

Working Session 5

Association “ Inva- Sodeystvie”

Stop the Policy of Isolation of Abkhazia/South Ossetia From the Global Community

To have to speak in the 21st century about the violation of the basic human right to free movement must be considered hugely shaming for mankind with its long history.

At this session I would like to attract the attention of the Participating States to the gross and severe violation that is the restriction of movement placed on the people of Abkhazia with regard to their travelling to the countries of Europe, the USA and elsewhere. I have to stress that, given its application to “the people of Abkhazia”, this disrespectful ruling acts against all the representatives of the various nations living in Abkhazia and obtaining Abkhazian citizenship. No matter if the person is Abkhazian, Russian, Armenian, Georgian, Jewish, Estonian or Polish, and no matter how long they have been settled in Abkhazia. They should have the right to move freely across the borders, even if Abkhazia is not yet fully internationally recognised; the people of the republic are, after all, no different from those who live in Europe or the USA. It seems the citizens of Abkhazia have been subjected to isolation (the airport and the seaport have been closed since the Georgian-Abkhazian war ended) and have had no right to lead a dignified life or to have contacts outside Abkhazia since 1994. Depriving the people(s) of Abkhazia of their rights is absolutely incomprehensible in the light of all human rights declarations and international covenants, or should one rather suppose that the right to travel freely is the right only of some privileged nations?

It is complicated to obtain visas for the citizens of Abkhazia, and most of the time impossible, even though the application is made in Moscow on the basis of the person's dual Russian citizenship. For example, especially since 2008, citizens of Abkhazia have had greater difficulty receiving visas to travel abroad, including to the United States and European Union countries, even when people apply to travel outside Abkhazia for medical or educational purposes, which seems utterly unjust and unheard of in our time. About 90 percent of Abkhazia's residents hold Russian passports, since Abkhazian travel documents are not internationally recognised. Here I would like to mention some cases when obtaining visas was denied to:

1. Children's dance-ensemble seeking permission to travel to France, Turkey and Poland;
2. NGO-members for travel to Belgium, Lithuania and France;
3. Abkhazian leaders have repeatedly been refused visas and thus have not been able to put forward their visions and ideas at international fora;
4. Young Intellectuals hoping to participate in an event in Latvia;
5. Teenagers invited to the German International Peace Youth-Camp.

The USA and European states express support of the so-called "territorial integrity" of Georgia within the Stalinist borders of the former Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, and this does not promote any change in the Georgian position regarding recognition of the reality on the ground and improving the situation respecting the violation of the right to free movement for the citizens of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Why not think of human security and the protection of human rights rather than geopolitical implications?

Perhaps an in-depth analysis done to discover the reasons behind the Georgian Parliament's adoption of the *Law on [the] Occupied Territories*, which envisages a legal basis for restrictions on free movement and economic activities in these countries, would prove to be unfavourable for Georgia. In particular, according to the relevant law, foreign citizens should enter Abkhazia and South Ossetia only through Georgia. This is a pure violation of not just the rights of the people of our republics but also those rights of all others who should be free to visit Abkhazia/South Ossetia and communicate with us. Most cynical of all is the assertion that this document "was created to support" the peaceful resolution of the conflict, de-occupation and for humanitarian purposes, but at the same time it bans air-, sea- and railway-communications as well as international transit via Abkhazia/ South Ossetia, mineral exploration and money-transfers. We consider that this should be appropriately evaluated and a way found to stop the policy of isolation of Abkhazia/South Ossetia from the global community and to assist in the building of **real** democratic states not the kind of **pseudo**-democracy as happened in Georgia, where the government stands for the promotion of human rights and privileges for just one nation (viz., the Georgians).

