

**‘FINDING DURABLE SOLUTIONS FOR THE MESKHETIANS’**

**A PRESENTATION OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND  
A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION WITH GOVERNMENT  
AND CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS IN GEORGIA**

Report on the Joint Conference organized by the ECMI and  
the State Minister of Georgia on Conflict Resolution Issues

By Denika Blacklock

Tbilisi, Georgia, 6 June 2005

ECMI Report # 56

August 2005

ECMI Report # 56

European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)

Director: Marc Weller

© Copyright 2005 European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)  
Published in August 2005 by the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Background to the Project .....	4
II.	Conference Rationale.....	5
III.	Conference Profile .....	6
IV.	Description of Conference Activities .....	6
	A. Introductory speeches.....	6
	B. Presentation of country case-studies.....	7
	1. Azerbaijan.....	7
	2. Kazakhstan.....	7
	3. Uzbekistan .....	8
	4. Russia.....	9
	5. Kyrgyzstan.....	10
	6. Ukraine .....	11
	7. Turkey.....	11
	8. Georgia .....	12
	9. United States .....	13
V.	Discussion .....	14
	A. Problems faced by Georgian government .....	14
	B. Follow-up activities for Georgian government, future plan of action.....	16
VI.	Annexes .....	17
	A. List of present ECMI experts.....	17
	B. List of conference participants.....	17

## I. BACKGROUND

The Meskhetian Turks<sup>1</sup> are one of the last of the national groups of the Soviet Union deported by Stalin in 1943–44, who have not yet been able to return to their native region (in southwest Georgia). Currently numbering some 370–400,000 people, the Meskhetian Turks, following pogroms and multiple displacements, find themselves scattered across vast territories of Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey and, most recently, the United States. In some of these countries, the Meskhetian Turks are exposed to ethnic persecution and discrimination, while Georgia, so far, has effectively blocked resettlement to their native region. International actors seeking to address these problems encounter severe difficulties in finding solutions, *inter alia*, due to a lack of consistent knowledge on the Meskhetian Turks' own perceptions of their displacement and their visions for future settlement.

The ECMI project, “Between Integration and Resettlement: The Meskhetian Turks”, aims to produce a comprehensive and comparative cross-border study of today's Meskhetian Turk communities and strives to develop an alternative discourse to the framework maintained by international actors addressing the problems of the Meskhetian Turks, based on an *a priori* assumption that the Meskhetian Turks desire to return to their region of origin. The project, through the conduct of multidisciplinary research in nine countries, seeks to grasp the complexity of the subject by obtaining a thorough understanding of Meskhetian Turkish identity, migration processes, concepts of ‘home’ and social organization, which can provide the basis for new approaches to find durable solutions to the problems of the Meskhetian Turks.

Hence, the aim of the project is to provide a major contribution to the study of the Meskhetian Turks and to help define new directions to address the problems of displacement and resettlement. The findings of the project will form a scholarly basis for future national and international endeavours to find durable solutions to the long-lasting problems faced by this disadvantaged group.

The project has facilitated two research seminars with the participation of local and international experts. The first seminar was held in Flensburg, Germany, in September 2004. The seminar adopted a plan and methodology for the research. Participants in the event were also representatives of the Council of Europe (CoE), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR.

Generously funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, the research project is conducted from June 2004 – March 2006. Upon completion of the project, an authoritative book volume will be published in English and possibly in Russian towards the end of 2006.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term “Meskhetian Turk” is contested and there is no consensus as to the proper designation of the population group. Whereas the majority of the population consider themselves to be of Turkish ethnic origin – hence, the term “Meskhetian Turks” – the population is usually referred to as “Muslim-Meskhetians” in Georgia, reflecting their presumed Georgian origin. ECMI does not take a position on this issue. In this report, the term “Meskhetian Turks” is used for convenience purposes, except in cases where the term “Muslim Meskhetians” is explicitly used by conference participants.

This volume will form an important contribution for scholars and practitioners in addressing the problems of the population.

On 4–5 June 2005, ECMI conducted its second workshop in Tbilisi, Georgia, with the participation of its network of researchers and experts, currently conducting studies in the countries of the Meskhetian Turks' settlement. The event summarized the results of major research activities and set deadlines for submission of final reports and chapters of the research to be publicized.

The presence in Georgia of the network of the leading scholars on Meskhetian Turks, prompted ECMI to organize – in collaboration with the State Minister of Georgia on Conflict Resolution Issues – a conference to familiarize the Georgian government and civil society with the research results and share the insights generated through the research project.

## **II. CONFERENCE RATIONALE**

In late 2004 and early 2005, Georgia has come under increased pressure from the CoE to fulfill its obligation to address the issue of the Meskhetian Turks. In November 2004, a government committee was formed to address the repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks, and in March 2005, the Georgian State Minister on Conflict Resolution Issues, Giorgi Khaindrava, was made chairman of this committee.

Acknowledging the importance of ECMI's research in the current Georgian context, the State Minister offered ECMI all possible assistance and partnership in the preparation and organization of this event. As a conference co-organizer, the Office of the State Minister, through its channels, distributed press releases and other conference materials among Georgian and international news agencies and printed and electronic media outlets. The State Minister's office also ensured the participation of relevant high officials from the Georgian Parliament, Ministries, State Chancellery and Presidential Administration.

The goal of the conference was to present to Georgian civil society and governmental representatives the preliminary findings of the field studies, conducted by ECMI researchers in nine countries of Meskhetian Turks' settlement. The preliminary results of the ECMI research project, presented at the conference, were envisaged to form an initial scholarly basis for the emerging governmental efforts in Georgia to initiate the repatriation planning process. The conference also aimed at commencing informed and insightful public discussions on the Meskhetian Turk repatriation issue.

Furthermore, the conference was an opportunity to demonstrate to Georgians and Meskhetian Turks alike that Georgia is not alone in addressing the issue of repatriation and that, with the assistance of the international community and experts, Georgia can undertake a public and transparent process that will ensure the maintenance of rights of Georgians and Meskhetian Turks.

### **III: CONFERENCE PROFILE**

The conference took place on 6 June 2005 at the Sheraton Metechi Palace Hotel in Tbilisi, Georgia. The structure of the event was designed to include the following elements:

#### **Part I**

##### **Presentation conference on the research project and presentation of preliminary findings**

- Introductory speeches
- Presentation of country case-studies by ECMI researchers/experts
- Discussion
- Press conference for local and international media

#### **Part II**

##### **Briefing session/roundtable for Georgian government officials on Meskhetian Turkish repatriation trends**

- Presentations by ECMI experts
- Question-answer session/discussions

### **IV. DESCRIPTION OF THE CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES**

#### *A. Introductory speeches*

The introductory part of the conference included a welcoming speech by ECMI's Regional Representative in the Caucasus, Tom Trier, who briefed the participants on the goal of the conference and familiarized them with the concept of the ECMI research project.

In his introductory speech, Giorgi Khaindrava, the State Minister on Conflict Resolution Issues, recognized the utility of presenting the preliminary findings of the researchers to the broader public, including other government officials in relevant departments, civil society organizations, international representatives and the media. These findings, presented by the researchers themselves, would assist in launching a well-structured repatriation process, and would allow the Georgian government to build upon its own findings in order to pursue a lasting solution to the issue of the Muslim Meskhetians

## *B. Presentation of country case-studies*

### *1. Azerbaijan*

#### STATISTICS:

- Approx. 95,000 Meskhetian Turks in five towns and 53 districts
- Approx. 50,000 Meskhetian Turks are citizens, among them 20–25,000 are registered as Turks; 25–35,000 are registered as Azeris

(Sources: Azerbaijan State Committee of Statistics; data provided by Dr. Arif Yunusov)

#### PRELIMINARY FINDINGS:

The first Meskhetian Turks arrived in Azerbaijan in the twentieth century and numbered some 43,000 persons. Between 1989 and 1994, 36–54,000 Meskhetian Turk refugees arrived from Uzbekistan (official numbers on refugees range between 43–44,000). They settled in primarily rural areas, and have always distinguished themselves from other Turks.

Initial interviews with the Meskhetian Turk community show that there is a general belief that their life in Azerbaijan is good – for many it is their native land, and they have rights to their own language and education. They recognize the economic problems in Azerbaijan but they realize that Georgia also has its own problems (economic and political instability). It is estimated that around 30% of the Meskhetian Turk population are eager to return to Georgia, mostly among the elderly. However, given other options, they prefer to remain in Azerbaijan rather than go to Turkey or the United States, where they feel they would be at risk of losing their national identity. In Azerbaijan, they have their own elite, intelligentsia, publish books on Meskhetian Turk folklore, and are able to maintain their kinship ties.

However, the Meskhetian Turk population in Azerbaijan wants Georgia to adopt a law giving them a legal right to return to their ‘homeland’, although it is uncertain how many people would take advantage of this opportunity.

### *2. Kazakhstan*

#### STATISTICS:

- Approx. 150,000 Meskhetian Turks reside in Kazakhstan regions:
  - Almaty – approx. 45,000
  - South Kazakhstan – approx. 40,000
  - Zhambil – approx. 36,000
  - Qyzylorda – approx. 10,000

(Sources: Estimations 2004, data from South Kazakhstan Branch of State Statistic Agency; provided by Igor Savin)

#### PRELIMINARY FINDINGS:

In Kazakhstan, large settlements of Meskhetian Turks have formed since their deportation from Georgia in 1944. They primarily dealt in agriculture but have diversified to work in construction, oil or their own businesses. Their living standards are no worse than other Kazakhs. However, they have a low level of representation in government and recognize that certain advantages are given to the majority population. As such, there is a low level of integration with other communities in Kazakhstan (ie., few mixed marriages).

Very few members of the community (5% – mostly elderly) want to go to Georgia. They recognize that life has changed and that they will not fulfill their economic potential in Georgia. However, they continue to emphasize their right to return, and want a law that would condition their return to Georgia. They have certificates from the prosecutor's office stating that they were repressed, and there is a 1993 law that has compensated them in Kazakhstan. However, even with these conditions for return to 'Meskhetia', Georgia is now only a symbolic homeland that they recognize they should be allowed to go back to, although whether they want to or not is a separate issue. They do not know what Georgia means to them now – Kazakhstan is their home, and they associate with Turkey due to certain cultural kinships and foresee Turkey taking a role as a kin-state. However, even with Turkey they are sceptical, as some of those who went to Turkey in the 1990s have since returned to Kazakhstan.

There is a pull from both Georgia and Turkey on their identity and concept of a homeland. On the one hand, they prefer to be called 'Turks' rather than 'Meskhetian Turks', but, on the other hand, they recognize a Georgian influence on their culture. Thus, their 'homeland' is a hypothetical one in southwest Georgia, while their home is in Kazakhstan.

### *3. Uzbekistan*

#### STATISTICS:

- Main regions of location:

- Bukhara – approx. 3,000
- Samarkand – approx. 4,000
- Nawoiy – approx. 2,000
- Tashkent, Sirdarya, Jizzakh, Kashkadaria – approx. 15,000–20,000

(Statistical data provided by Vera Svirskaya - informal sources)

There are no official statistics regarding the Meskhetian Turks in Uzbekistan, and what is available is not reliable – they are rough averages gained from international



organizations. Given this, researchers based most of their inferences on personal interviews carried out over two six-week periods.

#### PRELIMINARY FINDINGS:

The Meskhetian Turk community in Uzbekistan deals primarily in agriculture and faces difficult economic conditions, not unlike other ethnic groups. Agriculture in Uzbekistan is in a deplorable state, and most want to leave Uzbekistan for economic reasons alone. They foresee themselves following other relatives abroad, likely to Russia, Azerbaijan and the United States. They also see Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as attractive alternatives for economic opportunities.

Almost all Meskhetian Turks speak Uzbek, and are thus fairly well integrated and have a good relationship with the majority community. However, conflict between Meskhetian Turks and the local population usually erupts when the Meskhetian Turks attempt to migrate within Uzbekistan – they have difficulty finding, selling or buying property, and finding new employment.

Most do not think they have a homeland where they can live as one nation – for the elderly, their homeland is Georgia, while Uzbekistan is the homeland of the younger generations. Georgia is a homeland only for those who were born there – they do not understand why they were deported and why they cannot go back. Recently, the United States has become very attractive to members of the community looking to leave Uzbekistan. However, the intelligentsia feel that a move to the United States may cause a disappearance of their ethnic group. On the other hand, the intelligentsia are not attracted to Turkey either – regardless of the fact that many in the Meskhetian Turk community in Uzbekistan refer to themselves as Turks – because they are aware that many will face downward social mobility if they resettle in Turkey.

#### *4. Russia*

##### STATISTICS:

- Around 68,400 Meskhetian Turks reside in central regions and northern Caucasus:
  - Central Russia – approx. 14,000
  - Northern Caucasus – approx. 50,000-60,000, including Krasnodar Region – 15,008 and Stavropol Region – 6,500-7,000

(Statistical data from Census 2002; other sources provided by Dr. Igor Kuznetsov)

##### PRELIMINARY FINDINGS:

The Meskhetian Turk communities have lived in central Russia since the 1960s and the north Caucasus since 1989. In the most well known community in Russia, Krasnodar Krai region in the north Caucasus, the Meskhetian Turk community are seen as illegal migrants, and face discrimination due to this perception. Regardless, the Meskhetian

Turk community in Russia continues to be very mobile and there is a continual inflow of Meskhetian Turks from other parts of Russia to Krasnodar Krai.

Given the dispersal of Meskhetian Turks across Russia, they have different processes of self-identification and participate in different cultural rituals. Among Meskhetian Turks in Russia, there are a small group who consider themselves Georgian and a larger group who considers themselves to be Turks in Russia.

However, given the widespread discrimination against the Meskhetian Turk community in Krasnodar Krai, the IOM has received 11,000 applications from Meskhetian Turks to be resettled in the United States. However, on another level, it is difficult to determine how many truly want to leave Russia, since it is useless to carry out surveys, given that the IOM has documented changing attitudes towards leaving Russia and their destinations. The United States is simply an alternative to a economically and politically unstable Georgia.

## 5. *Kyrgyzstan*

### STATISTICS:

- About 50-70,000 Meskhetian Turks reside in the northern and southern regions
  - Total in the south – approx. 50,000, including the Osh Region – approx. 11,956
  - Total in the north – approx. 20,000 (Chuskaya and Talas Regions)

(Statistical data from the Turkish National Cultural Center; provided by Dr. Victor Voronkov)

### PRELIMINARY FINDINGS:

Most Meskhetian Turks are registered as Azeris, and live mainly in agricultural regions, although some live in urban dwellings. The standard of living is higher among Turks, and they are well integrated – they went to Kyrgyz and Russian schools and have no conflicts with the local population – it is a successful example of integration.

The idea of returning to Georgia is popular only among the elderly, and others would only return out of respect for their elders. Further, there are no leaders who disseminate the idea of returning to Georgia, nor do they have the tools to do so. Most Meskhetian Turks in Kyrgyzstan know nothing of Georgia – they do not even know the geographical location of Meskhetia. In this vein, the attraction to Georgia is weak – it is perceived as a ‘lost paradise’, and given the positive economic situation of Meskhetian Turks in Kyrgyzstan, as well as their level of integration, there should be no expectation of a mass exodus. It is likely that if they were to move, it would be to the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, or to Turkey because it is their perceived homeland and they would have the potential for citizenship and maintenance of their culture, as well as the promise of reuniting with relatives already residing there.

However, if Georgia were to create ‘paradise’ conditions, there is the possibility that Meskhetian Turks from Kyrgyzstan would return.

## *6. Ukraine*

### STATISTICS:

- Around 9,180 Meskhetian Turks live in all regions, except for the Volynski region
  - 89% of the Meskhetian Turks reside in the southern regions:
    - Khersonska Region – approx. 3,795
    - Donetsk Region – approx. 1,910
    - Republic of Crimea – approx. 1,003
    - Mykolaiv and Zaporozhski regions – approx. 1,000

(Statistical data provided by Dr. Olena Malinovska)

### PRELIMINARY FINDINGS:

Meskhetian Turks – or Turks as they also refer to themselves – came to Ukraine in 1992 from Uzbekistan, and more recently from Azerbaijan and Russia. The main settlement is in the southeast/Crimea, where they live in small groups of about 30–40 people and, given this disperse settlement pattern, there is a lot of internal migration between settlements.

Their main occupation is in agriculture. However, upon arrival in 1992, they primarily worked as labourers. When the kolkhozes collapsed shortly after their arrival, they were forced to turn to agriculture to make their living. They currently own their own land and, since 1997, their economic position has improved, although they tend not to invest much into their homes or other capitalist ventures. Most Meskhetian Turks in Ukraine have Ukrainian citizenship, with the exception of those who have recently resettled there.

While they find Ukraine a good place to live, they still feel that they live there temporarily – they still have a ‘homeland’ in mind, although it is an abstract notion of a place to find peace, family, friends and a place to maintain their culture, language and identity. Ukraine, Russia, Turkey and the United States do not satisfy their requirements for such a homeland, although they recognize that the idea of Georgia as their homeland is a romantic one. Given this, they do not expect their problems to be resolved soon, but would like to see moral support from the Georgians on political issues and citizenship rehabilitation.

## *7. Turkey*

### STATISTICS:

- About 35,000 Meskhetian Turks reside in the country. Their main locations are:
  - Bursa – approx. 20,000

- Antalya – approx. 4,000
- Istanbul – approx. 3,420

(Approximate estimations of the Meskhetian Turk Associations)

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS:

After the fall of the USSR, Meskhetian Turks began to move to Turkey and, in July 1992, Law 3835 was passed to assist with their migration to Turkey. The Turkish government financed the resettlement of 500 families. However, changes to policies related to Meskhetian Turks were initiated with the new government in 2002.

Citizenship has been given to 50% of the population and those who are in Turkey illegally are not expelled. Meskhetian Turks are currently concentrated in Bursa, Antalya and Istanbul.

They have integrated well – there is family/communal solidarity, as well as solidarity with the local population. Group identity also plays an active role in the community.

As such, Meskhetian Turks in Turkey have rejected the idea of repatriation to Georgia if they have to give up their ‘Turkishness’. Moreover, migration to Georgia has lost significance compared with the Turkish option, and they view migration to the United States as a third deportation. Although, the idea of Georgia as a ‘homeland’ is not widely accepted, there continues to be ideas of their old villages as ‘home’.

Given the family unification and psychological problems, Meskhetian Turks in Turkey will not go to Georgia, and it is felt that they should not be forced to undertake another migration.

## 8. Georgia

STATISTICS:

- Approx. 643 Muslim Meskhetians reside in 17 locations in Georgia:

- Main Regions:
  - Ozurgeti, Guria – 169
  - Samtredia, Imereti – 174
  - Akhalsikhe, Meskheti – 48

(Sources: Nasakirali village ‘sakrebulo’, Guria; Samtredia region ‘gamgeoba’, Imereti)

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS:

A small number of families live in western Georgia. A larger number had resettled to Georgia in the 1970s, but were forced to leave again for Ukraine and other countries in the 1990s. The Muslim Meskhetians who remained in Georgia initially spoke only their native Anatolian Turkish dialect or Russian. However, with time, Muslim Meskhetians

established close relationships with the neighbouring/host communities while managing to maintain their traditional internal social networks, habits, language and culture at the same time. This process eventually resulted in their comparatively successful integration into Georgian society within the areas of their settlement: middle-aged and young Muslim Meskhetians, especially those who had been born in Georgia, acquired good command of the Georgian language, while Meskhetian youth attend local Georgian schools and universities.

The Muslim Meskhetians in Georgia feel that they live in magnifying glass – researchers, international organizations and other academics show unabated interest in them and the issue of repatriation.

Further, it is understood that interviews must be conducted with their neighbours, to discern attitudes towards the Muslim Meskhetians. It is felt that they would object to the return of Muslim Meskhetians but people in different regions have different opinions on the subject.

## *9. United States*

### STATISTICS:

- Demographic data on the Meskhetian Turks in the United States is related to those living in the Krasnodar Krai region of Russia
- As of May 2005, there are between 1,500-2,000 Meskhetian Turks in the United States

(Statistical data from IOM)

### PRELIMINARY FINDINGS:

This is a sequel to the research carried out in the Krasnodar Krai region of Russia, as all Meskhetian Turks who have resettled in the United States have come from this region, and therefore their experiences, integration and identity are coloured by their experiences and memories in Krasnodar Krai.

They qualified for refugee status based on their classification as ‘refugees of special humanitarian concern’ and on the Refugee Act of 1980. They resettled voluntarily and are therefore eligible for refugee benefits that others are not. There was special criteria to apply: they had to prove they are ethnic Meskhetian Turk; had to have resided in Krasnodar Krai before January 2004; had to have fled from Uzbekistan; and had to prove difficulties integrating into Krasnodar Krai (ie., evidence of second class citizenship). Their resettlement is handled by housing and resettlement agencies in the United States.

There has been a major misconception among Meskhetian Turks and in the media, particularly with regard to the idea that Meskhetian Turks are going to the United States as cheap labour (in fact, the goal for resettlement agencies is to have them employed by the end of their first six months in the country). Another issue pertaining to the

resettlement of Meskhetian Turks in the United States is the concept of family: the definition of family used by the refugee agencies can differ from the cultural concept of family, which can result in separation of extended families. However, statistics on this issue are hard to establish since the community grows every week and thus it is difficult to determine how many families have suffered from this separation.

In terms of maintaining their identities in the ‘melting pot’ culture of the United States, importance has been placed on the complexity of their identity in language, history and specifics of their culture, and they have begun to build networks with both the Russian and Turkish communities in the United States.

For the Meskhetian Turks in the United States, Georgia is a memory of the generation of ‘grandparents’ – in the realm of ‘homeland’ and ‘belonging’, there are radical generational differences in their understanding of the importance of Georgia. However, there is a general consensus that symbolic recognition of their right to return should be guaranteed.

## **V. DISCUSSION**

### *A. Problems faced by Georgian government*

A number of questions were asked by the conference participants on the problems or obstacles to repatriation that the Georgian government and Georgian people would face. Questions of ethnic identification, language and legal issues were consistently raised. Special attention was paid to the cost incurred by the Georgian government for repatriation and how those costs would be passed on to Georgian society. ECMI researcher, Alexander Ossipov, broached the issue of undertaking the logistical issues of resettlement – the documents that would be required by Meskhetian Turks in other countries, challenges they might face from their ‘host’ countries and the sale of property.

The State Minister on Conflict Resolution Issues also raised the issue of accommodation. He noted that most villages have been populated by other formerly deported persons – these houses cannot simply be emptied. Likewise, some of the villages either no longer exist or are in ruins. He also emphasized that the ethnic composition of the people already living in the regions where the Meskhetian Turks anticipate returning will need to be taken into account in order to ensure that they are not placed in a potential ethnic conflict situation.

Other participants touched on the issue of compact settlements. The State Minister stated that compact settlement was not an issue, that emphasis would be put on the need for proper conditions for dignified life. One participant argued that resettlement must occur wherever the government decides, and not only to ‘Meskhetia’ (Samtskhe-Javakheti, from where they were deported) because it could create a hotbed of tensions in that region. Therefore, they must learn Georgian, and must live in designated areas for 10–15 years. The State Minister argued that it should be up to the returnees to decide where they

want to live, and that the government would not allow opinions on who would and would not return, and to where, to influence decisions on repatriation.

At this point, the State Minister noted that 70 years of propaganda needed to be addressed – that there was a need to change the perceptions of people in Georgia. He felt that the government should work in cooperation with ECMI experts to analyze this issue. Part of the solution would be to determine what happened during the deportation, and why the deportation took place. The State Minister was asked if the Georgian authorities would conduct research to find out what the local population thinks of repatriation and how the media would play a role. The State Minister underscored the necessity of paying attention to public opinion, and that specific individual opinions could be detrimental to this process.

One question was raised as to how the problem of ethnic- or self-identification was being addressed in the United States. The premise was to gather a better understanding of who and how the Meskhetian Turks would identify with upon their repatriation to Georgia. Steve Swerdlov and Lisa Koriuchkina noted that it was the prerogative of the Meskhetian Turk community to decide if they would keep their own traditions, become ‘American’ or retain their old citizenship. They noted that the Meskhetian Turk community in the US has already begun to organize their own community centres, and that there are no apparent obstacles to ethnic or cultural identity in the US.

It was noted that Georgia assumed a legitimate obligation to repatriate the Meskhetian Turks with the collapse of the Soviet Union and Georgia’s membership in the CoE, but repatriation would not be the end of the story. The issue of language was among the most popular topic with conference participants. Many wanted to know if the Meskhetian Turks were ready to learn the Georgian language and to participate in public life.

The State Minister on Civil Integration, Zinaida Bestaeva, asked what languages Meskhetian Turk children are currently taught in, so that Georgian officials could be adequately prepared to assist them in learning Georgian. ECMI expert, Igor Savin, noted that in Kazakhstan, there are some Turkish options, but most are educated in either Russian or Kazakh, or in Uzbek in settlements near the Uzbek border. It was pointed out that the only Turkish many Meskhetian Turks know is a colloquial version – they are only learning modern Turkish in Turkey. Elena Chikadze, who conducted research in Uzbekistan, commented that the Meskhetian Turks who were interviewed were not asked if they wanted to learn Georgian – but claimed that it would not be a problem for the children. This was backed up by ECMI’s expert from Ukraine, Olena Malynovska, who said that as the Meskhetian Turks are already multilingual, one more language should not be a great obstacle. Igor Savin raised the point that most seemed to emphasize the need to master the state language, as they have done in Kazakhstan. However, all experts were of the opinion that the Meskhetian Turks should have the right to preserve their mother tongue. Arif Yunusov, from Azerbaijan, pointed out that it would be up to the Georgian government to play a major role in helping to establish the Georgian language among the returnees.

The discussion session concluded with comments by the Chairman of Vatan, the largest organization of Meskhetian Turks. He noted that the Meskhetian Turks have wanted to return to Georgia for 60 years, but that with no opportunities for work, or any means to support their families, they have been forced to stay where they are. To move to anywhere other than Georgia would be considered a forced measure. He conceded that it is impossible to define the community, and to figure out who wants to return, but he stressed that what was important was the will and the wish of the people to make their own decision on returning to Georgia once they are guaranteed the right to do so.

*B. Follow-up activities for Georgian government, future plan of action*

Throughout the discussions, a number of ideas and recommendations were put forward for the government of Georgia. Some general suggestions included a repatriation process that proceeded on a stage-by-stage basis, and for the government to procure an international fund to support the entire process.

While no action plan was agreed upon, specific recommendations on what needed to be done by the Georgian government in the short and long term were tabled. These included:

1. Passing the law on repatriation (the draft law from the Young Lawyers Association has been used as a basis, was commented on by international experts, and approved by the Ministry but, since 2003, the process has been in a stalemate).
2. Establishing the demographics of Meskhetian Turks worldwide.
3. Creating conditions/provide information to allow Meskhetian Turks to make a free and fair decision on their choice to return to Georgia.
4. Ensuring that resettlement is allowed throughout Georgia, and not just Samtskhe-Javakheti.
5. Setting up rehabilitation/resettlement centres.

The State Minister on Conflict Resolution Issues concluded the conference by recognizing that the process of repatriation would be complex given that the countries where Muslim Meskhetians currently live have different laws, and that it will be impossible to take into account the legislation of other countries. He also touched on the issue of internally displaced persons and refugees currently in Georgia, and that the government will have to deal with these issues simultaneously. However, he pledged to use the expertise of other governments and NGOs on these issues.



## **VI. ANNEXES**

### *I. List of present ECMI Experts*

*Aysegul Aydingun*, Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey.

*Elena Chikadze*, Researcher, Center for Independent Social Research, St. Petersburg, Russia.

*Laverenti Djanishvili*, Institute of History and Ethnology, Georgian Academy of Science, Tbilisi

*Andrei Khanzhin*, Research Associate and Project Coordinator, European Centre for Minority Issues, Tbilisi, Georgia.

*Ms. Lisa Koriuchkina*, PhD Candidate, Brown University, Providence, RI, USA.

*Igor Kuznetsov*, Associate Professor, Kuban State University, Krasnodar, Russia.

*Olena Malynovska*, Researcher, The Ukrainian Academy of Government Administration, Kiev, Ukraine.

*Alexander Ossipov*, Program Coordinator, Memorial, Moscow, Affiliated Research Fellow, CISR, St Petersburg, Russia.

*Ingrid Oswald*, Professor of Sociology, University of Oldenburg, Germany

*Igor Savin*, Head of the NGO “Dialogue”, Information and Communication Center, Shymkent, Kazakhstan.

*Steve Swerdlow*, JD Candidate, University of California, Berkley, California.

*Tom Trier*, Regional Representative and Project Director, European Centre for Minority Issues, Tbilisi, Georgia.

*Victor Voronkov*, Director, Center for Independent Social Research (CISR), St Petersburg, Russia.

*Arif Yunusov*, Chief, Department of Conflictology and Migration Studies, Institute of Peace and Democracy, Baku, Azerbaijan.

### *II. List of conference participants*

#### **A. Government**

*Giorgi Khaindrava*, State Minister on Conflict Resolution Issues

*Zinaida Bestaeva*, The State Minister on Civil Integration

*Levan Abashidze*, Georgian Parliament

*Dimitry Kotetishvili*, Administration of the President Regional Office

*Giorgi Kizikurashvili*, Customs Department

*Irakli Kvezereli*, Georgian Parliament

*David Arabidze*

*Zinaida Bestaeva*, State Minister of Civil Integration

*David Berdzenishvili*, Member of the Parliament

*Nugzar Mgeladze*, Member of the Parliament

*Eldar Shengelaia*, Member of the Parliament

*Mikheil Chanturia*, State Security Council of Georgia

*Zurab Kajaia*

*Temur Lomsadze*, Office of the State Minister on Conflict Resolution Issues

*Tamara Tsikhistavi*, Office of the State Minister on Conflict Resolution Issues  
*David Tomadze*, Ministry of Justice  
*Maka Lashkhia*, Senior Specialist  
*David Japaridze*, Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation  
*Zurab Mezurnishvili*, Department of Civil Integration  
*Eter Astemirova*, Minister of Refugees and Accommodation  
*Koba Choplani*, Department of Civil Defense

## **B. Civil society**

*Tata Aleksidze*, Georgian Law Student's Association  
*Indira Amiranashvili*, Chief of Party, Save the Children  
*Liana Beria*, IDP Women's Association  
*Manana Kandelaki*, Association for Psychological and Sociological Aid, "Ndoba"  
*Giorgi Khutsishvili*, International Center for Conflict and Negotiation  
*Tengiz Mamaladze*, League for Defending the Rights of Georgian Muslims  
*Zurab Tsintsadze*, Institute of History, Tbilisi State University  
*Zaur Khatilovi*, Foundation for Civil Integration  
*Guram Simonishvili*, Association "Simi"  
*Inga Mamulashvili*, GBCG  
*Alekso Mikeladze*, Georgian Technical University, Professor  
*Akhpa Skulovi*, "Istoki" Newspaper  
*Gulaber Ananiashvili*, Society "Mamulishvili"  
*Israfil Pipinadze*, Association of Meskheta  
*Otar Kapanadze*, Caucasian House  
*P. Zukakishli*, "Kavkazski Aktsent" Newspaper  
*Salome Tsereteli*, World Vision International, Georgia  
*Archil Kikodze*, Georgian State University  
*Omaz Chkheidze*, Writer  
*Nodar Sumbadze*, Social Political Institute  
*Nana Zardiashvili*, Social Political Institute  
*Jemal Gelashvili*, Youth Organization "Meskheta"  
*Lia Melikishvili*, Institute of History, Professor  
*Darejan Tsitskiridze*, South Caucasus Institute of Regional Security  
*Eka Pirtskhalava*, Social Political Institute  
*Levan Nadareishvili*, Association "Mamulishvili"  
*Iso Melidze*, International Association of Forcibly Displaced Meskhetians  
*Marat Baratashvili*, Union of Georgian Repatriates  
*Mamuka Kuparadze*, NGO Studio "Re"  
*George Vashakidze*, Eurasia Foundation  
*Paradashvili*, Representative of Meskheta's Military  
*Telman Eristavi*, NGO "Maiak"  
*Ia Tikanadze*, Fredrich Ebert Foundation  
*Mikhail Aidinov*, Association of Russian-speaking Journalists  
*Mikheil Mirziashvili*, Open Society Foundation, Georgia  
*Marina Tabukashvili*, Open Society Foundation, Georgia  
*Eka Metreveli*, GFSIS

*Medea Matiashvili*, Law Students' Association  
*Zurab Burduli*, Georgian Young Lawyers' Association  
*Nana Kapanadze*, "Ex-political prisoners for human rights"  
*Robert Bekadze*, Georgian Repatriates Alliance  
*Alikhan Kuradze*, NGO "Khsna"  
*Ibrahim Virkhanov*, "Vatan" Azerbaijan  
*V. Akhmedov*, "Vatan" Kazakstan  
*Makhamot Khutsishvili*, Repatriated Meskhetian, Georgia  
*Suleyman Barbakadze*, Chairman, "Vatan", Moscow

### **C. International Community**

*Rikke Johannesen*, Danish Refugee Council  
*Peter Soerensen*, Danish Foreign Ministry  
*Katja Diesenbacher*, University Bremen/Germany  
*Irina Dmitrukha*, Russian Embassy  
*Marika Shioishvili*, Urban Institute CELIS/USAID  
*Firat Sunel*, Turkish Embassy in Georgia  
*Lanke Clark*, Resident Coordinator, UNDP  
*Phil Eanes*, IOM Krasnodar Krai, Russia  
*Anna Morsk*, Norwegian Refugee Council  
*Angel Dimitrov*, Programme Manager, UNDP  
*Khan Khalid*, USAID  
*J. Niculin*, Swiss Embassy  
*Natia Kvitsiani*, IOM Georgia  
*Vasily Korchman*, Russian Embassy  
*Rikke Friis*, Danish Refugee Council  
*Tamar Katsitadze*, Council Of Europe  
*F.S. Cheever*, Refugee Coordinator, US Embassy  
*Elkhan Polukhov*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Secretary, Azerbaijani Embassy

### **D. Media**

*Maia Bitsadze*, "Medianews" News Agency, Georgia  
*Nino Tsiklauri*, "Sarke" News Agency, Georgia  
*Nino Giorgobiani*, TV Channel "Mtavari", Georgia  
*Irma Gegechkori*, TV Channel "Imedi", Georgia  
*Bakur Chikobava*, TV Channel "Imedi", Georgia  
*Toma Chagelishvil*, TV Channel "Rustavi 2", Georgia  
*Nino Rodonaia*, Radio "Freedom"  
*Salome Ramishvili*, "Sakartvelo Radio", Georgia  
*Irakli Maisuradze*, TV Channel "Mze", Georgia  
*George Bukhaidze*, Newspaper "24 Hours", Georgia  
*Nino Mikiashvili*, Newspaper "Rezonansi", Georgia  
*Iuri Simoniani*, "Nezavisimaya Gazeta", Russia  
*Nodar Broladze*, "Gazeta", Russia  
*Veriko Tevzadze*, Newspaper "24 hours", Georgia  
*Zaza Chitanava*, Radio "Fortuna", Georgia

*Tea Gularidze*, Internet Magazine “Civil Georgia”