



## Javakheti One Year after the August War

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### Executive Summary

Because of its ethnic composition, Javakheti<sup>1</sup> is often considered a politically problematic region for Georgia. This situation is aggravated by severe social and economical conditions arising from the relatively harsh climate (cold winters) and economic underdevelopment which dates back to the Soviet period.

After the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008, the region once again became the focus of political speculation. It was openly said in newspapers and public speeches of some politicians that there are anti-Georgian forces in the region seeking to exploit existing problems in order to harm Georgian interests.

The present political analysis focuses on problem areas which were present in the region long before the 2008 war, including issues relating to the law-enforcement and judiciary systems; employment and migration; disputed churches and the repatriation of Muslim Meskhetians.

The analysis reveals that despite achievements in some areas, the majority of problems persist. The paper concludes with recommendations for the central and local authorities, and NGOs and international agencies working in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> By Javakheti we mean the part of Samtskhe-Javakheti region which includes the municipalities of Aspindza, Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda. In the latter two, citizens of Armenian ethnicity make up over 95% of the local population. A total of 210,000 people live in Samtskhe-Javakheti, out of which 54.5% are Armenians, 43% – Georgians. The region is also home to small communities of Russians, Ossetians, Greek and Ukrainians: <http://www.regions.ge/Samtskhe-Javakheti> (28.02.2009)

### Problem description and pertinence

Since the August war, the issue of Javakheti has been regularly covered in the Georgian press. For instance, in January 2009 the Versia newspaper reported that Russia was encouraging the Armenian government to become more active in Javakheti. According to Versia, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin discussed a potential Georgian-Armenian armed conflict with the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan while hosting them in Kremlin. The newspaper said that Yerevan refused, though it questioned how long Armenia would be able to resist the pressure from Moscow.<sup>2</sup>

Versia also cited Russian and Azerbaijani outlets as saying that Russia supplied Armenia with arms in December 2008. In newspaper interviews, Georgian military experts presumed that these arms may be intended for another anticipated conflict. According to them, there is information that the Russian defence minister assured his Azerbaijani colleague that weapons will not be used against Azerbaijan and that they were given to Armenia for a different purpose.<sup>3</sup>

In January 2008, the 24 Saati newspaper published an article by local analyst Andro Barnov based on a study<sup>4</sup> conducted by the Center for Strategy and Development. According to the article, Russia tries to thwart NATO's efforts to gain a foothold in the Caucasus and to this end will try to fully control Georgia and Armenia by any means and isolate Azerbaijan from Turkey. Russia

will try to settle the Karabakh conflict and instead stoke conflict in Javakheti. This will seriously endanger the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline and other regional projects.<sup>5</sup>

Javakheti is considered by many to be a weak point of the Georgian state, where the chances of another Russian strike are high. The question is: will this region, with its severe political, economic and social problems, become an Achilles' heel of the Georgian state in the wake of the 2008 war? But the present analysis doesn't aim at assessing outside threats. The objective is to evaluate the status of traditional problems in the region based on the trends that have taken shape after the 2008 war.

One of the indirect consequences of the 2008 war was the warming of Turkish-Armenian relations. Although what will result from this process is still unclear, it may have consequences for the Javakheti region. If the Turkish-Armenian border is opened, negative effects may include the weakening of Georgia's transit function, directly influencing the Javakheti region, e.g. the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku railway project. In addition, the government of Armenia may become more active in discussing the problems of the people of Javakheti; for instance, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan made a statement that he would support granting Armenian the status of official regional language in Javakheti.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the

Population by municipalities for the beginning of the year (thousands)							
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Samtskhe-Javakheti</b>	<b>206.2</b>	<b>202.6</b>	<b>203.5</b>	<b>208.5</b>	<b>208.3</b>	<b>207.7</b>	<b>208.1</b>
Adigeni, Municipality of	20.7	20.1	20.1	20.5	20.4	20.3	20.4
Aspindza, Municipality of	12.9	12.3	12.3	12.7	12.7	12.6	12.7
Akhalkalaki, Municipality of	60.5	59.9	60.4	62.5	62.5	62.3	62.3
Akhaltzikhe, Municipality of	45.8	45.2	45.4	46.9	46.9	46.8	46.9
Borjomi, Municipality of	32.2	31.6	31.7	32.1	31.9	31.7	31.5
Ninotsminda, Municipality of	34.1	33.5	33.6	33.8	33.9	34.0	34.3
<i>Source:</i> Statistics Georgia, <a href="http://www.statistics.ge/main.php?pform=47&amp;plang=1">http://www.statistics.ge/main.php?pform=47&amp;plang=1</a>							

<sup>2</sup> „Putin offers Armenia to start war against Georgia“, Versia, January 28-29, 2009, Agency Medianews. Newspaper Kviris Palitra published a comprehensive article on the same topic on November 9, 2009. Also, see Caucasian Integration, Liberal September 9, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> „Putin offers Armenia to start war against Georgia“, Versia, January 28-29, 2009, Agency Medianews.

<sup>4</sup> Full text of the study: <http://stand.ge/?page=11&lang=geo&content=148>

<sup>5</sup> Andro Barnov, „Caucasian Geo-politics and Geo-strategy“, 24 Saati, January 17, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Sargsyan made this statement during a meeting with Armenian diplomats on September 1, 2009 – see Armenian president speaks about the need of Armenian as regional language, <http://www.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=21721&search=javakheti>.

fears Javakhetians have long had about Turkey will probably decrease.

### **Methodology**

The present study used materials about the Javakheti region published in print and electronic media and the materials provided by the regional partners of the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development. On June 15, 2009, CIPDD hosted a round table where invited experts and civil society representatives shared their views regarding the issues discussed in the present analysis. The present study includes views expressed during the round table event.

### **Javakheti during the August war**

The August war horrified Javakheti society as much as that of all other Georgian regions: everybody's concern was "Russian aggression". Despite the fact that the majority of the population condemned Russia's invasion, there was disagreement over the causes of the war. It must be noted that this disagreement led to tension between citizens of Armenian and Georgian origin. Presumably the reason for this was that the main sources of information for the non-Georgian population were Russian television channels and internet sites. Considering that before and during the August war these media channels maintained aggressive and targeted anti-Georgian propaganda, it is clear how the opinion of the local population was formed regarding the ongoing situation. In addition, Georgian TV news were broadcast on local channels only during evenings (after the war one of the TV channels resumed broadcasting only on August 12), and telephone communication was limited due to overload.

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When Russian air forces started attacking and bombing residential buildings, the fear emerged among the Javakheti population that Russians would launch airstrikes on the closed Russian military base in Akhalkalaki. Many fled to villages, some left for Armenia. The panic was aggravated by misinformation spread by electronic media that Armenian youth were forcibly and hastily (at night) conscripted into the Georgian armed forces and that Georgian-Armenian border was closed to young men. Rumors spread that Russia was going to deploy its forces from its base in Gyumri, Armenia and open a third front. In fact, Russian helicopters which entered from Armenia did fly over the region several times. Another rumor was spread that Russian politicians had said on TV that Russian military forces would do no harm to Javakheti population. This created some tension between the local Armenian- and Georgian-speaking populations. Later, local authorities and state agencies assured the population that the spread of Russian aggression to the region was unlikely.

War-induced emotions declined after French President Nicolas Sarkozy and his Russian counterpart Dmitriy Medvedev concluded a cease-fire agreement on August 12, yet discussion resumed, albeit quietly, after Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia on August 26. Russia's disregard for the international community and recognized norms was viewed in the Caucasus as a show of force and a "lesson given" to the West.

Population of Samtskhe-Javakheti is 210, 000, of which 54.5 % are ethnic Armenians, 43 % – Georgians. In the region there are also living small communities of Russians, Ossetians, Greeks and Ukrainians.

*Source:* <http://www.regions.ge/Samtskhe-Javakheti>

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### **Problems of the region**

Since 2004 there have been many improvements in the Javakheti region: roads are being renovated, natural gas distribution networks are being built for the first time, and an important rail link is under construction. However, there are many different and long-established problems. The problem areas that bother local communities the most are grouped and reviewed below. It should be mentioned that majority of these problems are not linked to the August 2008 war.

### **The problem areas that bother local communities the most are not linked to the August 2008 war.**

#### *a) Work of law-enforcement and judicial systems*

Certain distrust towards the law-enforcement and judicial systems arose among the region's ethnic Armenian population after several civil activists were detained. In January 2009 Gregory Minasyan, director of an Akhaltsikhe youth center and Sargis Hakobjanyan, chairman of the Charles Aznavour Society, were detained. Both were accused of spying and forming illegal armed groups<sup>7</sup>. The arrests sparked protests not only among the local Armenian community, but also among the Armenian Diaspora of various countries. The form of arrests caused the most public outrage: law-enforcement executives arrested Minasyan at the youth center, during a class, and Hakobjanyan was

arrested at a local cemetery, during a funeral. The next day, locals, mainly young people, held a small protest rally, though most Javakhetians chose to wait for the trial.

The local community reviewed different versions regarding the reasons for the arrest of Minasyan and Hakobjanyan. Some linked it to their active involvement in the campaign surrounding disputed churches. Others expressed the opinion that the arrests were used by the central Georgian government to divert attention from the severe economic and social problems to the "traditional problem" of Javakheti— the demand for autonomy.

Public opinion linked the arrests of Minasyan and Hakobjanyan with the resonant arrests of Gurgen Shirinyan (member of the Javakhk organization) and Vaagn Chakhalyan (of the Akhalkalaki Youth Organization) in July 2008. These persons have been accused of organizing an explosion near the house of the chief of Akhalkalaki police and later arrested on charges of illegal acquisition and possession of weapons. Chakhalyan's trial was accompanied by an active information campaign, with the participation of nationalist organizations from Armenia and the Diaspora.

The local community attributed the arrests of Shirinyan and Chakhalyan to an alleged conflict between the local chief of police, Samvel Petrosyan, and the detainees, and was largely distrustful towards the role of law-enforcement and the judicial system with regard to the matter. In January 2009 Chakhalyan made an official statement in which he spoke about the violation of his rights by the court and political persecution. In particular, he said the Ministry of Justice refused to register his French lawyer and that inadequate translation was provided by the court. The human rights ombudsman reacted to the matter and in his statement drew attention to the problems posed to the French attorney.<sup>8</sup> In April 2009 Chakhalyan was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

<sup>7</sup> In March 2009 the detainees were released from custody with one year conditional sentence and on the security of GEL 2,000. Georgian Pirveli information agency [http://pirveli.com.ge/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=20670&Itemid=52](http://pirveli.com.ge/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20670&Itemid=52)

<sup>8</sup> For details, see statement of the human rights ombudsman of Georgia: <http://www.ombudsman.ge/index.php?m=8&newsid=979>



Source: Samtskhe-Javakheti Regional Development Agency, <http://sjrda.org/eng/>

### b) *Disputed churches*

The issue of disputed churches in Georgian territory is an especially sensitive one in relations between the Georgian Orthodox Patriarchate and the Armenian Apostolic Church and has an added political dimension.<sup>9</sup> Armenian print media frequently cover the issue by highlighting what they call the misappropriation of Armenian churches by Georgia as an illustrative example of oppression of Armenian community and culture in Georgia. Armenia openly demands that the Norashen church in Tbilisi and the Surbnishan church in Akhaltsikhe be handed over to the Armenian Church. Disputed churches are property of the Georgian state. However, because of the particular sensitivity of the issue, the government of Georgia avoids solving the problem without the consent of the the Georgian Orthodox Church.

The disputed churches, as a result of certain incidents, periodically come to the public's attention. One significant occurrence took place in December 2008 during the visit of Armenian Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan to Georgia. Together with several Georgian officials, Sargsyan and the Armenian delegation entered

Norashen, which is non-operational and locked shut. This incident provoked outrage in nationalist media outlets in both Georgia and Armenia. Some stated that Georgian and Armenian officials “broke into” the church and “broke open its doors”. One Georgian newspaper published an article according to which after the August war Armenia has become especially active and is seeking to exploit Georgia's difficulties in order to settle church disputes in its favor<sup>10</sup>. Georgian opposition MP Jondi Bagaturia demanded the resignation and trial of Environment Minister Goga Khachidze and Minister of State for Diaspora Issues Iulon Gagoshidze over the “break-in” at the church.<sup>11</sup>

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The head of the Georgian Church, Patriarch Ilia II, proposed an initiative to create an Armenian-Georgian committee on disputed churches. The prime ministers of both countries approved the initiative, though some groups in Javakheti said this was an effort to stall a resolution.

<sup>9</sup> “The issue of so-called disputed religious buildings is a significant one, and concerns the return of not only Armenian, but also Catholic, Muslim and Jewish properties” – Report of the Georgian Human Rights Ombudsman on state of human rights in Georgia, 2008, II half, [http://www.ombudsman.ge/uploads/reports/saxalxo\\_damevelis\\_angarishi\\_2008\\_ii\\_naxevari.pdf](http://www.ombudsman.ge/uploads/reports/saxalxo_damevelis_angarishi_2008_ii_naxevari.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Sakartvelos Respublika newspaper December 17, 2008 <http://www.opentext.org.ge/08/sakartvelos-respublika/235/235-18.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Akhali Taoba newspaper January 13, 2009.

Average monthly per capita income in urban and rural areas						
	GEL					
<b>Cash income and transfers</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>51,7</b>	<b>68,8</b>	<b>104,3</b>	<b>57,2</b>	<b>80,7</b>
Wages	44,8	13	28,9	56,1	15,6	35,9
From self-employment	15,2	6,7	10,9	16,7	6,3	11,5
From selling agricultural production	0,6	16,3	8,4	0,5	14,6	7,5
Property income(leasing, interest on deposit etc.)	0,5	0,3	0,4	1,8	0,3	1,1
Pensions, scholarships, assistances	8,6	8,7	8,7	10,8	11,7	11,3
Remittances from abroad	6,1	1,9	4	7	2,4	4,7
Money received from kin and friends	10,3	4,9	7,6	11,4	6,3	8,9
<b>Non-cash income</b>	<b>6,3</b>	<b>36,6</b>	<b>21,4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>20,5</b>
<b>Income, total</b>	<b>92,3</b>	<b>88,3</b>	<b>90,3</b>	<b>110,3</b>	<b>92,2</b>	<b>101,2</b>
<b>Other cash inflows</b>	<b>13,3</b>	<b>11,6</b>	<b>12,4</b>	<b>14,6</b>	<b>12,9</b>	<b>13,7</b>
Property disposal	2,6	1,1	1,9	2	1,2	1,6
Borrowing and dissaving	10,7	10,5	10,6	12,7	11,7	12,2
<b>Cash inflows, total</b>	<b>99,3</b>	<b>63,3</b>	<b>81,3</b>	<b>118,9</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>94,5</b>
<b>Cash and non-cash inflows, total</b>	<b>105,6</b>	<b>99,9</b>	<b>102,7</b>	<b>124,9</b>	<b>105,1</b>	<b>115</b>

Source: Samtskhe-Javakheti Regional Development Agency, <http://sjrda.org/eng/regional-plan/>

### c) Employment and Migration

Unemployment is a severe problem in the region. Since the Soviet period, much of the population has been engaged in seasonal migration, seeking work mainly in Russia. According to a local newspaper, every year approximately 20,000 residents seek seasonal jobs in Russia and Armenia, and during 1990-2008 a sum total of up to 100,000 people migrated to other regions of Georgia and foreign countries.<sup>12</sup> The region is not threatened with depopulation, however, as birth rates are high locally.

The recent extreme deterioration of Georgian-Russian relations has made it difficult for Georgian citizens to move to Russia. As a result, many Javakhetians decided to obtain Armenian citizenship and seek Russian visas with their Armenian passports (though quantitative data on this matter are contradictory and inaccurate). Armenia accepts dual citizenship, though many Javakhetians are unaware that after acquiring Armenian citizenship they lose Georgian citizenship and maintain only the right to live in Georgia. It is expected that this may cause severe tensions in future.

After the withdrawal of the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki in 2007, the main consumer of local products, potatoes, was gone (the base consumed ca. 500 tons per year).<sup>13</sup> There are no prospects for this demand to be replaced. Ongoing large-scale projects in the region partly help in solving the problem of employment, though they are also a source of disappointment and new protests, as project implementors often prefer to bring their own workers instead of employing locals. Despite the ongoing gasification and road rehabilitation programs, which are very popular, the population is still disappointed, because they are not involved in those projects.

The issue of employment is directly connected to the qualification of the local workforce, which is less competitive in a labor market created by international projects. This situation has served to highlight the lack of professional education in the region.

The economic development of the region and solving of the problem of unemployment is closely connected to the region's involvement in important transit projects. Particularly important is the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku railway project,

<sup>12</sup> Akunk newspaper, January 2009.

<sup>13</sup> In connection to the issue, see the article "Harvest is in storage, the population – in debt" in the local Samkhretis Karibche newspaper, <http://www.regions.ge/Samtskhe-Javakheti>

which was inaugurated on July 23, 2008 in Kars. According to the plan, the project will be finished in 2009 and trains will start running from 2010. Construction was temporarily halted during the August war.<sup>14</sup> This project will create new economic opportunities for the local community, though local attitudes towards this project are divided. New prospects of economic development create positive views among people, but some think that the railway is purely a military and political project that seeks to isolate Armenia. Some fear that there is a possibility of introducing additional Georgian military forces under the pretence of protecting the new railway; others fear that Turkish and Azerbaijani employers will ignore the local Armenian workforce and bring in “their own people”.

Additional questions have arisen with regard to the project since prospects of a warming of Turkish-Armenian relations emerged. However, experts say that since the matter is extremely delicate and will likely take a long time to resolve, it is doubtful that it can pose any serious threat to the railway project.<sup>15</sup> On the contrary, this development has diminished the “anti-Armenian” image of the project.

#### d) *Education*

Most problems in the field of education are related to the lack of knowledge of the state language among locals. This is one of the biggest barriers to civil integration. The non-Georgian population is cut-off from country’s public life. The majority of Armenian youth cite their lack of knowledge of Georgian when they refuse to join the military.<sup>16</sup>

Even though the state and international organizations focused attention on this problem long ago, progress towards its resolution has been very slow. Despite some actions by the Ministry of Education and Science (e.g. development of new methodology and handbooks for teaching Georgian language designed especially for minorities),

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secondary/high schools cannot provide instruction of the Georgian language at the necessary level. Consequently, graduates from Armenian- and Russian-language schools do not possess the minimum required level of Georgian language knowledge. Periodically Georgian and international organizations organize Georgian language learning courses for adults, though these programs are not regularly provided and cannot ensure a breakthrough. The Ministry of Education and Science is trying to reach better results through introducing bilingual methodology, though due to the lack of resources this only takes place in several schools of the region.

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Another significant problem is the weak motivation for learning Georgian among the local population. Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda Districts form what is essentially an Armenian-speaking language environment where local Georgians are also fluent in Armenian. On the other hand, because the Russian military base was the centerpiece of the local economy for years and the majority of population is engaged in seasonal migration to Russia, the Russian language is also traditionally strong. The majority of local population do not see a real need to study Georgian, and the strengthening of state efforts in this direction are perceived as a step towards assimilation. However, in recent years, as the strengthening of Georgian state becomes apparent, there have been signs that more people recognize that knowledge of Georgian language improves chances for success in social and economic life, and thus there is an increased interest in studying Georgian.

<sup>14</sup> Versia newspaper, August 20-21, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Akhali Taoba newspaper, September 8, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> For details see the article “Conscription under way” in Samkhretis Karibche newspaper, <http://www.regions.ge/Samtskhe-Javakheti>



Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kars\\_Baku\\_Tbilisi\\_railway\\_line](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kars_Baku_Tbilisi_railway_line)

Language is also a problem in terms of obtaining a higher education. Lack of knowledge of Georgian leaves practically no chances for the youth of the region to enroll in Georgian universities. In 2008 heated debates took place (including in parliament) about whether or not to make entrance examination in Georgian language less difficult for non-Georgian applicants. The dominant opinion was that this kind of leniency would further weaken motivation for learning the Georgian language among the youth.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, the state ensures certain measures which make easier for minorities to enroll in Georgian universities: they are can take the examination in their mother tongue in skills and certain subjects.

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The majority of ethnic Armenian youth nevertheless prefer to receive higher education in Armenia. There is a 70 person quota for students from Javakheti at Armenian universities. According to existing data, 186 and 314 students from Georgia enrolled in Yerevan universities in the years 2004 and

2008, respectively. After graduation many chose to stay and work in Armenia. Some Javakhetian Armenians view this as part of an effort to “banish” Armenians from the region.<sup>18</sup>

Two Georgian higher education institutions function in Akhalkalaki: Akhalkalaki College and the Tsodna Institute, which accommodates ethnic Armenian students as well. Joint study brings Georgian and Armenian youth closer. Some in the Armenian community are demanding the establishment of a joint Georgian-Armenian university in Akhalkalaki.

e) *Issue of Repatriation of Muslim Meskhetians*

The issue of repatriation of Muslim Meskhetians<sup>19</sup>, exiled by Stalin to Central Asia in 1944, is one of most acute problems facing the region. However, it should be mentioned that this problem doesn’t concern Javakheti that much, as Muslims were exiled mainly from nearby Akhaltsikhe and Adigeni Districts (Meskheti) and they seek settlement exactly in these areas.

In 2008 the Georgian parliament extended the deadline for submission of requests for repatriation for Meskhetians until July 1, 2009. Since the law “on repatriation of persons forcedly banished in 1940-1950 from Georgian SSR by

<sup>17</sup> “Akhali Taoba”, June 25, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> “Во имя поддержания или выдавливания армян?”, информационный центр Bagin, 13 октября [http://www.bagin.info/default.asp?Lang=\\_Ru&NewsID=1941&SectionID=0&RegionID=0&Date=10/13/2008&PagePosition=1](http://www.bagin.info/default.asp?Lang=_Ru&NewsID=1941&SectionID=0&RegionID=0&Date=10/13/2008&PagePosition=1)

<sup>19</sup> The name of this ethno-confessional group is itself a sensitive issue and subject of political controversy. The 1944 banishment was marked with religious discrimination: among those deported were Muslims of different nationalities. Presently, the majority of this group identify themselves as Turkish. In research and international materials they are referred as “Meskhetian Turks”, however, there are also some who identify themselves as Georgians.



the former USSR” went into effect, 2,000<sup>20</sup> requests have been submitted to the repatriation agency, while the number of requests submitted to Consulates in Azerbaijan has reached 15,000<sup>21</sup>. These are mainly Muslim Meskhetians living in Russia and Azerbaijan. According to most experts, the total number of the members of this dispersed ethno-confessional group in former Soviet states, Turkey and other countries reaches 300,000. The chairman of the Vatan organization (the strongest organization, which defends rights of Muslim Meskhetians), Suleiman Barbakadze, attributes the lack of requests to the lack of information among the group. According to him, approximately 90,000 Meskhetians in different countries seek repatriation to Georgia.

Meanwhile, the aforementioned law on repatriation only enables repatriation without any material assistance or restitution of property for repatriates. Thus, the prospect for their return is closely linked to their capability to obtain needed property for living in Georgia. This in turn decreases the number of those with a realistic outlook on repatriation.

Residents of the region are negative towards the repatriation process, but recently the level of concern has decreased. After the law came into effect, only a small number of Muslim Meskhetians managed to buy houses and settle in Georgian villages. This has not caused an overall increase of tensions in the region, but there have been conflicts between local and newly settled young people. Communities of certain Georgian and practically all Armenian villages are against the repatriation of Muslim Meskhetians. In these villages Meskhetians are denied the right to buy property and settle.

Repatriates face serious problems in terms of legal status, economic capacity and social and cultural adaptation. For example,

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Meskhetians who have returned from Russia are in a very difficult situation: they still have Russian passports and their visas for legal stay in Georgia have expired. Thus, they are subject to deportation. Many seek seasonal jobs in Turkey and have to buy visas or pay bribes when crossing the Georgian border. The majority of those deported cannot speak Georgian, which seriously hinders their integration into Georgian society. However, their children often study in Georgian schools, which does create better prospects for their integration.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The present study does not aim at assessing and predicting external threats. Whether or not external forces will try to destabilize the region depends on the position and actions of the international community. Therefore, it is more reasonable to address the issue of traditional problems of the region and directing resources and efforts towards their resolution.

It should be pointed out that recently the state has intensified its efforts to support the development of the region.<sup>22</sup> Several infrastructure projects are being implemented (e.g. gasification of villages). According to David Tkeshelashvili, minister of state for regional development and infrastructure, plans for 2009 include the improvement of the water supply of Samtskhe-Javakheti, gasification, and improvement of school and kindergarten infrastructure.<sup>23</sup> Also, the region's local budget will be significantly increased.

<sup>20</sup> „New deadlines are set for submitting applications for Muslim Meskhs”, Civil.ge, 17 July 2009 <http://www.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=21531&search=>

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.regions.ge/Samtskhe-Javakheti&newsid=60&year=2009&position=news\\_category](http://www.regions.ge/Samtskhe-Javakheti&newsid=60&year=2009&position=news_category)

<sup>22</sup> It should be pointed out that the National Concept on Tolerance and Civil Integration adopted in May 2009 addresses and includes many of the problem issues discussed above. The action plan defines the particular actions which should be implemented by 2014 in the following fields: education and state language, media and access to information, political integration and civil participation, social and regional integration, culture and preserving ethnic identity.

<sup>23</sup> The process of gasification has started in Akhaltsikhe. The city will get gas within a month and a half and villages will be gradually connected to the system. 32-kilometer pipeline is being built by the Georgian Oil and Gas Corporation and “New Energy”. Source: <http://www.itv.ge/ReadMore.aspx?LanguageID=1&Location=3929> Source: <http://www.itv.ge/ReadMore.aspx?LanguageID=1&Location=1989> (28.02.2009)

However, many of actions are spontaneous and uncoordinated. In fact, there is no strategy based on complex research and there is a lack of reliable data concerning the region. There are talks about the success of projects implemented, but detailed information regarding these projects is often not accessible to the public.

Human rights and the transparency of the government remain problematic issues. According to existing data, there are more frequent cases of short-term detentions under dubious motives of local journalists and members of NGOs by the police. Journalists and NGOs complain about difficulties in obtaining public information.

The lack of sources of information accessible to minorities is connected with the lack of knowledge of the Georgian language, as well as with the deficiency of central and local information channels.<sup>24</sup> Some important measures have been taken in recent years to address the problem,<sup>25</sup> though the existence of free media which would serve as a forum for discussing local problems is of vital importance. Also, it is important improve the qualifications of local journalists.

We base following recommendation on problems and trends discussed above:

***Human rights and good governance:***

- Adequate attention should be paid to the reported facts of human rights violations; ensure fair and equal realization of basic rights (*to central and local governments, NGOs*).
- Support integration of the Muslim Meskhetians through information cam-

paigns and improvement of conditions locally (*to local government, international organizations and NGOs*).

***Realization of economic rights:***

- Support employment of the local workforce; commence retraining programs (*to central and local governments, international organizations*).
- Better inform the population regarding ongoing rehabilitation projects and employment options (*to local government*).

***Education, media and cultural rights:***

- Increase the focus and effectiveness of Georgian language courses for citizens and for those employed in public service (*to central and local governments, international organizations*).
- Take measures to raise the qualifications and motivation of Georgian language teachers (*to central and local governments*).
- Increase the volume and diversity of the information accessible to the region's population. Namely, central and local TV channels should increase geographical coverage; free media should be developed in the region (*to central and local governments, international organizations and NGOs*).
- Provide the public with comprehensive and unbiased information regarding the problems of churches and other objects of cultural heritage through public discussions and information campaigns (*to NGOs and media*)

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<sup>24</sup> The present study does not cover the media landscape of the region. Regarding this issue see CIPDD, Georgia's regional media-map, Tbilisi and newspapers outside the capital, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Regions.ge is the first internet resource in Georgia which provides information on events in the various regions of the country. Fourteen regions have their own sites which link to the website, including Samtskhe-Javakheti's Samkhretis Karibche are already available on the website. Source: [http://rustavi2.com/news/news\\_text.php?id\\_news=30446&pg=1&im=main&ct=0&wth=](http://rustavi2.com/news/news_text.php?id_news=30446&pg=1&im=main&ct=0&wth=)

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