

## Georgian public opinion at the outset of the formation of historical memory:

### The issue of repatriation of those exiled from South-West Georgia in the 80s-90s of the 20th century

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In 1944, about 100,000 people were exiled from southwestern Georgia to Central Asia. The issue of their return to Georgia was raised several times for discussion in the Georgian reality. The last period of the 80s of the 20th century, *inter alia*, occupies the first and most prominent place. At that time, the ethnic issue became particularly relevant in Georgia. The situation became tense in Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region. In addition to the problems of local ethnic minorities, since 1989, the issue of those displaced from South-West Georgia in 1944 became especially acute, which became the concern of the national liberation movement during that period. In the Georgian press, discussion of the issue, determination of positions, heated discussions and conflicts on ideological grounds commenced. It was during this period, when the public discussed these and other issues for the first time and, long overdue, political discourses and public opinion were formed. Before proceeding to the main issue, as a brief introduction, we would like to touch on the events of the exile of the Meskhetians.

#### **The exile**

It should be clarified, from the beginning, that the often-used term "Turkish Meskhan" is conditional and its frequent use is due to its prevalence. Obviously, this term cannot accurately reflect the ethnic composition of the deportees, since "this term consists of two mutually exclusive components" (Janiashvili 2013: 68).

In November 1944, approximately 100,000 people were exiled from the historical Samtskhe-Javakheti territory to Central Asia (Vacharadze 2020). In the relevant orders, this population is referred to as "persons of Turkish nationality" (Alaverdashvili 2008: 125). It can be said that it was partly true. The influence of neighboring Turkey was still noticeable in this area. There were frequent cases of violation of the border, there was a case when the whole village was exiled to the territory of Turkey (Charkviani 2013: 44).

Then first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Georgian SSR, Kandid Charkviani, recalled the events of the exile: "...the attitude in one part of the Generalship was such that the people of the Caucasus were only thinking about betrayal and moving to the side of Germans" (Charkviani 2013: 43). Furthermore - he adds - they had reports that the Turks had expelled Georgians from the border in order to "clean" the border, that the Union government thought that such an action would be necessary. "The Turkish Meskhians had no way to reveal their treacherous intentions, although they created very serious difficulties and problems for us... Those who went abroad, exited through this people. They knew all the roads, had connections with the people living in the territory of Turkey, and transported the fugitives with anti-Soviet sentiments" (Charkviani 2013: 44).

Some authors add an economic factor to this reason for migration, which is manifested in the fact that the Soviet Union wanted to use the working people living here to work in the underdeveloped areas of Central Asia (Modebadze 2010: 17).

The road to Central Asia lasted about a month and up to three thousand people died on the way. Many deportees could not withstand the adaptation to new climatic conditions and place of residence. In this case too, different authors cite different numbers. For example, according to Klara Baratashvili, one third of the deportees died, and according to Umarov-Gozalishvili, the number of deceased reached 15,000 (Umarov-Gozalishvili 2005: 83).

In the Central Asian republics, special zones were created for them, the right to leave of which was forbidden without a corresponding order.

After the death of Joseph Stalin, his successor Nikita Khrushchev condemned his predecessor and in 1944 allowed some exiled groups (not including the exiled Meskhians) to return to their homeland. According to this decision, Crimean Tatars, Balkars, Turk citizens of the Soviet Union, Kurds, Hemshins and their family members, who were resettled during the Second World War, were released from the administrative supervision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The lifting of restrictions on the listed nationalities did not mean the return of confiscated property, they did not have the right to return to the places from which they were displaced (Modebadze 2010: 80-81). During the Cold War, Samtskhe-Javakheti was located in the border zone of the Soviet Union and NATO (in this case, Turkey), therefore, in the belief of the Soviet regime, the settlement of the pro-Turkish population in the region was against the state's interests (Swerdlow 2006: 1836).

### **Tragedy of Ferghana, demand for resettlement and Georgian Public opinion**

Until 1989, the process of resettlement (i.e. repatriation) of those deported in 1944 proceeded at a slow pace, and by the named year, about 300 families lived in Georgia (Bluashvili 2006: 5). The events that took place in Uzbekistan in May-June 1989, known as the "Tragedy of Fergana", sometimes referred to as the "Strawberry conflict", led to actively putting the resettlement process on the agenda. Rafik Nishanov, then First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Uzbek SSR, said that it all started because of strawberries (Конфликт в фергане 2018). According to this version, the Muslim buyer scolded the Uzbek seller for selling strawberries at a higher price than usual (Ибрагимова 2019).

After the first clashes, rumors spread that on May 24, the Meskhians killed Uzbek children (a photomontage was created for more credibility). Various rumors were added to this, for example, according to one of the rumors, a Meskhian raped and then killed an Uzbek girl (Конфликт в фергане 2018). According to another version, the Uzbeks were simply enraged by the socio-economic situation that the deported population was able to gain and were looking for a simple excuse to raid them.

Almost all eyewitnesses note that armed young persons living in other cities were brought by buses, and they later participated in this "battle" (Ибрагимова 2019).

As a result of raids, 103 people were killed, 52 of them were exiles. Internal troops evacuated 16 thousand Meskhetians (МЫ БЫЛИ КАК БРАТЯ 2019). All this forced the deported population and their descendants to seek refuge.

Different versions and opinions about who or what should have caused this conflict immediately spread in different societies. According to the "government conspiracy" version, the Soviet authorities planned this in advance, which had several reasons:

1. To provide the regions of Central Russia with manpower;
2. To shift the attention of Uzbek nationalists from the Slavic population to the deported Meskhetian people.
3. To cause chaos in the national movements of the Caucasus (Modebadze 2010: 84).

Aleksandre Mosiashvili notes in his article that: "The regime, by activating this topic, tried to create a headache for the country on the road to independence..." and believes that this was a response to the April 4-9 actions in Tbilisi (Mosiashvili 2016: 84).

This opinion will be all the more credible if we take into account the fact that right after the news of Fergana, the Meskhetians were already actively thinking and talking about returning to Georgia, creating initiative groups and conducting negotiations on the issue of repatriation.

In general, the national movement, perceived the ethnic problems created on the territory of Georgia as actions directed against them. Gia Chanturia, the leader of the National Democratic Party, wrote: "The events not only in Abkhazia, but also in Marneuli-Bolnisi are inspired by anti-democratic forces. Similar events are expected in Ossetia too... The forces that are causing these conflicts are planning to plunge the national movement into the swamp of mutual strife" (Talk with Georgia... 1989: 2).

The Meskhetian issue was also attributed to this category. In the National Movement, the events of Fergana were indeed perceived as a step against Georgia: "The tragedy of Fergana was inspired by the worst enemies of Georgia in order to aggravate the already acute demographic situation of Georgia..." (address to the Georgian people... 1990: 1).

Ivane Tvalavadze writes in his memoir "In the Footsteps of the National Movement" that the events of Fergana were provoked by the Soviet authorities and aimed at disrupting the Georgian national movement (Tvalavadze 2019: 216).

Meskhetians who returned from exile and lived in Khashuri stated in June 1989: "Why did the army attack peaceful protesters so quickly, unfairly and brutally on April 9?" Why was massive bloodshed not prevented in time in Fergana, why decisive measures were not taken and still are not taken by the government? Are they looking for the "second" Rodionov to once again accuse and slander the Georgian people...?" (Address to Mikhail Gorbachev 1989: 1).

In the background of all this, in the National Movement, which was the actual leader of the processes in the country (since April 9, 1989, this process was distinguished by a bottom-up character), the issues began to be discussed - who are the "Turkish Meskhetians"? Should they be allowed to return to Georgia? How is it possible to distinguish, among 300,000 people who want to emigrate, a real and a fake Georgian?

Shortly after the events of Fergana, in the month of June, a meeting was held at the "Georgian Film" studio, where a public discussion of the Meskhetian issue was organized. Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II, Rezo Tabukashvili, Guram Gegeshidze, Levan Sanikidze, Merab

Mamardashvili, Shota Lomsadze, Rezo Japaridze, Akaki Dvalishvili, Buba Khotivari, Nodar Managadze, Yuri Rosti, Giga Lortkipanidze, Lana Ghoghoberidze, Merab Kokochashvili, Rezo Esadze, Eldar Shengelaya, Misha Chiaureli, Manana Antadze, Niko Chavchavadze participated in the meeting. They showed video materials shot by Lasha Shonia, Nugzar Kipiani and Goga Khaindrava in Uzbekistan. The statements of the above listed persons show that they were in favor of the deportees to settle in Georgia. In addition, they considered it necessary to create working groups and commissions to solve the issue, they definitely considered reaching a consensus on the issue. They were thinking to settle 4-5 families of deportees in each Georgian village, and the village would be responsible for their care. As an exception, we can name Giga Lortkipanidze, who called the exiles "people who have changed their faith and heart" (Problem... Positions... 1989: 3-4).

A similar meeting was held in August, which was attended by Akaki Bakradze, Nodar Natadze, Rezo Tabukashvili, Mariam Lortkifanidze, Otar Zhordania, Eldar Shengelaya, Lana Ghoghoberidze, Ivane Tholavadze and Dato Bakhtadze, as well as two representatives of the exiled persons and a deputy of the USSR Supreme Council (Tvalavadze 2019: 218 Russians). The assembly decided that it was impossible to resettle the deportees (only Eldar Shengelaya and Lana Ghoghoberidze were in favor of their resettlement). Several reasons for refusal were named:

1. Thousands of families affected by natural disasters in Adjara and Racha needed urgent resettlement in different regions of Georgia, and in such conditions it was impossible to even think about resettling the deportees.

2. It was considered impossible for them to settle in Meskheta in general. In their view, this would lead to the confrontation of Georgians and Armenians living there with the Turkish-oriented settlers.

3. It was to be studied who and in what numbers were deported from Georgia and who was now requesting a return (Tvalavadze 2019: 220).

In addition, the meeting cited the appeal of the residents of Adigeni to the Georgian society as an argument:

"Absolutely all residents of Adigeni district categorically demand:

1. Immediately stop the settlement of Turks in Georgia, a people whose historical place was never the land of Georgia and whose laws, names, language and way of life are foreign to the Georgian nation.

2. The composition of the commission studying the issue of "Meskhian Turks" should be changed.

3. Disinformation from the press and television should be stopped, where fake scientists try to prove to us Turks displaced in 1944 are Georgian.

4. Turks already settled in the territory of Georgia should be exiled.

5. A meeting must be organized between the residents of the district and science, television and press representatives, as soon as possible. The recording of the meeting must be broadcast on Georgian television" (Tvalavadze 2019: 222).

Many types of information on the contemporary worldview of the deportees contributed to the spread of different opinions on the issue. For example, at the meeting held in "Georgian Film", historian Shota Lomsadze stated that 90% of the descendants of the population who were displaced in 1944 (400 thousand persons, he adds) are pure-blooded Meskhians, Turks make up only 7% (problem... positions... 1989: 3; the same is repeated by Naira Gelashvili (see paper Georgian Film,

1989, No. 43, p. 2). A different situation is presented by Goga Khaindrava, who himself was in the Uzbek SSR, got to know the emigrants (in most cases, their descendants) and filmed various video materials: *"The majority are real Turks there. They don't hide it. They categorically demand to return to Meskheti. They threatened us - "We lived in Meskheti and we will live in Meskheti". If they come, it will be a bad day for us Georgians, because they are our potential enemies and they will never accept anything Georgian. They are Turks, and we must make every effort to bring them back to Turkey"* ("On the Turkish Meskhetians" 1989: 2).

There was no unanimity among Georgian historians either. Nodar Lomouri urged the population not to be overcome by emotions (which arose after the events of Fergana) and to formulate their position rationally: *"If you are a layman, you should control your emotions, kill your feelings..., should feelings still dominate your mind today?!... It is difficult. But the future of the nation is being decided, and who has the right to act with emotions? The awakening of national self-consciousness, which happened inside us, cannot be reduced to emotions, feelings!"* (Lomouri 1989: 3). Historian Shota Badridze was guided by similar motives, who noted that after seeing the footage depicting the events of Fergana (and the following period), only a person "carved out of stone" would remain indifferent, "and yet, the cold mind asked the question...: *what will follow should those Muslim Meskhetians, who want to come to Georgia, return to Meskhetia at once? Only a few years will pass and a huge Uzbek-Turkish mass will grow in Georgia, and it seems impossible to mentally and linguistically Georginize them"* (Badridze 1989: 3). Mariam Lortkipanidze was among the opponents of the resettlement, who considered it inadvisable to resettle Meskhetians at this stage (Lortkipanidze 1989: 3).

Historian Shota Lomsadze had a relatively different position, who was partially in favor of resettlement, since, as mentioned above, he considered that most of the displaced people were of Georgian orientation. He thought of settling the deportees in the villages of Imereti and Kartli, but he added that: *"This time, due to the difficult conditions in Georgia, this matter should be postponed for a short time, and then, if possible, they will be selectively settled in the villages of Kartli-Imereti as separate households"* (Lomsadze 1989: 3).

The difference in positions was also caused by the disconnection that existed within the national movement. In January 1989, so-called "Court of Dignity" (Court of Dignity 1989) took place, where the National Movement was split into two opposing "camps" for the first time. They could not be reconciled throughout the following history. In the first group, there were the so-called radicals Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Gia Chanturia, Irakli Tsereteli and others. The second group consisted of the so-called liberals - Zura Chavchavadze and Tamar Chkheidze. The controversy was aggravated by the fact that in October of the same year, the Ilia Chavchavadze Society was not accepted into the main committee of National Liberation (Ilia Chavchavadze... 1989: 1). The confrontation between these two wings was deepened by the issue of the repatriation of the Meskhetians.

Speaking at a rally held on November 3, Zviad Gamsakhurdia said that Ilia Chavchavadze Society aims to settle half a million Turks (Mr. Z. Gamsakhurdia... 1989: 1). However, in July 3 issue of "Iveria" we read the address of Zura Chavchavadze, one of the leaders of Ilia Chavchavadze Society: *"Among the exiles are Georgians who have preserved their Georgianness and love for their homeland. This is exactly who we want to return to the homeland, and this return should be done*

*not at once, but gradually, taking into account the difficult situation in Georgia". It was also mentioned that they should not be settled in Samtskhe-Javakheti, but in other Georgian villages (position on Turkish Meskhians 1989: 1).*

Some of the authors (especially foreigners) consider the awakening of nationalist motives as the main emerging paradigm of views on the issue. *"Since the 1980s, nationalist calls have been heard more and more often in the National Liberation Movement of Georgia, which has threatened the multi-ethnic composition of the country. At least a few thousand of the large influx of Meskhetians who fled Uzbekistan found their way to Georgia, despite the fact that, according to nationalist leaders, their return posed a threat to Georgia's future stability. The above-mentioned leaders thought that it was a cunning idea of the Soviet government and an attempt to divert attention from the demand for the country's independence to another problem"* (Trier, Tarkhan-Mouravi, Kilimnik 2011: 35).

*"In Georgia, the antagonistic attitude toward the return of thousands of people who escaped from Uzbekistan gradually strengthened, despite the fact that a few years ago, with the help of the Georgian intelligentsia, repatriates began to be accepted here. Zviad Gamsakhurdia was among the dissidents who favored the return of the Meskhetians, who changed his position - which he had earlier, during the struggle for Georgia's independence - before coming to the head of the government. Now the popular Georgian philologist Akaki Bakradze was against the repatriation of Meskhetians. However, other dissidents and public figures, including Merab Kostava, Tamar Chkheidze, and writer Naira Gelashvili, despite the negative attitudes across the country, still supported the repatriation of the Meskhetians"* (Trier, Tarkhan-Mouravi, Kilimnik 2011: 34-35).

We have to agree with Tom Trier and the group of authors in the fact that after the events of Fergana, the Turkish Meskhetians who were displaced in different areas (Ukraine, Azerbaijan, the North Caucasus, the central parts of Russia) began to actively fight for their return to Georgia. Those individuals in the national movement who were in favor of their settlement until now (in the 70s) came out against it. Historian Ucha Bluashvili writes: *"After the Fergana tragedy, a campaign against the Muslim Meskhians was launched in Georgia as well. Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Akaki Bakradze, other leaders of the national movement, this time, found themselves in the high ranks of opponents of the return of the Meskhetians, which contributed to the formation of a negative attitude towards the Muslim Meskhetians in a significant part of the Georgian society"* (Bluashvili 2006: 5).

Akaki Bakradze and Zviad Gamsakhurdia, themselves, note that they were wrong when they advocated for the settlement of Meskhetians. Akaki Bakradze wrote: *"...at the end of the 70s and the beginning of the 80s, I was one of those who demanded the return of the displaced. I was there because I believed the historians who assured us that the main part of the Turks who were expelled from South Georgia are Georgians, but converted to Islam... Then I studied the problem myself and found a completely different picture. First, the great majority of the displaced are Turks by nationality and religion, and, secondly, the small part that may be Georgian by origin, are Turks by religion and national consciousness"* (Bakradze 1989: 18).

Like Akaki Bakradze, initially, Zviad Gamsakhurdia was also in favor of the resettlement of the deportees: *"My associates and I demanded their resettlement in Georgia. I agree with you (turning to Ivane Chalavadze - N.S.) that this was done without taking into account the expected*

*results and was used to confront the communist government. Then, meetings with them and a deeper look into the case showed that the majority of the exiles were of Turkish orientation and still are today"* (Tvalavadze 2019: 218).

Thus, these figures themselves stated that they had indeed changed their opinion, although they also clearly explained the reasons for the change in attitude.

There were also opinions that Georgians and Turks should be separated among those wishing to settle in Georgia. Goga Khaindrava wrote: *"...a special group should be created to study their way of life (in which, of course, people with a radical attitude against the settlers will not be included). This group should work for a long time, take into account the public opinion, open Georgian schools on the spot, review the cases and act as the situation dictates"* ("About the Turkish Meskhians" 1989: 2). And this is when the potential number of settlers was determined to be 400 thousand people.

This opinion was also shared by Ilia Chavchavade Society, where they believed that the candidates for resettlement should be selected by local Meskhetians: *"As for the selection of settlers, we should rely on patriotic Meskhians who have returned to their homeland, who know the localities well and will practically not make a mistake in the selection. And if we don't get the right to choose (from Moscow - N.S.), that's when we should say no to any resettlement"* (Position of Turk Meskhetians... 1989: 1).

Naira Gelashvili stood out due to her position on the issue of Meskhetians. In the newspaper "Georgian Film" her opinions were awarded extensive room in three editions (see Georgian Film, 1989, No. 43, 44, 45). Since her opinions have become the subject of yet another controversy, we must touch upon that as well. Naira Gelashvili's position can be formulated as follows: she, like some of the activists, believed that among the deportees, those with a Georgian orientation should be selected, which would be an easy task. Georgia should have received as many repatriates as the country's economy and demographic situation could handle. At the same time, no foreign power had the right to interfere in the resettlement process, it was only Georgia's business. The mentioned process had to be started immediately, because with the passing of each day, they would lose their connection with Georgia. Also, in the article, she criticized Nodar Lomour and considered his position as a "prohibition of differences of opinion" (Conversation Two 1989: 2). At the same time, she accused the Georgian press of circulating rumors: "The opinions expressed in our press mainly represent irresponsible conclusions and accusations against Muslim Meskhetians based on rumors and hearsay." On the other hand, she accused the opponents of the settlement of creating an "enemy icon" and repeating Bolshevik methods, acting with Bolshevik morality. She pointed out that society rejected the opinions of historians and that "the one who can shout, express aggression and 'radicalism' scores" (Conversation Three 1989: 2-3).

Naira Gelashvili's opinions received a wide response. The editorial office of the newspaper itself noted - *"According to the editorial mail and telephone records, among the readers, there is a negative attitude, indignation, and unrestrained anger towards the editorial office and the author of the letter."* (from the editorial office 1990: 2). Zviad Gamsakhurdia also responded to Naira Gelashvili's opinions. He noted that the author does not understand and is not familiar with the issue of deportation, and her and Ilia Chavchavadze Society's public opinions are harmful to the country, that all publications must concur with the Main Committee of National Liberation,

otherwise - he addresses them- "You will be exposed as traitors to the common cause. " (Open letter 1989b: 1).

Kote Beridze, chairman of the board of the Ozurgeti People's Front, critically responded to Naira Gelashvili: *while analyzing the problems of "Turk Meskhians", you refuse to discuss the legal, political and socio-economic aspects. Your subsequent opinions are mostly just based on emotions. Nowhere do you try to connect this problem with the severe politically explosive situation created in Georgia and the ethnocrisis inspired from the center... You yourself say that the problem of "Turk Meskhians" has deep roots, but you do not draw any conclusions from this* (open letter... 1989a: 4).

From the end of November 1989, the law of the Georgian SSR on immigration, which hindered the settlement and establishment of the population from other republics, became an obstacle to the process of settlement of Muslim Meskhetians (and not only – N.S.). *"The lack of land in the Georgian SSR and the modern state of the development of productive forces sharply reduce the capacity of the territory, which requires limiting the entry of the population from outside the republic. Since, as a rule, migration leads to destabilization of local labor resources..."* (Soviet Georgia... 1989: 1).

1990 was marked by new confrontations in Georgia. "Political competition along the party lines and struggle is a common phenomenon... the ongoing party struggles in Georgia took the form of an irreconcilable confrontation..." (Shvelidze 2021: 85).

In March 1990, when most of the parties of the National Movement (those who were part of the Main Committee of National Liberation) agreed on a single battle plan, the Meskhetian issue was again on the agenda. *"Not a day goes by that the press, radio or television does not bring news about the so-called Turko-Meskhians and does not aggravate the already difficult situation of Georgia..."* (Conversation about the so-called Turko-Meskhetians 1990: 2). If a year ago, all this was caused by the news that happened in Fergana, this time the reason for this was the events taking place in Tashkent district. Yuri Sarvarov, chairman of "Vatani" organizing committee, reported in a telegram on February 25:

*"We believe that the only way to save the nation from extinction is to resettle them in their historical homeland. During the tragedy of Fergani, the Georgian people pointed to the internecine conflict in their own republic, did not protect the doomed Turkish Meskhetians from their misfortunes and did not open the way for them to return to their native land..."* And then he adds that this was a second chance for the Georgian people to show humanity, generosity and give an opportunity for the Turkish Meskhetians to return to the place from which they were deported in 1944 (Depesha... 1990: 2). Along with this telegram, several other telegrams have been published in Russian. At the end of the telegrams, the editorial board of the newspaper (gazette "Kartvli Mother") adds: *"... here the comment is really unnecessary, but... the authors are clearly convinced that Meskheti, which they claim today, is the former territory of Turkey, they are Turks and a compact settlement in Meskheti will allow them to join their homeland."* After that, an interview with two residents of the village of Atskvita, Aspindze district, is enclosed, where the "Tatars" are presented in a rather negative context (from the editors, 1990: 2).

Since the spring of 1990, a different political situation has emerged in the country. The plan to create a national forum and then convene a national congress partially failed, as several political



parties separated from it and began to fight for victory in the elections of the Supreme Council of the Georgian SSR scheduled for October 1990. In the national movement, another opposing center appeared. The confrontation between those for the congress and the political groups in favor of the elections to the Supreme Council turned into an irreversible process, and the issue of Meskhian settlement moved to the background. And after the bloc "Round Table - Free Georgia" came to power, the discussion of the issue already rose to a new governmental level.

### **Conclusion**

Since April 1989, the Soviet government could no longer control the events taking place in Georgia. The governance of the country was assumed by the National Liberation Movement. The process of re-evaluating history has also begun. Opinions are formed on various issues important to the country. The press and rallies become the main space for the public discussions and the means of spreading information.

During the period under review, it was not possible to form a common attitude on the issue of repatriation of deportees. This was determined by specific objective or subjective reasons. The difference of opinions among the experts of the issue and the leaders of the National Movement also caused public confusion.

The fact is that the positions of the leaders of the National Movement had a great influence on the majority of the population and, accordingly, shaped public opinion. Since Zviad Gamsakhurdia enjoyed the greatest popularity, it was his opinions that became part of public opinion. As we showed in the article, this attitude was mainly negative.

As mentioned, in 1944, the issue of repatriation of exiles from south-western Georgia came up several times in the Georgian reality. Each time, public opinion was of great importance in deciding the issue. According to our observation, the beginning of the formation of public opinion related to the issue comes precisely during the period of the national liberation movement, which caused our interest in this issue.

The attitude of the deported Meskhians to the ongoing discussion in 1989-1991 can be seen from this short section:

"What should we do with the terrible reality of 1989-91, when the representatives of the Georgian nation expelled their own blood and flesh, the Muslim Meskhians who suffered from the evil empire... from their homeland... to emphasize our Muslimness and thereby cast doubt on our good faith or Georgianness and refuse our return to homeland. The Georgian society does not say thi out loud, but implies it, this is disastrous both for the state of Georgia, as a whole, and for the Georgian nation, because such an approach establishes among the Georgian people and the Georgian state:

- 1) Bolshevik psychology of mistrust, jealousy, ruthlessness and cold heartedness;
- 2) Totalitarian and stereotypical thinking;
- 3) Discreditation and discrimination of non-Orthodox citizens;
- 4) Neglecting and rejecting Muslim Georgians in the Georgian state consciousness;
- 5) Double-fadedness, hypocrisy, populism;
- 6) Arrogance, false patriotism and falsification of history;

- 7) Negative attitude towards Muslim nations living in Georgia and neighboring countries;
- 8) Political leaders with anti-democratic and pro-fascist awareness and political thinking lacking the ability of modern and strategic thinking;
- 9) Denial of historical reality (Papidze 2001: 202-203).

After the coup d'état in Georgia in December 1991 and the country was plunged into chaos and extreme poverty, interest in repatriation issues slowed down. Since 1995, when the reins of the country's governance were in the hands of the president, and accordingly, a kind of centralization of the government took place, the situation more or less stabilized, the issue became active again. In 1996, Georgia became a member of the Council of Europe, and the desire to join Western institutions grew. This imposed certain obligations on the country's government. One of them was the obligation to repatriate the deportees. Naturally, the next two governments had similar obligations. Nevertheless, for today, the repatriation process is rather weakly supported and, along with many other factors, the main role is played by the Georgian public opinion, which still has a negative attitude towards the deportees.

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