

National Minorities in Abkhazia

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It is clear that effective participation of minorities requires the promotion and implementation of international human rights standards.

In Abkhazia, there is understanding that the attitude to ethnic groups is among basic parameters of the country's development level as a democratic state.

Abkhazia is a multinational country inhabited by Abkhazians, the natives, Georgians, Russians, Armenians, Greeks and other nationalities, however the concern is focused only over Georgian population in Gal.

Armenians and Russians are concentrated in central and northern Abkhazia, the Georgian population is overwhelmingly concentrated in southern district of Gal, bordering Georgia. The vast majority of this population belongs to the Mingrelian subgroup closely related to Georgian. The Gal population consider their mother tongue rather Mingrelian than Georgian, but view themselves both Georgian and Mingrelian identities as compatible.

The Abkhaz Constitution contains non-discriminatory clauses and grants ethnic groups the right to native-language primary and secondary education. There are 16 Georgian schools in Abkhazia all located in Gal. Unlike Abkhaz schools curriculum, these schools operate according to the Georgian curriculum in terms of the hours allotted to specific subjects.

Russian, Armenian, Greek and Polish communities are registered in Abkhazia. They lead an active life so that there is a possibility for other people to engage in their culture. The government arranges folk festivals with the participation of folk groups representing other ethnic groups residing in Abkhazia.

Armenian, Russian, Georgian nationalities are represented both in the Government structures and the Parliament of Abkhazia.

The Abkhazian NGOs together with the Youth Centre organize peace camps with the participation of teenagers from the Gal region. Another NGO National Resources hold meetings of old people from all the regions of Abkhazia including the Gal region. Women organizations are the most active, they regularly meet the Gal women to discuss gender issues.

It is worth to mention that on 16 July, Abkhaz President Ankvab met with OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Mr. Vollebaek to discuss the issue of minority languages.

The OSCE official expressed hope for fruitful cooperation with the Abkhaz authorities. He noted interest in the problem of studies of Abkhazian and Georgian languages at the Gal District and said that Abkhazia had no problems in studies of languages.

In addition it is also important to note that the Institute for Democracy and Saferworld conducted a survey in Eastern Abkhazia in December 2011 and January 2012.

The results of both surveys show that, almost twenty years after the initial outbreak of war, communities in Eastern Abkhazia still suffer from the consequences of the conflict.

At the same time, feelings of stability are increasing across the region. Indeed, the most recent survey suggests that a significant number of residents are looking to the future with some optimism, waiting for further improvements to infrastructure, the economy and the security situation. Such optimism provides an opportunity to engage local people in processes to manage the problems facing them, with a view to developing sustainable mechanisms for protecting the rights of people living in Eastern Abkhazia.

We hope that Georgia will refrain from its policy of intimidation towards the Georgian population of Abkhazia and resort to preservation of fragile peace and security in that region. It is easy to damage relations, but it is not that easy to win back confidence.