

Citizenship and Political Rights from the Abkhazian perspective.

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I would like to draw your attention and start with the October 3 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) resolution. It requested Russia to reverse the diplomatic recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

With such a non recognition of the Abkhaz people by the European Union means receive no official voice or diplomatic relations among the international community. As a result, the people of Abkhazia have no international voice.

While the Georgian government and people have a right to promote and uphold their case and claims the peoples of Abkhazia have been denied to have such a right.

The international media disseminate only a Georgian version of events and ignore the rights of the ethnic Abkhaz to self-govern independently.

As a result of the Western pro-Georgian stance, citizens of Abkhazia are unable to travel freely throughout the world. International embassies do not recognize them.

The list of the Abkhaz citizen refused to receive visas continues to grow. I will mention just the latest 2 cases.

The Embassy of the Republic of Latvia in the Russian Federation refused to issue visa for Mr. R. Bganba saying in the letter dated Sept.6, 2011 that it had taken into account the Article 17 Section 3 of Immigration Law of the Republic of Latvia and the Consular Department.

Another resident of Abkhazia Ms. Aida Torchua was invited to the FLS Boston Commons Centre for the Intensive English Programs in the capacity of a student scheduled from July 16, 2012 to August 10, 2012, however the Consular Department of the Nonimmigrant Visa Section found that “she had not been eligible under the U.S. Immigration Law” and “was not able to demonstrate that her intended activities in the U.S. would be consistent with one of the nonimmigrant visa categories established in the U.S. Immigration law or more commonly, was unable to satisfy the requirements of the particular nonimmigrant visa categories for which she had applied”.

The Embassies recommend the applicants to readdress the issuance of visas to the Embassies in Georgia realizing that the citizens of Abkhazia cannot do it due to the results of the conflict which is yet unresolved as Georgia refuses to sign peace agreement.

The Georgian parliament on its turn passed legislative amendments for the issuance of travel documents and identification cards for people residing in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgians continue to accuse Abkhazia of forcible issuance of passports to the Georgian residents in Gal district of Abkhazia while Georgia itself imposes Georgian citizenship to the entire Abkhaz population

against their will.

In 2005 the parliament in Abkhazia adopted the Law of the Republic of Abkhazia on Citizenship of the Republic of Abkhazia. It defines who is eligible for Abkhaz citizenship, the procedures to obtain it and the grounds for refusal. It allows ethnic Abkhaz to become citizens automatically regardless of their residence, but non-ethnic Abkhaz may receive Abkhaz citizenship only if they were resident in Abkhazia for at least five years at the time of Abkhazia's declaration of independence in 1999.

Procedures for obtaining Abkhaz passports are time consuming. Even when Gal residents voluntarily apply for citizenship and a passport, they often face difficulties gathering the necessary documentation.

About 55,000 Georgians currently registered as living in Gal, only 9,000 have formally applied for Abkhaz citizenship. Many of them are willing to restore their Abkhazian identity those who during the Stalin regime were forced to change their Abkhaz nationality into Georgian followed by changing of their family names into the Georgian script.

Although the Abkhaz authorities claim that they do not compel anyone to obtain an Abkhaz passport, however the possession of such a passport is a prerequisite to enjoy civil and political, as well as social, cultural and economic rights. It is understandable that the Georgian residents of Abkhazia in Gal fear it may impede to get higher education in Georgia proper, or that they may be considered a traitor. The vast majority of people receiving Abkhaz identification continue to hold a Georgian passport and receive benefits from both the Abkhaz authorities and the Georgian government.

The acquisition of Abkhaz citizenship as well as the consolidation of relations between the Gal District and the rest of Abkhazia also stands amongst the most urgent issues in the process of providing security guarantees to the Gal residents.