

The Georgian Language

The Georgian language is the official language of Georgia. The status of the language is provided for by the Constitution. In one of the regions of Georgia - Abkhazia - the Abkhazian language, together with Georgian, also has the status of an official language.

History

The Georgian language is one of the most ancient languages in the world - its written monuments date back to the 5th century AD. During the 15-century history of the written Georgian language it has preserved a single system of development. It is noteworthy that the magnificent literary work of the 5th century - *Martyrdom of Shushanik* - is included in the curriculum of secondary schools and children aged fourteen or fifteen are able to understand it.

The Georgian alphabet went through several stages of development. The alphabet named Khutsuri was used from the 5th to the 11th centuries. The alphabet called Mkhedruli - a result of the development of Khutsuri - has been in use since the 11th century. Each sound of the Georgian language has a corresponding letter in the alphabet. One more interesting thing about it is that being one of the few alphabets in the world, it only serves the Georgian language.

According to the opinion of some scientists, the Georgian language belongs to the Ibero-Caucasian family of languages. To others, the Georgian language seems to be close to the Indo-European family.

During its long history, Georgia had to fight permanently to survive and be independent. Oriental empires tried to extend their power over Georgia, however, even during the most difficult periods, the Georgian language remained the official language of the country. It developed and became richer.

During the whole history of Georgia, only Tsarist Russia managed to introduce Russian as the language of the educational system. Under the Soviet rule, the Georgian language was reintroduced in the educational establishments, however, the totalitarian system was continuously trying to create legally a bilingual (Russian together with Georgian) system or introduce Russian in scientific organisations. An attempt was made to deprive Georgian of the official status in 1978; however, the efforts of the leadership of the Georgian Republic and the nation-wide movement resulted in the restoration of the official status of the Georgian language in the Constitution of Georgia.

Even under the totalitarian regime, Georgian scientists were greatly supported by the leadership of the republic in protecting and developing the Georgian language. Georgian scientists managed to investigate fundamental problems of the language, its rich vocabulary and dialects even under the Soviet regime.

Eight volumes of the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Georgian Language*, sixty volumes of *terminological dictionaries* in different fields of science, etc. were published in the Soviet period.

The State Commission for the Georgian Language made Georgia the only exception among the republics of the Soviet Union. The Commission consisted of writers and linguists and the Head of the Government chaired it. The Commission continues its active work today. The President of the country Eduard Shevardnadze now heads it. The Institute of Linguistics at the Academy of Sciences of Georgia is the basic institution of the Commission, which legitimates all of the new norms of the language and works to protect its purity. Its recommendations are obligatory for everyone.

The State Chamber of Language has been established in Georgia. It is a kind of executive body, which is supposed to guarantee the usage of the Georgian language as the official language in all the spheres of life.

Subcommittee for the State Language

The Committee for Education, Science, Culture and Sport of the Parliament of Georgia has the Subcommittee for the State Language.

A new democratic state with the rule of law is being built in Georgia. A completely new system of legislation is being created in this country. This issues new challenges with respect to the language too. The Subcommittee for the State Language of the Parliament of Georgia consists of well-known scientists, linguists, several writers and other MPs who are well informed on the problems of the language. They are trying to search for and introduce traditional Georgian terminology in the legislation of Georgia. In this way, great changes were introduced in the laws related to viticulture, the Criminal Code of Georgia and many other drafts. The Russian language dominated in the military field under the unified defence system in the Soviet period. The defence system of the democratic Georgia and its Army need Georgian military terminology. Together with the Ministry of Defence, the Subcommittee for the State Language promotes the use of the Georgian language in the defence system, finding traditional terminology and creating new ones. The same is true about other fields of state life.

The Subcommittee introduced a weekly television programme dedicated to the problems of purity of the Georgian language. Every Monday, a specialist speaks to the entire population of this country about incorrect forms used in the language and their correct versions. Incorrect forms are displayed on the screen, then they are crossed out and correct forms displayed. A well-known actor reads the text to make the information more effective and emotional. The programme is transmitted several times every day during the week. The process of correction of other incorrect forms and introduction of correct ones begins on the following Monday, etc.

The Programme of the State Language:

Together with Georgians, representatives of other ethnic groups, who fled from other countries because of repression and persecution and found refuge in Georgia, live in this country. Population of such ethnic groups is dense in two of the regions of Georgia. Under the Soviet regime, Russian was the language of contact with them. The situation was supported by the national policies of the leadership of the Soviet Union. This is why the population was still partially bilingual in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Nowadays, the Georgian State is pressing towards the integration of the so-called ethnic minorities, so that they are able to participate actively in the construction of the state and the public life. Georgia is their motherland too, and the lack of knowledge of the language should not hinder them from exercising their rights and obligations. *The Programme of the State Language* was elaborated on the request of representatives of ethnic minorities and on the initiative of the Subcommittee for the State Language. The state budget allocates money for the implementation of the programme. Ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanians in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli - citizens of Georgia - have been very active in studying the state language for four years now. Several Georgian schools have been opened; the curriculum of the Georgian language is intensified in Armenian and Azerbaijanian schools; courses of Georgian have been opened for adults willing to learn Georgian.

It should be noted that alongside with this, more attention is paid at schools to the Armenian and Azerbaijanian languages and literatures. Ethnic minorities should not master Georgian at the expense of their native languages.

The Subcommittee for the State Language discussed several draft laws on the state language and returned them, together with its remarks, to the Ministry of Justice. The Subcommittee also discussed the draft law on the state language elaborated by the State Chamber of Language. The remarks of the Subcommittee were taken into account. The law on the state language will be adopted as a result of juxtaposition of different drafts and submitted to the Parliament of Georgia for discussion and adoption.