



სახელმწიფოს მიერ დემოკრატიის დაცვა კოვიდ პანდემიის დროს ქვემო-ქართლის რეგიონში

ირინა ბენია

ასოცირებული პროფესორი,
თბილისის ჰუმანიტარული სასწავლო უნივერსიტეტი

აბსტრაქტი

მთავარი მიზეზი, რატომაც შევეცადე მემსჯელა იმ საკითხზე, დაიცვა თუ არა სახელმწიფომ დემოკრატია და ინფორმირებულობა ქვემო ქართლის რეგიონში იყო ის, რომ სრულიად ნათელი აღმოჩნდა სახელმწიფოს მხრიდან ამ საკითხის ვერ უზრუნველყოფა. ვიმსჯელებთ იმაზე, თუ რა სახის სისუტეები გამოვლინდა ამ რეგიონში: სტრუქტურული უმუშევრობისა და სიღარიბის მაღალი მაჩვენებლები, ეფექტური სოციალური დაცვის სისტემის არარსებობა, ეთნიკური უმცირესობების ინტეგრაციის დაბალი დონე, რაც გახდა მთავარი მიზეზი CoVid-19 პანდემიური სიტუაციების დაძაბვის დროს, სუსტი სამოქალაქო საზოგადოება და რეგიონული მედია, პროფესიული განათლების და სამუშაო ძალის კვალიფიკაციის დაბალი დონე, ეთნიკური უმცირესობების წარმომადგენლების მიერ სახელმწიფო ენის უცოდინრობა და მათი სუსტი ინტეგრაცია საზოგადოებრივ და პოლიტიკურ ცხოვრებაში, საავადმყოფოებისა და საწოლების არასაკმარისი რაოდენობა, სამედიცინო პერსონალის არაადეკვატური კვალიფიკაცია, მოსახლეობის დიდი ნაწილისათვის შეზღუდული ხელმისაწვდომობა ყოვლისმომცველი სამედიცინო მომსახურებებისა და მედიკამენტების მისაღებად, საზოგადოებრივი ტრანსპორტის ინფრასტრუქტურის არადაამაყოფილებელი მდგომარეობა.

TO WHAT EXTENT THE STATE PROTECTED DEMOCRACY AND AWARENESS IN THE KVEMO KARTLI REGION DURING THE SPREAD OF THE COVID VIRUS

Irina Benia

Associate Professor,
Tbilisi Humanitarian University

Abstract

The main reason why I tried to find out whether state protected or not democracy and awareness in Kvemo Kartli region is that it was clear that the state couldn't defend it. I will discuss the weaknesses that we do have in this region: high rates of structural unemployment and poverty and lack of an effective social security system, low level of integration of ethnic minorities what was the main reason during Covid-19 pandemic situations tension, weak civil society and regional media, low level of professional education and qualification of the workforce, lack of knowledge of the state language by members of ethnic minorities and their weak integration into public and political life, insufficient number and inadequate infrastructure of hospitals and hospital beds, inadequate qualifications of medical staff, weak equipment of ambulance crews, limited access to comprehensive medical services and medicines for the majority of the population, unsatisfactory condition of public transport infrastructure.

Key words: Internal and external migration, demographic situation, ethnic minorities, migrants, economically active population, subsistence benefit, water resources, Algeti National Park, government and civil society, civil sector and media, free trade negotiations.

1. Introduction

Brief socio-economic description of the country

Kvemo Kartli region is located in the south-eastern part of Georgia. The region is bordered on the west by Samtskhe-Javakheti, on the north by Tbilisi, Shida Kartli and Mtskheta-Mtianeti, on the east by Kakheti, on the southeast by the Republic of Azerbaijan and on the south by the Republic of Armenia. Kvemo Kartli covers an area of 6.5 thousand km², 9.3% of the country. The population of the region is 511.2 thousand, which is 11.4% of the population of Georgia. The region includes 347 settlements – 7 cities, 6 small towns and 334 villages. 39% of the region's population lives in cities and towns, 61% in villages. 19 villages of Dmanisi municipality, 46 villages of Tsalka municipality and 35 villages of Tetrtskaro municipality belong to the highland settlements. 44.7% of the population are ethnic Georgians, 45.1% – Azerbaijanis, 6.4% – Armenians and 3.8% – Abkhazians, Ossetians, Russians, Greeks, Ukrainians and Kurds. At the same time, ethnic Georgians predominate in Rustavi and Tetrtskaro, Armenians and Greeks in Tsalka, and Azerbaijanis in Gardabani, Marneuli, Bolnisi and Dmanisi. The population density in the region is 128 people per km². There are 7 self-governing units in Kvemo Kartli region: Rustavi, Bolnisi, Gardabani, Dmanisi, Tetrtskaro, Marneuli and Tsalka municipalities. At the regional level, the executive power of the state is represented by the State Representative-Governor, whose administration is located in Rustavi. Rustavi directly borders Tbilisi.

2. Presentation of the main research material

According to the Kvemo Kartli Region Development Strategy for 2014-2020 a common vision for the development of the region is derived: By 2021, Kvemo Kartli will become one of the fastest growing regions with its solid economy and social prosperity. By 2021, Kvemo Kartli will become one of the fastest growing regions in Georgia with its solid economy and social prosperity, this will significantly increase existing production capacity and exploit new markets as a prerequisite for life for significant raising of the level and long-term well-being of the population. The strategy should facilitate the implementation of the given vision. Accordingly, the overall goal of the region development strategy is: Increasing the competitiveness and well-being of a party, the wise management of its natural resources and tangible assets, improving the business environment, attracting direct investment, overcoming social imbalances and ensuring sustainable economic growth.

The following are the strategic goals, objectives and proposals for the development of the region, the implementation of which is a priority: Capacity building of public authorities, effective management and use of natural resources in the region, capacity building of industrial and energy sectors, promoting the multifaceted and sustainable development of the energy sector, promoting the introduction of new technologies and innovations, development of basic infrastructure and construction, support for agricultural development, attracting foreign direct investment in the region, support for small and medium enterprises, support for the establishment of small and medium enterprises, development of trade and services sector, development of tourism industry and improving the tourist infrastructure, support for software initiatives and their implementation, improving the level of tourist services, first of all arranging utilities and other public services, establish an effective system of social security and health care, development of education, culture and sports, implement effective environmental activities, ensuring media and civil society development, reducing gender inequality and integrating ethnic minorities into public and state life. These was the goals according to the 2014-2020 strategy.

It is very important to underline the potential of this region: Kvemo Kartli region is rich in natural resources. Rivers, lakes, groundwater – are the water resources of Kvemo Kartli region. Compared to other regions of Georgia, mineral water and thermal water resources are small. There are 6 reservoirs in the region used for drinking water supply, energy and irrigation. The energy sector is represented by three thermal power plants located in Gardabani. Over the past decade, the imbalance between the rate of electricity generation and the demand for electricity has been gradually increasing, this still has a negative impact on the socio-economic development of the region. Therefore, great importance is attached to the development of small hydropower resources and renewable energy sources, which Kvemo Kartli has in sufficient quantities. Kvemo Kartli has significant potential in terms of energy generation, using renewable resources such as hydropower, wind and solar energy. Kvemo Kartli occupies 21.7% of the forest area, which is the lowest rate among the regions of Georgia. The area of the forest fund is 143.2 thousand hectares, of which 134.6 hectares are covered by forest. In terms of biodiversity, the Algeti Valley stands out, where the **Algeti National Park** has been established; Kvemo Kartli has a diverse mineral and mining industry operating at its base. There are more than 200 non-ferrous, ferrous and precious metal ores in the region, a large part of which is still unexploited. The building and paving stones on its territory are also a resource of strategic importance for the region, their stock is quite large. High quality minerals are extracted in the region – basalt and tuff. These minerals are in great demand in both domestic and foreign markets. In addition, copper, barite, tungsten, nickel, iron, zinc, sulfate, manganese, marble, gypsum, white stone are extracted. No less important role in the development of the industrial sector of the region can be played by the development of construction ceramics, glass containers and porcelain raw materials and the development of the production of ceramic and glass containers in the region. Clay-gypsum deposits of the region are considered as an important type of raw material.

The proximity of Kvemo Kartli to Tbilisi, Tbilisi Airport and the Republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia, its location at the intersection of transport corridors and the East-West Energy Corridor, and the high level of urbanization provide a good opportunity for regional development. Compared to other regions, Kvemo Kartli has a relatively positive dynamics of natural increase, which means that in the long run, there is a challenge to provide the growing population in the region with social infrastructure, social services and jobs. According to the available official data, the population of Kvemo Kartli is 511, 2 thousand people. Recent data show a positive balance of natural population growth in both cities (2693) and villages (1229) (3922 people, 7.7%).

Internal and external migration has a negative impact on the demographic situation of the region. Migration processes are mainly caused by difficult social status and small employment prospects. Most of them are looking for a job in Russia, while representatives of ethnic minorities are mostly traveling to Azerbaijan and Armenia. Among migrants leaving the region, men outnumber women slightly. Every second migrant helps the family financially. The average annual number of employees in the region was 25,238 people (5.26% of the region's population), which was 26.92% higher than the same period in previous years, 9736 people were employed in large, 7441 people in medium and 8062 people in small enterprises. In terms of average monthly salary, Kvemo Kartli ranks second among the regions of Georgia and lags behind only Mtskheta-Mtianeti. A significant part of the population of Rustavi is employed in Tbilisi. The income from hired labor occupies the largest share in the income of the population (41%). The number of economically active population in Kvemo Kartli region is 195.5 thousand, the number of self-employed is 122.5 thousand, the unemployment rate is 9.4%, the activity level is 64.2% and the employment level is 58.2%. Poverty rates are high in the region. In recent years, 45.9 thousand families were registered in the unified database of families in need, of which 9841 families received benefits. Kvemo Kartli ranks first among the regions of

Georgia with a low percentage of the number of families registered in the unified database. There are 73.6 thousand people receiving pension and social package in Kvemo Kartli, which is 14.4% of the population and significantly less than the national average (19.05%). Among the recipients of subsistence benefits, the age category of 40-60 years prevails, which once again confirms the critical level of unemployment in the region.

According to the official data of the business register, 31,250 entities are registered in the region, including 237 medium and 106 large enterprises. The value added created in the business sector in Kvemo Kartli amounted to 625.7 million GEL, and the assets realized in fixed assets – 2014 million GEL. The turnover of the business sector amounted to 2302.4 million GEL, the cost of output – 1844.4 million GEL, the number of employees in the business sector – 32268 people, and the average monthly salary of employees in the business sector – 547.5 GEL.

Factors contributing to the development of the business sector in the region as I already mentioned above are: its strategic location and proximity to Tbilisi, as well as neighboring Azerbaijan and Armenia. In recent years, Kvemo Kartli has seen positive trends in the development of various sectors of the economy. Significant improvements have been made in both industry and services.

Factors hindering the development of the business sector in the region are: weak commercial and basic infrastructure, low income of the population, small volume of investments, low level of development of local social capital, low qualification of market workers, high cost of bank loans and difficult access, low opportunities for alternative capital and lack of organizations that support business, lack of systemic information about local business potential and supply base, shortage of local budget resources.

What refers to **Government and civil society**, here we have a problem as the regional administration and local self-governments enjoy limited powers, financial and property resources. Consequently, their capabilities in terms of ensuring regional development are very limited. In addition, there is a need for systematic training of regional administration and local self-government, especially in areas such as strategic planning, spatial planning, public services, etc. The condition of the regional administration and the administrative infrastructure of the municipalities is unsatisfactory. There are no service centres responsible for providing administrative services to the population in the settlements. Kvemo Kartli region self-governing units have scarce budgetary resources.

It's necessary to refer to the issue of **Civil sector and media** as the non-governmental sector is poorly developed in the region. NGOs are mainly concentrated in Rustavi and Marneuli. Women's and ethnic minority rights communities are relatively well represented. NGOs largely implement projects funded by international donors. Consequently, their stability depends on donor funding.

There are 3 regional TV companies in the region. Regional print media is published periodically in Georgian, Russian and Armenian languages. The population has the opportunity to receive information in Armenian and Azerbaijani through the Public Broadcaster¹.

The main reason why we tried to find out whether state protected or not democracy and awareness in Kvemo Kartli region is that it was clear that the state couldn't defend it. What a kind of weaknesses do we have here: high rates of structural unemployment and poverty and lack of an effective social security system, low level of integration of ethnic minorities what was the main reason during CoVid-19 pandemic situations tension, weak civil society and regional media, low level of professional education and qualification

¹<http://gov.ge/files/275-38366-523465-136517.09.13%E2%80%931.pdf?fbclid=IwAR05jSd3DbpfXEC4opU3ZrOiGkw-RUZJBdsr7k4WeVm3YKi9b9mVLXdweAc>

of the workforce, lack of knowledge of the state language by members of ethnic minorities and their weak integration into public and political life, insufficient number and inadequate infrastructure of hospitals and hospital beds, inadequate qualifications of medical staff, weak equipment of ambulance crews, limited access to comprehensive medical services and medicines for the majority of the population, unsatisfactory condition of public transport infrastructure.

What a kind of dangers do we have in this region? – Destabilization of the political situation, financial and economic crisis, natural disasters, industrial accidents and epidemics, weak implementation of regional and municipal development plans.

What a kind of opportunities do we have to get out of the current crisis situation? – Opening new markets for Georgian products; Complete ongoing free trade negotiations with strategic partners – the EU and the US; Alignment of the interests of the enterprises operating in the region with the requirements and needs of the existing large-scale international projects; Target programs funded from the central budget.

Strong sides of the region as I already underlined above is proximity of the region to Tbilisi, Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia and active trade relations, biodiversity, positive dynamics of value-added growth in agriculture, high agricultural potential of the soils of the region, favourable natural conditions for the development of agriculture, abundance of irrigation water resources. What refers to the **weaknesses**, some of them are: Irrigation systems malfunction, low labour productivity in agriculture, low productivity of agricultural production, low level of agricultural modernization, low level of food safety, internal market disorganization, low competitiveness of products in relation to imported products and poor exploitation of pastures.

The damage to the world economy due to the pandemic amounted to 7 trillion dollars. This is an unprecedented economic downturn since World War II.¹ According to the heads of the big shopping centers in Tbilisi, the so-called Lockdown put them in front of a bitter reality, with 10 million losses for 6 centers each closed day. In this situation, the existence of a crisis situation in the Kvemo Kartli region is completely natural. We had the worst situation in Kvemo Kartli, 36% of those infected were from there. Namely in 3 municipalities – Bolnisi, Marneuli and Tetritskaro. We talked about the 2014-2020 strategy plan and we can say that not even half of all this is done, and the reason of this was just Covid-19-pandemic situation there, it isn't even close to reality. What is our state doing to rectify the situation after Covid-19? The state is trying to bring the region out of crisis. According to the draft budget, the budget of Marneuli for 2021 was set at 29,603,600 GEL.² With the help of the state, 200 new enterprises were financed within the framework of the United Agro Project, of which 25 new enterprises were opened in the Kvemo Kartli region. Rural and Agricultural Development Agency implements „Unified Agro Project“, which is designed for long-term development, it's goal is to create an environment that will contribute to increasing competitiveness in agriculture, stable growth in the production of high quality products, the introduction of international food safety standards.³

3. Conclusion

The research revealed that Covid-19 pandemic situation showed us that there indeed exist some problems in Kvemo Kartli Region that need to be payed attention to. It was said that Georgian Melioration Ltd will spend 338 000 GEL on repairing Kvemo Kartli reclamation infrastructure, this is necessary as far as with-

¹<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-51706225>

²<https://droa.ge/?p=92022&fbclid=IwAR0rn27yoXskX3vGhgXuRjQCSKhMvcbTws-SkYF3pQuJI8MSLAByDUSn7MQ>

³<https://commerciant.ge/post/ertiani-agroproeqtis-farglebshi-qvemo-qartlis-regionshi-mefrinveleobis-ferma-amoaqmedda>

out irrigation water supply it will be impossible to produce arable crops perfectly.¹ Kvemo Kartli reclamation funded, this means that the infrastructure will be maintained so that the agricultural sectors can be put into operation more efficiently.

As a conclusion, we can say that there is a lot to do in terms of strengthening and raising the involvement of population in social life, exactly the shortage of this awareness and knowledge caused all the problems raised during Covid-19 spring tension in Kvemo Kartli region.

¹ <https://commerciant.ge/ge/post/shps-saqartvelos-melioracia-qvemo-qartlis-samelioracio-infrastruqturis-mowesrigebashi-338-000-lars-daxardjavs>

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