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**Alternative report on
ARMENIA'S IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION
ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION**

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GENERAL SITUATION

In today's Armenia, ethnic minorities are still discriminated in all spheres of society. Different factors are at the root of this discrimination. The major one is the predominance of different cultural and social stereotypes towards people that are not ethnically Armenian and have a different religion to that prevailing in Armenia. This concerns people who recently arrived on Armenian territory, such as Syrian refugees or people of African origin, for example. However, it also includes people who have lived in Armenia for centuries, such as Boshha minority.

Cultural and social stereotypes go hand in hand and are grounded in the celebration of the Armenian people, a 98% majority of the population, and the Armenian culture. The corollary of this celebration is a tendency to label other people and cultures as inferior. Generally speaking, there exists in Armenia what one could call a national preference.

According to the Armenian Constitution, all schools in Armenia should be secular. However, a course called "The History of the Armenian Church" is imposed on all children from primary school age, and exclusively teaches the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church. This course is approved by representatives of the clergy, and the Armenian Apostolic Church has the right to participate in the development of the program and textbooks for the course, as well as to nominate and evaluate its teachers. In practice, the entire teaching process for this course is controlled by the Church.¹ No alternatives are offered to students of other religious groups or atheists. These children are also not allowed to skip these classes and must perform religious rites in class or, as reported in the case of Ezidi children in some schools, must stay in school corridors while the others pray in the classroom. There is also evidence that teachers of this course display a negative attitude towards children from religious minorities.² Education experts criticize the course for embodying a propaganda of intolerance to other religions (Oganes Oganesyan, professor of Yerevan State University); for failing to be secular and for imposing the idea that a real Armenian should believe in the Armenian Apostolic Church or they cannot genuinely claim to be Armenian (Armine Davtyan, researcher).³ Human Rights organizations take the same standpoint on the issue.⁴

In 2013, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that the Armenian authorities "revise the curriculum of schools in order to reflect the freedom of religion of all children and eliminate the compulsory subject of the History of Armenian Church from the curriculum".⁵ The government refused to implement this recommendation, and in public presentations education officials refer to the crucial role of the Armenian Church in building Armenian "spirituality", identity, and nation. The Minister of Education and Science, Armen Ashotyan, speaking at the National Assembly in May 2014, accused the authors of shadow reports on the issue of promoting "Western values" in contradiction of the views of Armenian society which is "not against the teaching of the history of the church".⁶ According to the representative of the National Institute of Education, Hasmik

¹ Hovhannes Hovhannisyan, PhD. Teachers of "Armenian Church History" subject at public schools of Armenia, 22.08.2016: <http://www.religions.am/eng/articles/teachers-of-%E2%80%9Carmenian-church-history%E2%80%9D-subject-at-public-schools-of-armenia/> The videos from open classes available in the Internet show that the course is not just education about the religion but definitely religious: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TeL2a2fDPXg>

² Gayane Mkrtychyan. In Armenia the teaching of religion is being criticized. 10.07.2013 (in Russian): <https://iwpr.net/ru/global-voices/в-армении-критикуют-преподавание-религии-в>

³ Id.

⁴ <http://www.religions.am/files/8860/library/legal/L013.pdf>

⁵ Concluding Observation of the CRC on Armenia, 63rd session, July 2013: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fARM%2fCO%2f3-4&Lang=en

⁶ Education Minister Defends Religious Education in Armenia's Public Schools, 22.05.2014: <http://epress.am/en/2014/05/22/education-minister-defends-religious-education-in-armenias-public-schools.html>

Margaryan, religion classes are necessary in schools to “teach the system of values”, to “round up Armenian spirituality”, and to guaranty the future of the Armenian nation.⁷

The fact that ethnic Armenians constitute an absolute majority of the population (11 recognized ethnic minorities constitute about 2%) is often used by authorities and other actors to justify and explain their failure to respect ethnic minorities’ rights, as well as to make statements on behalf of “the society of Armenia”. Thus, in arguing against the possible replacement of the “History of the Armenian Church” course with a course on the “History of different religions and cultures”, Vardan Navasardyan, director of the Center of Christian indoctrination of the Holy Echmiadzin, stated that more than 90% of the Armenian population belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church.⁸ This rhetoric has been shared by some minority NGO leaders. For example, Ghasan Tamoyan, a Yezidi community leader, considers it unnecessary for ethnic minorities to have representatives in Parliament, because on a legislative level all their problems are already addressed.⁹ Leaders of Armenia’s largest ethnic minorities (Yezidis, Russians, Assyrians, Kurds) who will participate in the elections and vie for the quota of 4 parliamentary places for the ethnic minorities, have stated that discrimination of against them “does not exist”.¹⁰

From a political perspective, Armenia is, on the one hand, a participant in the Eastern Partnership preparing for association with the European Union. This means that Armenia has obligations to adopt and improve its legislation and practices on combatting discrimination, corruption, and equality. On the other hand, it is a member of the Euro-Asian Economic Union and looks in many respects to the Russian Federation, including to that country’s negative influence in promoting “traditional values” and homophobia.

Despite the fact that Armenia is expected to devise new anti-discrimination measures and laws, its existing legal framework has yet to be reformed. Whilst the Armenian government have recognized the need to change the legal framework and announced that significant reforms should be expected in 2017, nothing has been achieved so far (the adoption of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation in accordance with modern standards is one of Armenia’s obligations within the framework of a 12 million Euro EU-Armenia Human Rights Budget Support program package for’sprovided by the European Union for the period 2016-2018¹¹). Moreover, the Armenian government has given no information about the timeframes for reforms to date. A dialogue between the Anti-Discrimination Coalition of Armenia and representatives of the Council of Europe and other institutions involved in the working group on the creation of the comprehensive anti-discrimination law is currently under way. However, there is no publically available draft of the law itself,¹² nor even one that is accessible at least to those NGOs who participated in the development of it and submitted their own proposals or recommendations.

Despite some changes to law these past years in Armenia, legislation still fails to provide a clear definition of racism, or direct or indirect racial discrimination. As a consequence, racial discrimination is practically never followed by a legal procedure. Article 226 of the Criminal Code (“Incitement to national, racial or religious hatred”) has never been evoked, and the Code on Administrative Offences provides no opportunity for application against hate speech or discrimination (the only article of the Code on Administrative Offences mentioning discrimination on racial or national grounds, Article 228, is about the equality of people under the administrative procedure).

⁷ Report on public discussion in the Media Center, 13.06.2013: <http://epress.am/en/2014/06/13/teaching-religion-in-school-in-armenia-justified-using-israels-example.html>

⁸ Gayane Mkrtchyan. In Armenia the teaching of religion is being criticized. 10.07.2013 (in Russian): <https://iwpr.net/ru/global-voices/в-армении-критикуют-преподавание-религии-в>

⁹ Ghasan Tamoyan: National minorities in Armenia don’t need representatives in the Parliament, 16.07.2016 (in Russian): <http://www.armenianreport.com/pubs/134525/>

¹⁰ National minorities in Armenia prepare for the parliamentary elections, 21.02.2017 (in Russian) <https://news.rambler.ru/caucasus/36155635-armyanskie-natsmenshinstva-gotovyatsya-k-parlamentskim-vyboram/>

¹¹ Information about the EU-Armenia Human Rights Budget Support program 21.01.2016 (in Armenian): [http://legalportal.am/cat/viewnews/2236%D5%BE; 08.04.2016 \(in Armenian and English\): https://www.facebook.com/eudelegationtoarmenia/photos/a.304215459632390.80842.302970569756879/1003110116409584/?type=3&theater](http://legalportal.am/cat/viewnews/2236%D5%BE; 08.04.2016 (in Armenian and English): https://www.facebook.com/eudelegationtoarmenia/photos/a.304215459632390.80842.302970569756879/1003110116409584/?type=3&theater)

¹² Fight Against Discrimination and the Necessity to Adopt Law on Anti-Discrimination in Armenia, 10.10.2016: <http://www.media-center.am/hy/1476187430>; At what stage is the project of the anti-discrimination law, 16.11.2016 (in Armenian): <http://www.media-center.am/hy/1479371648>

This lack of an adequate legal framework means that most cases of discrimination are not recognised as such and are consequently not documented. As neither the Criminal Code nor the Administrative Code provide people with effective legal protection from hate speech, individuals are mostly forced to resort to civil procedure, which whilst it can lead to a compensation award, does not recognize the discrimination factor. According to lawyer, A. Ghazaryan, Article 226 of the Criminal Code is weak, and there is no culture of initiating criminal cases under it.¹³

Example: The case of Nazik and Yuri Amaryan

In July 2015, four members of the Services of execution of judicial acts broke into Ms Nazik Amaryan's house. They injured her, bit her son Yuri and expelled them both from the house. According to Yuri, one of the men who bit him used hate speech referring to the Yezidi origin of the Amaryan family. Without receiving any medical care, Yuri Amaryan was taken to the police station and persuaded not to complaint against the officers. Eventually a criminal case was opened against Yuri Amaryan for "using force against a representative of the official authorities." Yuri's state-designated public defender, Ludwig Avetisyan, said that the discrimination based on nationality could be raised in this case but it was not reflected in the defendant's final position.¹⁴

In the context of an inadequate legal framework to oppose racial discrimination, both Armenian authorities and other public speakers deny that the problem of racism exists in the country. For example, the former Ombudsperson of Armenia, Larisa Alaverdyan, stated that there is no racism, and "racism-like" cases are not serious.¹⁵ At the same time, cases of intolerance, hate speech and xenophobia are not considered from a perspective of racism.

In school and university programs for 2017-2018 (Annex to the Decree of the Republic of Armenia No.1060-A of October 18, 2016) there are virtually no classes promoting tolerance, nor activities with a tolerance component. If they occur, such classes are usually initiated by NGOs without obstruction, though they do require the agreement of the school principal and a special authorization from the National Institute if the program covers several schools and provides regular lessons. In universities, nothing is organized at a national level whether among professors or between professors and students to promote tolerance or improve the understanding of national and ethnic backgrounds of students.

¹³ Racist Yerevan Teacher Won't Be Fired Because 'He Has a Right to Free Speech', 16.01.2017: <http://epress.am/en/2017/01/16/racist-yerevan-teacher-wont-be-fired-because-he-has-a-right-to-free-speech.html>

¹⁴ Prosecution Fails to Address Allegations of Ethnic Discrimination Against Yazidi Defendant, 9.09.2015: <http://epress.am/en/2015/09/09/prosecution-fails-to-address-allegations-of-ethnic-discrimination-against-yazidi-defendant.html>

¹⁵ Armenians are one of the most tolerant nations, 21.03.2016 (in Russian): <http://newsarmenia.am/news/armenia/armyane-odna-iz-samykh-tolerantnykh-natsiy/>

1. THE DOMINANCE OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL STEREOTYPES AS A BASIS FOR RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA

CELEBRATING THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE: NATIONALIST ORGANIZATIONS, POLITICAL PARTIES AND THEIR RHETORIC

Although the Armenian government denies that political parties and groups of ultra-nationalists' spread racist propaganda,¹⁶ some nationalist organizations and representatives of political parties frequently disseminate their racist or xenophobic ideas through posters, leaflets and stickers that are often made visible in public spaces. These contain discriminatory slogans, such as "An independent Armenia for the citizens of Armenia", "if you are a citizen of Armenia – you are an Armenian," "One nation, one religion", "Only the Armenian Apostolic Church".¹⁷

One of such organizations is "One Nation" (Mek Azg), whilst Armenia's Deputy Minister for Youth and Sport, Khachik Asryan, heads another nationalist organization the "Armenian Eagles".¹⁸ Armenia's Minister of Defense, Seyran Ohanyan, has expressed appreciation for the "important role of the 'Armenian eagles' in organizing the formation of military and patriotic upbringing and the ideological education of the youth".¹⁹ The organization also spreads nationalist ideology.

The Armenian authorities do not take sufficient measures to counter the rhetoric of nationalist organizations. Moreover, political leaders often openly support right-wing organizations and their members. For example, the MP, Eduard Sharmazanov, supported a nationalist attack on the DIY club, whilst another deputy of the parliament, Artsvik Minasyan said that the attackers acted to protect national values and national ideology.²⁰

Hayk Babukhanyan, MP, member of the ruling Republican Party of Armenia, is the director of Iravunk Media LLC, which produces the nationalist newspaper Iravunk. The editor of the newspaper, Hovhannes Galadzhyan, has repeatedly been convicted because of homophobic and nationalist publications. In 2014, on the 25th anniversary of Iravunk, the President of the Republic, Serzh Sargsyan, awarded Babukhanyan with the Movses Khorenatsi medal.²¹

In December 2013, the MP of the ruling Republican Party of Armenia, Manvel Badeyan, responded to a journalist by using hate speech and humiliating the Yezidi people. According to a representative of the Yezidi NGO Sinzhar, this is not the first time public officials have engaged in such behaviour.²²

The fact that nationalist organizations are intertwined with political figures clearly shows state support for the celebration of Armenian people over other nationalities. In Armenia, there is no effective legislative ban on the activities of organizations that promote and incite racial discrimination.

¹⁶ Information on the implementation of the UN CERD Recommendations by the Republic of Armenia (2012): http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fARM%2fCO%2f5-6%2fAdd.1&Lang=en

¹⁷ The web-site of the organization Mek Azg (in Armenian): <http://mekazg.do.am/blog/>

¹⁸ Information about Khachik Asryan, "Chairman and Founder of the Patriotic Civil Organization Armenian Eagles" on the web-page of the organization (in Russian): <http://www.hayocartsivner.am/KhachikAsryanRus.html>

¹⁹ The Minister of Defense of Armenia: The Armenian Eagles Organization has great input to the ideological education of youth, 05.02.2014 (in Russian): <http://www.yerkramas.org/article/68471/ministr-oborony-armenii-organizaciya-%C2%ABarmyanskie-orly%C2%BB-vnosit-bolshoj-vklad-v-ideologicheskoe-vospitanie-molodezhi>

²⁰ Ghayane Abramyan (EurasiaNet, USA). Marine Margharyan: "Faschist, savage propaganda is eligible on the state level », 29.05.2012 (in Russian): <http://www.armenianreport.com/pubs/34319>

²¹ Armenian Court Rules Against Hate-Spreading Newspaper, Obliges to Pay Compensation, 15.05.2015: <http://epress.am/en/2015/05/15/armenian-court-rules-against-hate-spreading-newspaper-obliges-to-pay-compensation.html>

²² Armenia Yezidi Group Delivers Toilet Paper to MP for 'Racist' Remarks, 10.12.2015: <http://epress.am/en/2013/12/10/armenia-yezidi-group-delivers-toilet-paper-to-mp-for-racist-remarks.html>

HATE SPEECH BASED ON RACIAL PREJUDICE AND STEREOTYPES

In the absence of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, there is a lack of regular monitoring of hate speech in the media and on the Internet, as well as an absence of appropriate responses to such cases by responsible bodies and effective procedures to protect victims. As such, expressions of racism go unpunished in practice.

Example 1: In January 2017, there was a scandal in social media about a family picture published by the Photo Center Marashlyan. In this picture, a black skinned father was dressed, like other family members, in Armenian traditional costume. More than 1,000 hateful comments followed, some of them even containing threats towards the family. The Photo Center had to delete the picture from its website, the first time in its practice.²³ Among racist comments about the need to “keep the purity of the Armenian blood” there were texts published by Levon Stepanyan, a teacher of School #52 in Yerevan. In particular, they stated: “It is cruel, but this is reality, don’t trick me with political correctness. Nature and history proved that niggers, as a rule, can do three things well: sing, dance and do sport. It has a simple explanation: niggers live according to their instincts, they have well developed body language, but we can’t say the same about their mental abilities. They have what they deserve... Don’t convince [me] to consider the mixed marriage of an Armenian woman and a Negro as normal”.²⁴ When asked by independent journalists from epress.am about whether there would be any disciplinary measures imposed on Stepanyan, the school’s director, Narine Sharyan, said that neither reprimand nor dismissal would be applied. According to her, “he gave evidence that mixed marriages lead to the disappearance of a species. He didn’t write ‘kill or burn this or that nation’, but referred to scientific research and said that mixed marriage is a mistake”.²⁵ Ovanes Ghaladzhyan, editor of the Iravunk newspaper, who regularly uses hate speech in his publications, supported Stepanyan in social media. A representative of the Ministry of Education and Science said that teachers have freedom of speech and thought.²⁶ The Ministry of Education reacted only after intervention from Peter Switalski, head of the EU Delegation to Armenia. This resulted in Levon Mkrtchyan, the Minister for Education, writing a letter to the Mayor of Yerevan and proposing the creation of a working group on the case, in order to evaluate the professional activity of Stepanyan and, if needed, to apply sanctions.²⁷ A representative’s havethought from e. This resulted in for Education writing proposing the creation of No information followed this proposal.

Example 2: Independent journalists reported that, “several students refused to study English from a teacher from Cameroon because of the color of her skin”.²⁸

Example 3: According to an eyewitness, in 2015, two black men were walking down the street in Yerevan when children threw stones at them and called them “Negro”.²⁹

Xenophobia and prejudice are also documented towards foreign students who are not of Armenian origin. These individuals have often reported that they suffer from hostility, teasing, disdain, and discrimination because of their language.

Example 4: A student from India reported that sometimes other students say “gimmy gimmy” (from the Bollywood movie “Dance, Dance”) when they pass by him to express their disdain towards Indian Culture.

²³ <http://www.aravot.am/2017/01/05/843237/>

²⁴ Racist Yerevan Teacher Won’t Be Fired Because ‘He Has a Right to Free Speech’, 16.01.2017: <http://epress.am/en/2017/01/16/racist-yerevan-teacher-wont-be-fired-because-he-has-a-right-to-free-speech.html>

²⁵ Id.

²⁶ Id.

²⁷ The Minister of Education of Armenia got concerned with the racists’ record of a teacher after the EU Ambassador expressed concerns, 28.01.2017 (in Russian): <http://epress.am/ru/2017/01/28/%D0%90%D1%80%D0%BC%D1%8F%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B8%D0%BB%D1%81%D1%8F-%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%B8.html>

²⁸ Interview with journalists in Yerevan, February 2017.

²⁹ Field materials recorded in Erevan, February 2017.

*Example 5: When a professor passed by a classroom and saw a student from Iran, she first asked her: “where is your hijab?”*³⁰

THE FEAR OF OTHER CULTURES AND RELIGIONS ON A NATIONAL SCALE

In Armenia in general, there is widespread mistrust towards other cultures and religions. The geographical fact that Armenia is mostly surrounded by countries where Islam is the dominant religion has in part helped to foster the mistrust of the Armenian people towards Muslims. According to a sociological review on the attitude of Armenians towards other nations living in Armenia and surrounding countries (2013), the highest social distance Armenians keep from those of other cultural backgrounds is from Turkish and Azeri peoples (more than 80 points from 100); second, from Iranians (about 65 points from 100); and third, from Yezidis and Kurds (about 62 points from 100).³¹

Muslims from Iran sometimes have difficulties renting apartments and sometimes Iranians are not allowed to enter clubs or bars. Recently there was even the case of a person who was not allowed to enter a children’s store.³² This is paradoxical given that the Iranian border is one of only two open borders with Armenia, leading to many Iranian tourists visiting Armenia, especially during Nowruz (the Iranian New Year).

PREJUDICE ROOTED IN DIFFICULT RELATIONS BETWEEN ARMENIA AND TURKEY AND AZERBAIJAN

The traumatic historical experience of Armenian-Turkey relations (no diplomatic relations so far) and the long-lasting conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan have negatively effected the attitude of Armenian towards people from Turkey and Azerbaijan. Some children from transnational families in Armenia have faced discrimination because of their dual origin.

*Example 1: The editor of the online journal Iravunk, Ovanes Ghaladzhyan, often publishes hate speech against Turkish people on Facebook. For example, he has posted a picture of a torture scene with the sentence “Every Turk should have the same fate”, and “A good Turk is a dead Turk”.*³³

*Example 2: On 27 September 2015, 40 year old Artak Arakelyan killed his wife, Aegin Dambazyan, after discovering she had communicated with a Turkish man over Skype. The sister of the victim said that Aegin was only discussing issues related to the family’s financial debt with this man, since her husband Artak did not want to talk about it. Independent journalists reported that during the trial, the family’s 15-year-old son was asked “Do you think it was normal for you mother to talk to a Turkish man?”³⁴ According to journalists, popular opinion in Armenia supported the killer, believing he did the right thing as not only did his wife supposedly cheat on her husband, but she did it with a Turkish man.*³⁵

³⁰ These examples 4-5 were documented in February, 2017; interviews with foreign students of the Medical Institute of Yerevan.

³¹ Samvel Manukyan. Mutual Positioning of Armenians and Georgians in Social Space // 21 Vek, №2(31), 2014 (in Russian): http://www.noravank.am/upload/pdf/4.Samvel_Manukyan_21_VEK_02_2014.pdf

³² Interview with journalists in Yerevan, February, 2017.

³³ <https://www.facebook.com/arordi666?lst=738131666%3A100000797020584%3A1490690910>, record of 29.12.2016.

³⁴ Media report, 16.02.2017 (in Armenian): <https://epress.am/2017/02/16/279082.html>

³⁵ A man murdered his wife for communication with a Turkish man, 02.03.2016 (in Russian): <https://news.am/rus/news/314728.html>

2 THE SITUATION OF ETHNIC AND CONFESSIONAL MINORITIES

In general, the refrain that “we don’t have any problems with national minorities”, as articulated by both the Armenian authorities and leaders of politically enfranchised ethnic communities, means that the most pressing problems of ethnic minorities (education, economic well-being, inclusion and integration) remain unresolved, and cultural heritage is not researched or preserved. Xenophobia faced by minorities in everyday life is also not overcome – the words “Yezidi” and “Bosha”, for example, are often used as an insult by non-minority people.

LACK OF SUPPORT FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES

As outlined in the state report, some measures seeking to support the language and culture of minorities have been undertaken. However, they are not sufficient. For example, the authorities report that they have made some links to online books in Yezidi language available, but the website through which they can be accessed (<http://lib.armedu.am>) is only available in Armenian. There are some newspapers in Yezidi, as well as programs on the public radio, but these are not really popular. Most Yezidi people in Erevan do speak Armenian, but outside Erevan most speak their own language.³⁶ The same can be said about the Assyrian language. According to our sources, there are no schools with Yezidi or Assyrian as the language of instruction.

The Government Program (Annex to the Decree of the Republic of Armenia No.1060-A of October 18, 2016) declares support of the cultural representation of ethnic minorities, including the publication of books and newspapers in different languages and organization of events. In 2017, 90 events are scheduled but the overwhelmingly support the Armenian culture and language in Armenia and abroad, and aim at promoting patriotism in society. Programs and activities to support the culture of national minorities are completely absent.

According to Article 28 of the Law “On Television and Radio”, public radios and televisions can provide special programs in ethnic minority languages, but these programs should not exceed one hour a week on television and one hour a day on the radio.

THE CASE OF BOSHA PEOPLE: ALMOST COMPLETELY ASSIMILATED, XENOPHOBIA REMAINS

The situation of the Bosha, a group of ethnic Roma origin living in Armenia for centuries, is a clear example of how a marginalised ethnic minority has resorted to mimicry not to stand out, and how the state has not taken any proactive measures to improve their situation, raise the prestige of their culture, or raise the awareness of the majority about them. The prevailing negative attitude towards the Bosha and a lack of effort to change this attitude, have led to assimilation. Indeed, the Bosha are

³⁶ Field research in Armenia, February, 2016.

now considered as sub-ethnic group of the Armenians. They have lost their language, their traditional crafts (sieve making, basketry, blacksmithing) are almost forgotten, and the term “Bosha” itself has taken on such a notoriety for offensiveness that the word *magagorts* (‘sieve makers’) is preferred instead. At the same time, representatives of this minority consider themselves a separate group. Neighbors and schoolteachers recognize the Bosha visually, by surnames and as belonging to certain families, and a negative attitude towards them remains – as one source said, “it’s a shame to be a Bosha”. Among the constituent features typical for Roma-like groups the Bosha have only one: a clear contraposition to their surroundings and consequent xenophobia from the majority.

Representatives of the Bosha group remain isolated and do their best not to attract attention, fearing negative attitudes from the majority. In a bid “not to harm” the group further, even academics do not disseminate information on the Bosha’s history, ethnography and sociology.³⁷ As a result, the Armenian population is almost completely unsensitised to this minority and no measures have been taken to overcome stereotypes about the Bosha. They are not considered by the state as a national minority, and neither cultural nor educational programs are carried out regarding the Bosha.

Meanwhile, field research in three schools where dozens Bosha children study showed that there are problems with the preschool education of children, and drop outs from schools (especially among girls) with very few Bosha students going to university.³⁸

MOLOKANS

The Molokans are an ethnic and religious minority (Russians belonging to an Orthodox sect) living in the South Caucasus since the 19th century. Like with the Bosha, the authorities have taken no measures to overcome the traditional isolation of the Molokans, supported by its religious leaders.

The most pressing problems of the Molokan minority are economic. The traditional economic activities of the Molokans (harvesting and preserving vegetables) provides a poor income and there is considerable labor migration to cities. In addition, there are problems with the education of their children, especially girls, who drop out of schools in order to help families at work. Studying at schools with only the Russian language of instruction means that they have poor competence in the Armenian language, rendering further education in Armenia difficult or impossible.

³⁷ Interview with Hamlet Petrosyan, head of the department of culturology, historical faculty, Yerevan State University. February 2017.

³⁸ Field research, February 2017.

3. DISCRIMINATION AGAINST REFUGEES OF NON-ARMENIAN ORIGIN

Although Armenia has welcomed many refugees of Armenian ethnic origin, people of non-Armenian origin face problems when it comes to obtaining asylum and refugee status. In 2016, 37 persons received the refugee status in Armenia. Twenty-nine of these were from Syria, none were from Turkey, Iran, Bahrain or Yemen. In 2015, 316 people applied for the refugee status and 202 people received it. Three of a total of 22 applicants from Iran were successful. One out of nine applicants from Lebanon received status, whilst people from Turkey are routinely denied status. In 2014, none of the 25 Iranian citizens to apply for refugee status were successful.³⁹ However, even these numbers require further investigation, as there is no disaggregated data on the number of persons of Armenian origin among those who applied for refugee status.

According to activists, the process of granting refugee status suffers from institutionalised racism: people of African origin and Muslims, as a rule, are not granted status, although a very few come to Armenia.⁴⁰

Human rights defenders from the NGO “Mission Armenia” have reported that quite often men from Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan and other countries are denied the refugee status. As a result, people remain in Armenia until all remedies have been exhausted. When their temporary residency permit expires they remain in the country illegally, and are subjected to administrative prosecution. As such, it is necessary to adopt legislative amendments to suppress administrative responsibility when the state cannot deport a person (as is currently the case due to lack of funding) or a person cannot leave Armenia for objective reasons.⁴¹

The Armenian government had planned to publish a Program for the comprehensive integration of refugees in the autumn of 2016. For now, there is only an announcement about the development of such a Program, and it concerns only Armenians from Syria.⁴² The only initiative to help refugees in Yerevan comes from non-local initiatives. Indeed, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the NGO “Mission Armenia” have created a center for Syrian refugees where they provide assistance and support to discuss their situations. However, this center only helps Syrian Armenians.

Boris Murazi, leader of the NGO National Union of Yezid “Sinzhar”, reports that after negotiations with the authorities of Armenia it became clear that these authorities would not welcome Yezidi refugees from Syria and Iraq, and the only solution for a number of families to enter Armenia was to obtain tourist visas, or else they would be at risk of immediate deportation.⁴³

³⁹ http://smsmta.am/?menu_id=145

⁴⁰ Information received from CSI.

⁴¹ Interview with the experts from the NGO Mission Armenia, CSI, February 2017.

⁴² Strategic plan on further integration of Syrian Armenians will be developed, 19.01.2017 (in Armenian): <http://panarmenian.net/arm/news/230355/>

⁴³ Murazi: Armenia can't accept Yezidi refugees, 18.05.2016 (in Russian): <http://epress.am/ru/2016/05/18/%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%B2-%D1%81%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%8F%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B8-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8C-%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%B4.html>

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, taking into account the recommendations of the civil society and legislative proposals developed by NGOs.
- Stop and prevent the activity of nationalist organizations and groups propagandising racism, xenophobia, and the superiority of Armenian people over others.
- Abolish the mandatory course on the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church in schools.
- Adopt and implement a comprehensive program on the promotion of tolerance and anti-racism at schools and universities, including training for teaching staff.
- Adopt and implement systematic programs on supporting ethnic minorities aimed at improving their social and economic situation and access to high quality education, including university education. It is necessary to educate teachers on minority languages and teachers who conduct all lessons in languages of minorities.
- Grant asylum and refugee status to all applicants who satisfy the definition of a refugee, as stated in the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Geneva Convention), and not only to ethnic Armenians.

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