

ECMI

ANNUAL REPORT
2003

Excerpts on the Caucasus

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I. Action-Oriented Projects

The year also saw a geographical expansion of ECMI's project activities to Moldova and Georgia. In Moldova, the Centre established a program to further the negotiations on a federalized constitution for the republic as part of international efforts to resolve the decade-long dispute over the status of the break-away republic of Transdnistria. In Georgia, a project to defuse interethnic tension and promote integration of the ethnic Armenian region of Javakheti was begun. With the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia in November 2003, new opportunities for active conflict-resolution have emerged, and ECMI is planning additional support to the stabilization of minority-majority relations in 2004.

II. Defusing Interethnic Tension and Promoting Regional Integration - the Javakheti Region of the Republic of Georgia

A. Aims

This project seeks to defuse interethnic tension and promote regional integration in the Javakheti region of Georgia. By establishing a network consisting of civil society actors that includes representatives for most ethno-religious groups as well as government officials in Javakheti, the project seeks to improve interethnic relations, to broaden the consultative process of decision-making, and to increase effective public participation and public awareness on local governance. The project will promote regional integration of the region by involving province- and state-level policy-makers in the network, thereby creating firmer links between regional actors and central levels of authority

B. Project activities

In 2003, ECMI has carried out assessments and stakeholder consultations with civil society structures in Javakheti and government institutions at the local, regional and central levels. The project initiation was slightly interrupted in late 2003 due to the revolutionary events in November 2003, which led to the end of the Shevardnadze era, and the coming into power of Michael Saakashvili and a new Georgian leadership.

In 2004, ECMI will establish an interethnic dialogue network through the organization of a "Javakheti Citizen's Forum" to convene on a monthly basis. The forum will work to address technical issues of relevance to all communities in Javakheti, and will present their recommendations to policy-makers at the state level, governmental institutions at the regional, province and central level as well as to NGOs and international actors in Georgia. On-going research of political and socioeconomic developments in the region will be an integral part of the project. In addition, the project will enhance the capacities of local NGOs as well as ethnic and religious communities and provide resources to improve their participation in civil society. Moreover, the project will support mobilization and development in local communities to ensure their active participation in the activities of the interethnic network. The project will establish a dialogue and negotiation network that cuts across ethnic and religious lines and which is capable of focusing on technical issues affecting the population of Javakheti. The recommendations and support offered by the network, as well as the much-needed dialogue in itself, will contribute to the long-term improvement of interethnic relations and regional integration of the Javakheti region into the Georgian state.

III. Between Integration and Resettlement: The Meskhetian Turks

A. Aims

The project 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 Meskhetian Turks desire to return to their region of origin. The project, through the conduct of multi-disciplinary research in eight countries (Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey), 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 a basis for new approaches to finding durable solutions to the problems of the Meskhetian Turks.

B. Relevance

The Meskhetian Turks are the last among the national groups of the Soviet Union deported under Stalin in 1943-44 that has not yet been able to return to their native region (in southwest Georgia). Consisting of some 270-335,000 people today, the Meskhetian Turks, following pogroms and multiple displacements, find themselves scattered throughout vast territories in the former Soviet Union and Turkey. In some of these countries, the Meskhetian Turks face ethnic persecution and even expulsion, while independent Georgia effectively blocks resettlement to their native region. International actors seeking to address these problems encounter severe difficulties in finding solutions, inter alia, because of a lack of consistent knowledge on Meskhetian Turks' own perceptions of their displacement and their visions for future settlement.

C. Project activities

The project will consist of three research workshops, eight country case studies (including 30 cases of mainly ethnographic fieldwork), five thematic and two legal studies, and the compilation of an authoritative research volume on the topic.

D. Links with other institutions

The project will be implemented in cooperation with several higher educational institutions, think-tanks, human rights institutions, international organizations and 59 scholarly establishments both in Western Europe, the former Soviet Union and Turkey. As a by-product, a comprehensive network of scholars on the issue will be created.

E. Time frame and funding details

The project will run for 20 months. Funding is currently being sought. While assessments were conducted in 2003, the project will be initiated in 2004 and run for two years.