

## **The Role of the Orthodox Church in the Formation of Georgian National Identity**

Ilia State University

**Main applicant:** Sergo Ratiani

**Project leader:** Tatia Mebagishvili

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Today, Georgian society is in the process of identity-construction – on the one hand, the Soviet values, lifestyle, norms and system of relationships are being devaluated gradually, on the other hand, new ones have not yet been established firmly. With our research, we aim at investigating the role of the Orthodox Church in this process, assuming that since Georgia regained independence in 1991, religion has been strengthening its influence on society and contributing much to the construction of the national identity. The Orthodox Church has actually generated the formula according to which to be Georgian is to be Orthodox. In October 2002, the President of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze and the Patriarch of Georgia Ilia II signed the “Concordat”, the Constitutional Agreement between the state of Georgia and the Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia. This agreement granted the latter a privileged, tax-free status in Georgia.

In order to grasp the situation, one should take history into account. In the later decades of the Soviet regime, the government changed its policy, “reconciled” with the Church and tolerated its existence while maintaining control over it. Therefore, churches continued to function, but they were subordinated to the government’s control. Today the Church is independent, but in the transition period from totalitarian to post-totalitarian system it remained untouched (has not been reformed), so we suspect that its ideology is likely to replace the Marxist-Leninist one.