

ECMI

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Excerpts on the Caucasus

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ECMI ANNUAL REPORT 2005	3
I. ACTION-ORIENTED PROJECTS.....	3
A. Integration of ethnic minorities through increased dialogue and political participation in the South Caucasus - Georgia	3
A.2. Engaging local communities	4
A.3. Decentralization and self-governance.....	5
A.4. Repatriation of Meskhetian Turks - resettlement of a deported minority.....	6
A.5. Framework Convention on minorities	7
A.6. State concept for integration and protection of national minorities	7
A.7. Council of National Minorities.....	7
II. PRACTICE-ORIENTED RESEARCH.....	8
A. The use of minority languages in the education system in Georgia.....	8
B. “Between Integration and Resettlement: the Meskhetian Turks”	8
C. The research process.....	9
D. A few research highlights	10
E. Research workshops and conferences.....	12
F. Project goals achieved	12

ECMI ANNUAL REPORT 2005

I. Action-Oriented Projects

A. Integration of ethnic minorities through increased dialogue and political participation in the South Caucasus - Georgia

The past year has witnessed a drastic increase of ECMI activities in the Caucasus. Through the implementation of three action-oriented projects, ECMI, with a particular focus on Georgia, has aimed at advancing the development of higher standards of governance for national minorities and at engaging minority communities in dialogue on minority protection and regional integration issues with government and parliament. The conduct of these activities in 2005 were made possible through funding generously provided by the Neighbourhood Programme Department of the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the OSCE Section of the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

ECMI Annual Report 2005 Georgia Following the break-up of the Soviet Union and independence in 1991, Georgia faced political unrest, ethnic tension and civil war. The regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia became *de facto* independent, although unrecognized by the international community, after bloody conflicts in the early 1990s and these conflicts remain frozen up until today. Over the past 15 years, Georgia has also witnessed tension in the relations between changing Georgian governments and minority groups in other parts of the country. ECMI focuses its attention on two lesser known regions located in the south of the country, namely the predominantly Armenian populated region of *Javakheti* (95% Armenians, but also with groups of Russians, Greeks and Georgians) and *Kvemo Kartli*, where mostly ethnic Azeris reside, along with smaller groups of Georgians, Greeks and Armenians. Although Georgia is home to a wealth of other ethnic groups, including Kurds, Yeshids, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Assyrians, Chechens, Jews, Germans, Dagestani people and others, the regions of Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli are often referred to as potential ethnic tension zones by Georgian and international actors and political analysts. Indeed, the fact that Armenians and Azeri reside compactly in regions where they constitute the majorities has proved challenging in the relations between the state and the minorities. The Georgian government has yet to devise a clear policy on national minority protection and regional integration, despite the fact that about one fifth of the country's population is made up of national minorities with the Azeris and Armenians as the most numerous.

Past governments at best ignored the Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions and their non-Georgian populations. However, the rise to power of Mikheil Saakashvili and his team after the November 2003 "Rose Revolution" has given justified reasons for hope that policies on national minorities in Georgia can and will improve over the coming years. With a new government most keenly motivated to further the integration of Georgia into European and Transatlantic structures, there are promising signs that the country also in the field of minority protection is gradually becoming more receptive to voices advocating better standards for governance as means to improve the livelihood of national minorities, prevent future ethno-political tension and enhance political stability in a part of the world that has suffered tremendously by ethnic conflict since the demise of the Soviet Union.

A.1. Enhancing dialogue and state-minority relations

In this context, ECMI, since launching its activities shortly after the "Rose Revolution", has worked to enhance dialogue on policy issues affecting the Javakheti region. In 2005, ECMI has also launched a similar process in Kvemo Kartli. In parallel a project to support the Georgian Government and Parliament in devising policy on national minorities based on European best practices was initiated. While the two former projects pay special attention to empower the

minority communities in policy dialogue and to capacitate these communities in providing input to the debate based on their communities' needs and concerns, the latter initiative seeks to build capacity and transfer knowledge on minority governance to stakeholders in government and parliament based on relevant European standards. With the three initiatives closely linked thus creating synergies across the projects, the results of the activities have crystallized into significant results in the past year.

On the government and parliament side, ECMI has been lobbying intensively on enhancing awareness on the necessity of developing consistent structures for governance on regional and minority issues and on taking immediate measures to enhance relations between the central executive bodies and regional authorities and civil society in Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. To this end, ECMI has liaised with a number of government and parliament structures, including the State Minister for Conflict Resolution Issues, the State Minister for Civic Integration, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Ministry of Justice, the State Security Council, the Public Defender, the Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights and Civil Integration, the Committee for Regional Policy, Self-Governance and Mountainous Regions, the Committee for European Integration, the Committee for Foreign Relations and the Department for National Accord Processes and Civil Integration at the President's Administration. At the regional level, ECMI has also worked with the Offices of the Governors of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, the district prefects in the Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions and with the Ministries for Sports and Culture, Finance and Education on specific matters. By seconding a number of national specialists to several regional and national level government bodies, ECMI has provided useful and highly appreciated assistance in making manpower and expertise available to address issues of specific relevance and support policy-making on minority and regional affairs.

Measures promoting regional development and collaboration have been of particular priority in ECMI's strategy to encourage a process of direct consultation between the central authorities and the regional stakeholders. Such efforts have taken place through the organization of a number of events in Georgia's capital Tbilisi as well as in the minority regions, where government officials and parliamentarians, including ministers, their deputies as well as a range of higher and mid-level government representatives, have met regional stakeholders and minority representatives at conferences and consultative meetings. These events have had a significant impact on how minority stakeholders perceive the central governance structures.

Having been largely ignored for over a decade, and often portrayed in mass-media as disloyal citizens, minority representatives in Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli have welcomed the new and affirmative attention expressed by central government officials with the increasing frequency of their visits to the regions and their declared willingness to consider the concerns of the regional minority populations. For example, a passport issuing authority has been established in Javakheti's principal town of Akhalkalaki, saving the local inhabitants a 75 km journey twice, respectively for submission and receipt of travel documents. Another matter, which has been addressed through consultations with State Minister Khaindrava, is the provision of coal to Javakheti for heating in the winter 2005-06. However, there are still groups in both regions that look with skepticism on the approach of the new government. Indeed, the Georgian government has yet to follow up on a range of minority concerns, even matters that both government and minorities can agree upon. Major problems remain to be solved, including issues relating to decentralization and regional self-governance, the soon-to-come closure of a Russian military base in Javakheti and its impact on the employment situation.

A.2. Engaging local communities

Complementary to the dialogue process, ECMI has, at the regional level in Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, also facilitated processes to engage local communities across ethnic lines in networks of

regional stakeholders. By means of establishing specialized working groups, regional activists and community leaders have been encouraged to contribute to the identification of specific regional problems and in contributing to finding solutions to these problems. This could be for example in the areas of language and education issues, health, gender equality, youth. The proceedings of the working groups are presented at larger conferences, to which a broader and more representative segment of the regional populations are invited. The conferences, along with public information meetings and seminars, also serve as channels for disseminating information on new laws or policy matters, which may affect the regional populations. Often, the state measures to disseminate relevant information are inadequate, and the ensuing information vacuum usually in itself has a negative effect on minorities' appreciation of state policy.

In the first part of 2005, the above activities in Javakheti — along with the establishment of a Resource Centre in the region's principal town of Akhalkalaki, training events and a limited number of mini-grants to encourage community mobilization — formed the backbone of a loosely organized network for policy debate, information sharing and civil empowerment.

In August, the structure was further institutionalized when an inaugural assembly of the "Javakheti Citizen's Forum" (JCF) was held in the region, where a declaration with the aims and objectives of the JCF was adopted by some 120 stakeholders and a set of organizational statutes approved. The JCF is henceforth managed by a board with facilitation by ECMI and has a chairman and a deputy who work in close contact with the Centre. The institutionalization of the network has proved important, as the Forum now functions as a regionally representative association of NGOs and individuals, and the regional and central authorities consult increasingly with the JCF management on policy issues affecting the region. International organizations also acknowledge the importance of JCF and the network's Chairman now represents the Javakheti region on the civil society consultative board of the road project implemented by the Millennium Challenge Georgia — a USD 295 million project funded by the USA, which is envisaged to rehabilitate 245 km of main roads in southern Georgia between 2007 and 2010 to the benefit of the geographically isolated population.

Similarly in Kvemo Kartli, ECMI formed initially a loose network of stakeholders. Technically, the project in Kvemo Kartli is more complicated compared with Javakheti. Kvemo Kartli region consists of two districts, while the project in Javakheti covers only one. While in Javakheti, the vast majority of the population is Armenian, the Kvemo Kartli region differs with regard to ethnicities from district to district, although Azeris constitute the overall majority. Based on the experience gained in Javakheti, the aim of the initiative in Kvemo Kartli is to move towards an institutionalized "Kvemo Kartli Citizen's Forum". To this end stakeholders from the JCF play an active role in the activities in Kvemo Kartli and contribute significantly to the knowledge-transfer. The enhanced relations that result from the interaction between regional and central actors, are undoubtedly reducing mutual suspicion and engendering a measure of trust between the minorities and the government that help to defuse tension. It appears that an environment is beginning to take shape (especially in Javakheti where the project is at a more advanced stage than in Kvemo Kartli), where a genuine dialogue takes place between the regional representatives and the central government structures. In future, ECMI will pay significant attention to design and implement durable structures that can further institutionalize this process and make efforts in preparing the citizens' forums to become sustainable associations. To be sure, this remains a time-consuming process, but the successful results in advancing regional policy engagement, dialogue and regular consultation in 2005 certainly give cause for optimism.

A.3. Decentralization and self-governance

Throughout the year, ECMI has also worked closely with parliamentary committees responsible for regional or minority issues, including the Committee for Regional Policy, Self-Governance

and Mountainous Regions. The Committee has drafted a new Law on Self-Governance, which was adopted by Parliament in December 2005. In the second part of 2005, ECMI facilitated a number of consultative meetings and information seminars for stakeholders from the minority regions, which allowed the Committee members to disseminate information on the new law and the minority representatives in voicing concerns on the impact of the law. Although the law was adopted without providing adequate time for thorough consultations with civil society in Georgia, the Committee is now planning to prepare an amendment to the law, which will take place following a consultative process with the regions prior to its adoption later in 2006. ECMI will assist the Committee in this process and also facilitate minority communities in presenting their views.

A.4. Repatriation of Meskhetian Turks - resettlement of a deported minority

The repatriation of Meskhetian Turks is one of the yet unfulfilled commitments of Georgia to the Council of Europe and the government is under pressure to take active measures. As a side effect of the research project on Meskhetian Turks (see separate section), ECMI has managed to reinvigorate the discussion on a possible solution to the displacement of this population group deported 61 years ago. A conference was held in June, co-organized with the State Minister for Conflict Resolution Issues & Head of the State Committee ECMI Annual Report 2005 on Repatriation. The presence of an international team of researchers in Georgia having completed extensive fieldwork in the nine countries of settlement of Meskhetian Turks as part of the ECMI research project on Meskhetian Turks, allowed for presentations to the government and a larger audience of representatives for international organizations and NGOs on the preliminary research findings. The conference and a subsequent government briefing resulted in renewed government attention to the issue of repatriation. In seeking to advance the process, ECMI in the second half of the year seconded a specialist on human rights issues as senior advisor to the State Minister for Conflict Resolution Issues.

This expert has, among other issues, played a leading role in drafting an action-plan for repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks based on collaborative efforts with relevant ministries and parliament committees represented in the State Committee for Repatriation. The action plan, in contrast to several previous plans, provides the Government's *modus operandi* for repatriation and outlines a clear division of responsibilities and a feasible timeframe for repatriation. It also forms the basis for government measures in the current preparation phase.

Through close cooperation with the State Minister for Conflict Resolution Issues, Mr. Giorgi Khaindrava, ECMI has also facilitated missions to the Northern Caucasus, Central Asia and Azerbaijan, where Meskhetian Turks are settled in large numbers. These missions have allowed the government representatives, including the State Minister himself, to gain further knowledge of the populations and also to engage in active consultations with representatives of Meskhetian Turk organizations, not only in Georgia but also in several other countries of settlement.

As an additional step to advance the process, ECMI in collaboration with the State Commission on Repatriation and the Council of Europe in December established a working group consisting of prominent Georgian legal experts. The expert group, working from December 2005 through January 2006 will complete a draft law on repatriation, to be reviewed by the Council of Europe expert. Following subsequent discussions within the government and hearings in the Parliament, it is hoped that the law can be adopted in 2006. The passing of the law is seen as a milestone event, which will provide a key indication of the extent to which Georgia will commit to begin the repatriation process.

A.5. Framework Convention on minorities

A major event for Georgia's national minorities in 2005 was the ratification by Parliament of the Council of Europe *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (FCNM). Georgia's government signed the FCNM in 2000 shortly after joining the Council of Europe, but the ratification was delayed for years. It was only in 2005 that Parliament started seriously considering the ratification. To support the process of ratification and to allay fears in government and parliament circles of its implications, a two-day seminar was held in September for MPs and government officials with a leading European expert on the FCNM. Moreover, a public conference on the Framework Convention was held for civil society to enhance public awareness and bring the ratification issue on to the media agenda. Finally, a training session for minority NGOs was organized. All FCNM-related activities were closely coordinated with the Council of Europe. It caused some concern that Georgia might follow the example of Latvia and ratify the FCNM with declarative statements limiting the implementation of specific provisions. Indeed, when the FCNM subsequently was ratified by Parliament in October, a number of declarations were made. However, when the instrument of ratification was submitted to the Council of Europe in December, no declarations were included. The FCNM enters into force in Georgia on 1 April 2006.

A.6. State concept for integration and protection of national minorities

The Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights and Civil Integration has for some time been preparing a "Concept on the Policy Regarding the Protection and Integration of National Minorities". However, the preparations for ratification of the FCNM reasonably had put the drafting of this document on hold.

Following the ratification by Parliament in October, ECMI with the assistance of a legal expert and in consultation with the Committee drew up a set of recommendations, which subsequently were presented to the Committee. The recommendations in particular were aimed at securing correspondence between the Concept, the FCNM and the European Convention for Human Rights. One weakness of the Concept, however, is that it merely interprets the provisions of the FCNM, while bringing the Framework Convention into effect in Georgia is envisaged through the implementation of a number of State Programmes (e.g. on the protection and development of minority languages and cultures; on mass media access; on tolerance promotion and on participation of national minorities in local self-governance arrangements). These programmes are still in the making and, in 2006; ECMI will offer advice on the implementation modalities. In 2006, ECMI plans to follow-up on the implementation of the FCNM in a number of joint activities with the Council of Europe. Events preparing the ground for the anticipated ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages are also being prepared in cooperation with the Council of Europe.

A.7. Council of National Minorities

The last major event on minority related issues taking place in 2005 was the inauguration of the Council of National Minorities under the auspices of the Public Defender and with facilitation by ECMI. While ECMI generally encourages the establishment of minority councils as means to create permanent structures for dialogue between minorities and government and with a positive experience from helping such councils into existence in the Balkans, such efforts in Georgia led to concrete results in December. The Council of National Minorities is envisioned to be a key institution for consultations and, from early 2006, a number of specialized working groups will convene to address issues of particular concern to minorities, including language and education, mass media and culture. The working group meetings, conferences and other proceedings of the Council will form a ECMI Annual Report 2005 platform for policy discussions between minority representatives and government and parliament. While there is a tendency in Georgia to "forget"

regional stakeholders due to the physical distance from Tbilisi to the often remotely located minority populated regions, ECMI under this activity pays attention to the importance of involving minority representatives from Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli and aims at linking the existing Javakheti Citizens' Forum and, in the future, the Kvemo Kartli Citizens' Forum, to the activities of the Council of National Minorities.

In light of the already gained results, the considerable regional experience and the growing acknowledgment of ECMI's efforts and expertise by government actors and minority groups alike, the Centre is now particularly well positioned to continue its functions with a high impact. As such, ECMI is likely to play an important role in the years to come in enhancing minority-majority relations in Georgia, and most probably also in other parts of the Caucasus.

II. Practice-Oriented Research

A. The use of minority languages in the education system in Georgia

A smaller practice-oriented research conducted by ECMI in Georgia has focused on studying the conditions for usage of minority languages in regions of Georgia in the context of best practices in Europe and on providing models for minority language usage, which can be useful in the Georgian context. A new law on higher education was passed in Georgia in 2005.

While Armenians, Azeris and other minorities before the introduction of the new law were permitted to enter institutions of higher learning situated in minority areas without knowledge of the Georgian language, the passing of a Georgian language test is now a requirement for entering university. While this new provision is meant to enhance regional integration and promotes the usage of the Georgian state language, the law in effect seems to exclude minority youth in Javakheti from higher education in Georgian institutions. This development may exacerbate an already significant out-migration trend from a poverty stricken minority-populated region, as youngsters seek access to higher education in Armenia or Russia.

To further the understanding of the impact of the new law and seek solutions to the issue, research has been conducted which offers examples from Romania and Macedonia of how bilingual education can function as a tool for regional integration. Another study focuses on the potential for and effects of introducing minority languages as second administrative languages in regions where national minorities are settled in large numbers. This research provides examples from Romania and Croatia, where special provisions are made to accommodate the special language needs of minority populations. Both studies will be made available in Georgian, Russian and English and form a basis for policy discussions with relevant stakeholders in 2006. 30 ECMI Annual Report 2005 Finally, ECMI has conducted research on resettlement of ecological migrants from the Georgian regions of Svaneti and Adjara, affected by natural disaster in the 1980s and 1990s, to the minority regions of Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti. The research, which continues in 2006, will lead to the publication of a working paper which discusses the history of the resettlement process (1987-present), provide data on the resettled population and analyze the impact of the resettlement on inter-ethnic relations in the recipient communities.

B. “Between Integration and Resettlement: the Meskhetian Turks”

The research project “Between Integration and Resettlement: the Meskhetian Turks” conducted by ECMI with generous support by the Volkswagen Foundation is now drawing to a close. Its main goal was to assist the Government of Georgia in fulfilling its commitment to offer a legal framework and implementation strategies on repatriation of Meskhetian Turks to Georgia.

The findings of the project as well as its legal and implementation elements may create a model for restituting rights of other deported peoples in the former Soviet Union or forced emigration in other countries (e.g. Turks in Bulgaria). From mid-2004, an inter-disciplinary and international team of prominent researchers with expertise in the field of forced migration and a profound knowledge of issues related to the Meskhetian Turks have been conducting research in nine countries where this population is settled.

The Meskhetian Turks were forcibly and collectively deported from Georgia to Central Asia in 1944. Unlike other peoples displaced during Stalin's reign, Meskhetian Turks have for long been forsaken by policy-makers and scholars alike. Up until the end of the 1990s, the international community largely neglected the plight of this people. The paucity of scholarship has also contributed to the confinement of Meskhetian Turks to the margins of an otherwise fairly intensive debate over the fate of different ethnic and national groups in the post-Soviet space. The few existing studies addressing problems of Meskhetian Turks have lacked a comparative perspective and have tended to depict Meskhetian Turks as a homogeneous group, whose first and foremost intention is to return to Meskhetia in southern Georgia, the region from which they were originally deported. Moreover, the voices of the Meskhetian Turks themselves have been notoriously missing in most of these accounts. The major thrust of the ECMI research project has been to fill in the gap in scholarship on Meskhetian Turks, thereby drawing the attention of the international community to their problems and making the facts and knowledge available for international organizations and practitioners in devising durable solutions for this population group. It has endeavored to provide a comprehensive insight about the lives, livelihood and views of Meskhetian Turks.

Among other issues, the research covers the following aspects, which are essential for an understanding of Meskhetian Turk communities: the history of their settlement; the functional integration of Meskhetian Turk communities into their host societies; the role of their leadership and elite; identity and networks; and the Meskhetian Turks' concepts of home and homeland. Throughout the research, ECMI has ensured that the voices of the Meskhetian Turks themselves are adequately represented. Knowledge and information generated throughout this project are likely to become a significant asset for governmental and non-governmental actors committed to finding solutions to the problems of the Meskhetian Turks. A thorough analysis of peoples' responses to displacement, their own strategies and survival mechanisms is envisaged to challenge the dominant discourse based on homogenization and generalization. By presenting a comparative perspective, the research emphasizes difference and diversity of Meskhetian Turk communities in the various countries where they live.

C. The research process

The project methodology has embraced a number of qualitative methods, including in-depth, open-ended interviews, expert interviews and ethnographic participant observation. Meskhetian Turks currently reside compactly in nine countries: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Russia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey and the USA. Within the framework of the research project, eighteen long-term studies have been carried out in different regions of these countries. Each long-term study lasted for six weeks. During this period researchers lived continuously with one or more Meskhetian Turk host families. Each study included at least twenty in-depth interviews with Meskhetian Turk informants; 3-5 interviews with members of the host population; and several interviews with local officials and with formal or informal leaders. Participant observation also allowed the fieldworkers to observe the day-to-day life of the communities under research and engage in their activities. All field studies have now been completed.

There are several factors impacting on the course of research as well as empirical findings and analytical points that are worth a closer presentation here. Not surprisingly, given the rather turbulent situation in some countries of research, some fieldworkers encountered serious obstacles during their fieldwork. For instance, the fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan was temporarily interrupted due to the ‘Tulip Revolution’ in March 2005. The fieldwork resumed in mid April after the Meskhetian Turk communities realized that further engagement in the research process would not pose a threat to their community.

The fieldwork in Uzbekistan was very difficult from the very outset. Memories of pogroms that took place in 1989 in Fergana Valley as well as the increasingly authoritarian nature of the Karimov regime compel Meskhetian Turk communities to keep a low profile. The researchers, therefore, faced major problems with access to the field. From early on, it became obvious that local law enforcement agencies kept a close eye on the researchers throughout their fieldwork, although they did not directly prevent the conduct of the works. Similar problems impeded research in some regions of Russia. However, notwithstanding all the obstacles and problems, the researchers managed to establish contact with Meskhetian Turks and fieldworks were conducted in all countries as planned. Follow-up and short-term studies complemented the findings of the long-terms studies. Follow-up studies were conducted in the same locations as long-terms studies, whereas short-term studies sought to explore communities in the regions not covered by long-term studies. The short-term studies were conducted to ensure that the research covered a wider range of communities and thus providing an adequate picture of the communities in each country. For example in Azerbaijan, the Meskhetian Turks are settled in 19 regions and in several other countries, the communities are also numerous and scattered throughout vast territories. In total, 23 short-term studies and follow-up studies were conducted. As part of the project, a number of scholars were also commissioned to write thematic and legal studies chapters. Two legal studies chapters focus on legislation and legal practices pertaining to Meskhetian Turks in Russia and Georgia respectively. Thematic chapters cover topics such as the role of international organizations; the Meskhetian Turks’ elite and leadership; and a comparison of identity formation and concepts of ‘home’ and ‘homeland’ among Meskhetian Turks and Crimean Tatars.

D. A few research highlights

Although the study was not intended to gain accurate statistics on the numbers of Meskhetian Turks worldwide, the researchers did their best to obtain fairly reliable figures. Estimations indicate that the total number of Meskhetian Turks ranges between 400,000 and 450,000, which is higher than suggested by other studies. However, it should be noted that it is hardly possible to determine the precise number of Meskhetian Turks as many of them were registered as Azeri or Uzbeks.

Moreover, in some countries the authorities appeared reluctant to reveal information on the national minorities populating these countries, while figures provided by Meskhetian Turk organizations are often inflated. The research has confirmed the assumption that Meskhetian Turks do not constitute a homogeneous group and that their conditions considerably differ from country to country. The degree of integration of Meskhetian Turks in different countries is contingent on many factors, including the history of their settlement in a particular country, the location of Meskhetian Turk communities, the number of Meskhetian Turks and, of course, the economic, social and political situation in the host societies. In short, some countries conduct more favorable policies toward national minorities in general and Meskhetian Turks in particular, whereas others are, to put it mildly, less tolerant to ‘guests’. In terms of functional integration, in some countries Meskhetian Turks have integrated with relative success.

In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, and to some extent, Azerbaijan, Meskhetian Turks are relatively well integrated, hold citizenship and are, generally, treated on an equal footing with natives. Cultural and religious similarities also make for better integration into these countries. In Uzbekistan, however, the trauma inflicted by the Fergana Valley events in ECMI Annual Report 2005 33 1989 has not yet fully healed. Meskhetian Turks were disposed to be wary after what had happened to them: many of them are registered as Uzbeks and prefer to keep a low profile, blending in to the Uzbek society. However, there are common obstacles hindering the cultural and societal integration of Meskhetian Turks into their adopted societies. First, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, most former Soviet republics embarked on nation-building projects that were often accompanied by nationalist policies and rhetoric blaming minorities for numerous difficulties faced in the early days of independence. These policies generated fear among the Meskhetian Turks — particularly in Central Asia — and led to their relative marginalization and self-isolation. Second, a large number of Meskhetian Turks moved to Ukraine and Russia shortly before the demise of the Soviet Union or were evacuated after the Fergana Valley pogroms. The short history of their settlement in these regions is often mentioned as an obstacle to their integration into these countries.

Moreover, it made them most vulnerable to attacks by nationalists, as they were often perceived and portrayed as a ‘last gift’ of the crumbling empire. Third, the dire extent of economic conditions in most of these countries has not allowed for the successful and swift economic integration of the Meskhetian Turks. On the other hand, in some countries, particularly Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, Meskhetian Turks are often better off compared with the natives. This further antagonizes the local population. Fourth, due to a lack of funds and goodwill, most countries have not formulated coherent policies to encourage the integration of the Meskhetian Turks. Finally, as Meskhetian Turks tend to live in rather confined and closed communities, maintaining their own rites and, often in contrast to their neighbors, working hard and live modestly, they have, to a certain extent, wittingly or unwittingly alienated themselves from the rest of the population. This hampers their cultural and societal integration. Due to these factors, compounded with the collective history of two deportations, even in the most favorable and minority-friendly countries, like Kazakhstan and Ukraine, they often concede that they still live in constant fear – as they put it, on a powder keg – of being displaced again. Quite a few of them perceive their presence in these countries as temporary. This is particularly the case in Krasnodar Krai (South Russia), which stands out as a region where continuous and persistent discrimination and violation of basic human rights take place. In this region many Meskhetian Turks are basically denied a legal status and consequently access to education, health care and legal employment.

At the same time a degree of functional and cultural integration does not necessarily correlate with Meskhetian Turks views on prospective repatriation or migration to other countries. Some Meskhetian Turks are well integrated into the local environment and enjoy support from local bureaucracy for the protection of their own businesses, and at the moment are not planning to go anywhere. Many of them are at a crossroads. Since one of the main conditions of migration for them is security guarantees and organized resettlement programs, the direction of their migration depends on who is offering such programs. Not so long ago, the majority assumed that a country of destination would be Turkey, but over 34 ECMI Annual Report 2005 the last few years the situation has changed. The Meskhetian Turks now have the hope of an organized return to Georgia, since most of them are not in a position to return independently.

The older generation mostly believes it is ready to leave for the homeland of its own accord, once the relevant laws have been adopted. However, they need political, social and economic guarantees. If Georgia can provide this, the number of potential repatriates could rise considerably. For the younger generation, countries where they were born are a comfortable and

safe home. For the majority, the Caucasus is their historical homeland, the ancestral homeland, but regardless of how informed they are (according to what the elderly told them) about features of the southern Georgian landscape, people who have never been there have a very unemotional attitude to Georgia as homeland. For them it remains an imaginary homeland.

E. Research workshops and conferences

The workshop was organized in conjunction with a conference for major stakeholders involved with Meskhetian Turk issues in Georgia, i.e. government officials and representatives for international organizations and civil society. The conference took place on 6 June and was followed by a separate briefing of high-ranking officials from the Georgian government.

The Georgian ministers for Conflict Resolution Issues, Refugees and Accommodation and Civic Integration attended the conference and subsequent briefing along with a range of other officials and parliamentarians. A press conference for local and foreign journalists was also held following the briefing. At these events, the ECMI research network experts informed Georgian officials, activists, scholars and other stakeholders involved in the solution of Meskhetian Turks' issues on the preliminary findings of the research project.

On 6 June 2005, ECMI held a conference entitled "Finding Durable Solutions for the Meskhetians" in Tbilisi, Georgia, as a part of a large-scale comparative research project "Between Integration and Resettlement: The Meskhetian Turks". A special emphasis was put on the population's integration in their countries of current settlement and their plans with regard to possible repatriation to Georgia. The events were widely and rather positively covered by the Georgian mass media.

F. Project goals achieved

The project has already achieved its main goal. During its implementation, comprehensive and profound knowledge about Meskhetian Turks has been acquired. This knowledge is not shelved but is already being shared with relevant stakeholders, especially in Georgia. Georgian officials as well representatives of the international community, including in particular the Council of Europe, have been regularly updated on the research progress. The research findings have been extensively used by the Georgian authorities in devising strategies for repatriation of Meskhetian Turks. Furthermore, ECMI is now recognized by the Georgian authorities and by Meskhetian Turk organizations as a lead agency on Meskhetian Turk issues. As an offspring of the process, ECMI is currently facilitating an expert group in Georgia in drafting a law on repatriation of Meskhetian Turks and discussions with the Georgian Parliament are currently taking place on activities to prepare recipient communities in the envisaged process of future resettlement.

The research will lead to the publication in English of an authoritative 600+ page book volume on the Meskhetian Turks. Co-edited by Tom Trier (Project Director and Regional Director for ECMI in the Caucasus) and Andrei Khanzhin (Project Coordinator and Research Associate), this volume is envisaged to be launched in early autumn 2006. In addition, efforts are currently being made to translate and publish the work in a Russian language version as well.

As another result of the research project, a network of scholars has been created. Remarkably, scholars representing different academic views and also a wide-ranging spectrum of ideological orientations pooled to produce not just a purely academic account, but a study which can serve as an important source of information for those concerned with the plight of Meskhetian Turks. It has been a positive experience for ECMI to work with such a network of researchers representing different disciplines and holding different academic views. It is envisaged that in future new research initiatives can take shape based on the contacts established within the project.