic citizenship and, consequently, attempts to strengthen the independence of CSOs, starting cooperation with business, financial independence and professionalization of organizational development, it is likely that Georgian democracy will remain incomplete. The problem lies also in the way of supporting CSOs in Georgia by international and regional organizations, institutions and agencies. In this respect, it is necessary to understand the real “needs” of Georgian civil society and to make efforts to overcome the huge difference in the development of CSOs in the capital, the large cities and at the local level. Our project has confirmed many theses formulated about the current condition of CSOs in Georgia. One of the most important of these is the fact that local CSOs require special support not from large international organizations, but from similar organizations from countries that responded to the same third wave but passed the consolidation phase much better.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The publication was written as part of the implementation of the Visegrad grant “Civil Society Development for Participatory Democracy in Shida Kartli Region” (number: 21650031).
- <sup>2</sup> These numbers, however, include also government units such as kindergartens, which makes it difficult to determine the actual number of civil society organizations. The annual growth is attributed to easy registration procedures combined with an extremely complex liquidation process.
- <sup>3</sup> A country or territory is awarded 0 to 4 points for each of 10 political rights indicators
- <sup>4</sup> The Index’s methodology relies on CSO practitioners and researchers who, in each country, form an expert panel to assess and rate these dimensions of CSO sustainability during the year. The panel agrees on a score for each dimension, which can range from 1 (most developed) to 7 (most challenged). The dimension scores are then averaged to produce an overall sustainability score for the CSO sector of a given country.
- <sup>5</sup> The assessment of the activities of the NGO sector in the Shida Kartli region is based on passive observation and is the result of meetings with representatives of local NGOs and local authorities during two visits that the co-author of the article – Arkadiusz Modrzejewski made on 24–25.08.2017 and 19–22.07.2018 under the project “Civil Society Development for Participatory Democracy in Shida Kartli Region” financed by the International Visegrad Fund and the government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. As part of the first visit, in addition to the meeting with social activists and magistrates from Gori, similar meetings were organized in the other three cities of the region, i.e. Khashuri, Kareli and Kaspi.

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#### INTERNET SOURCES

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