



## **“Coalition for Equality” disapproves the use of Hate Speech during the session of Working Group on Human Rights Committee of Parliament**

On January 21, 2019 the meeting of a working group established by the Committee of Parliament on Human Rights and Civil Integration was chaired by Sophio Kiladze, chairperson of the Committee. Representatives of religious confessions, members of parliament, state agency of religion, public defender and NGO were invited at the meeting. The draft law prepared by MP Emzar Kvitsiani has been subjected to a special discussion at the session of working group, the law noted imposes responsibility in case of wearing a traditional headscarf of a Muslim woman - niqab and burqa in public areas.

Mirtagi Asadov, a head of the High Commission of Muslim of Georgia expressed his opinion on this legislative initiative. He said that women member of Azerbaijani Muslim community wear niqab or burqa during Shiite Muslim holiday. According to Mirtagi Asadov, in case of passing the draft law, Muslims of Georgia will not be able to hold Muslim rituals properly, since wearing niqab or burqa will be punished. Mirtag Asadov considered the initiative of the bill as a violation of the duties of the Member of Parliament (MP). Mirtag Asadov is a citizen of Georgia, ethnic Azerbaijani. Since he does know a Georgian language, during the session, he made a speech in Azerbaijani language. Oktay Kazumov, a member of the same community, translated his

statements into Georgian.

The MP Emzar Kvitsiani responded to Mirtag Asadov`s statement. He aggressively requested from Mirtag Asadov to explain whether he was a citizen of Georgia. When Emzar Kvitsiani gave a positive answer, he questioned Mirtag Asadov, why he did not he speak Georgian if he was a Georgian citizen.

**The lack of sufficient knowledge in a state language in regions, which are densely populated by minorities, is a serious challenge for the state of Georgia. Despite the measures implemented over the years, the state could not overcome the problem. Not knowing the language is an essential reason, which causes the isolation of Georgian citizens, ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians from the state and the rest of society. Emzar kvitsiani`s statement unequivocally contained the hint saying that if the member of ethnic minority does not know the language, they do not have the right to express their critical position regarding the specific draft law, which directly affects their own lives and also the life of their community. The fact that a representative of the ethnic group did not know the language has been used by MP as a source to marginalize his opponent. The MP called into a question the possibility of Georgian citizen, belonging to the ethnic group, to express their concerns in an address of Georgian authorities, in their native language. Such approach is in full contradiction with the declared effort of the Georgian government to integrate ethnic minorities.**

The parliament of Georgia adopted the Code of Ethics<sup>[1]</sup> for the Member of Parliament on the bases of Rules of Procedures of Georgian Parliament Article 227, paragraph 1. According to a sub-paragraph „b.g. of the Code, „The Member of Parliament respects the other members of the Parliament and citizens and does not use hate speech aimed at the minorities defined by race, skin color, gender, religion or other grounds. In the case given, Emzar Kvitsiani revealed disrespect and intolerance regarding the language and ethnicity of Georgian citizen, which represents hate speech by the Code of Ethics of the Member of Parliament.

According to the Rules of Procedure, the Council of Ethics should react to the unethical behavior of MP, however, the council noted, has not been resourced yet, so unfortunately, this statement of Emzar Kvitsiani cannot become the subject of discussion of the Ethics Council.

The chairperson of the session Sophio Kiladze had no respond to Emzar Kvitsiani`s statement, instead she criticized the part of Mirtagi Asadov`s statement where the initiative of the draft law has been considered as the violation of the deputy duties. The inactivity of Sophio Kiladze, chairperson of the Human Rights and Civil Integration Committee, causes concern; she could not prevent the use of hate speech, nor did she space herself from the use of such language by her own colleague.

**We call on the Members of Parliament to meet the requirements of the Code of Ethics of the MP and not to use hate speech. Running parallel to this, the chairperson of the relevant committee or plenary session should timely respond for putting an end to the violation of the Code of Ethics by the MP or for its future prevention. Besides, we call on the Parliament of Georgia to compose the Council of Ethics on time, in order to give a legal assessment to this fact, and on the other hand, avoid such incidents in the future.**

#### „Coalition for Equality”

„Coalition for Equality” is an informal union created in 2014 with the support of the Open Society - Georgia Foundation and unites nine NGOs. Members of the coalition are: „Open Society - Georgia Foundation”, „Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center(EMC)”, „Article 42 of the Constitution” Union, „Safari”, „Georgian Young Lawyers` Association”, „Women`s Indicatives Supportive Group (WISG)”, „Partnership for Human Rights (PHR)”, „Georgian Democratic Initiative (GDI)” and „Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI)”.

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[1] <https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/189564?>  
<https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/205673?>