

Abkhazia: Citizenship and Political Rights.

“Veresk” charitable foundation for disabled and amputees
Session 11

I would like to thank the organizers of the conference for giving us, representatives of Abkhazia a voice and the opportunity to bring to your kind attention our concerns at such high level. Non recognition of our country by Georgia encounters certain difficulties and infringements for people inhabiting Abkhazia.

Abkhazia has a long- aged history of its existence as a state since the antiquity enjoying its defined territory, population, government and capacity to enter into relations with other states. It even took part in the ancient Greek Olympic Games as mentioned by ancient Greek historians. The follow up formation in the 8th century of the independent Abkhaz Kingdom proclaimed with its autocephalous church, marked the beginning of new ecclesiastical chronology of Abkhazia. Today, in the 21st century it strives to retain its status, political rights and right to retain Abkhazian citizenship.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, despite the fact that the according to the USSR 1977 Constitution Chapter 10 on the Autonomous Republics where the Article 84 says that “The territory of an Autonomous Republic may not be altered without its consent” Georgia’s territorial integrity was recognized without the concern of the Abkhazian Autonomous SSR. Moreover, Georgia was admitted to the UN on the 31st July 1992 and on 14 August two week later it invaded Abkhazia.

After the end of the armed conflict, a significant proportion of the Georgian population left Abkhazia. However, in the late 1990s –around 50,000 ethnic Georgians returned to the Gal district and a number of villages in Abkhazia but had never been registered by the UNCHR as the Georgian government made hindrance to this process to speculate on this issue. Though the International Convention on the Status of Refugees of July 28, 1951, in particular Article 1 of Section C, does not apply to a one –third of Georgians that fled Abkhazia as they voluntarily acquired a new nationality, and are protected by the country of their nationality and Georgian Legislation does not provide dual citizenship. According to 2011 official Abkhaz census over 46,000 Georgians live in Abkhazia. Majority of them reside in Gal district. More than 26,000 passports were issued to Georgians residing in the Gal, Tkwardal and Ochamchira regions in Abkhazia. Before obtaining Abkhazian passports Georgian citizens first have to renounce their Georgian citizenship. Abkhazia citizenship started to become preferable for 707 citizens of Georgia despite the fact that Georgian Legislation does not provide dual citizenship as mentioned above.

People living in Abkhazia possess Abkhaz passports issued by the Republic of Abkhazia that identify the holder as an Abkhaz citizen. Unfortunately, the Abkhaz passport is not recognised at the international level and cannot be used for international travel, except those countries which

recognised the independence of Abkhazia. The obtaining of Russian passports is considered as a step that gives people the opportunity to travel freely for various reasons and issues. The Abkhaz Legislation envisages dual citizenship with the Russian Federation.

Speaking in his televised meeting with a group of Georgian political analysts on September 25 Georgian Prime Minister IVANISHVILI suggested launching a war again to break the fences as he termed administrative border along Abkhazia and S. Ossetia built by the Russian Troops". Further he suggested that "placement of barbwire was related to the Olympics" and that "Georgia would create conditions to maximally help Russia and that his government was criticized for its policy of appeasement with Russia".

Within 20 years Georgia keeps refraining from signing peace agreement with Abkhazia and S. Ossetia. Georgian Prime Minister promises "to create conditions that would convince them to live with us". At the same time Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights says : All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. These commonly accepted principle should not be violated.

Thank you for your attention.