

European School reflects Georgia's growing diversity

by William King | Mar 29, 2018 11:43



Tucked away in an unsuspecting part of the Saburtalo district is Tbilisi's European School, where 900 students representing 23 different nationalities mingle together in a truly multicultural, multi-ethnic learning environment. The diversity of European School's student in some ways reflects Tbilisi's increasingly diverse cultural and ethnic makeup.

As a whole, Georgia has attracted a growing number of foreigners in recent years. This can largely be attributed to the country's rising status as an international tourism destination. Georgia's business climate and favorable tax regime for businesses and investors have also attracted many from abroad in recent years. Naturally, when investors and businesspersons move here, they come with their families' in tow.

4u.ge, spent some time last week talking to some of the older students at the European School about their experiences. I asked them what it's been like for them to be in a learning environment so rich with diversity and about their overall impression of Georgia. All four of the students I spoke with seemed quite loquacious (as teenagers tend to be), and they all had their own take on the school, its diverse student body and their plans for the future.

One of the most easy-going and talkative of the students was Mohammad Amin Moezzi, 16, an eleventh-grader from Tehran, who was the newest arrival to Georgia among the four.

"My father and I came to Georgia on a three-day trip before settling on the idea of moving here," he told me in almost perfect English. "When we came here we really liked it a lot. We liked that it was such a small country. Everything was at peace and people here are very kind. So we decided to move."

When I asked him what he found interesting about Georgia, he told me that compared to the situation back home, things were very different – especially in the schools.

"In my country [Iran] things are very different. First of all, boys and girls are separated. In Georgia we all study together," he explained. "But that was not such a big deal for me. One of the adjustments I had to make was to get used to studying in a different language. I knew English and had been studying it in Iran, but spending half the day engaging in this new language was a really new experience," he noted.

This school has so much cultural diversity. I have met so many interesting people. My classmates have so many interesting nationalities, so it's really cool to get close to them and find new things about their culture and their countries. I really like it," noted Sofia Darsavelidze, 17, who is also in the eleventh grade and who has spent her summers in Moscow most of her life.

Tahira Valiyeva, 18, is a twelfth-grader who is originally from Azerbaijan and has been at the European School since the ninth-grade. Prior to coming to the European School, she said that she was studying at a Russian school where all the students were either Georgian or Russian.

"When I came here, my class was so international. We had and still do have, kids from Greece, from Iraq, from Iran, the United States and Sweden and from so many different countries. This was really challenging and interesting for me. This was the first time I was in an environment with people who had so many cultural backgrounds," she said.

Valiyeva went on to tell me that after four years of studying in such a diverse environment, she has essentially become "addicted" to it, and has great respect for every nationality, culture and religion.

"I have best friends from so many different countries."

"One the best things about this environment is that while we all might come from different places, when we are all sitting together learning, we all become one. At the end of the day, we are all worried about normal things that all students are worried about – our school work and making friends. You can feel how the same we all are, but at the same time we are all unique," says Georgian student Liza Saakodze, 16.

All four students are fluent in at least two languages. But Valiyeva, the eldest of the four's impressive command of six languages – Russian, Georgian, English, Azeri, Turkish and German – in some ways represents the future career goals of all of them.

"I think this environment prepares us for our future lives, when we will be living and working in different places in the world," Valiyeva adds.

All four students envision themselves either working outside of Georgia in the future or working in Georgia among a diverse range of colleagues once they graduate from high school.

After speaking to Mohammad, Liza, Sofia and Tahira, I don't doubt for a second that they will all be successful in their future endeavors. All four of them have bright futures in Georgia or wherever they wind up in the world. Most of all, I left our short meeting both impressed and envious by how nearly 1,000 kids from so many different backgrounds and cultures have an opportunity to learn together in such a diverse environment.

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