



IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Georgian-Armenian Expert Forum on Samtskhe-Javakheti

Caucasus Media Institute and the Caucasus Institute for Peace Democracy and Development

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Executive summary

The project was focused on problems of the region of Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia. While there have been no conflicts on ethnic ground in the region, it has attracted attention of experts and international community since it was believed to have potential for conflict. The reasons for such concerns include general record of ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus since the collapse of the Soviet Union; geographical isolation of the region from other parts of Georgia due to poor condition of roads; lack of integration of the ethnic Armenian community of Javakheti into Georgia's civic and political life. Presence and pending withdrawal of the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki was considered a potential trigger-factor for a conflict: while the Georgian government, with strong support of the Georgian society, pressed for the withdrawal of the base, the local Armenian community considered vital the preservation of the military base for its economic interests and long-term security.

Recent developments in the region may be interpreted as both grounds for optimism and concern. The Russian military base withdrawal caused some protest rallies but overall it proceeded in a peaceful and organized manner. Local residents, while unhappy about the closure of the base, proceeded to planning their lives in new conditions. On the other hand, more active policy of the Georgian state, especially in the area of education, has been met with greater protest activities of various local groups. The meeting of Georgian, Armenian and international experts, co-organized in July 2006 in Akhalkalaki with participation of the CIPDD and CMI, demonstrated deep mistrust of the local community towards intentions of the Georgian government. Part of the local public perceive strategy of the Georgian government towards the region as aimed at eventual assimilation of the local population and/or changing of the demographic balance in favor of ethnic Georgian residents. Local Armenian community is also concerned about expected rise of Turkish influence in the region.

It is notable that the attitude and behavior of the ethnic Armenian community in Samtskhe-Javakheti is influenced by messages received from neighboring Armenia, as well as worldwide organizations of the Armenian Diaspora.

Perceptions of the situation in Javakheti held both by both the Georgian and Armenian public may be considered part of the problem. The national media in both Georgia and Armenia tend to exaggerate problems of Javakheti and present them in one-sided – though different – ways. Thus, they contribute to mistrust between the Armenian community in Javakheti and the Georgian public.

To change these tensions, in the framework of Small Embassy Projects of the Netherlands Embassy supported project CIPDD and CMI jointly organized two expert roundtable meetings in order to establish Georgian-Armenian Expert Forum on Samtskhe-Javakheti, to develop policy recommendations for relevant stakeholders and develop a stable network of experts interested in the region.

Project goal and background

Javakheti is one of the regions of South Georgia. The population of this territory, one of the economically least developed in Georgia, are ethnic Armenians. Problems that are common for the entire Georgian state – lame and stuttering system of administration, corruption, separation from the system of decision making etc – get even more complicated in Javakheti because representatives of an ethnic minority form compact settlement in the region. Problems with linguistic and cultural policies, local self-governance, political and civil rights, resistance to facilitation of contacts with Armenia that has common borders with this region etc, generate resentment and discontent in the local population which looks at everything through the “lens of ethnicity” on practically every problem in the region, and produce a feeling of discrimination. The Georgian authorities, in their turn, respond with extreme apprehension to the autonomy demands that reach them from Javakheti and from public figures in Armenia who are often emigrants from Javakheti. This tangle of contradictions creates an almost classic model situation of a latent ethnic conflict in the making for the post-Soviet space and breeds mistrust between the ethnic majority and ethnic minorities in Georgia.

Project goal was to contribute to confidence-building and sustainable development in the province of Samtskhe-Javakheti. During the implementation of the project close network between the representatives of expert societies from Georgia, Armenia and Samtskhe-Javakheti was established. In long-term period it will be helpful for confidence-building and economic development of that region, to keep political stability and integration of Armenian ethnic minority in Georgia society and effective and constructive involvement of the Republic of Armenia in resolving the main problem of Samtskhe-Javakheti.

Implementation Summary

CIPDD and CMI jointly organized two expert roundtable meetings on the problems of Samtskhe-Javakheti region in Georgia in order to develop policy recommendations for relevant stakeholders and develop a stable network of experts interested in the region. Georgian-Armenian expert forum was formed on Javakhetia issues. Productive preconditions were created for future cooperation of two organizations for permanent functioning, immediate reaction and recommendations on the region problems.

Role of each project partner organization

CIPDD was responsible for selecting participants on the Georgian side, organizing the roundtable in Bakuriani and traveling of Georgian participants to Armenia for the second roundtable.

CMI was responsible for selecting participants on the Armenian side, for organizing the roundtable in Aghveran and traveling of Armenian participants to Georgia for the first roundtable.

Both organizations worked jointly on summing up the recommendations. (For details see below)

Roundtables and establishing Georgian-Armenian Expert Forum on Samtskhe-Javakheti

During the reporting period CIPDD and CMI organised two roundtables. The first one was in Bakuriani, Georgia, 17-18 November 2007 and the second one was in Aghveran, Armenia, 1-2 March 2008.

About fifteen experts participated in each meeting; five from Armenia, ten from Georgia (5 from Tbilisi and 5 from Samtskhe-Javakheti). It was not a necessary condition that all the participants of the first roundtable should be present in the second one. Though there were several participants that were present during the two roundtables. Georgian-Armenian Expert Forum on Samtskhe-Javakheti was formed based on an accurate selection of the participants. For more details on the agenda of roundtables and the list of experts and participants see the attachments.

The meeting in Bakuriani (Georgia) *Samtskhe-Javakheti: Minority rights, Integration and State-Building (Bakuriani, 17-18 November, 2007)* was the first in the series of two events, and it was dedicated to the three most topical problems of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region:

1. *The Region with concentration of ethnic minorities within a state: the case of Samtskhe-Javakheti*
2. *The system of municipal government in Georgia and rights of ethnic minorities*
3. *Education policies and minority rights*

The discussion was mainly focused on challenges created by existence of ethnic minority region in Georgia, and the ways to confront those challenges. The participants recognized positive trends in the region, though they were not at the center of the discussion. By the participants of the meeting have been described some general challenges and important positive developments as well (see detailed information of the Round Table outcomes in the *Bakuriani Recommendations* document).

The participants of the meeting agreed that further dialogue on the problems of the region between the Georgian and Armenian experts was rather useful. However, there was also an understanding that the project should continue through more specific activities, such as common research project carried out by the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development and the Caucasus Media Institute.

During the second Roundtable “Samtskhe-Javakheti: Developing the Region in International Context” (**March 1-2, 2008, Aghveran, Armenia**) the following topics were discussed:

1. *Prospects of economic development in the regional context: approaches and methodologies.*
2. *The problem of Javakheti and information about it.*
3. *Javakheti in regional and international politics.*

In general, the event in Aghveran was successful. Besides, the three above-mentioned topics for discussion and expert reports, the main outlines of recommendations on the project were discussed during the event, including the Bakuriani first roundtable results and interim consultations between the organizers.

Recommendation

Based on reports of invited experts from two roundtables and the valuable experience of organizers in Samtskhe-Javakheti region research, recommendations were made for situation improvement to all interested parties, first of all for governmental structures of Georgia, local authorities, as well as Armenian officials.

The electronic versions of recommendations will be available on the websites of the CMI and CIPDD and will be offered to interested parties.

See the text of recommendation in the appendix.

Media coverage

The organizers envisaged summary press-conferences on the results of two roundtables. But this couldn't be fulfilled due to political reasons in the period of events. Both in Georgia (November 17-18, 2007) and Armenia (March 1-2, 2008) there was state of emergency, which enabled the travels of participants to Georgia's and Armenia's capital cities and made impossible holding press-conferences with organizers and experts.

However, CMI is planning an event in May 2008 in Yerevan with the participation of expert from Georgia, where the local and international Media and the community will be given information on the project and the joint recommendations made on the results of the project by Georgian and Armenian experts.

Results of implementation

The main target group of the project - expert communities from two countries, representatives from Georgian government and local government in the region, Armenian officials, was widely involved in the implementation of the project.

Almost all main goals of the project were achieved:

1. Armenian-Georgian Expert Forum (Council) on Javakheti Issues was formed, which will be functioning in future on permanent basis;
2. Recommendations were summed up based on the discussions, speeches given by the experts of two roundtables in November 2007 and March 2008 and further consultations made by the organizers of the events;
3. Armenian and Georgian experts got unbiased and balanced view on the problems and perspectives of Javakheti region and are able to present it to the community and government of Georgia and Armenia.

Prospects for permanent cooperation between CMI and CIPDD

The *Georgian-Armenian Expert Forum on Samtskhe-Javakheti* project implementation and roundtable organization experience showed that there is close professional contact and reliable atmosphere generated between the CMI and CIPDD. This can become a good basis for continuation of joint activities, both in the frames of permanently existing Expert Forum on Samtskhe-Javakheti and in the frames of other possible and perspective projects.

Particularly, the recommendations, made by joint efforts of both companies and the cooperation experience of the Armenian-Georgian experts can become an effective basis for implementation of joint research project on Samtskhe-Javakheti and further publication of results for wide public.

Attachments

Attachment 1. Agenda, Roundtable in Bakuriani

AGENDA

Samtskhe-Javakheti: Minority rights, Integration and State-Building

Roundtable

17-18 November 2007, Bakuriani, Georgia

17 November, 2007

- 15.00 – 15.30 Round Table opening. Participants' introduction
Alexander Iskandaryan (CMI), Ghia Nodia (CIPDD)
- 15.30 – 16.30 Topic 1:
The Region with concentration of ethnic minorities within a
state: the case of Samtskhe-Javakheti.
- 16-30 – 17.00 *Coffee-break.*
- 17.00 – 18.30 Discussion

18 November, 2007

- 10.00 – 11.30 Topic 2:
The system of municipal government in Georgia and rights of
ethnic minorities
- 11.30 – 12.00 *Coffee-break*
- 12.00 – 13.30. Discussion
- 14.00 – 14.45 *Lunch.*
- 14.45 – 17.00 Topic 3:
Education policies and minority rights
- 17.00 – 17.15 Closing of Round Table

Attachment 2. Agenda, Roundtable in Aghveran

AGENDA

“Samtskhe-Javakheti: Developing the Region in International Context”

Roundtable

1-2 March 2008, Aghveran, Armenia

1 March 2008

12.00 - 14.00. Arrival of participants

14.00 – 15.00. Lunch

15.00 – 15.30. Opening ceremony
(Alexander Iskandaryan, David Aprasidze)

15.30 – 16.30. First session:

Prospects for economic development in the regional context: approaches and methodologies

16.30 – 17.00. Coffee-break

17.00 – 18.30. Discussion

19.00. Banquet

2 March 2008

9.00 – 10.00. Breakfast

10.00 – 12.30. Second session:

The Problem of Javakheti and information on it

12.30 – 12.45. Coffee-break

12.45 – 14.45. Third session:

Javakheti in regional and international politics

14.30 – 15.00. Closing of Roundtable

15.00 – 16.00. Dinner

16.00. Departure of participants

Attachment 3. List of Participants, Roundtable in Bakuriani

List of Participants

Samtskhe-Javakheti: Minority rights, Integration and State-Building

Roundtable

17-18 November 2007, Bakuriani, Georgia

1. Dali Agdgomeladze, a Georgian Language teacher (Akhalkalaki, Georgia)
2. Armen Darbinyan, Civil Forum of Javakheti (Akhalkalaki, Georgia) Армен Дарбинян, Гражданский форум Джавахети (Ахалкалаки, Georgia)
3. Marina Elbakidze, CIPDD(Tbilisi, Georgia)
4. Artak Gabrielyan, (Akhalkalaki)
5. Soso Gogelidze, National Examinations Center (Tbilisi, Georgia)
6. Gagik Iandyan, Adults Education Center (Akhalkalaki, Georgia) Центр образования взрослых (Ахалкалаки)
7. Alexander Iskandaryan CMI (Armenia)
8. Konte Kandelaki, International Center for Civil Culture (Tbilisi, Georgia)
9. Ivlian Khaindrava, (Tbilisi, Georgia)
10. Granush Kharatyan, expert (Armenia)
11. Shavarsh Kocharyan, National-Democratic Party (Armenia)
12. Maya Miminoshvili, National Examinations Center (Tbilisi, Georgia)
13. Grigori Minasyan, Union of Armenian Youth (Akhaltsikhe, Georgia)
14. Sergey Minasyan CMI (Armenia)
15. Ghia Nodia, CIPDD (Tbilisi, Georgia)
16. Eduard Sherasanov, Republican Party (Armenia)
17. Takui Vartanyan, OSCE correspondent (Ninotsminda, Georgia)

Attachment 4. List of Participants, Roundtable in Aghveran

List of Participants

“Samtskhe-Javakheti: Developing the Region in International Context” Roundtable, 1-2 March 2008, Aghveran, Armenia

1. Alexander Iskandaryan (CMI)
2. Sergey Minasyan (CMI)
3. Hranush Kharatyan (Head of Department for Ethnic and Religion Minorities, Government of Armenia)
4. Harutyun Khachatryan (Informational Agency “Noyan Tapan”)
5. Hayk Janpoladyan (Informational Agency REGNUM)
6. Pavel Chobanyan (Institute for Oriental Studies, National Academy of Science, Armenia)
7. David Aprasidze (CIPDD)
8. Marina Elbakidze (CIPDD)
9. Kote Kandelaki (International Center for Civil Culture)
10. Thornike Gordadze (French Institute for Anatolian Studies, Caucasus Observatory)
11. Rezo Sakerashvili (“24 Saati” Newspaper)
12. Artashes Palanjyan (expert, Javakheti)
13. Armen Grigoryan (NGO activist, Javakheti)
14. Clear Delaseuar (International Crisis Group)

Attachment 5.

Bakuriani 17-18 November, 2007, Round Table Report

The Recommendations - *Samtskhe-Javakheti: Minority rights, Integration and State-Building*

General Summary

The innovative nature of the meeting in Bakuriani consisted of its format and aims. Some fifteen people participated, who represented experts, political and civil society activists from Tbilisi, Yerevan and Samtskhe-Javakheti. This was the first meeting of this kind, where Georgian and Armenian experts took part in a discussion of the region. This is especially important because in effect, the Armenian government and society exerts important influence on the state of affairs in Samtskhe-Javakheti, a region of Georgia that is adjacent to Armenia and where ethnic Armenian population is concentrated. Armenian media actively covers situation in Samtskhe-Javakheti (usually, this coverage is extremely negative), while the Georgian society usually considers influence of Armenian activist groups in Samtskhe-Javakheti as pernicious. Therefore, there was a necessity of having open and professional dialogue on the problems of the region between expert communities of the two countries that would eventually have an impact on public opinion in the both countries and develop common and specific vision regarding developments in the region.

The meeting was the first in the series of two events, and it was dedicated to the three most topical problems of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region (See attached agenda and participants' list). Discussions were informal, lively and friendly.

The discussion was mainly focused on challenges created by existence of ethnic minority region in Georgia, and the ways to confront those challenges. The participants recognized positive trends in the region, though they were not at the center of the discussion.

The following general challenges were described by the participants of the meeting:

- (1) Lack of language proficiency in the Georgian language among ethnic Armenian population of Samtskhe-Javakheti constitutes a long-term project for the region. It contributes to isolation of the minority community, diminishes its chances of advancement in political, public and economic spheres, and deepens the general trend of mistrust between communities.
- (2) No clear and consistent policy towards ethnic minority communities and regions where they are concentrated has been defined by the Georgian government.
- (3) Prevalence of ethnic over civic identity in the Georgian society in general (including the majority and the minority communities) constitutes an important background problem.
- (4) There exists prejudice and mistrust on the both sides of the community divide. Among Georgians, there exists an image of "treacherous minority" bearing a hidden separatist agenda; on the other hand, large part of the Armenian community in Javakheti (as well as in Armenia) believes that the Georgian government has a hidden agenda of assimilation and/or forcing the minority out through gradual change of ethno-demographic situation in the region. Such allegations are frequently made by nationalistically-minded activists and spread by the Georgian and Armenian media.

However, in the recent years there have been important positive developments as well:

- (1) While earlier the Armenian community (as most of other Georgian citizens) treated the Georgian state with contempt, in recent years it became visibly more functional and efficient. In particular, it improved public infrastructure (roads, electricity, started repairing school buildings), reduced corruption and other kinds of crime, increased salaries in the public sectors, etc. This increased trust and respect to the Georgian state (though also fear of it being more capable of carrying out its hidden assimilationist agenda).
- (2) Against this backdrop, there is some – though not very strong – increase of interest towards studying the Georgian language among the local Armenian community.
- (3) The withdrawal of the Russian military base from Akhalkalaki was feared to be a critical juncture that could lead to destabilization of the region. However, while the local Armenian community did not welcome this development and there were some expressions of protest, overall the process of the based closure proceeded smoothly. Thus, one potential source of anxiety and destabilization was removed.
- (4) Despite radicalism of certain pronouncements, on the balance all political parties (including Georgian ruling and opposition parties as well as local political and civil groups) demonstrate considerable prudence and openness to dialogue.
- (5) New infrastructure projects such as new highways that are built are planned to be built in the region, as well as the planned Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars railway, create better chances for economic development of the region (although the railway project is also a source of uneasiness since the project is opposed by the Armenian government).

The participants of the meeting agreed that further dialogue on the problems of the region between the Georgian and Armenian experts was rather useful. However, there was also an understanding that the project should continue through more specific activities, such as common research project carried out by the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development and the Caucasus Media Institute. Some ideas for such joint activities were discussed in a preliminary manner, but it was decided that the final decision would be taken on the next meeting within the framework of the same project, scheduled for March 2008 in Tsakhkadzor.

The following summarizes discussions dedicated to the three topics that were on the agenda of the meeting in Bakuriani.

Topic 1: The Region with concentration of ethnic minorities within a state: the case of Samtskhe-Javakheti.

This part of the discussion was mainly focused on general problems of the region. Large part of it was dedicated to discussion of more general picture as described in the summary, but also to the possible or actual strategies of the Georgian state on the one hand and groups representing the Armenian minority on the other.

Participants noted that so far the Georgian government has failed to formulate and implement any distinct and consistent strategy towards minority issues. The new Georgian government that came to power after the ‘Rose Revolution’ displays much greater attention towards problems of minority regions and its rhetoric is much more inclusive. The European Charter on Minority Rights was adopted – something that the previous government was reluctant to do. President Saakashvili has frequently traveled to the region and highlighted the message that Georgia equally belongs to all its citizens notwithstanding their ethnic origin. However, these steps did not develop into any consistent behavior with clear and transparent policy goals. Moreover, greater activism of the Georgian state has led to greater concerns among parts of the Armenian community of Javakheti, who is afraid of hidden agenda of the Georgian government to dilute the ‘Armenian’ character of the region through assimilation and/or squeezing out ethnic Armenian population.

This lack of explicit and consistent policy may be explained by insufficient political will and/or resources on behalf of the Georgian government – as well as by the presence of the “hidden agenda” that the government wants to hide. Another explanation – proposed by Ghia Nodia – may be, however, that none of the classic paradigms (or “ideal types”) of ethnic minority policies on behalf of the nation state seems to be feasible in Georgia in its “pure” form. If this is the case, the minority policy doomed to be inconsistent and not fully explicit.

In particular, such ‘ideal types’ of the minority policy may be:

- (1) *ethnic cleansing* – radical change of ethno-demographic situation, aiming at reducing the share of minority population to the level when it is no longer considered threatening to the ‘Georgian’ character of the region;
- (2) *civic nationalism/patriotism* (the ‘French’ solution)– privatization of ethnicity, whereby cultural distinctiveness of the minority population is relegated to the private sphere, while in the public sphere, everybody is considered just a *citizen* loyal to the common polity;
- (3) *multiculturalism* (a ‘Swiss’ or ‘Canadian’ solution) – expressed through either ethno-territorial federalism (autonomy), or extra-territorial communal federalism and sets of “affirmative action” policies.

Neither of these solutions – if consistently applied – is politically feasible in Georgia with regards to Samtskhe-Javakheti, for different reasons. Therefore, there can be no explicit and consistent policy aimed at this goal. De facto policies of the government have to fluctuate somewhere between options (2) and (3) – something that can be expressed by a slogan “integration but not assimilation”. It has to be understood, however, that actual difference between these two terms is highly ambiguous and it is differently understood by different actors. For instance, insistence of Georgian language proficiency among the Armenian community in Javakheti is considered as part of legitimate agenda of civil integration by the most liberal-minded Georgians, but some Armenian activists brand this as an expression of drive towards assimilation. This very ambiguity, though, may be considered to be an asset rather than shortcoming. Actual ethnic policy agenda of the Georgian government may be described as that of civic patriotism with some concessions to multiculturalism; more moderate activists of the minority community, on the other hand, want to strengthen the multiculturalist elements without openly opposing general requirements of Georgian civic patriotism. Thus, the grey space between concepts such as “integration” and “assimilation” provides a good possibility for developing a working *modus vivendi*.

Apart from political projects as formulated by the elite groups, however, there are realities or perceived realities that cause concerns among different communities. They were voiced by different participants of the meeting. Here are some of these concerns:

- Vast majority of the Armenian residents of Samtskhe-Javakheti do not consider themselves fully-fledged citizens of Georgia.
- The fears of assimilation have increased recently.
- Georgian political parties are not active in the region, therefore the region feels isolated from the Georgian political life.
- Personnel policies of the Georgian government make Armenians feel discriminated against.
- Armenians have few chances to get university education in Georgia.
- Georgians use lack of linguistic competence of Armenians as a pretext – those Armenians who do speak Georgian do not get promoted anyway.

The participants naturally discussed the best policies conducive for peaceful and sustainable development of the region. While there was no agreement on all specific issues, there was an agreement that neither full assimilation nor encouragement of ethnic isolation are feasible and acceptable policies. There was also an agreement that Georgia's strife to the integration in European and Euro-Atlantic organizations is the best possible guarantee that – despite difficulties and occasional crises, Georgia will maintain its overall direction of building its institutions on liberal and democratic values. This provides the right background for due respect for minority rights.

Therefore, European values and European institutions are the best background within which the ethnic minority problems can be best addressed. This is, in particular, the key recommendation towards local Armenian community activists who claim to represent interests of the Armenian community. Apart from this, there are Georgian political actors were advised to mount their activities in minority regions. This applies, especially, to the opposition parties, who are traditionally rather passive in the minority regions. The Georgian government should activate and perpetuate the process of ongoing dialogue with representatives of minority communities, and demonstrate patience and flexibility when addressing minority concerns.

Topic 2: The system of municipal government in Georgia and rights of ethnic minorities.

General assessment of the new system of local government in Georgia by participants of the workshop was that it creates new mechanisms for the development of the system of municipal government. Potentially, the system of the local government on the rayon level may provide for the creation of effective and sustainable municipal units. However, in effect the system has been rather centralized so far. The center has retained strong leverage on the bodies of the local government, which may be formal or informal. Such a situation is caused both by the reluctance of national elites to give up leverage and their mistrust towards the local actors, but also genuine lack of capacity and initiative on the local level.

This is characteristic for the system of local government in general, but such a deficit of genuine local government is an additional problem when it comes to regions where ethnic minority communities are concentrated. It is often assumed that further development of local government should be the main avenue of the development of rights

of minorities in the regions where they are concentrated. Such a development could diffuse some perception that the minority region is dominated by the center and reduce calls for local autonomy that becomes ground for concern in the Georgian society. On the other hand, however, the real or perceived craving of concentrated minority communities towards more autonomy is an impediment towards instituting greater level of local government: the fear of creating new challenges towards state integrity is one of major reasons why any political group in power is reluctant to allow higher degree of local government.

As some participants of the meeting said, the problem was linked to the general level of democracy in Georgia as well as other countries of the South Caucasus. The problems should be solved in the context of general democratization of the region. Without that, singling out the issue of local government is hardly productive.

On the other hand, however, there remains a problem of developing local capacity: a deficit in this area is an important reason why local government cannot effectively exercise those rights given to it by law. Therefore, developing local capacity should be one of priorities, especially for civil society actors.

Topic 3: Education policies and minority rights.

As participants noted, of late education policies have become the prior area of concern for the Armenian minority community in Samtskhe-Javakheti. This is related to several recent reforms in the area of education that may be successful and well-meaning in general, but have created new challenges to minority representatives.

The main concerns are related to difficulties of getting university-level education in Georgia. These problems got worse after Georgia instituted a new system of national exams that are the only way for getting admission to the university. As these exams require certain level of competence in the Georgian language, the reform – generally hailed for wiping out corruption from university admission system – has led to sharp reduction of the Armenian entrants to the Georgian universities. Naturally, it is difficult for graduates of non-Georgian-language schools to compete with graduates of Georgian-language schools, when tests are conducted in the Georgian language.

There are other concerns as well. More recently instituted system of certification of school principals (that also includes the requirement of certain proficiency in the official language) has led to the situation when many Armenian applicants for the positions of school principals in non-Georgian-language schools failed certification exams. As a result, they were still appointed by the ministry of education and science on a provisional basis, but their position and future prospects are uncertain. Moreover, local communities are afraid that eventually this process will lead to “Georgianization” of the Armenian and Russian-language schools where most Armenian residents of the regions study.

There was also wide-spread criticism of the level of instruction of the Georgian language, which includes schoolteachers, textbooks, and curricula in the non-Georgian-language schools, and effectiveness of various short-term courses in the Georgian language conducted by different Georgian and international organizations. Thus, while there are a number of new initiatives (by the State, international organizations, and civil society groups) aimed at improving the level of the instruction of the Georgian language, so far their effectiveness has only been marginal. This against the background when the demand for the knowledge of the Georgian language is on the increase.

Representatives of the National Examination Centre presented the vision of how their Centre and Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia plan to address issues of minority school graduates. In particular, for 2008, key test in *general abilities* will be for the

first time available in Armenian and Azeri languages. This is expected to considerably increase chances of graduated of minority schools to successfully compete with graduates of the Georgian-language schools.

Some Armenian participants asked for a grace period of about 10-15 years during which the Armenian population of Georgia would study Georgian. The idea of opening an Armenian-Georgian university in Akhalkalaki, based on cooperation between the two countries, was also raised – although doubts were expressed as to how such university could fit into the Georgian education system (for instance, applicants to those universities could only be admitted through the same system of National Examinations).

The system of special quotas for students coming from Javakheti who would then return to the region as schoolteachers was also proposed as a solution for the long-standing problems of shortage of teachers of the Georgian language in the region.

Attachment 6.

Aghveran, 1-2 MARCH 2008 Round Table Report

Recommendations - *Samtskhe-Javakheti: Developing the Region in International Context*

Introduction

The roundtable in Aghveran (Armenia) was the second and last roundtable within the project. It discussed on the following issues: the social and economic development of the region, the coverage of the Javakheti issue in the regional, Georgian and Armenian media, the role of the media, as well as the influence on the Armenian-Georgian interstate cooperation and the regional integration. Taking into account the results of the first roundtable in Bakuriani and the subsequent consultations of organizers from Armenia, Georgia and Samtskhe-Javakheti, during the second roundtable three new topics were discussed (see the Attachment for agenda and participants list), the results of the project were summed up, recommendations were prepared.

The participants of the meeting pointed out that ethnic minorities in Georgia continue to be minimally involved in the socio-political life of the country and in the processes of decision-making at practically every level. Representatives of minorities are virtually absent from any responsible positions in the Parliament, the central government, or regional-level administrative bodies (for example Samtskhe-Javakheti). Although minorities do take part, to a certain extent, in the self-governance of the areas of their territorially concentrated habitation, at the same time the number of officials representing an ethnic minority, for example, in some predominantly Armenian-populated districts of Samtskhe-Javakheti (with a very considerable proportion of population), is absolutely out of proportion to the ethnic composition of the total population. If we also take into account the insufficient level of assigned responsibilities, weak decentralization of power and underdeveloped self-governance, these factors do not bode well for the real participation of minorities in the socio-political life of the country and for their integration into society.

Insufficient level of local authorities, weak centralization of powers and the lack of development of the local government negatively influence the minorities' participation in the country's social and political life and their integration in the society. The participants of the meeting noted that it is necessary to change the situation as soon as possible, in particular, the issues of increasing the role of the minorities in the processes of political decision-making and the governance.

The representatives of the Georgian expert community stressed the urgency of developing programs and events to teach the inhabitants of Samtskhe-Javakheti the national language. The representatives of the Armenian NGOs in Javakheti, who participated in the roundtable, agreeing with their Georgian colleagues, pointed to the fact that the issue of the national language proficiency by the representatives of the ethnic minorities cannot be solved merely via administrative and organizational measures in the language and education field,. The problem demands complex solutions in the political and social fields, such as positive and mass examples of personnel growth of the minority representatives in state and socio-political structures of the country. It is also necessary to increase the awareness of the population's rights and the socio-political processes in Georgia. The total improvement of the economic situation in the region, creation of conditions for the rehabilitation of the infrastructure and the transport communication, investment attraction should become important factors contributing to the solution of Javakheti's blocks of problems.

In their reports and further discussions, the Armenian experts agreed with their colleagues from Tbilisi and Javakheti, and pointed out that any actions taken by the central government and regional authorities in places inhabited by ethnic minorities should be conducted in accordance with European and international political and legal commitments. On the whole, experts and NGO representatives reached a consensus on many issues and prepared recommendations for the improvement of the situation in Samtskhe-Javakheti.

Some Armenian experts in their reports and discussions pointed to the circumstance that the creation of a genuinely democratic and advanced state is a long and difficult process. According to them, achieving the age of a civil society is even longer and more difficult process, especially if there is ethnic and religious diversity in the country (such as Georgia), experiencing the processes of post-communist and democratic transition. The experience of the global community shows that this process may take years or decades and that forcing acceleration may not always lead to desired results. The Armenian experts noted that on this path both the society of Georgia and its ethnic minorities need to be ready to sacrifice some elements of their stereotypical concepts and to shed some of their unsubstantiated fears and prejudices.

Experts and NGO representatives of Samtskhe-Javakheti region pointed out that ethnic minorities in Georgia should not remain hostages to, or unwilling victims of the sad events that took place in Abkhazia and South Ossetia at the end of the last century. The unwillingness to liberalize the attitude towards Georgian citizens of non-titular ethnicity must not hide behind pointing to unfortunate analogies of the beginning of the 1990s. Regardless of the degree of effectiveness of the apparent force-driven control that the Georgian authorities succeed in installing on the territories with territorially concentrated settlements of ethnic minorities, the problem will remain unresolved and the only result will be that these regions will become a real headache for Georgia and the entire South Caucasus with new toughening of the policies of the Georgian leaders. The hopes harbored by certain groups of the Georgian political elite to find a "solution to the problem" by a slow and systematic demographic "colonization" of the territories with compact habitation of ethnic minorities is equally counterproductive. An example of, say, attempts of large-scale repopulation of such regions by Georgian settlers in the Tsalk district of Kvemo Kartli not only fly in the face of the accepted international legal standards but increase the risk level and the conflict generation potential; in fact, they are in practice virtually unfeasible for Georgia in the foreseeable future.

All the participants of the discussion, from Armenia, Tbilisi and Samtskhe-Javakheti, were unanimous that the intensification of the processes of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, an intense dialog concerning the process of Georgia's induction to the

NATO environment will concentrate the attention of European and international organizations and leading powers on the problems faced by ethnic minorities in Georgia in the field of protection and implementation of their rights. As a result, due to the active help of the international community and some not-indifferent states may lead in the future to achieving a mutually acceptable compromise in balancing the interests and approaches of the Georgian majority and its ethnic minorities in even the most entangled problems, with a view to establishing long-term political stability and progress in the evolution of political processes in Georgia.

Summary of discussions in Aghveran

Topic 1. The media coverage of Samtskhe-Javakheti issue

As a whole there is a lack of accurate, objective and professional coverage of the issue of the Armenian-populated Georgian region in the local and Georgian media, and in the media of Armenia. This is due to the general poor professionalism of the journalists who cover this issue, and also to the fact that media, NGO representatives and experts from Samtskhe-Javakheti are not sufficiently involved in the media coverage.

Recommendations:

- Increase the level of awareness in the Armenian population of the rights they have and improve the access of ethnic minorities to information by producing a larger number of news and educational programs in the minority languages in electronic and print media;
- Actively involve social and political organizations and individual representatives of ethnic and religious minorities in working on draft laws that are relevant to their concerns;
- Declare moratorium on irresponsible speculations concerning the problems of regions with compact habitation of ethnic minorities in the domestic political activities and media in Georgia and Armenia;
- Draft out a new extended law on ethnic minorities that would take into account their interests in the cultural, linguistic, educational and informational spheres and promote the civic integration of minorities;
- Introduce additions and changes into derivative standards and laws and into departmental regulation of issues concerning cultural, linguistic, educational and political rights of ethnic minorities in Georgia;
- Actively involve social and political organizations and individual representatives of ethnic and religious minorities in working on draft laws that are relevant to their concerns.
- Start a broad-based campaign for promoting tolerance with regard to ethnic and religious minorities;
- Analyze and discuss the issue of incorporating adequate modifications concerning minority languages into domestic legal acts and into derivative departmental instructions;
- Organize courses for improving the proficiency in the official language among civil servants and eliminate language-based discriminatory practices (such as sacking civil servants belonging to ethnic minorities for reasons of insufficient command of the official language);

Topic 2. Prospects for economic development in the regional context: approaches and methodologies

The difficult social and economic situation and numerous problems stemming from it represent an important factor that influences developments in Samtskhe-Javakheti. Therefore, the improvement of the situation in the region will require the effective implementation of existing projects and creation of new programs of economic rehabilitation, creation of new jobs, development of transport and communications, with the participation of Armenia, leading Western countries and international donors.

Recommendations:

- Actively complete implementation of the program (or draft a new one) of job procurement for the local population of Javakheti after evacuation of the 62nd Russian military base;
- Coordinate the implementation of projects in the territories of concentrated habitation of ethnic minorities with the activities of representatives of local socio-political organizations and NGOs;
- Boost the scale of those projects that aim at resolving the issues with the socio-economic rehabilitation of regions of territorially concentrated habitation of ethnic minorities;
- Implement an efficient state-supported program of socio-economic rehabilitation, expansion of the transportation infrastructure and provision of natural gas to Samtskhe-Javakheti.

Topic 3. Javakheti in regional and international politics and in context of Armenian - Georgian bilateral cooperation

Whatever further developments in Javakheti may be, it is essential that Armenia and Georgia, as the two main stakeholders, should continue and deepen their bilateral interstate cooperation to the benefit of this region, jointly implementing projects aimed at resolving the vital economic, social, cultural and education issues of Javakheti. It is equally important to promote the involvement of international and European agencies and donors in these projects.

Recommendations:

- Promote ratification by Georgia of the *European Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities, 1980* (and its additional *Protocols*) and continue codifying the rights of ethnic minorities to cultural, educational, economic and other types of across-the-frontier links to their “ethnic motherlands” (also by signing bilateral treaties or by including *ad hoc* articles into intergovernmental agreements);
- Sign bilateral legal acts covering legal standards at the governmental and interdepartmental levels and concerning specific ethnic minority issues between Georgia and Armenia;
- Set up a joint Armenian-Georgian State University in the town of Akhalkalaki in accordance with the intergovernmental agreements between Armenia and Georgia;
- Promote the involvement of the Georgian-Armenian Expert Forum on Samtskhe-Javakheti in elaborating recommendations and proposals for governments and informing the societies of both countries
- Promote a more profound dialogue between the interested international organizations and the Georgian and Armenian authorities on issues with the protection of the rights of ethnic and religious minorities;
- Stimulate investment for the socio-economic rehabilitation in areas of territorially concentrated habitation of Armenian minority originating from the Republic of Armenia and Armenian Diaspora.