

THE MESKHETIANS: TURKS OR GEORGIANS? A People without A Homeland

by

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INTRODUCTION

“Having left the oblast and the republic, it is important to create favourable conditions for the return of the Meskhetian-Turks under a collective guarantee of security, so that they can live and labour peacefully until the final decision by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on the questions of their ethnic nationality”¹.

The question of the Meskhetian Turks is yet one more indicator and reminder of the complexities and interconnections which are met with in the Caucasus Region: a region rich in the diversity of peoples, nations and language, but impoverished by the legacies of the Soviet Union; a region confused and still suffering from the adoption by Soviet Communist power of a flawed administrative structure and rigid nationalities policy in the furtherance of ‘divide and rule’; a region whose internal social fabric became distorted and complicated not only as a result of the mass deportation of peoples from the Caucasus during the Great Patriotic War between November 1943 and November 1944, but also from the consequences of their return from exile. In the case of the Meskhetian Turks, they had an additional factor with which to contend. In the late 1950s, when the question of their return from Uzbekistan to Georgia and Meskhetia began to appear as a possibility, the Meskhetian Turks were to meet with seeming official indifference and even hostility from their own native homeland. A second exile, this time from Uzbekistan following the pogrom in 1989, gave rise to some poignant, but succinct descriptions concerning the plight of the Meskhetian Turks², *“Meskhetian Turks - Twice Exiles of the Soviet Union”*, *“Soviet Turks in search of*

¹ *Izvestiya* No 204 (22742) of 22 July 1989 *“Vosstanovit' doveriye”*, UzTAG - TASS correspondent reporting I Karimov at Fergana oblast party plenum on 21 July.

² *“Tsentral'naya Aziya”* Sweden No 4 (10) 1997 page 99 *“Turki-Meskhetintsi - Pokhod k*

a roof”, “*They want a homeland in Georgia, the homeland does not want them*”, and one attributed to the famous Georgian film producer R Chkheidze in his film “*Land, where is thy son*”³. The Meskhetian Turks, as a complete people, have still not been able to return to the land of their ancestors.

Rodinu” by Reuven Enokh.

³ *Ogonek* No 50 (3255) 9-16 December 1989 page 31 “*Gde syn tvoy, zemlya?*” by Mayra Salykova and Semen Yanovskiy.

Whilst it would be difficult to maintain a position that the issue of the return of the Meskhetian Turks and their full rehabilitation boasted a full quiver of important geo-political, geo-strategic and economic implications on a global scale, nonetheless the question of the return of this nation to their ancestral homeland, still delayed and unfulfilled after some 54 years, raises difficult questions and decisions for the Georgian authorities and the Georgian people. The presence of Meskhetian Turks, restrained from returning to their homeland, but 'lodged' in adjacent republics and territories of the Russian Federation in the North Caucasus, such as Krasnodar Kray, or in the sovereign Azerbaijan Republic, is yet one more factor contributing to instability in the region, remembering that '*. . . the situation in the region is changing not by the day but by the hour*'⁴; moreover under the present circumstances it might not take much to provide "*The last drop which overflowed their cup of patience*"⁵.

In a recent paper⁶, the position of Nagornyy Karabakh and the implications for oil pipelines were discussed. As Map 1 below illustrates, Meskhetiya-Dzhvakhetiya borders both Turkey and Armenia. Whilst the possibility of an oil pipeline passing through Meskhetiya as one of the "*Baku oil southern transit route improvements*"⁷ not only increases the importance of Meskhetiya, it must also sharpen the sensitivities of the Georgian government towards Meskhetiya and the questions concerned with the return of Meskhetian exiles to this region

Map 1 - The Region of Meskhetiya-Dzhvakhetiya⁸

⁴ C W Blandy "*The Impact of Baku Oil on Nagornyy Karabakh - Waxing Western Influence: Waning Russian Power*" S33 December 1997 CSRC, page 1.

⁵ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 211 (1536) 10 November 1997 page 1 referring only to the expression "*Posledney kapley, perepolnivshey chashu ikh terpleniya, . . .*" - in other words "the last straw"!

⁶ Blandy op.cit page 1.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "*Kurorty I Kurortniye Resursy Gruzinskoy SSR*" Moskva 1989, page 13 Politiko-Administrativnaya Karta.

Key to Rayony:

38 - Adigenskiy; 39 - Akhaltsikhskiy; 40 - Aspindskiy; 48 - Akhalkalakskiy; 49 - Bordanovskiy.

The purpose of this paper is to examine and assess the present position of the Meskhetian Turks, or Meskhi as a large number of them prefer to be called, with regard to the possibilities of their being able to return to Meskhetiya-Dzhvakhetiya in the near future or within a longer time frame. In the process of examination, the paper briefly covers the deportations and important points during the continuing exile, such as the Fergana pogrom in June 1989, then the paper undertakes an investigation on the question of who and what are the Meskhetian Turks, the problems of terminology, Georgian public opinion and the problem of assessing the exact numbers of Meskhetian Turks who wish to return to their homeland. It dwells for a period on the latest pronouncements in Tbilisi which are very much coloured by the present economic state of the republic. However, superimposed over this question of Meskhetian Turks is a fact which is still pertinent in Russo-Georgian relations, namely that for "*Georgia the sun rises in the north*"⁹. Georgia for the present remains dominated by her larger and more powerful neighbour lying to the north - Russia.

DEPORTATION AND EXILE**Deportation during the Great Patriotic War**

It will be remembered that as part of Operation Edelweiss, the German objectives had been to destroy the Soviet Southern Front, seize the Caucasus and thereby enable the Third Reich to benefit greatly from the oilfields of Maikop (Krasnodar Kray), Groznyy (Checheno-Ingushetia, as it then was) and Baku (Azerbaijan). Parts of the Caucasus became occupied by the Germans as they penetrated deeper into the North Caucasus and in particular the hinterland of the north west Caucasus. There, they backed national governments in attempting to exploit the volatile nationality problem to the detriment and discomfort of the Soviets through a partial implementation of the Rosenberg Plan¹⁰. As a result of these events, the establishment of a national

⁹ C W Blandy "*The Georgian Ethnic and Humanitarian Crisis*" S26 October 1996 CSRC page 9, Note 3.

¹⁰ Blandy "*The Chechen Conflict - Escalation and Expansion*" P15 June 1995 CSRC page 20: "A case in point was the formation of a national Karachai government which began to restore traditional social and religious structures, as well as reversing the policy of

Karachai government, Chechen insurrection and general unrest “... *The scourge of mass deportation was inflicted on the Karachai, the Balkar, the Chechen, the Ingush, the Kalmyk Buddhist people from north of the Kuma River and, from the Transcaucasus, the Meskhetian turks in Georgia*”¹¹.

The Meskhetian Turks were deported on the orders of Stalin in November 1944 because of concerns over the German-Turkish relationship and the proximity of the Meskhetian Turks to Turkey. Boxes 1, 2 and 3 below contain descriptions of the deportations to Soviet Central Asia and Kazakhstan.

collectivisation in the agricultural sphere”.

¹¹ Ibid page 21. These consisted of the deportation of the Karachai (62,267 in Nov 43), Kalmyk (93,139 in Dec 43), Chechen (387,229 in Feb 44), Ingush (91,250 in Feb 44) and the Balkar (33,773 in Mar 44).

Box 1 - Deportation to Soviet Central Asia¹²

During the deportation from Georgia of the Meskhetian Turks to Soviet Central Asia and Kazakhstan, these people suffered extreme privation, discomfort and death for “*Out of the 115,000 old people, wives and month-old children at the start of the journey in overcrowded packed wagons and in the first winter stay in plywood structures, mudhuts and dugouts one quarter perished (28,750)*”.

Box 2 below provides a little more detail from another source on the numbers of Meskhetian Turks and other peoples from the Transcaucasus who suffered deportation as well. It will not go unnoticed that there is a wide disparity in the figures concerning the numbers of Meskhetian Turks and other peoples who suffered deportation in November 1944. The exact numbers of Meskhetian Turks who suffered deportation, who were in Fergana, and how many are left in Central Asia, are still a matter of ongoing debate and speculation today, covered later in this paper.

Box 2 - Meskhetian Turks and Other Peoples Deported in November 1944¹³

1. This ethnic group of approximately 200,000 people was deported in 1944 from Georgia to Soviet Central Asia. Furthermore this was forced migration and these migrants are forced settlers.

2. Not only did the illegal deportation in November 1944 consist of Turks, but furthermore, people of Kurdish¹⁴, Khemshin and Azerbaijani nationalities from the territory of five rayony in the south of Georgia: Akhaltsikhke; Adigeni; Aspindza, Akhakalaki; Bogdanovka - from the geographically named region of Meskhetiya-Dzhvakhetiya¹⁵.

¹² Salykova and Yanovskiy, op.cit.

¹³ “*Konflikty i Peregovory*” No (8/96) May 1996 page 12 “*Situatsiya menyayetsya?*” Extracted from speech by El'dar Zeynalov, Director of the Protection of Rights Centre of Azerbaijan.

¹⁴ See also Shirin Akiner “*Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union - An historical and statistical handbook*” Second Edition: page 261, on the question of other peoples in Meskhetia, there were Turkmen (who also call themselves Turks), Karapapakhs, Khemshins (Khemshils), Armenians and Turkicised Kurds; page 254, a few thousand Karapapakhs are found in the south of the Azerbaijani Republic; page 255, the Khemshins were Armenian Muslims but following the 1944 deportation their present whereabouts are unknown.

¹⁵ Salykova and Yanovskiy, op.cit.

A great irony was also attached to the deportation of the Meskhetian Turks, for even before the deportations, some 40,000 Turks had already been amongst the first to join up and serve in the ranks of the Soviet Army. *“Out of those who had been fighting 14,000 remained and returned from the war: Heroes of the Soviet Union, ones who had been decorated and invalids”*¹⁶.

Whilst Box 3 mainly concentrates on the experience of a 10 year old boy in the deportation from Meskhetia, the fate of his uncle, a returning war veteran is also described.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Box 3 - The Experience of Tayfur Abuzer - an “Unreturnable”¹⁷

“I was 10 years old when we were exiled. I myself am from Aspindzskiy (Aspindza) rayon of Meskhetia, from the village of Khertvezi. We were driven out onto the street at midnight and held until 0400 hrs in the morning, and then they said ‘We are taking you away temporarily’. My mother said to me “Go to Granny’s” - but our grandmother lived in another village. It was vital; I informed her that they were taking us away to somewhere. But as I was just going away on the road, they caught me redhanded and threw me into the first Studebaker”¹⁸.

“Separated from parents and relatives, I was taken to Alma-Atinskaya Oblast’. I only just survived on the journey. Simply don’t have the mental strength to talk about what happened during the journey in a goods wagon for cattle, in which we taken. . .”

“I did not see any of my relatives from 1944 to 1948. Then by accident in the bazaar I saw my aunt, then my father and brother came. And later my uncle returned from the army. They sent him to the Komendatura and said “Take off your medals and shoulder boards”. All this and in addition his documents were taken away from him. He went into a decline, he was ill for a year and he died”.

Endless and Continuing Exile

Temporary Easing of Restrictions on Movement

In 1956, at about the same time as the Muslim mountain peoples of the North Caucasus began to find that they could begin to move back to their ancestral homelands, the restriction on free movement was also partially lifted for the Meskhetian Turks. Details

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See Blandy “*The Chechen Conflict - Escalation and Expansion*” P15, June 1995, CSRC page 21 for further remarks about the seeming ubiquitous use of ‘*Studebekkers*’ in the deportation of the Chechens in February 1944: “In general terms the deportations were abrupt and violent. They were carried out with ruthlessness and extraordinary speed. In Chechnya, it was ironical that American Studebaker lorries were employed in conveying the deportees from their *auls* to Groznyy. The journey to their place of exile was by train in the questionable luxury of cattle trucks . . . Even those serving in the Soviet Armed Forces, having fought loyally against the Fascist Germans were not exempt from deportation after the war. All the deported people were subjected to stringent surveillance measures whilst in the territories of exile. Penalties were severe if they absconded from their designated settlement area, with the imposition of sentences of up to 20 years hard labour, if they suffered capture”.

and approximate numbers are given in Box 4 below.

Box 4 - Partial Lifting of Movement Restrictions for Meskhetian Turks¹⁹

1. In 1956, and again in 1958, the first 2,150 families of Meskhetian Turks were resettled in Azerbaijan, closer to their homeland in Georgia, but they had still not reached home.
2. It was estimated that “the overall number of Turks, which had arrived in Azerbaijan in 1958-1962 consisted of some 20,000 to 25,000 people” .
3. But after the easing of movement restrictions in 1956-58 the return of the Meskhetian Turks was to suffer a reverse. 160 families which had returned in the 1970s were once again forced to leave Georgia.

The Fergana Pogrom

¹⁹ Op.cit “*Konflikty i Peregovory*” No (8/96) May 1996 page 12 “*Situatsiya menyayetsya?*” From a speech by El’dar Zeynalov, Director of the Protection of Rights Centre of Azerbaijan.

Whilst a deep analysis of the Fergana pogrom against the Meskhetian Turks is outside the scope of this paper, in brief, the causes of the Fergana tragedy revolved round the following points²⁰. The first reason was the concept of the creation of a Pan-Islamic state in Uzbekistan. At the end of December 1988, “*the activation of a reactionary Muslim movement of “Wahhabis” in the Fergana Valley was started. Its programme included the purifying of Islam, the restriction of women’s rights and the creation of an Islamic Army. In the towns of Namangan and Uchkuran many Pan-Islamic assemblies and meetings took place*”²¹. Zealot nationalists in pursuing their objective considered that Uzbekistan needed to be a union embracing all Muslim peoples. At the end of 1988 and the beginning of 1989 “emissaries” from Tashkent met the leaders of the “Committee for the Return of the Meskhetian Turks to their Homeland” and prevailed on them to unite with them in this ‘holy’ idea. The second reason was that having consulted their *aksakaly*, the ‘white-bearded’ elders, the Meskhetian Turks wanted nothing to do with the Uzbek idea, as the desire to return to their homeland was uppermost in their minds. Having given the Meskhetian Turks time for reflection, allusions were then made by the Uzbeks to possible reprisals and violence. However, the Soviet authorities completely dominated the Meskhetian Turks, particularly in connection with the hopes which the policy of *perestroika* had opened with aspirations and dreams of returning to their own historical homeland after 45 long years.

From 18 February 1989 onwards the situation in Fergana oblast’ began to deteriorate, when a group of 100 young Uzbek workers attempted to inflict reprisals on non-Uzbek people in the Kuybyshevskiy district of Tashkent, followed by another disturbance in Tashkent on 23 February and a clash between Uzbek and foreign students on 22 April where more than 1,000 participated, resulting in wounded on both sides and much material damage to property and buildings. The death of a young Uzbek was the ‘supposed’ catalyst for a clash between Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks in Kuvasai on 23-24 May 1989, which “*led to mass civil disorder on the basis of inter-ethnic hostility from 3 June*”²² until after 7 June, with the main nucleus of MVD troops being concentrated to keep order in Fergana, Margilan, Tashlak, Kirgili, Kuvaisa, in villages of Akhunbabskiy rayon and in the sovkhos of Yusupova and Kokand.

However, remembering that much of the Uzbek nationalism was directed at Russians, the Uzbeks may have needed a ‘whipping boy’ on whom they could demonstrate their strength. The Meskhetian Turks were an ideal target because they did not belong to a great power like the Russians and furthermore did not have strong, tight and age-long

²⁰ *Ogonek* No 29 (3234) 15-22 July 1989 pages 28 to 31 “*Zatmeniye*” by Anatoliy Golovkov.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Golovkov op.cit.

roots in the community. Golovkov and Enokh writing nine years later²³ both make the point that the events in Fergana had been planned beforehand. A outline of the casualties and damage which occurred in the Fergana valley is shown in Box 5 below.

²³ Enokh, op.cit, quotes from a TASS report of 12 June 1989: "It has become clear that the happenings in Fergana Oblast', as in other several other areas of the republic, was a well thought out and organised action. For its execution needed solid means. Judging by everything, the extremists have. What are their sources"?

Box 5 - Casualties in Fergana Valley by on 19 June 1989²⁴

Cadavers: Total - 98; Meskhetian Turks - 69; Uzbeks - 19; Tajiks - 1; Unknown - 9.

Military Casualties: Injured - 136 MVD servicemen, 57 militiamen; 41 hospitalised.

Destruction of Property: Houses burnt down - 753; State buildings - 27; Vehicles - 275.

Weapons seized: 8,970.

Evacuated to other RSFSR regions: 16,282 Meskhetian Turks.

In any case, the Meskhetian Turks were banished once again, on this occasion from Uzbekistan. *“More than 16,000 Turkish refugees were loaded into aircraft and sent to Russia”²⁵*. Furthermore, additional numbers of Meskhetian Turks managed to get nearer home for, *“After the anti-Turkish pogroms in Uzbekistan between 44,000 and 48,000 Meskhetian Turks arrived in Azerbaijan. The migrants of 1989 obtained the official status of refugees”²⁶*.

In the attempts of the Meskhetian Turks to be closer to their homeland, *“a by no means insignificant number managed to settle themselves in Azerbaijan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Krasnodar Krai and other regions of the country”²⁷*. Everywhere the gradual process of assimilation was observed. Attempts were made at creating Turkish schools, but the huge territorial dispersion of the young people, made the creation of a single centre of culture unrealistic and unattainable. *“This question”, they said, “can only be solved with a compact settlement of our people”²⁸*. Perhaps this statement also provides evidence that the Meskhetian Turks wanted their own autonomous administrative entity on their return to their homeland. For in 1964 the Interim Organisational Committee of Liberation²⁹ was created by the Meskhetian Turks, which not only had the aim of returning home but also as a consequence of the return *“the creation of a Turkish autonomy”³⁰*.

The members of VOKO noted that the return to their historical homeland, the Akhaltsikhskiy rayon of the Georgian SSR, gave them the possibility of reviving their

²⁴ Golovkov op.cit.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *“Konflikty i Peregovory”* op.cit.

²⁷ Saltykova and Yanovskiy op.cit.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Vremennyy Organizatsionnyy Komitet Osvobozhdeniya (VOKO).

³⁰ Enokh, op.cit page 101.

vanishing national culture. Their happiness at this thought was balanced by the harsh realities which they foresaw they would find on their return, namely that on the territory of Meskhetiya-Dzhavakhetiya there would be several hundreds of destroyed, ruined and uninhabited villages.

Having covered the circumstances of the deportation in 1944, the Fergana pogrom and continuing exile, it is now appropriate to turn attention to the difficult questions of who and what exactly are the Meskhetian Turks. This will allow us then to investigate the problems of Georgian public opinion and assessing the exact numbers of Meskhetian Turks that there are wishing to return to their homeland.

DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS OF MESKHETIANS

Terminology

On the question of terminology and definition several natural questions arise. Who are the Meskhetian Turks³¹? Is there a homeland in actual fact? For a long time now the ethnic antecedents of the Meskhetintsi have been an insoluble problem. Some representatives of these people consider themselves to be Meskhetian Turks - the majority; on the other hand there are others who believe themselves to be solely Meskhi as part of a single Georgian nation. It would appear that Georgia does not wish to receive the Meskhetian Turks, and if they do not want to, then why not and on what basis is their objection founded? Both in the Georgian as well as in the earlier Soviet Press, attempts were made to answer these questions as well as those concerning the sources of the 'Fergana Tragedy', where the Meskhetian Turks were once again banished, this time from Uzbekistan.

According to Reuven Enokh³², writers, most probably, turned attention to circumstances when the term "Meskhetian-Turk" was used in inverted commas and by no means accidentally. First, there is the view that these people are called 'Soviet Turks', 'Turks', 'Meskhi', 'Meskhetian-Turks', 'Turks from Meskhetia' etc. Secondly, in Georgia, people mentioning these terms are subject to severe criticism. For example, one of Georgia's prominent historians, Professor N Lomoyrin attempted to show the illegality of their application in the following way "*Concerning the term "Meskhetian-Turks. How is it applied legally? The term, without doubt, is artificial, it has no history, it arose recently"*³³. However, Professor Lomoyrin went on to say that: "*...in the press, on television, in customary everyday use we also sometimes meet such terms as: "Turkish Meskhi", "Meskhi of Turkish origin", "Meskhi-Turks". None of these terms are true and correct"*³⁴.

Enokh also maintains the view that "*It is important to understand that Turks and Meskhi are completely different peoples and must not be identified as the same peoples*"³⁵. Further views on the subject are expressed by another Georgian historian Levan Upushadze, who wrote that "*The term 'Meskhetian-Turk' (or 'Turks from Meskhetia') has*

³¹ *Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya* Volume 16, Third Edition, 1974, page 320: "Meskheti - the country of the Meskhi (one of the Georgian tribes)."

³² Enokh, op.cit.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

*a provocative connotation, substance or undertone since only Meskhetian-Georgian, or even Meskhetinets exist, who became Turks*³⁶.

History

Let us go back in time to 1989 and take the instance of one Emma Panesh, an academic from Leningrad, as it was then, who gave an address on this theme at a meeting of the Council of the Culture Fund of the USSR on the development and preservation of the culture of numerically small nations. Part of her talk is given in Box 6 below.

³⁶ Ibid.

Box 6 - A View on the People from Meskhetiya-Dzhavakhetia³⁷

“Meskhetiya-Dzhavakhetiya is border country. Over the duration of many centuries on the border territory ethnic Turks and Georgians have lived in neighbourly contact, turning to the local history of any borderland, this situation could be typical.

“If the territory was Turkish, then as they usually did under such circumstances, they transferred the Georgians to the depths of the country and on the territory of the border constructed military cantonments. If the territory was Georgian then the very same thing happened but it was done by the other side. That was what was done in 1944. From the border land Muslim peoples were evicted. Meskhetian Turks were sent away, and on the vacated territory they settled Georgians. Although without doubt there was also a portion of evicted Georgian Muslims.

“We think that the question of origin is impossible to resolve peacefully. And it is important that the solution of this question does not turn out to be pressure on the consciousness of the Meskhetintsi; it is a fine and delicate question”.

A further description of the Meskhetian Turks is given by Shirin Akiner.

Box 7 - Dr Shirin Akiner's Description of Meskhetian Turks³⁸

“Being of mixed descent: some are descended from Turks, others from Turkicised Georgians. Meskhetia, a part of Georgia, came under Turkish rule in the sixteenth century. Many of the indigenous population became Muslims and adopted Turkish as their language. After the Treaty of Adrianople (1829), the northern region of Meskhetia was incorporated into the Russian Empire (which by then included Georgia) and only the south remained in Turkish possession”.

From a historical point of view this reflects the wax and wane of military conquest, transfer of territory and resultant political settlement. The viewpoints of a Georgian historian, Guram Mamulia, are summarised in Box 8 below:

Box 8 - Viewpoint of Guram Mamulia on Meskhetiya³⁹

1. “This problem is one of the most complicated for a Georgian. For the whole republic. That group of people whom they talk about as Turks, are as a matter of fact Meskhi. Since olden times the population of that territory were exclusively Georgian. Turks as such, I have in mind the Ottomans, never lived there. Even in official statistics of the past there was no such understanding as ‘Turks’.”
2. As a result of the expansion of the Turkish Empire, the process of Muslimisation of the Meskhi in those places lasted over three centuries. In connection with this the loss of language took place, with all its ensuing consequences. But to say that in Meskhetiya from time immemorial Turks lived there and it is Turkish land is a complete miscomprehension.
3. Meskhetiya was the centre of Georgian culture. And even if this territory was to be looked at from the point of view of material memorials of culture, then precisely the oldest Christian churches are situated there. And it is possible to trace through later historical documents, on

³⁷ Salykova and Yanovskiy op.cit.

³⁸ Akiner op.cit.

³⁹ Salykova and Yanovskiy op.cit.

the desolation of the territory, mosques which rose up as a result of Muslimisation. Part of the Meskhi, as a result of persecution, converted to the Catholic Faith. The religious consciousness of the Meskhi as a result of this fell into three parts: part were secret Orthodox, who were regarded as Georgians, part were Catholics who were called Frenchmen and part were the Muslimised population, who called themselves Tatars, but not Turks.

4. This part of the Georgian population over centuries was a sacrifice to the 'big time' politics of the state for they lived on the border and constantly experienced pressure from the side of the state.

5. Even in the Soviet period they were described and written about as Azerbaijanis and Georgians, and in 1944 they were exiled as Turks. **And thus the so-called Meskhetian-Turk nation was formed on the grounds of a religious and not national consciousness.**

6. "Unfortunately, there were events in recent history which still remain in the memory of the people. When the Turks in 1918 advanced through Meskhetiya, the Muslim (Mussulman) population of the territory rose up in rebellion. It amounted to slaughter. Christian and Muslim. There where Christian and Muslim lived side by side, often Muslims saved and hid Christians. But it was a terrible price. And this, to this very day lives on in the minds of the people".

Klara Baratashvili has provided additional historical detail pertaining to Meskhetiya and the Meskhi.

Box 9 - Additional Historical Detail on Meskhetiya and the Meskhi⁴⁰

1. Meskhetiya was under the Ottoman yoke for 300 years, while Georgia did not turn to Russia for help. As a result of the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-29 fighting only stopped in the northern part of Meskhetiya, the population of which was described as "Sunni-Gorgians".

2. The above fact is mentioned in "A Collection of materials on the Description of a Tiflis Governor" of 1807. It is also corroborated in family or village lists of the Akhaltsikhe *uyezd*⁴¹ of Tiflis province in 1886, where reference was also made to Sunni-Mahomedans and where each tribe was clearly labelled as 'Georgians'. The Table of Statistical Data concerning the Population of the Transcaucasus Kray⁴² draws attention to the fact that the Muslim population of Meskhetia consisted of Sunni-Georgians, Terekmintsi and Kurds. There were practically no ethnic Turks in Meskhetiya.

3. In the lists mentioned above, there were in Meskhetiya about 200 Muslim villages. Terekemtsi and Kurds lived in only about 20 of them. In 1944 out of the 125,000 inhabitants of Meskhetiya, evicted on [grounds of] Muslim religious belief were approximately 7,000 Terekemtsi and 3,000 Kurds. The remaining 115,000 were the so-called Turks, in reality Georgian-Muslims from the Meskhi tribe.

⁴⁰ "Konflikty i Peregovory" No (9/96) 1996 page 8 "Termin . . . Tormozit repatriatsiyu" by Klara Baratashvili, Committee Member of the Society "Khsna", Member of the Federation Union of Georgian Journalists.

⁴¹ District.

⁴² "Konflikty i Peregovory" No (9/96) 1996 page 8. The date of this table is "Tiflis 1893".

Nationality

Box 10 - The Meskhi Consider themselves to be Georgians⁴³

1. Meskhi consider themselves to be - historically, ethnically, genetically a Georgian tribe of the Meskhov, that is to say, founders of Georgian culture, language and statehood. Suffice it to say that the famous Shota Rustaveli, Beka Opizari, Giorgiy and Ioane Mtatsmindeli were all Meskhi by origin.

2. "We consider ourselves to be ethnic Georgians, having all the historical and archival references and indicators of this. Including also Georgian names which we have preserved until this very day, despite the historical movements and policy of state pressure of the denationalisation of the Meskhi-Moslems. These names are alive in the memory of the nation.

Every Meskh tells you what Georgian families were in his ancestral village, for example Abashidze, Orbeliani, Eristavi, Machabeli, Kherkheulidze, Tavdgiridze, Mukhranskiye, Baratashvili, Avaliani and many others. **Thus, the term "Turks" by which we are labelled is completely untrue**".

Some five years ago there was a split within the Meskhetian peoples who had suffered deportation. The Meskhetians "*who had a Georgian consciousness disassociated themselves from the pro-Turkish organisation 'Vatan' (Homeland)*"⁴⁴, and founded their own organisation 'Khsna' in 1993. The representatives of 'Vatan' had always considered themselves to be Turks, and still do so.

"It is not understood why they wish to return to Georgia, and not to Turkey. Their objective is known of course - to return to those 220 villages where their ancestors lived. They even confirm: I will never go to Adigeni, I go to Klde . . . We consider the whole of Georgia to be our Homeland".

But how do the Georgian public and their leading representatives feel about the return of the 'Meskhetian-Turks' to Georgia generally, and in particular to those rayony (areas) from where they were banished or exiled?

Georgian Public Opinion

Earlier Positive Feeling towards Meskhetian Turks

On the dawn of the revival of the Georgian national movement at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, it was possible even then to put a question concerning the importance of a positive decision on the return of the Meskhetians. Moreover, even earlier in this period concrete steps were undertaken on the settling of a few displaced people in different rayony of Georgia, in the main in Western Georgia. One of the former party leaders remembered:

*"As regards the Zugdidi rayon episode: at that time 'fans' of the displaced Turks came to me having called determinedly to open the gate for the settlement of Turks. Calls and letters from the official organs came next. The strong pressure of Moscow was felt"*⁴⁵.

⁴³ Ibid page 8.

⁴⁴ Ibid page 12.

⁴⁵ Enokh, op.cit page 100.

Change of Attitude: Apprehension of Islam and Pan-Turkism

But gradually the attitude of a considerable part of Georgian society towards this problem changed. Many of those who had worked for their return started to take an opposite view. The erudite party activist V Gurgenidze with some irritation discusses how easily the attitudes, judgements and points of view are changing on such a complicated and fateful question for Georgia, as *“two years ago our very intelligentsia presenting themselves as learned, visible public figures of culture and art turned to the government of the republic with a request concerning the Muslims who were displaced in 1944. Later many letters went to Moscow, often with an opposing content”*⁴⁶.

Perhaps the fact that the exact numbers of Meskhetian Turks after the Fergana tragedy in June 1989 had not been accurately assessed was another factor in this change of attitude, remembering that figures speculated about by the Soviet press in May 1990 ranged from *“upwards of 200,000, followed by 300,000 and finally 400,000”*⁴⁷. Again, the numbers of Meskhetian Turks who had arrived in Adler in August 1990 were bandied about by the press before they attempted to start their march of return to Georgia. The numbers varied between *“1,500, 2,700 and at a meeting in Sochi on 11 August there were more than 8,000 people and some 10,000 people were expected.”*

The change in attitude of Georgian society to the return of the Meskhetian Turks was conditioned also by the fact that they felt doubtful about the intentions of those scheduled to return, in that the desire of the Meskhetian Turks to create their own autonomous entity⁴⁸ in the south of Georgia was well known. In Georgian society, voices were also heard saying it was necessary to turn *“attention not to the question of the religion of the Meskhetian Turks but to the subject of their national consciousness. It was necessary to make a division on the principle of who was Georgian and who was not”*⁴⁹.

There was also not a little apprehension with regard to Islam and Pan-Turkism. One of the moving spirits behind the Georgian national movement, A Bakradze, wrote in January 1990 that amongst other matters they would make tough demands upon the Georgian authorities:

“Because of the danger of a large and pointless bloodshed we do not want a return of the displaced Turks from Southern Georgia. We will not spill blood, but we and the Turks cannot prevent bloodshed ... In the achievement of the expectations of Pan-Turkism they

⁴⁶ Ibid page 101.

⁴⁷ Ibid page 103.

⁴⁸ Ibid page 104.

⁴⁹ Ibid page 101.

*have their own missions. From here there are tough demands: Turkish language, Turkish schools, a tight and compact Turkish autonomy for those Turks living in the south of Georgia*⁵⁰.

During the Zugdidi resettlement in 1988, there were demands that the Georgian authorities “*From the start built us a mosque and then living accommodation*”⁵¹.

Previous Soviet Awareness of Complexities Even before the Fergana tragedy, the leadership of the USSR well understood the whole complexity of this problem, as A Luk’yanov and R Nishanov indicated respectively in May and September 1989.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Box 11 - Awareness of Soviet Leadership⁵²

A Luk'yanov in May 1989: *"I without doubt stand for the full rehabilitation of these illegally repressed peoples. But this must be decided extremely carefully, so that it does not cause an even greater 'incandescence' of inter-ethnic relations"*.

R Nishanov, President of the Nationalities Council of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, speaking at a plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, reported in *Pravda* of 19 September 1989 remarked: *"As to the Soviet Germans, the Crimean Tatars, the Meskhetian Turks, that they doggedly strive for the right to live in a place from where they have been evicted. This striving is based on what? Yes, without doubt. It is the difficulties in its realisation? Yes of course, because it is impossible to take into account those realities which happened in the Crimea, Povolzh'ye, Meskhetia in the preceding half century."*

The leading Georgian writer, Ch Amiredzhibi discussed more definitively one aspect of this problem for the Russians: *"The fact of the matter was this, that if more than 400,000 Turks were resettled, then it would not only strengthen the position of Islam, but in general over the passage of time the region would be made for Muslims and Russia would finally lose it"*⁵³.

Armenian Population in Southern Georgia There was an additional aspect to which Georgian politicians turned their attention, namely the question of Armenian-Turkish relations. In their opinion there was the possibility of Armenian-Turkish opposition, which could become a regrettable reality, if Turks were resettled in an area of Southern Georgia predominantly populated by Armenians. Southern Georgia could become a second Fergana tragedy.

Shortage of Land Furthermore there was also the problem of insufficient land in general in Georgia, and in the given region in particular, which would once again be a potential catalyst for straining inter-ethnic relations, increasing the wretchedness of natural poverty of those from the mountainous regions of Adzharia and Svaneti living without shelter for whom it was necessary to provide and guarantee some form of living accommodation. Traditionally, relations between Tbilisi and Batumi, capital of Adzharia, have never been demonstrably close.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid page 102.

Summary of Differing Perceptions

Tables 1 and 2 below provide a summary of the differing perceptions with regard to the Meskhetian Turks.

Table 1 - Terminology, History and Nationality

Box No.	Author	Detail
-	Lomoyrin	“Turkish Meskhi”, “Meskhi of Turkish origin” and “Meskhi-Turks” are all incorrect.
-	Enokh	Turks and Meskhi are completely different peoples and must not be identified as the same.
-	Upushadze	“The term ‘Meskhetian-Turk’ (or ‘Turks from Meskhetia’) has a provocative connotation, since only Meskhetian-Georgian, or even Meskhetinets exist, who became Turks”.
6	Panesh	Meskhetiya-Dzhavakhetiya is border country. On change of ownership population transferred to depth of country and military force imposed.
7	Akiner	Meskhetians are of mixed descent, some from Turks, others Turkicised Georgians. Meskhetia under Turkish rule in XVI Cent. In 1829, North of Meskhetiya incorporated into Georgia (Russian Empire).
8	Mamulia	This is complicated for Georgians. The group they talk about as Turks are Meskhi, the population of that territory were exclusively Georgian. Meskhetiya was centre of Georgian culture, the oldest Christian churches are there.
9	Baratashvili	In Table of Statistical Data on Population of the Transcaucasus Kray, the Muslim population of Meskhetia consisted of Sunni-Georgians, Terekmintsi and Kurds. There were practically no ethnic Turks in Meskhetiya.
10	Baratashvili	Meskhi consider themselves to be historically, ethnically, genetically a Georgian tribe of the Meskhov, that is to say, founders of Georgian culture, language and statehood. “The term “Turks” by which we are labelled is completely untrue”.

Table 2 - Georgian Public Opinion on Return of Peoples to Meskhetiya

Subject	Detail
1. In 1970s and 1980s - positive attitude toward return and rehabilitation of Meskhetian Turks.	
2. Post Fergana in 1989 - apprehension toward Islam and Pan-Turkism.	<p>a. Concern over numbers; following Fergana, estimates of between 200,000 and 400,000 people.</p> <p>b. Fear of establishment of Turkish autonomy in Meskhetiya, including religion, but also Turkish language and separate schools.</p> <p>c. Fear of bloodshed between Georgian and Meskhetian Turk.</p> <p>d. Fear of clash also between Meskhetian Turks and Armenian population, the latter located around Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki.</p> <p>e. The question of the shortage of land, always a problem in Georgia, but in particular near upland and mountainous sub-regions Adzharia and Svaneti.</p>
3. View on Soviet/Russian Perspective	If more than 400,000 Turks were resettled, then it would not only strengthen the position of Islam, but in general over time the region would be made Muslim and Russia would finally lose it.

The final point which must be taken into account, is the fact that after the conflicts in Georgia in the 1990s and the resultant dislocation of society, the plight of refugees and living standards well below the poverty line, the majority of Georgian society is simply not interested in accepting another collection of people, the majority of whom are not Georgians and do not have ethnic Georgian roots. To this we must now turn our attention.

CURRENT SITUATION IN GEORGIA

From the point of view of the President, in practical terms, it is not possible to solve the given problem in a time acceptable to the deportees”⁵⁴.

Negative Consequences of Instability and Conflict

The instabilities in the Caucasus have done irreparable harm to Georgia and her economy, in particular through the consequences of the conflict in Nagornyy Karabakh, Georgia’s own conflicts over South Osetia and Abkhazia, not forgetting the turbulent period of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the resultant civil war in Mingrelia, let alone the knock-on effects of the Ingush-North Osetian dispute over Prigorodniy rayon at the northern end of the Georgian military highway, the Russo-Chechen conflict with implications for the political power structures in the adjacent Russian Federation Republics of Daghestan, Karachai-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkar and the social, ethnic and economic tensions in Krasnodar Kray. Severe economic repercussions and humanitarian crises have followed and attended all these conflicts. Disruption of gas pipelines, inability to pay for gas, and dislocation of rail traffic from the north have exacerbated these problems. The development of the humanitarian crisis into three distinct periods, as a result of the movement of refugees in Georgia, is shown below.

Box 12 - The Humanitarian Crisis in Georgia⁵⁵

1990-1991 - The flight of 70,000 to 100,000 people consisting of Georgians from South Osetia to mainly Tbilisi and Gori and Osetians from various Georgian rayoni to South and North Osetia.

1992-1993 - As a result of conflicts in Tbilisi, Mingrelia and Abkhazia, possibly several thousand were displaced. According to Abkhaz estimates some 30,000 left Abkhazia in 1992.

⁵⁴ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 5 (1576) 17 January 1998 page 5 “*Vernutsya li v Gruziyu Turki-Meskhetintsy - Rabota po ikh vozvrashcheniyu mozhet byt’ vozobnovlena?*” by Nodar Broladze. President Shevardnadze speaking on the subject of the Meskhetian Turks and their return.

⁵⁵ C W Blandy “*The Georgian Ethnic and Humanitarian Crisis*” S26 October 1996 CSRC page 7.

Autumn 1993 - As a result of the renewed Abkhaz offensive, 250,000 Georgians, in the main Mingrelians, were forced out of Abkhazia. According to UN estimates some 280,000 have been dispersed in Georgia, with concentrations of displaced people in Zugdidi (69,594), Tsalenzikha (12,884) and Senaki (13,268). A further 66,220 displaced persons are housed in Tbilisi, 20,294 in Kutaisi and smaller numbers from South Osetia in Shida Kartli.

Box 13 - Extent of Humanitarian Crisis⁵⁶

1. The humanitarian crisis had many dimensions, with the country experiencing a critical food shortage as a result of the legacy attributed to Soviet agricultural planning, conflict, insecurity in rural areas, lack of transport, disruption of trading links, lack of foreign exchange.
2. Agricultural shortages drove up food prices, exacerbated by the IMF's insistence that subsidies should be removed from staple food products.
3. By early 1995, the incomes of many professional people and pensioners were insufficient to cover their food requirements, let alone other essentials such as housing and medicine. Some 5% to 6% of the total Georgian population were forced to leave their homes.
4. One of the consequences of civil war and economic collapse was the devastating deterioration in preventive medicine and health care, with hospitals suffering from chronic shortages of equipment, medicines and vaccines, exacerbated by a lack of heating, light and fuel.
5. The absence of proper immunisation programmes, the incidence of gross overcrowding and peaking of demands, centred on an outmoded, ineffective and haphazard functioning of the public infrastructure, gave rise to a serious outbreak of epidemics and to an increase in the incidence of hepatitis, acute respiratory diseases, bronchial asthma, tuberculosis and diphtheria in 1993-1994.
6. Together with the displacement of people and poor health, there is the sobering chronology of violent human rights abuses, as witnessed when Georgian government troops entered Sukhumi in August 1992, when "a pattern of vicious, ethnically based pillage, looting, assault and murder emerged" and likewise during the Abkhaz advance to the Inguri river in September 1993 when they "committed widespread atrocities against the Georgian civilian population, killing many women, children and elderly, capturing some as hostages and torturing others".

It is against this background of a country riven by conflict, still suffering from the psychological wounds caused by violent abuse of human rights, with an economy where the majority of the population is just surviving and the administrative system is slowly getting round to the question of resettling refugees in other parts of the country that the question of the return of the Meskhetian Turks is being debated.

⁵⁶ Ibid pages 7 and 8.

Campaign for Return of Meskhetian Turks

Ever since the fall of the Soviet Union the matter has been continuously pursued by the Meskhetian Turks and their supporters with letters and demands to the Georgian President, Eduard Shevardnadze similar to the ones below.

**Box 14 - An Appeal from the Committee of the Meskhi Deportees of 1944
from Georgia⁵⁷**

From the very beginning of its activities the Committee of a Society called “Khsna” (“Spaseniye”)⁵⁸ has demanded of the Georgian leadership:

1. Wide publicity for the problems of the Meskhi, regular enlightenment on television and other mass media of truthful information about the Meskhi, their current position, the position of the Georgian leadership in relation to the restoration of the deported peoples' rights.
2. The adoption of an appropriate declaration by the Georgian Parliament about the illegality and inhumanity of repressive acts carried out by the USSR on the territory of Georgia in the period 1937-1951.
3. The adoption of a law concerning the full rehabilitation of deported Meskhi.

Further resolutions approved by a general meeting of the Khsna Society some 2 years ago included three points which are given in Box 15 below.

Box 15 - Points passed at General Meeting of ‘Khsna’ in 1996⁵⁹

1. To pass a law rehabilitating the population deported from Samtsikhe-Dzhavakheti in 1944.
2. To adopt a state programme of repatriation.
3. To join with the 1992 Bishkek Agreement on people deported from CIS countries.

⁵⁷ “*Konflikty i Peregovory*” No (8/96) May 1996 page 12. The third point has not been included here.

⁵⁸ Meaning “Salvation”

⁵⁹ Ibid.

The details of a letter, listing the various Georgian government orders and cabinet decisions, sent on 15 June 1996 from the President of the Khsna Society, I Ashfarov to President Eduard Shevardnadze are reproduced in Box 16 below.

Box 16 - Letter from Khsna to Georgian President⁶⁰

Respected President!

Already for 4.5 years we, the representatives of the “Khsna” Society, situated in Tbilisi, are striving for the return of our people to the Homeland. However, no results as yet have been seen. The state organs take all sorts of decisions concerning our questions.

There were enough of them:

1. Order of the Head of the Georgian State **N106 of 18 May 1993** concerning the return of the deported Meskhi;
2. Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of Georgia **N589 of 23 August 1994** concerning the repatriation of the Meskhi;
3. Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Georgia **N641 of 7 September 1995** concerning the repatriation of the Meskhi.

However, despite this, not one decision has been realised. Respected President, it is necessary therefore to put a few questions to you:

1. Why is there no law on the rehabilitation of the deported Meskhi?
2. Why is the President of Georgia not signing a Decree on the repatriation of the Meskhi?
3. Why is Georgia not signing an international agreement between Georgia and Russia on the question of the deported Meskhi?
4. Why is Georgia not signing the Bishkek Agreement of 1992 concerning deported nations?

Respected President! You are the very guarantor of the protection of human rights. Really, are 52 years of deportation not enough?

Reaction of Georgian Government

Some time before the letter of 15 June 1996 from the ‘Khsna’ Society to the Georgian President, the Government Ministry for the Repatriation of Refugees prepared a draft resolution for the Georgian Parliament “Concerning the Initial Measures for the Restoration of the Rights of the Deported Meskhi and Their Repatriation”. The details of the draft resolution are contained in Box 17 below.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Box 17 - Draft Resolution on Restoration of the Meskhi⁶¹

Governing by the principles of international human rights and the Constitution of Georgia, judging that the practice of deportation in the Soviet state, in particular, the deportation of the population of Georgian ancestry on **15-17 November 1944** on the **grounds of religion** from Akhaltsikhskiy, Adigenskiy, Aspindskiy, Akhalkalakskiy and Bordanovskiy rayony of the Georgian SSR on the basis of Resolution N6279 of **31 July 1944** of the State Defence Committee of the USSR and all the subsequent legal acts were unlawful and have lost validity, the Parliament of the Republic of Georgia

DECREES

1. To consider all Meskhetian repatriates, deported from Samtsikhe-Dzhavakhetiya on the basis of Resolution N6279 of 31 July 1944 of the State Defence Committee of the USSR, who are coming back to their Homeland and their descendants right up to the third generation, as having Georgian descent.
2. Georgian citizenship, names and nationality must be restored to persons considered as repatriates.
3. Property and monetary savings of the repatriates defined in clause 1 of the Resolution must be free from customs duty during the time of crossing the Georgian border.
4. In clause 1 of the resolution persons and their descendants who are returning to Georgia are entitled to the rights given in clause 2.
5. The repatriation must be carried out within the framework of quotas of the parliamentary Resolution.

It is only fair to point out again that during the period that these Resolutions were passed, 1993-1995, the Republic of Georgia was fighting for its very survival as a sovereign state and trying to cope with all the problems adumbrated above. However, *“The problem concerned with the return of the Meskhetian Turks who were deported during the Second World War is again being discussed in Georgian political circles”*⁶². President Eduard Shevardnadze has also discussed his views on the matter. From the point of view of the President, there was first and foremost the fact that in practical terms it was not possible to solve the problem of the Meskhetian Turks, their return and rehabilitation, within a time frame which would be acceptable to the deportees. The main reason for this delay was, as he stated in a recent radio interview, simply the economic factor, for Georgia has not yet overcome its economic crisis. According to Shevardnadze, *“today’s capabilities do not permit the restoration of schools, kindergartens and hospitals destroyed by natural disasters”*⁶³. Furthermore, the majority of Parliamentary deputies also considered that the state must keep in mind the problems connected to the 100,000 refugees from Abkhazia.

⁶¹ Ibid page 9.

⁶² Broladze op.cit.

⁶³ BBC summary of World Broadcasts SU3124(F) of 14 January 1998.

The Georgian authorities therefore considered that the return of a huge mass of people was unrealistic, particularly when the state simply did not have the capability to guarantee the Meskhetian Turks all of today's necessities. However, Shevardnadze urged his countrymen towards being patient. He recalled that in particular in the 1980s the process of the Meskhetian Turks' return to their homeland had been interrupted, and this according to the President was a serious mistake. Shevardnadze, then the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, had been involved and began the decision to start the return. It was according to him a controlled and forecast process. Meskhetian families who were successful in returning, quickly adapted themselves in the different rayony of Georgia. Today, the Georgian leadership considers that the work on the creation of the conditions for the return of the Meskhetian Turks, residing nowadays in a series of Russian regions and in the Central Asian states must be continued. But for this it is necessary to accumulate the necessary economic resources. Shevardnadze stated that *"realistic ways for the solution of the problem will emerge only when Georgia turns out to be in a state of acceptable economic growth"*⁶⁴.

Whilst Georgia does not have the financial wherewithal at present to solve this problem, a suspicion must remain that the complex of deeper reasons noted above makes its own contribution to procrastination on solving this problem.

CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that the question of the Meskhetian Turks and the subject of their return is a complicated question. Terminology is confusing.

It is probably safe to conclude that there were two different types of people living in Meskhetiya at the time of the deportation in November 1944, namely those Meskhetians with a Turkish consciousness, the majority, and those with a Georgian consciousness, the minority.

Probably, the majority of those originally from Meskhetiya wishing to return belong to those possessing a Turkish consciousness, and their descendants. The resettlement of people with a Turkish consciousness in an area populated by Armenians could produce its own problems the south of Georgia. The rayony of Meskhetiya lie just to the north of Armenia, with one, the rayon of Bogdanovka, sharing a border with Armenia.

The problem of Nagornyy Karabakh currently prevents the betterment of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Georgia and Azerbaijan enjoy closer relations, in turn, enhanced by the prospect of mutual economic and commercial benefits to be derived eventually from the oil pipeline from Baku to Supsa. However, neither is it in Georgian interests to have 'inharmonous' relations with Yerevan, remembering the recent Russo-Armenian Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance of 29 August 1997.

With all the turbulence caused by the recent conflicts within Georgia and the subsequent massive refugee problem, it is very unlikely that the Georgian government

⁶⁴ Broladze, op.cit.

or the Georgian people want to get involved in another mass migration and resettlement of people, particularly from outside the confines of the Georgian Republic. The Georgian government must also take into account Russian sensitivities with regard to a 'Turkish' population within the Georgian Republic, and one which could be located in the Georgian-Turkish border areas. For the Russians, refugee Meskhetian Turks in an area such as Krasnodar Kray also pose a problem in an area where there are high levels of unemployment, militant Cossacks, ethnic and social disharmony.

People with a Turkish consciousness in origin settled in border areas of Georgia could also encourage Ankhara to make territorial claims some later date. These would be unwelcome.