

Working Session 12

“Veresk” Charity Foundation for Disabled and Amputees, Abkhazia

Language Aspect and National Minorities in Abkhazia.

As I mentioned in the previous presentations Abkhazia is building a democratic state although the circumstances, economic and social conditions, a bitter Abkhaz-Georgian war of 1992-93 and the humanitarian blockade after it, the international isolation made their negative impact on the development of truly democratic processes in the country.

In spite of the world community's neglect (except the Russian Federation) the Abkhaz state holds the policy of integration of minorities into the Abkhaz society, and it is actively supported by the civil society which is deeply concerned with this very important and hard matter.

One of the main problems of national minorities if not the most problematic, is the promotion and respect to their language rights. No one denies that the problem of the language in the state is deeply political and trigger. The Abkhaz authorities fully understand the importance of providing equal opportunities for all ethnicities living today in Abkhazia and feel responsibility to take right measures in this direction in order not to increase any tensions which can be easily achieved by partial and wrong language policy.

People in Abkhazia remember yet the violent policy and terrible methods they had experienced during of the worst period of the Soviet time of the Black Terror implemented by Josef Stalin and his executioner Beria, both Georgian nationals when all the Abkhaz schools were closed for almost 15 years till Stalin's death and the Abkhaz children were forced to study in Georgian, which was not their mother's tongue. The majority of intelligentsia were killed or repressed and the main state task performed was to georginize Abkhazians through severe violation and deprivation of language rights. Moreover the Abkhaz identity was at threat of total disappearance. Abkhazians only represented approximately 18% of the population at that time, mainly due to Georgia's policy of resettling Georgian nationals in ethnic minority areas. The aggressive pursuit of Georgian nationalism after the collapse of Communism further alienated ethnic minorities and strengthened their fight for freedom from Georgia. The consequences of that policy echoes even nowadays as today the Abkhaz children are able to get just a primary education in native language and the Abkhaz. Though today it is free from Georgian oppression there is a room for concern that it could yield to increasing spread of the Russian because of different reasons. Regretfully Abkhaz language is officially added to the list of endangered languages of UNESCO as it is at risk of falling out of use. Much is to be done to preserve it and prevent from disappearance and maintain as a functioning language, but one must have enough resources for it. The same can be said about South Ossetians.

As for the other ethnicities and their language rights one should take into consideration that there are various schools of national minorities as Russian, Armenian and Georgian (in Gal region where mostly Georgians/Migrelians live). No one forbids anyone in Abkhazia freely to use his mother tongue both in private and in public.

As for the language rights violations of Gal residents about which the Georgian officials like to complain we should emphasize that no one has restricted the education at schools in Gal region

in Georgian except the problem of textbooks especially on Geography and History, the content of which is conflict sensitive and the Abkhaz authorities suppose to create new ones. It would be more than nice if the international organizations could provide assistance in resolving this complex problem.

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