

Historical Background of Meskhetian Turks' Problem and Major Obstacles to the Repatriation Process

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Abstract

This article analyses the historical background of Meskhetian Turks' problem. It deals with the events such as the repeated displacements of Meskhetian Turks and constant violation of their human rights. It also highlights major obstacles to the repatriation process. This research is based on the interdisciplinary method: it is a combination of historical overview and political analysis of the Meskhetian Turks' problem.

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Introduction

The ethnic origin of the people deported from southern Georgia in 1944 is a controversial issue. There is a disagreement among historians and scholars over their origins. According to the Georgian, Russian and Soviet historical sources they are ethnic Georgians, who were forcibly islamized when the Ottoman Empire conquered Meskhethi. On the other hand some Turkish and Azeri scholars reject the hypothesis of islamized Georgians and argue that the deported people are ethnic Turks. According to them they are descendants of Turkish tribes who moved to the Georgian lands and settled down in Meskhethi. The reality about the ethnic origin of the Meskhetian Turks lies somewhere between these two views. The formation of the Meskhetian Turkish community was a result of both migration of nomadic Turkish tribes to Meskhethi and gradual assimilation of local Meskhetian population and their conversion to Islam. (Aydınün, Balım Harding, Hoover, Kuznetsov, Swerdlow, 2006) Other tribes also played a role in the formation of Meskhetian Turks' distinct identity: Kurdish nomadic tribes, Khemshins (Turkish-speaking Muslim Armenians), Karapapakhs (also known as Terekeme), Lezgins and North Caucasian tribes. The representatives of three different language families shaped the nucleus of this ethnically heterogeneous group:

Caucasian – Meskhetians (Georgians), Lezgins and North Caucasian tribes.

Altay – Turkish nomadic tribes, Karapapakhs (also known as Terekeme).

Indo-European – Armenians, Khemshins (Turkish-speaking Muslim Armenians), Kurds. (Ghazinyan,2008)

Deported Meskhetian population's culture has many Turkish elements, as well as strong Georgian linguistic and cultural influences. They follow Islam and speak Oghuzic Turkish with many Georgian elements.

They are widely scattered across several countries of the Former Soviet Union: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Georgia. There are also Meskhetian communities in Turkey and United States. The exact number of the deported Meskhetians is unknown due to a lack of reliable census data. The estimated population lies somewhere between 300.000 and 350.000. Living conditions of the

deported people varies from one country to another and many lived in difficult circumstances in places such as Krasnodar Kray, until their resettlement to United States. They were subject to discriminatory and abusive treatments in Krasnodar Kray but their living conditions have considerably improved after their resettlement to United States (Pentikäinen, Trier, 2004)

Historical background of discrimination and displacement

Neighbouring countries of Georgia played a very important role in shaping the ethno-confessional structure of Meskhети. Ottoman dominion, as well as Russian occupation, has radically changed the ethnic composition of this region. Turkish rule lasted for more than two centuries in Meskhети, until the arrival of Russians in Caucasus. Russian occupation also greatly altered the demographic picture of this region. Therefore, Samtskhe-Javakheti is today an ethnically and religiously diverse region.

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union people became aware of the great number of historical injustices and crimes committed by the Soviet State. One of the crimes committed was the deportation of Meskhetian Turks to Central Asia. In 1944 Stalin deported about 100 000 Muslim Meskhetians that were labeled as “unreliable people” to central Asia. Allegations of collaboration with the enemies of the Soviet Union served as the justification for deportation of these people. They were forcibly dispersed across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The 55,500 Muslim Meskhetians were deported to Uzbekistan, 29,500 – to Kazakhstan, and 11.000 – to Kyrgyzstan. The deportation was one of the most tragic events for the Meskhetian people as they were deprived of their homeland, forced to leave behind their homes, businesses, nearly all their property and were not given any food or clothes during the deportation. Resulting from these injustices many of them died en route.(Umarov-Gozalishvili,2005) Due to a long journey (lasting almost one month) and primitive conditions in Central Asia, many deportees, especially children and aged died.

Soviet government forcefully resettled 30.000 Christian Georgians from different parts of Georgia (mainly from Upper Imereti and Racha) to Meskhети. They were settled in the homes of the deported Meskhetians.

Muslim Meskhetians were deported to different climatic zones,

frequently to the most inhospitable Lands of Central Asia. Local authorities were not prepared to shelter them and therefore, they were settled in hovels and semi-destroyed houses. Many of the deportees could not adapt to the abominable living conditions and harsh climate of Central Asia. Within six months after deportation, one third of deportees, among them 17.000 children died due to disease, cold and hunger.(Umarov - Gozalishvili, 2005) Deaths outnumbered births 11.5 times. Famine was widespread among Meskhetians and many were forced to eat grass in order to survive. Those who survived after the deportation had to endure extreme deprivation, humiliation and discrimination. Local population was hostile to the newcomers as they thought that Meskhetian Turks were “enemies of the people.” Despite this fact, Meskhetians managed to improve their living conditions gradually and situation started to improve in the fifties. Many purchased houses and, through hard work in the fields, actually achieved higher level of affluence than the majority of local population. (Sumbadze,2002)

Local Authorities continued to discriminate against Muslim Meskhetians, treating them as “traitors” and “enemies of the people” and forced them to live under the so-called special regime, which denied them basic human rights, including freedom of movement. Only after Stalin's Death in 1956 a decree of the USSR Supreme Soviet's Presidium was released which cancelled this regime and the restrictions on Meskhetian Turks' movement were lifted.(Pepinov and Osipov, 2007) In first years after the decree many Muslim Meskhetians started to struggle for the resettlement to Georgia. They organized themselves in movement which was engaged in a peaceful campaign for repatriation to Georgia. They sent petitions, letters and appeals to Soviet government officials, organized peaceful demonstrations in order to convince Soviet government to allow them to return to Georgia. But the most the Meskhetian Community could achieve was the resettlement to Azerbaijan. Approximately 30.000 Muslim Meskhetians left Central Asia and settled down in Azerbaijan in order to stay closer to Georgia. In Azerbaijan they were registered as “Azerbaijanis” and every attempt of the Muslim Meskhetians to restore their Georgian nationality was strongly opposed from the government. Repressions against the Muslim Meskhetians that wanted to return to Georgia continued in Azerbaijan and all kinds of provocative actions were

organized in order to prevent Meskhetians from leaving Azerbaijan and going back to Georgia. For many Meskhetians living in Azerbaijan became dangerous and they were forced to resettle in Kabardino- Balkaria. (Umarov - Gozalishvili, 2005)

Soviet Government strictly opposed any attempt of Meskhetians to return to Georgia. Meskhetians were allowed to live anywhere in the Soviet Union except Georgia because during the Cold War era Samtskhe-Javakheti was considered a sensitive border region between Nato and Soviet Union. This region was declared a special “border zone” which created an additional obstacle: nobody could enter this region without special residency permits. These were unavailable to Meskhetian Turks. Due to the existence of this border area regime, which was extended to the entire Samtskhe –Javakheti region, Meskhetians were unable to return to this region.(Pentikäinen, Trier, 2004) Every time when Muslim Meskhetians returned to Georgia police deported them from the republic or detained the migrants on the border. In 1974 Soviet government released a special decree which lifted restrictions on the movement of Meskhetian Turks to Georgia. In practice, Soviet government officials prevented this from happening. After the failed attempts of returning to Georgia, small number of Meskhetian Turks migrated to other republics of Soviet Union from 1956 onwards, but the vast majority of them remained in Central Asian Republics until 1989. Only a handful of Muslim Meskhetians could return to Georgia as a result of the efforts of Georgian intellectuals and dissidents. They were resettled in different regions of Georgia. (Sumbadze,2002)

Muslim Meskhetians faced ongoing persecution and humiliation everywhere they settled. The hatred towards Muslim Meskhetians reached its peak in 1989, when a pogrom broke out against the Meskhetian Turks in the Uzbek section of the Ferghana Valley. As a result, 110 people died, 1,032 people were injured and 856 houses were burnt or destroyed. This crime was committed when Muslim Meskhetian families were already fully settled in Uzbekistan and managed to build new lives for themselves. Law enforcement officials did nothing to prevent this crime. They just watched how the violent Uzbek mobs were burning and pillaging houses, killing innocent people and raping Meskhetian women. People many times requested help, but the prevention of this crime was not in the interests of

the Soviet government officials. (Umarov- Gozalishvili, 2005)

There is a doubt in the Meskhetian Turkish community that the events at the Ferghana Valley were provoked by the Soviet government in order to solve various problems: 1. To provide the Central Russian Regions with the manpower; 2. To divert the attention of the Uzbek nationalists from the Slavic population to the Meskhetian Turkish community; 3. To spread confusion and chaos in the Transcaucasian national movements, because the migration of thousands of Muslim refugees from Central Asia to this region would increase tensions and worsen the situation.

Large scale massacre of Meskhetians in the Ferghana Valley forced many to flee Central Asia and they became refugees once again. The Soviet Army assisted in removing 17.000 Meskhetian Turks from Ferghana Province to Central Russia and the tragic events led to a larger outflow of Meskhetian Turks from Uzbekistan. It is estimated that more than 70.000 Meskhetian Turks had to leave Uzbekistan and move to other republics of the Soviet Union, though some stayed behind, mainly those who had assimilated into the Central Asian republics (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan) through marriage. The Soviet Army acted so quickly and the relocation of Meskhetians to Russia was so swift that many were unable to sell their property and prepare for the resettlement. People, who were fully settled in Uzbekistan, were forced to leave behind their homes, belongings and property and had to start all over again in exile. Some left Central Asia without proper documents and papers and later this complicated matters for Muslim Meskhetians in Russia, especially in Krasnodar Kray. Because of the lack of documents and papers, many of these people became stateless and were denied citizenship by the local authorities of the Krasnodar Kray. (Hoover,2005)

The refugees were resettled in various regions of Central Russia, some of them moved to Azerbaijan, Ukraine and to the neighbouring republics of Uzbekistan: Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Many of them requested the repatriation to Georgia but did not achieve any results. After the tragic events in the Ferghana Valley, only a handful of Muslim Meskhetians managed to return to Georgia, but they were forced to leave Georgia in 1989-1991 due to anti-Meskhetian campaign and popular opposition to their return. In addition, more than 200 families of

Meskhetian repatriates, which were already residing in Georgia were expelled from the country. Despite this fact, compact Meskhetian Turkish settlements remained in some Georgian villages such as Ianeti, Nasakirali and Naruja.

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union Georgia was involved in multiple conflicts and wars and it was unable to deal with the repatriation issue. The ability of the Georgian government to deal with the repatriation issue was very limited due to conflicts and wars with Russia. Georgia was overwhelmed with refugees and therefore could not solve the Meskhetian problem and provide shelter to Meskhetians. There was also a fear that the return of Muslim Meskhetian would create a new source of ethnic tensions.(Sumbadze,2002) These factors became the major obstacle to the repatriation process and delayed the return of Muslim Meskhetians to Georgia.

Meskhetian Turks' organizations

Meskhetian Turks started to engage in a peaceful campaign for the repatriation to Georgia and organized themselves in a national movement virtually from the moment of the lifting of the special settlement regime in 1956. They were all united in this movement and had one clear objective, the repatriation to Georgia. This movement failed to achieve any concrete results and started to disintegrate. Soon it became divided and various organizations with different objectives and orientations emerged in its place.

Meskhetian Turks do not reside compactly in one place and are widely scattered across several countries of the former Soviet Union. These people lack unity and therefore, their goals and priorities are different. For this reason their interests and demands can not be represented by one movement or organization. There are many Meskhetian Turkish organizations that have contradictory interests and ethnic orientations. They can not agree on a number of crucial issues, can not co-operate and unite their efforts for the issues of repatriation. Meskhetian Turks lack the conception of themselves as a unified people and members of the same ethnic group. They can not agree on a number of issues such as their ethnic identity, the exact definition of their homeland and, respectively, the target of repatriation. (Nodia, 2002) With regards to

ethnic identity, the majority of the Meskhetian Turks believe that they are ethnic Turks but they have different views about their homeland. Some of them think that their homeland is Meskheta and therefore, demand their repatriation to Georgia. On the other hand, some believe that their homeland is Turkey and are in favour of their return to Turkey. Small number of Meskhetian Turks perceive themselves as ethnic Georgians and demand their return to any place in Georgia. There is also a considerable portion of Meskhetian Turks that can not point to any definite ethnic identity and their ethnic denomination changes according to circumstances and political situation. In the early sixties many of Meskhetian Turks referred to themselves as Georgians but when the repatriation movement failed to achieve any concrete results and Soviet government prevented their return to their ancestral homeland, they changed their pro- Georgian orientation with pro –Turkish orientation. Thus, when they failed to achieve their primary goal i.e. repatriation to Georgia, they changed their orientation and demanded their resettlement to Turkey. This movement also failed to achieve any concrete results. (Pohl,2005)

Over the years, several Meskhetian Turkish organizations, aligned with one of the above mentioned ethnic orientations, emerged to fight the right of their return to Georgia. Numerous Meskhetian Turkish organizations with contradictory goals and objectives were founded such as Vatan (Fatherland in Turkish), Khsna (Salvation in Georgian), Union of Georgian Repatriates, Umid (Hope in Turkish), Association of Turks residing in Kyrgyzstan, International Federation of Akhiska Turks of CIS countries, The Federation of Akhiska Turk's Association, Akhiska Refugee Turks' Cultural and Social Assistance Association, etc. Meskhetian Turkish organizations are geographically widely scattered across several countries, are divided by different orientations and lack unity. (Aydingün, Balım Harding, Hoover, Kuznetsov, Swerdlow, 2006)

The most distinguished from these organizations are Vatan and Khsna. Vatan was established in 1990 and represents the interests of the pro-Turkish part of the Meskhetian Turkish population. Vatan's followers believe that Meskhetians are ethnic Turks and have distinct Turkish cultural identity. This organization has two main goals: the recognition of the fact that the deportation of Meskhetian Turks in 1944 was illegal and unconditional return of Meskhetian Turks to Meskheta. They reject the

repatriation of Meskhetian Turks to other regions of Georgia and request their return only to Meskhethi. Vatan also demands cultural autonomy for Meskhetians. It claims special cultural rights for Meskhetian Turks such as the right of education in their own language and the protection of their cultural heritage.

Khsna was founded with the support of Georgian government in Kabardino – Balkaria, in 1992 and established close relations with Georgian human rights activists. It represented the interests of the pro-Georgian part of the Meskhetian Turkish population. Followers of Khsna declare themselves as Georgian and hold the view that the Meskhetian Turks are ethnic Georgians who were converted to Islam when Meskhethi was conquered by the Ottoman Empire. They are in favour of repatriation of Meskhetian Turks to the whole territory of Georgia rather than necessarily to Samtskhe – Javakheti. Unlike Vatan, followers of Khsna do not claim any cultural autonomy for Meskhetian Turks. In 1999 Khsna ceased to exist and was replaced with the Union of Georgian Repatriates. Today, Union of Georgian Repatriates (UGR) is based in Tbilisi and is the main Meskhetian Turkish NGO in Georgia. There are also other Meskhetian Turkish organizations that operate in Georgia: Latifshah Baratashvili Foundation – Meskhethi; Khalil Gozalishvili International Association of Muslim Georgians “Gurjistan”, “The International Union of the Young deported Meskhetians – Meskhethi”. They all have pro-Georgian orientation and campaign for Meskhetian Turks return to Georgia. They also provide assistance to Meskhetian repatriates that were already resettled to Georgia. (Sumbadze, 2002)

Umud (Hope in Turkish) was founded in 1994 on the initiative of Akram Bayraktarov, a resident of Krymsk region. It operates only in the Krymsk district, in Russian Federation. The Organization considers that Meskhetian Turks are ethnic Turks and its main goal is the resettlement of Meskhetian Turks to Turkey.

There are various Meskhetian Turkish organizations and associations that operate in Central Asia. Meskhetian Turks have established a cultural centre in Tashkent which is called Meskhetian Turks' Cultural Center. There are two Meskhetian Turkish organizations in Kyrgyzstan: the Association of Turks Residing in Kyrgyzstan and

International Federation of Akhiska Turks of CIC countries. Both hold the view that the deported people are ethnic Turks and both aim at the resettlement of Meskhetian Turks to Turkey.

There are numerous Meskhetian Turkish associations and organizations that operate in Turkey. The majority of these associations are located in Bursa, which is also the place of residence of country's Meskhetian Turkish population. Local Meskhetian Turks, which are citizens of Turkey, run all the organisations. These associations and organizations rest on the assumption that Meskhetians Turks are ethnic Turks. Followers of these associations consider themselves as “genuine Turks” who have returned to their homeland, i.e. Turkey. However, this discourse is challenged by some, including an Akhiska Turks' Educational, Cultural and Social Assistance Association which is based in Istanbul and aims at the repatriation of Meskhetians Turks to Samtskhe–Javakheti. The activities of this association are the following: publication of Journals and production of films about Mekshetian Turks; Education of Meskhetian Turkish youth in order to foster the intelligentsia for the community; Assistance of Meskhetian Turks who arrive to Turkey . (Pentikäinen, Trier, 2004) The Meskhetian Turkish associations and organizations that operate in Turkey are well organized and provide considerable support to Meskhetians who return to Turkey.

The biggest problem of Meskehtian Turkish organisations is that they can not unite their efforts and fight together for the repatriation of Meskhetians Turks to Georgia. As is has been mentioned above, they are divided by different orientations and have contradictory goals and objectives. These organizations can not achieve consensus and have very little in common. Because of the absence of a unifying ethnic or national consciousness and lack of conception of themselves as members of the same ethnic group, they can not establish a unified movement in order to address more effectively issues relating to the repatriation of Meskhetian Turks. If they were united they would be more powerful and would have more influence over political processes.

Major obstacles to the repatriation process

When Georgia joined the Council of Europe in 1999, it assumed the responsibility to repatriate the deported Meskhetians to their historic

homeland. It undertook a number of obligations which included: creation of a legal framework for the repatriation of Meskhetian Turks within two years after its accession to the Council of Europe; initiation of the process of repatriation within three years after its accession and completion of this process within twelve years after its accession.(Sumbadze,2002) Thus, Georgia adopted a twelve year framework to repatriate Meskhetian Turks as a condition of entry into the Council of Europe and the repatriation process of the Meskhetian Turks must be completed in 2011. Under that framework, a law on repatriation was supposed to be in place by 2001. In spite of the acceptance of the commitment, the law on repatriation was never adopted under Shevardnadze's regime.

After the rose revolution the new government has started to pay more attention to the obligations and commitments that the country undertook when it joined the Council of Europe in 1999. One of the main goals of the new political elite is the integration of Georgia into the Euro-Atlantic structures, which can only be achieved with the fulfilment of its obligations and commitments to the Council of Europe. An essential requirement for admission to NATO and European Union is the implementation of the obligations taken before the council of Europe. Therefore, it is in the government's interests to complete the fulfilment of these obligations.

Over the last years considerable progress has been made with regards to the repatriation issue. New regime has helped six Meskhetian families from Azerbaijan to return to Georgia. Another positive step taken towards the repatriation of the deported Meskhetian population was the adoption of the law on repatriation. The law on repatriation, which was officially named “Law of Georgia on Repatriation of Persons forcefully sent into exile from the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia by the Former USSR in the 40's of the 20th Century,” was finally adopted on 11 July 2007 by the new government. The main goal of this law is to create legal mechanisms for the return of Meskhetians and restore the historical fairness. This law allows the deported Meskhetian population and their descendants to apply for repatriation to Georgia. The law on repatriation envisages step- by- step return of repatriates.

Despite many positive steps taken towards the repatriation of the

deported Meskhetian population, there are some obstacles to the repatriation process. The concept of repatriation of Meskhetians is very unpopular among ethnic Armenians that inhabit Samtskhe- Javakheti region. Armenians perceive their return to Georgia as a threat. There is a fear of isolation and total blockade of Armenia. Armenian state is surrounded by Muslim population and Armenia perceives this as a threat to its national security. (North of Iran and south of Georgia are inhabited by Azerbaijanians. In the East and west Armenia's neighbours are Turkey and Azerbaijan) Samtskhe –javakheti is the only region which is not inhabited by Muslims and a sort of gateway to the outside world for Armenia that joins a territory with non-Muslim population. (Ghazinyan,2008) Armenians think that the return of Meskhetians will cause a complete blockade of Armenia and therefore, strongly oppose their return in order to avoid the encirclement of Armenia by Azerbaijan and Turkey. Hostilities between Muslims and Armenians have deep historical roots. Increased ethnic tensions in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War forced many Armenians to emigrate to Samtskhe –Javakheti in order to escape Turkish pogroms. They strongly oppose the return of Meskhetians Turks because many believe that the return of Meskhetians will destabilize the region and may provoke ethnic tensions. As Melik Raisian, ethnic Armenian deputy from the region said, any attempt of repatriation will be a “catalyst for confrontation.” (Baazov, 2001) There is also a fear of losing properties and lands that previously belonged to Muslim Meskhetians. Many Armenians settled in the houses of deported Meskhetians and therefore, are afraid that Meskhetians will reclaim their land and property.

Armenians are afraid that if the deported population will return to Georgia whole region of Samtskhe –Javakheti will become predominantly Turkish and the repatriation will radically change the ethnic composition of this region. Sociological research that was conducted by the European Centre on Minority Issues revealed that the massive migration of Meskhetians to Georgia is less likely to take place. The idea of returning to Georgia is unpopular among Meskhetians. (Zukakishvili, Gotebashvili, 2008) Most of the Muslim Meskhetians, especially the younger generation will not return to Georgia as they have already fully settled in other countries and don't want to start all over again in Georgia. (Brennan,2003) The idea of going back to Georgia is popular only among the older

generation. It is mainly the elderly that were born in Meskheta and personally experienced deportation, that still want to return to their roots. Some of them are still able to speak the Georgian language. The middle and recent generation have been raised in other countries and do not perceive Georgia to be their homeland. As a result the younger generation feel quiet at home where they find themselves and have less desire to start a new life in Georgia.

There is a widespread belief among many Georgian politicians that if Muslim Meskhetians will return to Georgia, the stability and the territorial integrity of the country will be harmed. In reality, experience has shown that Muslim Meskhetians that returned to Georgia established close and friendly relationships with their neighbouring communities, acquired good command of Georgian language and at the same time managed to maintain their traditional habits, language and culture. Their integration into the Georgian society has been a relatively successful process. (Blacklock, 2005)

Another obstacle to the repatriation process is the huge number of internally displaced people, which were left homeless due to wars and conflicts with Russia. Since the independence Georgia has had very strained relations with Russia and many internally displaced people are unable to return to their original places of settlement. Georgia already has a severe refugee crisis, with almost 300.000 people displaced by conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In addition, the four-day war against Russia in 2008 increased the number of refugees greatly. It is estimated that approximately 100.000 refugees left the conflict zones. Their properties and houses were destroyed by the Russian invaders and separatist forces.

Internally displaced people mostly associate the resettlement of Meskhetians with their own return. Repatriation will become a heavy financial burden on the state while it has to take care of such a huge number of refugees. It has to be taken into consideration that Georgia is still suffering from the consequences of wars and conflicts with Russia, the situation is aggravated with the presence of the Russian invaders in the occupied areas and no progress has been achieved so far with regards to the return of the refugees from conflict zones. These are the major destabilizing factors in the country and with these conflicts unresolved

Georgia does not have the resources to finance the repatriation process. Georgia is still unable to launch such a costly project and cope alone with the Meskhetian problem. Therefore, the assistance of the international community will be crucial for the creation of appropriate conditions in the country for the safe and dignified return of Meskhetian Turks and the successful implementation of repatriation process.

Conclusion

The attempts of the Meskhetian Turks to return to Georgia have been mostly unsuccessful. Multiple conflicts and wars with Russia were the main obstacle to their return as well as the huge number of internally displaced people and extreme unpopularity of the repatriation process among ethnic Armenians. Due to above mentioned reasons the repatriation has become a complicated process and there is a need to elaborate the repatriation plan in a way that would reduce the risk of conflict and ethnic tensions.

More international community's and Georgian society's efforts are needed to address the Meskhetian Turks' issue. There are many international organizations that have acquired a lot of knowledge and experience about the repatriation process and can apply this knowledge to the Meskhetian Turks' problem. Active cooperation with the international organizations can help the state to resolve this issue in a civilized manner: guarantee safety and security of the repatriates, cover the costs of repatriation and develop effective integration strategies. The elaboration and implementation of the repatriation and integration program requires close cooperation of the different government departments, local governments and international actors. Conditions have to be created in advance and necessary ground has to be prepared for the resettlement of Meskhetians. The regions and places have to be selected in advance where the safety and security of Meskhetians will be guaranteed. At the same time integration strategies have to be developed in order to convert deported Meskhetians into full-fledged citizens of Georgia. Rehabilitation of Meskhetian Turks is a moral obligation for Georgia and international organizations should provide assistance for the fulfilment of this obligation.

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