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LIFE WITHOUT RIGHTS

The Plight of Ahiska Turks in Southern Russia in 2015

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“What are you hoping for?”

“We’ve got a cow. She is our only hope.”

From an interview with Ahiska-Turks

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SUMMARY

Ahiska (Meskhetian) Turks in Southern Russia have been facing a difficult situation for over 25 years. Their hardships are primarily related to the fact that various legalization issues (obtaining temporary or permanent residence permits, Russian citizenship, and so on) have never been fully resolved for many Meskhetian Turks, residing in the country. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and legislative changes, the Ahiska Turks ended up as illegal migrants, whose status in the eyes of the Russian authorities has been on par with all the other “illegals” arriving from the former Soviet republics over the past few years. Thus, many Ahiska have been subjected to arbitrary detentions, arrests or deportation. In our opinion, this policy is extremely unfair, because Meskhetian Turks—the unwitting victims of the collapse of the Soviet Union—have been living in Russia for many years. The government’s reluctance to take these circumstances into account, abuse of authority and rampant corruption among local officials, as well as the low level of legal awareness among the Ahiska—all these factors create obstacles to resolving the pressing issues.

Meskhetian Turks, who do not have Russian citizenship, are deprived of all rights and face huge challenges practically at every step of their lives, from birth to death. They cannot legally get a job, buy a house, land or a vehicle, or register their marriage; they receive no retirement pensions or benefits and have no access to medical care. Children over 14 years of age have no educational opportunities (in high schools, colleges, or universities).

The overall ethnic tensions exacerbate the situation and provoke xenophobic attacks, the most notorious of which was the murder of 19-year-old Arslan Nazimov by Nazi skinheads in 2012. The situation is particularly tense in the Kabardino-Balkar Republic, where the cases of group assaults and beatings against Ahiska have become more frequent (for example, the attack against a wedding in the village of Telman (Krasnoarmeyskoye) in Tersky District in 2013). Discriminatory and insulting remarks against the Meskhetian Turks have long become part of everyday life. In some regions, aggressive nationalist Cossack associations, which make no efforts to hide their animosity toward Meskhetian Turks, play a prominent role.

Local authorities do not pay sufficient attention to religious needs of the Ahiska, often hinder the development of their religious life, and prohibit them from establishing mosques or prayer houses. The priests themselves are vulnerable and cannot be active in resolving these issues.

All of the above contributes to an atmosphere of fear. Most of the interviewees are afraid to tell about their problems, let alone submit a public statement to a civic organization or the police. Ordinary people believe that no help is forthcoming, while their situation is likely to worsen after the publicity. Therefore, most cases of discrimination perpetrated by officials and by local residents never become public knowledge.

Meanwhile, the local leaders of the Meskhetian Turks sometimes are not merely loyal to the government, but fully side with it, and engage in intimidating ordinary people, instead of protecting their interests and helping to solve their problems.

Human rights and civil society organizations encounter enormous difficulties in collecting data due to pressure from the authorities and local Ahiska leaders and their unwillingness to “wash dirty linen in public” on the one hand, and people’s fear on the other.

Measures, undertaken by federal and local authorities, are largely aimed not at solving the problems of the Meskhetian Turks, but on the contrary at aggravating an already difficult situation.

In general, traditional discrimination against this minority persists, as do the traditional stereotypes in relation to it. The Meskhetian Turks remain vulnerable and increasingly become targets for persecution. Discrimination against them has become systemic. As a result, Ahiska representatives fear for their future and feel that they, once again, have no homeland and no protection.

ABOUT THIS WORK

This report summarizes the results of a research carried out in southern Russia in April through August 2015 by a team of researchers from the Moscow Helsinki Group and the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis. This is the first known project of this kind in many years.

Research on Meskhetian Turks available in Russian is, for the most part, focused on history¹ or ethnography, or describes primarily the life conditions of the Meskhetian Turks in the Krasnodar Region in the 1990s—early 2000s.²



The purpose of this project was to get information about the number of Ahiska (Meskhetian Turks) living in the Southern Federal District and North Caucasian Federal District of the Russian Federation, including their living conditions, legal status, the extent to which their rights were honored/violated, and to assess the kind of assistance they might need and opportunities for such assistance. To this end, three field trips took place in April, July and August 2015. The information was collected during visits to Ahiska settlements, dwellings and workplaces,

via conversations or questionnaires, as well as at the meetings with local community leaders and government officials.

Members of the group visited the places of compact residence of Meskhetian Turks in Kabardino-Balkaria,³ Karachay-Cherkessia,⁴ Republic of Kalmykia,⁵ the Stavropol Region,⁶ and the Rostov Region,⁷ as well as prayer houses in the Rostov Region and the Muslim cemetery in Zimovnikovskiy District of the Rostov Region; they also met with the mullahs of Bagaevskiy District and Zimovnikovskiy District.

Researchers from the Moscow Helsinki Group and SOVA Center conducted several meetings with Ahiska diaspora leaders: the leader of the Turk community in Martynovskiy District of the Rostov Region, the leaders of Ahiska in Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, Donskoye village (Volgodonskiy District of the Rostov Region) and Zimovnikovskiy District.



Inter-ethnic relations were also discussed during the meetings with government officials, including the head of the Zimovnikovskiy District administration, his assistant, and a representative of the Rostov Regional government, the deputy head of the Martynovskiy District Administration of Rostov Region, the acting head of the Department of the Federal Migration Service in the same district, the first assistant to the Ataman of “Don Cossacks” in Martynovskiy Yurt, the head of the Martynovskiy District Administration, the law enforcement assistant to the head of Administration, the head of the Monitoring Unit for Interethnic Relations in the Eastern Territories of the government of the Rostov Region, and the leader of the Turkish community in Zimovnikovskiy District of the Rostov Region.

¹ See, for example, Simonenko, V., *Meskhetinskie turki: istoricheskaya sudba i problemy kulturnoi adaptatsii* [Meskhetian Turks: the historical fate and problems of cultural adaptation]: Dissertation, J.D. Candidate: 07.00.02. Krasnodar, 2002. URL: <http://www.dissercat.com/content/meskhetinskie-turki-istoricheskaya-sudba-i-problemy-kulturnoi-adaptatsii>.

² See numerous works by A. Osipov.

³ village Telman (Krasnoarmeyskoye), Terskiy District.

⁴ Sadovoye village, Cherkesskiy District.

⁵ Ulianovskoye village.

⁶ The villages of Starodubskoye and Arkhangelskoye.

⁷ Including Chernyshovka farm (Zelenogradskiy District), Bagaevka farm (Bagaevskiy District), Donskoy village and Krasnodonskoy village (Volgodonskiy District), Mechetnoi and Malomechetnoy farms and Visly village (Semi-karakorskiy District), the villages of Malaya Gorka, Grom-Gora, Molodoi Sad, Novoberyozovka, Bol'shaya Orlovka and Chetyrekhyarskiy farm (Martynovskiy District), Nikolaevskiy, Leninskiy and Glybokiy farms (Zimovnikovskiy District), and other settlements in the Rostov Region.

Attorney Marina Dubrovina provided major help in researching the situation as well as specific legal consultations

The SOVA Center representative reported on the situation with the Meskhetian Turks at the side session on the human dimension of the OSCE meeting on Contribution to the Protection of National Minorities in Vienna on October 30.⁸

INTRODUCTION

History

Meskhetian Turks, or Meskhetians⁹ (self-designation: Ahıska Türkleri, ahyská turks) are Sunni Muslims,¹⁰ speaking an East Anatolian dialect of the Turkish language.¹¹ There are about 400 thousand Ahıska in the world.



Until November 1944, the vast majority of Ahıska resided in the border region of Southern Georgia, in the historical province of Meskheta. The designation “Meskhetian Turks” emerged in the 1970s,¹² but only became widespread in the late 1980s—early 1990s.

In 1944,¹³ “due to the fact that significant part of the population was connected by kinship to residents of border regions of Turkey and demonstrated their disposition toward emigration”, the Meskhetian Turks were accused of “aiding an enemy, smuggling and serving as a recruitment ground for spies and bandit groups for Turkish intelligence agencies”¹⁴ and, on trumped-up charges, the NKVD special forces forcibly moved them in cattle cars from the Georgian SSR to republics of Central Asia. According to various estimates, the total number of the exiles ranged from 90 to 115,500 people. Deported Turks were distributed among settlements in different regions of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as “special settlers” (i.e., with no right to change their place of residence). The restrictions against Ahıska were lifted in 1956. However, they were not allowed to return to their homeland in Georgia, so some of them moved to Kabardino-Balkaria and other republics of the North Caucasus, but most remained in Central Asia and Kazakhstan.

In June 1989, an ethnic conflict, accompanied by numerous pogroms, flared up in the Fergana Region of the Uzbek SSR. By the order of the Soviet government,¹⁵ about 17 thousand Meskhetian

⁸ The Plight of Meskhetian Turks in Southern Russia, SOVA Center, 11. 03.2015. URL: <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2015/11/d33161/>.

⁹ We will use the terms Ahıska or Meskhetian Turks. They are also known as Turks, Ahıska, Turks, Meskhetai Turks, Hemshil-Turks, Javakha Turks, Osman Turks, Akhaltsikhe Turks, and Caucasus Turks. Georgian: თურქო მესხედი.

¹⁰ The most comprehensive review of the origins of the Meskhetian Turks, known to us, is given in the report by Osipov, A. *Rossiyskiy opyt etnicheskoy diskriminatsii: meskhetintsy v Krasnodarskom kraye* [Russian experience of ethnic discrimination: the Meskhetians in Krasnodar Region], M.: Zven'ya, 1999

¹¹ As reported by a leader of the Turks in Karachay-Cherkessia, Ahıska children studying in Turkey, unanimously noted their difficulties with modern Turkish: “Ankara and Istanbul poorly understand our language.” Experts note that Ahıska speak the East Anatolian dialect of Turkish. As noted by researcher I. Kuznetsov from Krasnodar, their dialect is different from the language used by the population, forcibly evicted from Adjara. Turkish, spoken by the Meskhetian Turks was heavily influenced by Uzbek (terms and whole phrases were absorbed), and observations show that their wedding folklore is largely similar to the wedding folklore of Azerbaijan.

¹² More in: Osipov, A., “Dvizheniye meskhetintsev za repatriatsiyu (1956–1988)” [Meskhetian Turks’ Movement for Repatriation (1956–1988) in *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* [The Ethnographic Review.], 1998. No. 5, pp. 95–107.

¹³ Kurds and Hemshils were also deported.

¹⁴ By order of the State Defense Committee of the USSR of July 31, 1944 No. 6279.

¹⁵ The relocation of the Turks to the Russian Federation was approved by the Order of the Council of Ministers of the USSR on June 26, 1989 No. 503 and the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR of 13 July 1989 No. 220.

Turks from the Fergana Region were evacuated to Russia. However, tensions in the republic kept growing, and over 70 thousand Turks were forced to leave not only the Fergana Region, but also other regions of Uzbekistan in 1989–1991. They resettled mainly in Russia and Azerbaijan,¹⁶ some in Ukraine and Kazakhstan. The majority of Ahiska settled in Apsheronsky, Abinsky, Krymsky and Belorechensky districts of the Krasnodar Region. However, the overall anti-immigration policy of local authorities and particular antagonism of local nationalist associations (Cossacks) toward the Meskhetian Turks have led to harassment and discrimination against Ahiska residents of the Krasnodar Region.¹⁷

Due to the heavy plight of the Meskhetian Turks in the Krasnodar Region, the International Organization for Migration, in accordance with the US Government decision, began a program of their resettlement from the Krasnodar Region to the United States in February 2004. In 2004–2007, about 11 500 people moved to the United States to more than 60 cities, including Portland, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Knoxville Waukesha, Kent, etc. The program has been very successful—Ahiska have adapted well to the United States and integrated into American life; the latter was evident from the exhibition “Meskhetian Turks. Unfinished deportation”, which took place on February 27, 2014 in the US Congress building in Washington. The resettlement program for Meskhetian Turks ended in 2007.

Contemporary statistics and geography

Despite the relatively large outflow of Turks from the Krasnodar Region, a significant number of Ahiska remains in Russia. The 2010 census¹⁸ in Russia recorded 105,058 “Turks” and 4825 “Meskhetian Turks.”¹⁹ Of course, not only “Meskhetian Turks” comprised the “Turks” category and not all “Meskhetian Turks” described themselves as such—people could have thought that they had to provide for the census their ethnicity as written in their passport.²⁰ Moreover, errors of compilation should also be taken into account. The census of 2002 (cited, among others, by I. Kuznetsov),²¹ reported about 80 thousand Meskhetian Turks in Russia. Such an assessment seems realistic to us.

95% of all Ahiska Turks in Russia reside in the Southern Federal District: the Rostov Region (42 thousand), the Krasnodar Region (8.2 thousand), the Kabardino-Balkar Republic (13 thousand), the Stavropol Region (10 thousand), the Volgograd Region (5 thousand), the Republic of Kalmykia (3.7 thousand), the Republic of North Ossetia (3 thousand), the Chechen Republic (1.4 thousand), the Astrakhan Region (1.1 thousand), the Republic of Ingushetia (0.9 thousand) and Karachay-Cherkessia Republic (0.6 thousand).²²

About 5% Ahiska reside in the Central Federal District, mainly in the Belgorod Region (4 thousand)²³, the Voronezh Region (3.5 thousand), the Kursk Region (1.1 thousand), the Orel Region (0.9 thousand), the Smolensk Region (0.4 thousand), the Ryazan Region (0.3 thousand) and the

¹⁶ Azerbaijan took in several thousand Meskhetian Turks, but, because of problems with refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, resettlement of the Turks has been discontinued.

¹⁷ More in Osipov. A., *ibid.*

¹⁸ According to the 2010 data, about 270–290 thousand Meskhetian Turks reside on the territory of the former Soviet Union: 80–100 thousand in Kazakhstan, 70–110 thousand in Russia, 40–60 thousand in Azerbaijan, 25–30 thousand in Kyrgyzstan, 15–20 thousand in Uzbekistan, 5–10 thousand in Ukraine and about 600 people in Georgia.

¹⁹ Russia-wide Population Census. 2010. URL: http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-01.pdf.

²⁰ Their Soviet passports, which for some Ahiska remain their only identity document. As a rule, they are recorded as Azerbaijanis, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, and so on.

²¹ Kuznetsov, I, “The Russian Federation: Identity Construction and Social Networks” in *Turki-meskhetintsy. Integratsiya. Repatriatsiya. Emigratsiya* [Meskhetian Turks. Integration. Repatriation. Emigration]. St. Petersburg. 2007.

²² Socio-demographic portrait of Russia: on the results of the Russia-wide Population Census 2010. IAC “Statistics of Russia”, 2012: http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/portret-russia.pdf.

²³ Here and below we use the data from the Census of 2010.

Tula Region (0.1 thousand). Small Meskhetian Turk groups can also be found in other regions of Central Russia.²⁴

Living conditions of Ahiska Turks in southern Russia today



This section is based on observations made by the authors of this report in the spring and summer of 2015, and represents only a preliminary compilation of the data.

Most Ahiska permanently reside in rural areas and engaged in low-skilled labor. Some Turks, who have no problems with their status or documents, are employed in the agro-industrial enterprises. Quite a lot of men, including those who have problems with documents,

work as combine harvester operators, tractor drivers or truck drivers. Many work in fields “for Koreans” (“on onions”, and so on). Most likely, the “Koreans” (and, apparently, farmers of other ethnicities as well) are the kind of employers least interested in their laborers’ legal status; therefore, such work constitutes the main source of income for people who have no Russian citizenship (of course, this work is illegal and does not comply with the labor legislation).

“Shabashki”—construction crews—are another popular source of income. Ahiska, who have Russian citizenship, could go and work in other regions, including major cities, where they receive high wages (by the regional standards). Meskhetian Turks, whose status has not been resolved, have to limit their activity to the neighboring regions (the ones that can be reached by car or where a passport is not required for buying a ticket). Accordingly, their income is significantly lower.

Animal husbandry and horticulture are important sources of income as well. Cows, sheep and poultry (chickens, geese and turkeys) are kept by the majority of those able to care for them. Many people raise livestock for sale. Where possible, people also grow and sell garden vegetables and fruits. Families often take in calves for fattening. The Ahiska have a highly developed culture of dairy manufacture and baking.



Urban residents often engage in small business. They hire their relatives as employees; the latter work on a rotational basis, and, having finished their rotation, return to their villages and farms and go back to agricultural work.

In southern regions of Russia overall, and in the Rostov Region in particular, the employment situation is dire, and finding a job is extremely difficult. Qualified professionals are extremely rare among Ahiska; their education is usually limited to high school, and most Ahiska cannot get a job. Most likely, this is caused not by any specific discrimination against the Turks, but by general lack of jobs. Finding on-the-books employment is extremely difficult.

Ahiska, who are denied employment opportunities and receive no retirement pension due to their problems with documents, are forced to take any job they are offered. In Novoberezovka, a village in Martynovsky District of the Rostov Region, we met a man, born in 1953, who has no Russian citizenship and, therefore, receives no retirement benefits; since he can no longer work in the fields, he has resorted to making adobe bricks for sale. He makes them in the primeval way in the courtyard of his own house.

As far as we can tell, Ahiska, who settled in rural areas, try their best to preserve their traditional way of life, with some local peculiarities they have picked up in Uzbekistan. They tend to live in large multi-generational families, their houses are equipped with traditional Meskhetian Turkish carpeted platforms and minimal European furniture. At the same time, of course, Ahiska do not reject the achievements of the progress, whenever available. Many of them own televisions and computers;

²⁴ The Bryansk Region, the Vladimir Region, and others.

mobile phones are ubiquitous. The Meskhetian Turks actively use online social networks, many communicate with relatives and friends living in other countries via Skype, etc.

The Ahiska continue to use Turkish language. Often the older generation (those born before 1975) are more fluent in Turkish (and, probably, in Uzbek) than in Russian. Those, who grew up in Russia in the 90s, are well-assimilated and speak excellent Russian, in addition to their connection to Turkish culture.

Ahiska's general level of educational attainment is quite low. Few people have higher education usually obtained during the Soviet era. Most people we surveyed had incomplete secondary or secondary education; some were able to acquire secondary vocational education.



When we visited Ahiska homes (it is worth noting that we were not always invited into the house—often the owners were obviously ashamed of their pitiful living conditions and justified their lack of hospitality by “renovations” or claimed that they “had no time to clean up”), we were usually treated to tea, cheese, yogurt, sour cream,

and freshly baked bread. In some households we were only offered water; occasionally, we had to ask for water, and our hosts fetched it from the well. The group members left watermelons as gifts to several people, found in particularly difficult circumstances—it was obvious that even these small gifts were significant to them.



LACK OF LEGAL STATUS FOR AHISKA IN RUSSIA

I do not need money—I need papers; I can earn money.

From an interview with M.

Malomechetnoy, the Rostov Region

For vast majority of the surveyed Ahiska, their most pressing problem lies in their difficulties in obtaining Russian citizenship. The difficulties in question are of legal nature (obtaining temporary and permanent residence permits or Russian citizenship). According to the most preliminary estimates, we are directly or indirectly aware of at least 300 people in Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, Republic of Kalmykia, the Stavropol Region and the Rostov Region, who are experiencing various problems with identity documents.

Among the Meskhetian Turks, who arrived to territory of the Russian Federation prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, some have lost their Soviet-style documents and / or have never officially terminated their registration at their former place of residence (which makes perfect sense—when people fled, abandoning their homes and belongings, officially terminating registration was either difficult or impossible). As a result, even in the Soviet times, they could not register in their new places of residence, and, accordingly, could not exchange their USSR 1974-style passports for the new passports of the Russian Federation. Following the collapse of the USSR and the changes in legislation, enacted in 2002, they became “illegal immigrants”. A low level of general and legal literacy of these migrants usually precludes them from resolving these issues and obtaining legal status on their own; meanwhile, these problems can often be quickly resolved by legal means. For example, T. (born in 1982) moved to the Rostov Region in 1996 without any documents to prove his identity (his mother died, and his Soviet birth certificate from the Samarkand Region has been lost). His wife and father in law are the citizens of the Russian Federation. T.'s problem can be resolved quite easily, but, due to his fear of government institutions and his conviction that an ordinary person can never get a fair hearing, he made no attempts to resolve it.

The situation is complicated by the high level of corruption among local officials.²⁵

²⁵ The need to audit a number of the number of FMS Directorates for corruption was raised by V. Karastelyov during his meeting with representatives of the Internal Affairs Division of the Rostov Region.

In case of foreign citizens, who have recently crossed the border, their stay in the Russian Federation, is regulated according to the “90×90” scheme—a person has the right to remain in Russia for 90 out of 180 consecutive days, and then is required to spend 90 days outside of Russia, unless s/he obtains a work permit or a warrant. For the vast majority of Ahiska from this category, obtaining a work permit is out of the question, so this regulation, in fact, means that a person is obligated to spend half of the year outside the Russian Federation. However, since Turks usually have no job, housing, and often no relatives in the country of their formal citizenship (and no money to travel to the place and settle there), they choose to ignore the law. They remain in the country illegally, hide from the police, pay fines for violating the residence regulations, and are subjected to deportation. For example, Z. (b. 1973) from Martynovsky district of the Rostov Region has an expired temporary residence permit, but has no financial means to leave; besides, he is afraid to leave his wife and three children (all citizens of Russia) alone in a house with no gas or hot water.

Citizenship

Ahiska, who moved to Russia in the first half of the 1990s, frequently have no documents at all, or have a single identity document—their USSR citizen passport (in 1974 format) without any marks of entry into a different citizenship. These people are stateless under the Russian law, or displaced persons from the international law standpoint.

For example, P. from the village of Telman (Krasnoarmeyskoye) in Kabardino-Balkaria, only has his Soviet passport, issued in Azerbaijan on August 19, 1991. When he applied for Russian citizenship, the FMS required that he submit a certificate of renunciation of Azerbaijani citizenship. He was unable to get such a certificate, since, according to a migration service official, it could only be obtained via a personal visit to the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Moscow; with no valid documents P. managed to travel as far as Novorossiysk, where he was issued a fine and returned back. Problems with the documents have also affected his four children, who only have their Azerbaijan-issued birth certificates. In addition, the father’s passport spells the children’s last names differently from the last names of the parents, and this is likely to create additional problems.²⁶

In another example. S. (b. 1958), interviewed in the Rostov Region, has the Soviet passport, issued in Uzbekistan in 1979, and residential registration in the village of Frunze. S. moved to the Rostov Region in 1997, having lived in Ulan-Ude for several years prior to that. When asked about the reasons for never obtaining Russian citizenship, he explained that he had made several attempts at it, but “officials extorted money, and I have no money...” He lived in Russia illegally for many years. As a result, when S. faced deportation in 2014, the officials found no place to deport him; he is a stateless person, and no state is willing to take him in.²⁷

The procedure for obtaining the status of a stateless person is associated with numerous bureaucratic obstacles, and often people make no attempts to even initiate it.

According to the letter of law, the status of a stateless person, that is, the status of an individual “without Russian citizenship, and able to prove the absence of citizenship of his state of origin”, should simplify the procedure of obtaining Russian citizenship. In practice, however, these people face the same or even more serious problems in obtaining a temporary or permanent residence permit.

Occasionally, Ahiska’s USSR passports bear the citizenship stamp of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan. These stamps were commonly used in these countries in 1992–1995; the passports were often stamped automatically in the process of residential registration. Immigrants, who find themselves in the territory of the Russian Federation with such documents, experience serious difficulties, since the authorities initiate the procedure for legalizing a passport holder as a foreign national.

For example, the X. family, interviewed in the Rostov Region, moved to Russia from Azerbaijan in 1998. All family members had Soviet-style documents (the USSR passports for the adults;

²⁶ In Mechetnaya village we encountered the case of a woman, who could not change the passport because of discrepancies in the spelling of her name between her birth certificate and her Soviet passport.

²⁷ His wife, an Uzbek national, was deported.

birth certificates for the children). Father's passport carried a mark indicating his Azerbaijani citizenship. He was unable to obtain Russian citizenship.²⁸ Meanwhile, the mother of the family managed to become a citizen. Their daughter has married and received her citizenship as a wife of a citizen of the Russian Federation. One of their sons has a residence permit, another one has an expired temporary residence permit, and the third son's only identity document is his birth certificate. Since the entire family has filed for citizenship together many times, their current situation serves as evidence of arbitrary treatment by Federal Migration Service, courts and other institutions.

The situation is different for those, who really hold the citizenship of another country and had obtained the corresponding passport prior to their departure for Russia. For example, all members of the F. family from the village of Bolshaya Orlovka, as citizens of Kazakhstan, have been living in Russia for over 20 years based on their migration registration issued for no more than 90 days (that is, constantly need to travel to Kazakhstan) and never even tried to legalize their status in Russia for fear of any contact with the authorities.

However, attempts to obtain citizenship often bring no results. D. (b. 1951), a resident of Sadovy village in Karachay-Cherkessia, has been unable to change her Kyrgyz passport for the Russian passport for 15 years. With the help from local activists, she appealed to the FMS Directorate, which requested the certificate of renunciation of her Kyrgyz citizenship. A problem arose when D. found herself unable to transfer the renunciation fee to the Embassy of Kyrgyzstan in Moscow.²⁹ Her two granddaughters, S. (b. 1997) and N. (b. 1996) face the same problems and have only their birth certificates, issued in Kyrgyzstan³⁰.

In general, almost all the respondents complained about the problems with obtaining certificates from various embassies. Embassies of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan seem to be the most difficult to deal with. The respondents indicated that no paperwork ever arrived from the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Moscow; the only way to receive it was to travel to Azerbaijan and get the necessary documents there "through bribes". The Uzbek embassy is known to take at least six months to generate a certificate.

The situation is different from one region to another, and depends on the whim of local officials. For example, in Starodubskoye village of the Stavropol Region,³¹ we were told "since the documents were impossible to obtain here, they went to Chechnya to receive Russian passports." For example, brothers A. and D. (ages 23 and 27), migrants from Uzbekistan, followed this course of action. According to them, they were refused documents in Starodubskoye, where the officials demanded that they show an income of at least 90 thousand rubles. Chechnya proved to be an easier place for obtaining the necessary documents.

The problems do not end even after a person obtains a residence permit—a document confirming their right to permanent residence in Russia with unfettered entry and exit. A residence permit is valid for five years, then the resident must either renew it or apply for Russian citizenship.

All respondents noted significant problems with collecting almost every single document on the list. Documents go inexplicably lost or missing in the FMS, or end up destroyed. According to D. from the Rostov Region, in 2006, "the neighbors found all the documents to obtain Russian citizenship for her sons, so painstakingly gathered, in the FMS bathroom simply thrown out into the trash." Often, no action is taken on the collected documents until the certificates reach their expiration dates; then officials declare that they are invalid and need to be collected anew.

²⁸ In particular, he has a certificate, issued to him by the District Court, on the termination of the proceedings for obtaining a residence permit in connection with his withdrawal of the claim—despite the fact that H., of course, never withdrew his claim.

²⁹ A member of our research group tried to transfer money directly in Moscow, but failed. We attempted to pay the fee at the embassy, so they could send a certificate of renunciation to D. However, embassy officials refused to even talk to our representative without a power of attorney.

³⁰ Her grandchildren I. (b. 2000) and B. (b. 2005) managed to obtain Russian citizenship; previously they had a temporary residence permit, and the FMS repeatedly demanded that they cross the border after 90 days.

³¹ The exact number of people, living without passport, is rather difficult to establish. Thus, according to Ahiska activist P., Starodubskoye village was home to about 50 families without passports, while one of the local Ahiska residents estimated their number at about 15.

We have recorded the cases of the local FMS employees arbitrarily changing the documentation requirements, adding requirements that were clearly unnecessary and difficult to obtain (like the above-mentioned request to demonstrate income); some of them never informed people about an accelerated procedure for obtaining citizenship (for example, via registering their marriage with citizens of the Russian Federation) and insisted on the usual procedure (longer and more expensive).

However, the problem with the documents does not end even after the long-awaited Russian citizenship has been obtained.

Thus, R. (b. 1987) received his Russian passport at the Novomartynovsk FMS, and was using it for several years (obtained a travel passport, a military ID, loans and so on). However, in the passport office of Tselinsky District of the Rostov Region, which he visited to get a certificate, his passport taken away and destroyed, R. was told that it was a “fake”, not listed in the federal databases. R. unsuccessfully tried to challenge this statement in court. Meanwhile, he has never received a new passport.

A similar story happened to O. from the village of Kuyan in Kabardino-Balkaria. When, in 2013, he came to “get the stamp about the children,” the passport office staff told him that he had “a fake passport,” and took it away, adding: “Why did you come here, who invited you?”³²

K. (b. 1994) from the village of Malomechetnoy in the Rostov Region obtained her Russian passport in 2008. In 2012, she married, changed her name and started the passport replacement procedure. However, in 2013, her passport was deemed “issued in violation of the established order and revoked”. As a result, she was recognized as a stateless person, and has been trying to receive her identity documents for two years.

In general, we suspect that the number of “fake passports” (i.e. issued without proper justifications or in violation of procedures) is quite large, but we cannot even approximately estimate the number of people encountering such problems, since this information can be obtained only by reviewing a case and the entire document package. However, it is likely that such cases primarily take place in the Rostov Region, where, during our interviews, Ahiska stated that local FMS officers (especially in Zimovnikovsky and Semikarakorsky Districts of the Rostov Region) had extorted bribes from them.³³ The fee for a Russian passport, they said, was 100 to 300 thousand rubles. In 2014, the head of the Martynovsky District Federal Migration Service in the Rostov Region was convicted of corruption for “facilitating and accelerating the procedures for obtaining the citizenship of the Russian Federation.” We also know that people from the Krasnodar Region traveled to the Rostov Region and Kalmykia “in order to get passports for money.” However, the experience has shown that a bribe did not guarantee a valid passport. The currently discussed plans for transferring the FMS functions to the Ministry of the Interior could potentially result in an audit and lead to discovery of additional “fake” documents; subsequently, the number of Turks, who experience problems with the documents, will only increase.

Notably, some Ahiska leaders believe that most of the above problems are non-existent, and that people themselves are to blame for not legally obtaining proper documents.

Numerous scammers take advantage of the Meskhetian Turks’ dire situation. In the Rostov Region, for example, we recorded a number of cases, when large sums of money were extorted from people wishing to take the Russian language exam (required for obtaining temporary and permanent residence permits and citizenship), ostensibly for transportation to the examination venue and for the procedure itself (the exam is not free, but the fee is determined by the order of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation).

A. from Leninsky farm (Zimovnikovsky District of the Rostov Region) lived with an expired Azerbaijani passport and birth certificate from 2004 to 2013. Her temporary residence permit expired as well, and the woman had to pay fines for violating the passport regime. In 2013, the family of A.

³² From O’s appeal to MHG.

³³ In one of the families we were asked not to tell anyone that a woman, obtaining a Russian passport, was expecting her second child. “If they find out that we are having a baby, and that I can get maternity subsidies, they will start extorting even more money.”

was contacted by a “lawyer” (according to them, he was from Azerbaijan) and offered help in obtaining all the necessary documents, including the passport of Azerbaijan, for a large sum of money. Once A. gave him all her documents and an agreed-upon amount of money, the “lawyer” simply vanished.

S. from Visly village of the Semikarakorsky District (the Rostov Region) said that some representatives of “Turkish organizations” twice took his money “for a new passport.”

Deportation Decisions. The Case of the Makhamatov Family

The above-mentioned negative attitude towards the Ahiska by local authorities is aggravated by virtually unchecked abuse of power. People remain in a humiliating and marginalized situation. At any time, they can be simply deported from the places where they have lived for many years. This happened with the Makhamatov family in the Kabardino-Balkar Republic.

The case can be summarized as follows. Rashid Makhamatov (b. 1968) came from Uzbekistan to Russia in 1998.³⁴ On February 26, 2014, a record of administrative offense was issued against him.³⁵ At that time, he lived in the village of Proletarskoye, in Prokhladnensky District of the KBR. On March 5th, the District Court found him guilty of committing an administrative offense under Article 18.8 Part 1.1 of the Administrative Code (“Violation by a foreign national or a stateless person of the Regime for Entry or Staying in the Russian Federation”). Makhamatov was charged for his lack of identity documents, and documents confirming his right to reside or stay in the Russian Federation, and was subjected to an administrative penalty in the form of a fine of two thousand rubles along with administrative deportation from the Russian Federation. He was placed in a “special facility for detention of foreign nationals and stateless persons subject to administrative deportation from the Russian Federation” in the Pridorozhny village in Prokhladnensky District of the Kabardino-Balkar Republic.³⁶ The same thing happened to his son Ravshan (b. 1993). Their appeals against the deportation orders to the Supreme Court of the KBR and the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation were unsuccessful.

The members of Makhamatov family were detained in the special facility for foreign nationals from March 5, 2014 to April 6, 2015 “in order to ensure their deportation.” A certificate, obtained from the Uzbek embassy, which verified that Makhamatovs were not citizens of Uzbekistan, i.e. were stateless, made it possible to obtain a court order, stopping their deportation from the Russian Federation, and to release them from the special detention facility. In the fall, the court confirmed the fact of Makhamatovs’ residence in Russia. Now, they must go through the process of collecting and submitting documents to obtain Russian citizenship.

It is possible that the other Ahiska families in southern Russia could face similar problems, since they lack legal status.



The War in Donbass, and the New Challenges for Ahiska

In 2014, new problems compounded the existing ones. Russia faced an influx of refugees from Ukraine, including a significant number of Turks (large communities existed in the Donetsk and Lugansk Regions, particularly in Sloviansk and other settlements that were destroyed during the war).

³⁴ He served in the Soviet Army, as confirmed by his military card, and carries a passport of the USSR. He applied to the state authorities in order to obtain the necessary documents, as evidenced by the certificate of identity, issued to him. He is the sole breadwinner in the family.

³⁵ According to the decree, he violated Article 25.10 of the Law “On procedure of exit from the Russian Federation and Entry to the Russian Federation.”

³⁶ For the purposes of implementing the imposed sentence of deportation from the Russian Federation.

Unlike citizens of other countries, eligible for temporary residence without permission to work for no more than 90 days in six months, Ukrainian citizens—residents of the Donetsk Region and the Lugansk Region—have the right to stay in Russia until a specific government order.³⁷

Some Ukrainian citizens hope to return home only if the situation improves. Several Turkish men we have surveyed came to Russia for work prior to the escalation of the conflict, leaving their families back home, and now are afraid of returning for fear of mobilization. Some are hesitating whether to stay in Russia or return to other safer areas of Ukraine. Some immigrants have begun the procedure for obtaining Russian citizenship.

We met families from the Donetsk Region, who received a “temporary asylum certificate.” According to the law on refugees, their passports were handed over to the Federal Migration Service for the duration of their temporary asylum certificate.

It is difficult to predict the future course of events, but the abuse of power in relation to this category of citizens is almost inevitable. In the summer of 2015, R. told us that he left the family in Sloviansk, because he cannot come up with any strategy for bringing them in and getting them settled in the Rostov Region. According to him, he must pay 30 thousand rubles a month for his child to attend a Russian school. Likely, this statement indicates that R. has fallen prey to extortion, but we cannot exactly pinpoint the officials who participated in it.

N. from Leninsky farm in the Rostov Region reported that he had to send his pregnant wife, a Ukrainian citizen, to give birth in Sloviansk. Her temporary residence permit had expired a few days before the expected delivery date, and an officer of the Federal Migration Service categorically insisted on her departure, despite the statements from her doctor that she was not in condition to travel. Most likely, N. faced an extortion attempt, but failed to recognize it as such (and, in any case, he had neither ability nor desire to pay bribes).

Various Bureaucratic Problems

According to Turks, we interviewed in the Rostov Region, the process of accepting new applications for passports or photograph replacement periodically comes to a halt, and many people have to live without documents or with invalid passports. There are known cases of passports, fully ready for use but not issued to their holders for six months; the staff only agreed to give them out for a separate bribe. Thus, citizens automatically find themselves in violation of the Regulations on the Passport System and deprived of virtually all their rights, including the right to hold a job. If lost, the passport can be restored only with great difficulty. The same applies to birth certificates. Some interviewees complained of difficulties in marriage registrations. The Offices of Civil Registration (*Otdel Zapisi Aktov Grazhdanskogo Sostoyaniia*, ZAGS), in accordance with the Russian law, refuse to register marriages between citizens of different states, requiring a foreign citizen to provide “a certificate, issued by the competent authority or consulate (embassy) of his country of citizenship, confirming that he is not married”. Meanwhile, a number of states refuses to issue such documents. For example, N., a citizen of Ukraine, who has been living in the Rostov Region since 2002, cannot officially register her marriage to a citizen of Russia, since the ZAGS requires a certificate to confirm that she has no spouse in Ukraine; the Ukrainian side refuses to issue such a certificate, citing the fact that the registration of marriage under Ukrainian legislation is confirmed by a stamp in one’s passport, and its absence constitutes a sufficient proof (it is not so, under the Russian law).³⁸

As far as we know, usually Ahiska obtain birth certificates without problems. However, in Martynovsky District of the Rostov Region, we have met B., born in 2006, the only evidence of whose existence was his certificate from the maternity ward. The maternity ward of Salsky District mistakenly indicated that the boy’s mother was a citizen of Uzbekistan (she was born in the Shymkent Region, but is a citizen of Kazakhstan). Due to this clerical error, the ZAGS refused to issue a birth

³⁷ Citizens of Ukraine and stateless persons who have left the country in large numbers in an emergency, official website of the Federal Migration Service, [URL: http://www.fms.gov.ru/foreign_national/grazhdanam_ukrainy](http://www.fms.gov.ru/foreign_national/grazhdanam_ukrainy).

³⁸ These certificates are obtained not from a ZAGS office, but from an archive; neither Ukrainian nor Russian officials informed the woman about it.

certificate.³⁹ Every month for three years, the child's mother and grandmother requested the maternity ward to correct the error, but achieved nothing. As a result, the boy does not attend school due to lack of documents. It is significant that H., the leader of the local Turkish community, adheres to the official version and claims that the mother left the child in the care of her elderly parents (supposedly, making it impossible to issue a birth certificate). According to the mother, H. offered to send the boy to an orphanage, so that he could attend school; it was clearly interpreted by the family as a threat.



The Consequences of the Problems Listed Above

Meskhetian Turks, who do not have the necessary identity documents, face enormous difficulties with employment, education, housing and so on.

Housing

Due to their lack of documents, Ahiska are unable to receive temporary or permanent residence registration. In this situation, the realty is obtained on the name of third parties, usually the family members. The relatives tend to give their families an opportunity to register in the Russian Federation (sometimes, Ahiska have to obtain a temporary or permanent residential registration in other regions of the country).

Employment

Most of the people we surveyed cannot obtain permanent employment without proper documents. For the most part, they are engaged in unskilled labor. Most frequently, Ahiska Turks work as seasonal agricultural laborers. The men also find employment as loaders and manual laborers, and women work on weeding and harvesting.

Subsequently, the Meskhetian Turks are usually deprived of the right to a paid leave; receive no bonuses, allowances or benefits in kind. On average, according to the respondents, they receive half the pay of those, who work on a permanent basis. In addition, workers without residence registration are regularly fired. Illegal workers are not protected by the labor laws at all, and are subject to severe exploitation.

According to our respondents, local authorities often refuse to lease any land to Meskhetian Turks. Therefore, they lease land illegally from private individuals.

Education

To the credit of school principals, in most cases, Ahiska Turk children have no problem enrolling into schools.⁴⁰ We even know of a girl, who was permitted to attend school despite her lost birth certificate and lack of temporary residence permit. Head of the Turkish community in the Rostov Region and Martynovsky District Khalid Repatov confirmed this information and said that, while 90 children in the area had problems with schooling due to parental lack of citizenship in 2013, all children, regardless of the of their parents' citizenship status, have access to education in 2015.

At the same time, Ahiska children, who have problems with their identity documents, have no access to education beyond junior secondary school. After completing the ninth grade, children without passports⁴¹ cannot continue their studies in a high school or enroll into a secondary vocational school. For example, a family from the village of Telman in Kabardino-Balkaria stated that "the son

³⁹ A birth certificate can be obtained at the request of a Russian citizen, who has a residential registration in the ZAGS area; the hospital issues a verification of a child's birth, not a verification of citizenship of the child's mother. Nobody in the agency have informed the family about it.

⁴⁰ We only met one boy who did not attend school (see above).

⁴¹ Passport in Russia is issued at 14 years of age.

wanted to go to college, but he couldn't." A 19-year-old woman from the Rostov Region told us: "I was an excellent student and left the tenth grade, because I had no documents. I was told "you can attend, but we still can't admit you to the exams, and you won't get an 11th grade graduation certificate." Children must bring an identity document (i.e. passport), when they take the Uniform State Exam.

Sometimes children in schools receive clear hints that they need to leave, because they "only spoil the statistics" during the Uniform State Exam. Ahiska children, indeed, are often poorly motivated to attend school and study. They realize that they have no opportunity to complete their education and transition to a high-skilled labor. It should also be noted that many children, including those who have received Russian passports, are experiencing difficulties in school due to their poverty and poor housing conditions, and frequently drop out of school to help families.

There are known cases of the vocational high school administrators being receptive to the needs of undocumented Ahiska children and giving them a chance to continue their education. For example, A. from the Chetyrekhyarsky farm in Martynovsky District studies accounting in college on a fee-paying basis, although her only identity document is a certificate that her documents were handed over to the FMS for obtaining Russian citizenship. However, if her passport is not ready by the time of her graduation, the young woman will not be able to receive a college diploma (we also know of a young man, who have completed the course of study in a vocational school, but could not get his diploma, because he had no passport).

Segregation is also a problem in some schools. Schools isolate refugee children (not only Ahiska) in separate classes and programs, where they receive lower quality education than other students. Specifically, we know that Ahiska and Kabardian children were isolated into separate classes in the secondary school of Krasnoarmeysk (Tersky District of the KBR) in 2010 (ostensibly, at the request of the parents, although usually the parents tend to be against segregation of children). School classes are formed along the ethnic lines in some schools of the Rostov Region as well; often schools create classes that consist exclusively of Ahiska children, thus hindering their acquisition of the Russian language.

The issue of teaching their mother tongue has never been raised or discussed by local authorities or the associations of Turks.

As for daycare and pre-school facilities, parents who do not have residential registration, cannot use them even if places are available. Many people have encountered this problem.

Social Benefits

Due to lack of mandatory identity documents, Ahiska are completely deprived of social benefits, such as retirement pensions, assistance payments or compensations. In the village of Starodubsky, we encountered a case of retirement pension being denied even after its accrual. G. (a citizen of Uzbekistan with a temporary residence permit) received a pension transfer of 4700 rubles. When she and her husband went to find out why her accrued money is smaller than the fixed minimum amount (6700 rubles), her pension was cancelled altogether, with a justification that, by law, foreign citizens receive no pensions as of December 2014. (Indeed, in accordance with the law, only citizens of the Russian Federation are eligible for pension benefits.)

War Veterans, who do not have the necessary documents, receive no discounts on utilities. Some are unable to recover their lost veteran's certificates. Many respondents reported that they find moral side of the issue even more distressing than the material one—the state abandoned the people who had fought for it, as unnecessary. "My husband's uncle, Nuri Ilyasovich, was a war veteran, and he died without a passport right here in Mechetny in 2008"—as told by the members of D. family.

Multi-child families and families without breadwinners face particular difficulties without access to state support.

Health care

Lack of identity documents deprives people of basic medical care. They cannot count on free services available under the mandatory medical insurance policy (which is issued at the place of one's

residential registration), and are forced to pay in full for their treatment. As the S. family from Malomechetny told us, they had to pay cash for an eye surgery. The K. family from Telman (Krasnoarmeyskoye) village in Kabardino-Balkaria, added the following, “Our daughter is going to give birth soon; we had to pay for all the tests and examinations.” M., a mother of four children from Bolshaya Orlovka in Martynovsky District of the Rostov Region, suffers from a serious kidney disease and needs urgent treatment, but has no money and no access to free medical care.

Persons with disabilities also lack access to medical care. For example, T. from Chetyrekhyarsky farm in Martynovsky District suffered two strokes, but still has to pay for the ambulance trips, and receives no regular adequate medical care at all.

War veterans, including disabled veterans, are also deprived of their right to partial payment or payment exemption for medications.

Conscription

Ahiska’s uncertain status has complicated the issue of conscription. Unlike many other recruits, Meskhetian Turks believe that military service is necessary for a man. “I never thought that joining the army and paying my debt to the motherland would be a problem! My father was instilling manly values in me since the childhood, and the Army Service was one of them! As it turns out, simply joining the army is impossible...” as a young man of military age from Opytnoe village in KBR told us with bewilderment. He added that the recruitment office demands money (30 thousand) from him in order to be “taken into the army.”

This traditionally respectful attitude of Ahiska toward military service leads, in particular, to the fact that the young men who did not serve in the army, cannot find a bride. Thus, V. (b. 1989) from the Grom-Gora village in Martynovsky District of the Rostov Region specifically complained to researchers about this particular negative consequence of his stateless status.

To summarize the above information, we can say that the Meskhetian Turks, who do not have legal status in Russia, are denied their basic rights, such as right to vote and right to freedom of movement. Their documents are regularly inspected and seized. Being detained and fined, they become victims of bribery. They do not receive retirement pensions, assistance payments or other social benefits; they lack access to medicine and permanent legal employment. The corruption of local officials and Ahiska’s low level of legal literacy make these difficulties insurmountable.

XENOPHOBIC INCIDENTS

General attitude toward Ahiska has been increasingly influenced by outbursts of ethnicity-based hostility, which generated numerous local conflicts.

The year of 2013, when persecution against the natives of Central Asia and the Caucasus was unleashed both on television and in reality (in a number of regions, including Moscow and St. Petersburg), was marked by a noticeable surge in ethnic violence, evident even to disinterested observers.⁴² Of course, Ahiska, who are visually different and are perceived as “ethnic aliens,” were also affected. We recorded several cases of ethnic discrimination against the Meskhetian Turks in the south of Russia, ranging from violent attacks and pogroms to threats and xenophobic insults. The level of ethnic intolerance in the country has currently decreased, but we expect this drop to be temporary, since it resulted not from any deliberate policy by the authorities to reduce xenophobia and intolerance, but from processes of an entirely different character.⁴³ Therefore, Ahiska population remains vulnerable.

⁴² More details in Vera Alperovich, Natalia Yudina, *The Ultra-Right Shrugged...*, SOVA Center. 02. 17.2014. URL: <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2014/02/d29004/>.

⁴³ More in: Vera Alperovich, Natalia Yudina, *Calm before the Storm? Xenophobia and Radical Nationalism in Russia, and Efforts to Counteract Them in 2014*, *ibid.* 03.05.2015. URL: <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2015/03/d31575/>.

Violence

The exact number of ethnically motivated violent incidents is unknown. Gathering such information is difficult, because the victims of the attacks, as a rule, are very scared—they avoid publicity and rarely contact the police, NGOs or the media. People can talk about an incident, but refuse to make any written or public statements. Only the absolute worst cases get in the media and become public, such as the murder of 19-year-old Meskhetian Turk Arslan Nazimov⁴⁴ by Nazi skinheads from the Patriot⁴⁵ group on 6 May 2012 in the square near the Palace of Sports in Rostov-on-Don. This is a rare case, in which the killers were found and punished. On January 17th, 2014, the North Caucasus District Military Court⁴⁶ sentenced Dmitry Kurgansky to 19 years in a maximum security penal colony, Andrei Murka—to 11 years and 2 months, and Ilya Samotyuk—to 1 year and seven months in a penal settlement colony. Yuri Khrushchev, Vladimir Ivanov and Pavel Denikin were sentenced⁴⁷ to correctional labor. 22-year-old Victor Krivoruchko went into hiding and the police was only able to establish his whereabouts in June.⁴⁸ On October 27, 2014, the Kirovsky District Court sentenced him⁴⁹ to 2 years and 1 month in a penal colony.⁵⁰

As far as we were able to establish, the situation is at its most tense in Kabardino-Balkaria, where ethnic conflicts are often disguised as common crimes. For example, consider an attack against O. from Kuyan village. O. reported in his statement to MHG, that, in 2014, a number of local residents “run him over by a car” and, when he protested “as all the Turks living in our village,” “the locals came [to his house], started a scene in the yard and... shouting xenophobic insults... said that they gave me 24 hours to collect my family and leave.”⁵¹

While in such cases the xenophobia motive is not always obvious, the mass attack against the Meskhetian Turkish wedding celebration in Telman village of Tersky District on July 4, 2013 left no doubts about the presence of this motive. The attack was accompanied by the shouts of “Get out of here, or we will burn your houses and kill you all.”⁵² As a result more than 20 elderly people, women and children suffered injuries of varying severity.

The victims wrote a collective appeal to the MHG: “...during the wedding, some of the violent groups of people aged 16 to 30, numbering about 50 people, attacked us with batons and started beating up guys, men, old men, women and children. They were also beating our cars. In the course of the beating, the attackers shouted that they wanted to kill and expel our people. There is every reason to believe that the attackers had been preparing in advance. Our women and children were very frightened because they were afraid for themselves and for their children’s lives. If it was not for the police, which arrived when we called, things might have ended very tragically. Not a single assailant was arrested and punished, although their names and addresses were known. The next day, some of the attackers came to the victims and demanded money, threatening us with a knife. As a result, victims were pressured, so people were frightened and never filed a written statement for the police.

⁴⁴ It had been previously reported as the murder of a native of Turkey, but the murdered young man was a native and citizen of the Russian Federation.

⁴⁵ Nazi Skinheads Killed a Meskhetian Turk in Rostov-on-Don, SOVA Center. 10.05.2012. URL: <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/racism-nationalism/2012/05/d24376/>.

⁴⁶ Under paragraphs “g” and “l” of the Article 105 Part 2 of the RF Criminal Code (murder motivated by ethnic hatred), and paragraph “a” of Article 282 Part 2 (incitement to ethnic hatred).

⁴⁷ Only under paragraph “a” of CC Article 282 Part 2

⁴⁸ Thus, the case against him was considered separately.

⁴⁹ Under Part 1 of CC Article 282.

⁵⁰ A nationalist, on the run for two years, was convicted in Rostov-on-Don, SOVA Center. 10. 27.2014. URL: <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/counteraction/2014/10/d30530/>.

⁵¹ From O’s appeal to MHG.

⁵² Citing Mistreatment, Turkic Group in Russia Seeks US Help—Activists, Sputnik news. 14.09.2013. URL: <http://en.ria.ru/world/20130914/183425523/Citing-Mistreatment-Turkic-Group-in-Russia-Seeks-US-Help—Activists.html>.

It has happened many times, and we view it as discrimination against our people. Unfortunately, this is not the first time, and we live in constant fear for our children and families. We claim that there is an ongoing ethnic discrimination against our people.”⁵³

A similar incident occurred in the spring of 2013, when men, armed with re-bars, attacked a Turkish wedding and beat up the participants. The attackers promised to “deal with them for good after the Olympics”.

According to Ahiska activist P, in September 2013, students in one of the schools “purposefully, under the guidance of adults, who arrived by car, beat up the Turkish children... saying “you are forbidden from coming here” (30–40% of school students are Turks, the rest are Kabardian and a few Russians). After that “almost half of the Meskhetian Turkish children refused to go to school to study for an entire week, September 2 through 8 of 2013, because of the beatings and humiliation...” A commission from Terek came to investigate. Police found no ethnic motive in the incident.

On December 26, 2014, in front of the local administration, ten people armed with bats and knives arrived in three cars and attacked two students of the same school. One of the assailants was armed with a pistol. According to Khamid Dursunov, the head of the Vatan Society in Tersky District, an armed attacker put a gun to a student’s head and said that he would suffer no consequences [for shooting]. One of the victims, a 10th grade student, has been hospitalized. The attackers arrived at the hospital and threatened “...if you file a statement, we’ll bury you alive.” The teenager was frightened and did not file a statement with the police. After the incident, his father transferred him and his brother to another school in the town of Maysky.

The situation in rural areas of the KBR has become so tense that many Ahiska are trying to sell their homes and leave, fearing for their lives and well-being.

Incidents of Hate Speech

Ahiska constantly face discriminatory and offensive statements; they constantly being reminded that they are not “on their own land.” However, they are reluctant to discuss such problems. Only after several hours of conversation, our interviewees mentioned the abuse they were hearing (“blacks... you multiply like cockroaches,” a woman was told in a maternity ward, “all coming here... and now, because of you, we have to wait in line,” “You, lumps (*churki*), are bad at learning...” and so on). In general, in comparison with the rest of their problems, Ahiska do not perceive verbal offenses as an important issue.

Discrimination by the Authorities

Not only rank-and-file local residents, but also even officials are guilty of discriminatory remarks against Ahiska. Those, who try to get justice “in the center”, regularly encounter threats and insults (in higher courts). For example, G., who had difficulties in obtaining Russian citizenship, wrote a letter addressed to the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation in 2014. Her appeal was forwarded to the territorial division of the Federal Migration Service, which responded with a threat “If you write again, we deport you.”

In this context, it is not surprising that the FSB representatives put forward accusations against Ahiska. On October 7th, 2014, Mikhail Filimonov, the first deputy chief of the FSB Directorate of the KBR, said during a meeting of the Interdepartmental Commission on Crime Prevention, “The migration situation in Kabardino-Balkaria remains difficult and tense, which could be used by destructive forces... this is due to... a large diaspora of Meskhetian Turks.”⁵⁴

⁵³ From the statement by 17 witnesses of the attack addressed to the MHG chair L. Alekseeva. Personal Archive of V. Karastelev.

⁵⁴ The Migration Situation in Kabardino-Balkaria Remains Difficult—FSB Directorate, RIA Kabardino-Balkaria 07.10.2014. URL: <http://kbrria.ru/proisshestviya/migracionnaya-obstanovka-v-kabardino-balkarii-ostaetsya-slozhnoy-ufsb-4874>.

Discriminatory actions by officials are not limited to insulting remarks and threats. Ahiska also encounter direct administrative abuses of power. For example, students in Kislovodsk were expelled from the Medical College because; they danced Lezginka on October 8, 2013 at about 21:00 near Panorama cafe thereby violating public order. The police asked them to disperse. The students left, but, about 100 meters away from the café, they were detained by another police unit and taken to the police precinct, where they were recorded for an administrative offense. On October 23, the session of the Commission on Affairs of Minors sentenced them to a fine of 1,000 rubles each. The notifications were sent to the college. The Ministry of Health of the Stavropol Region joined in as well.⁵⁵ On November 18, the press service of the State Directorate of the Ministry of Interior of RF in the Stavropol Region reported that 18 students of the Kislovodsk Medical College were expelled from the educational institution “for committing unlawful acts.”⁵⁶ Three students were dismissed at the initiative of the college; the others succumbed to the entreaties of the administration and withdraw from college voluntarily “in hopes that they will then be readmitted.” Ultimately, however, the students were never readmitted to their original college or to any other schools.

This case received certain publicity. Head of the SOVA Center Alexander Verkhovsky noted, “I have never encountered such a situation. It is my understanding that prosecutors have no right to demand expulsion of students. The Prosecutor’s Office has exceeded its authority, because it should not dictate to an educational institution its course of action with respect to its students.” Student Rights Commissioner A. Khromov added, “The behavior of these guys... could worry some people, but the dance is not a reason to expel them and ruin their life.”⁵⁷

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Thanks to our district administration, we have a cemetery.
*From an interview with Azal Kyuzym-ogly, 78
Malaya Gorka, the Rostov Region*

Religious life serves Ahiska as an important identity criterion. They are Sunni Muslims. They practice circumcision, celebrate major religious holidays, some of them observe fasts. As far as we understand, the only dietary restriction they observe is the ban against the consumption of pork. They have not been noticed to abuse alcohol, but some men, who have served in the army and are familiar with customs of other Russian regions, are not very strict in observing this prohibition. Most Meskhetian Turks have no special expertise in Islamic theology. Some try to give their children the basics of religious education and of Arabic, required for reading the Quran.

The clergy prefer not to intervene in the problems of their compatriots; besides, most of them have no influence. Mullahs, educated in Turkey, command a certain degree of authority, but there are very few of them, and they do not play much of a role. Sometimes, mullahs along with leaders of Turkish communities engage in the distribution of humanitarian aid.

Almost everywhere, the Meskhetian Turks are experiencing difficulties due to lack of mosques and prayer houses. Rostov-on-Don has two mosques, but the vast majority of Ahiska live in the countryside. Our respondents said that, in the absence of mosques, they had to violate the burial rites during parting with the deceased; sometimes, they have to remove the doorjamb for the funeral procession to pass.

Kamal Mirzayev from Zimovnikovsky District of the Rostov Region attempted to build a mosque in his neighborhood. He is the only imam in several districts, who has received a higher religious education, and therefore enjoys great prestige among Muslims. He started building a mosque in the central town of the district, but the project was prohibited. Then the imam asked for a permis-

⁵⁵ Mukhametshina, E. *Mi ne znali, chto nelzya tantsevat lezginku* [“We did not know that dancing Lezginka was forbidden”], *Gazeta.Ru*. 11. 20.2013. URL: <http://www.gazeta.ru/social/2013/11/19/5760429.shtml>.

⁵⁶ The Lawbreakers are expelled from the College, Website of General Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia in the Stavropol Region. 11. 18.2013. URL: <http://26.mvd.ru/news/item/1347918/>.

⁵⁷ Mukhametshina, E., *ibid.*

sion to build a house in his name and use it as a house of prayer. When the house was almost completed, the construction was suddenly prohibited. Mirzayev was accused of violating the building codes, “allegedly he is building a mosque—one of the walls of the house is facing Mecca—and generally, on a vacant lot entrusted to him... the fence is located too close to the house”. Unknown offenders knocked out the windows, destroyed the walls, and left a threatening inscription, addressed to the imam, telling him to “clear off” along with his four children and elderly parents; the perpetrators also desecrated the building by tying a pig and leaving it there to die. As a result, Mirzayev had to use his own home as a prayer house. In the end, because of the prosecution related to the construction of the mosque, the imam was forced to leave his family, go to the US and ask for political asylum. Deputy Head of the Zimovnikovskiy District Administration Leonid Dubinsky stated he saw no need to build a mosque in his district, because it “will attract more Muslims here, and they have a high birth rate. A few years—and the indigenous people will have no one to speak to in their mother tongue.”⁵⁸

In most cases, prayer houses are de-jure privately owned by local religious leaders. As we were told by a mullah from Zimovnikovskiy District, “today we are allowed to pray, and tomorrow they will come and kick us out.”

On September 27, 2013, Meskhetian Turks gathered for Friday prayer in a culture center they rented in Tsemdolina village of the Krasnodar Region. Meanwhile, they were banned from holding the ceremony with no reasons provided. On prior occasions, they were able to hold it without any hindrance.

In early 2013, a religious Muslim society, which also functioned as a prayer house, in Novorossiysk had to close due to pressure from the local security services.

In several villages in the Rostov Region, we were faced with the fact that local authorities required formal people’s assemblies of local residents, on which people were expected to confirm that they were not opposed to the house of worship operating in the village.

The authorities of Bagaevka village in the Rostov Region demanded that construction of a prayer house should also be coordinated with the Cossacks, known for their nationalism and aggressiveness toward ethnic outsiders.⁵⁹

Shariah law strictly forbids burying Muslims at non-Muslim cemeteries, and vice versa. Muslims from the majority of ethnic groups residing in the Rostov Region (Chechens, the peoples of Dagestan, a few others) usually bury their deceased relatives back in their tribal villages; however, the Meskhetian Turks have no place to go back to and bury their dead. Therefore, the opening of the Muslim cemetery in the Rostov Region became a great victory for Ahiska. We are not aware of problems with Muslim cemeteries in other regions.

GENERAL CLIMATE OF FEAR

We live the same way, in fear, as our people are used to...

This train of repressions is still moving through time.

*From the statement to the MHG by P.,
an Ahiska activist from KBR*

Almost everywhere, Ahiska live in such fear that they often refuse to discuss their problems, making our job very difficult. In these circumstances, it is impossible to even roughly estimate the real scale of the problems.

⁵⁸ Vlasenko E., *Turki-meskhetintsi. Grazhdane bez rodini* [“Meskhetian Turks. Citizens without Homeland”], *Sovershenno Sekretno*. 12. 24.2013. URL: <http://sovsekretno.ru/articles/id/3977/>.

⁵⁹ For more information about the Cossack associations and their attacks against Ahiska, on the example of events in the Krasnodar Region, see Osipov. A, *ibid.*; Karastelev V. *Polozheniye Turok-Meskhetintsev (Ahiska) na Yuge Rossii 2014, Koalitsiya protiv nenavisti* [Plight of Meskhetian Turks (Ahiska) in the Southern Russia 2014. Coalition Against Hate] 08/25/2015. URL: <http://stop-hate.org/sites/default/files/files/turki-m.doc>.

As we mentioned before, the most difficult situation exists in Kabardino-Balkaria. Seeing the impunity of the law enforcement and local government officials, people assume that resorting to legal remedies is useless and can only worsen their situation. “You leave, and tomorrow the local policeman comes,” we were told in one of the villages. Our respondents insisted on anonymity and did not allow video recording. A family in Visly village of in the Rostov Region asked us to “keep our voices down,” (“they will hear that someone was here; they can come and deport us”). Some people refused to talk at all. In Chernyshevka farm in Zernogradsky district of Rostov Region, Ahiska activists simply insisted that our respondent interrupt the interview and asked the researchers to delete all the collected information from their computer. Our informants are sometimes unable to explain, who and what specifically they are afraid. On more than one occasion, Ahiska could not tell us who would create problems for them, and from whom they were expecting repercussions (from local authorities, the state etc.).

PERSECUTION AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND ACTIVISTS

Persecution and pressure against representatives of NGOs and human rights activists, who work with the Meskhetian Turks, have long become common. This is largely due to the local authorities’ desire to block the flow of information from the regions. All the activists on the ground encountered threats and pressure from the authorities in one way or another. This strategy was first tried in the Krasnodar Region, where the School of Peace, a city civic fund of Novorossiysk was eliminated on spurious grounds at the initiative of the Ministry of Justice of the Krasnodar Region in 2003. In 2010, the Novorossiysk City Prosecutor’s Office filed a claim demanding elimination of the Novorossiysk Committee for Human Rights, a non-profit organization, as extremist. In October 2013, FRODO, a city civic charity organization in Novorossiysk, was eliminated without following the proper procedures. A photographic exhibition on the harassment faced by the Meskhetian Turks, organized by activists and human rights defenders in the south of Russia, encountered intense and multi-pronged opposition from the authorities.⁶⁰

Local authorities are very apprehensive about the collection of data on Ahiska living conditions. In 2013, after the visit of representatives of the Moscow Helsinki Group to the village of Starodubsky, the officials went house to house, asking questions about the identities of the visitors, purpose of their visits, and threatening with deportation in case of refusal to talk. In April 2015, the house of local activist P. in the KBR was put under surveillance as soon as he invited the representatives of the Moscow Helsinki Group into his house. The next day, local police summoned the Ahiska leader of H. village and “dictated the entire conversation... and how many cars are parked...in the yard...”⁶¹

Direct attempts by government agencies to prevent data collection were observed as well. In the summer of 2013, FSB officers met with Meskhetian Turkish activists in Krasnodar and Rostov and “advised” them not to participate in such projects, because it was “dangerous”.

The work of organizations involved in monitoring human rights violations in Russia, is associated with increasing difficulties. In addition the Law on Foreign Agents,⁶² adopted in 2012 and significantly encumbering the work of NGOs, the State Duma adopted the Law on Undesirable Organizations in May 2015.⁶³ Under the new law, a foreign or international NGO can be recognized as

⁶⁰ More in Karastelev V. *Polozheniye Turok-Meskhetintsev...*

⁶¹ From P.’s statement to MHG.

⁶² More in “*Inostrannyye agenty*”: *mificheskiye vragi i real’nyye poteri rossiyskogo obshchestva* [“Foreign Agents”: Mythical Enemies and Real Losses of Russian society], Resursnyy Pravozashchitnyy Tsentri [Human Rights Resource Center]. St. Petersburg. 2015 URL: http://www.hrrcenter.ru/awstats/HRRC_report%20on%20FA%20NGO-1.pdf.

⁶³ The law on “undesirable NGOs” will make the work impossible for any organizations disfavored by the authorities: legal analysis, Article20. 05.23.2015. URL: <http://www.article20.org/content/zakon-o-nezheletelnykh-npo-isklyuchit-vozmozhnost-raboty-lyu#.VfbBPH1GTgw>.

undesirable if it “represents a threat to the fundamentals of the constitutional system of the Russian Federation, the country’s defense and state security.” The law introduces a ban on creating and opening in Russia any structural units of an “undesirable organization”, as well as on dissemination of its informational materials. Participation in the activities of an “undesirable organization” entails administrative responsibility in the form of fines; in case of systematic violations—specifically, if an administrative punishment was applied more than twice in one year—the offender faces criminal liability up to imprisonment. The list of “undesirable organizations” is published on the Ministry of Justice website. At this time, the list contains only one organization—the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). However, this list will inevitably grow—in summer, the Federation Council prepared a “patriotic stop-list” of over a dozen non-governmental foreign organizations, most of which are the US foundations working in Russia. In discussing the list, the LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy proposed including, among other organizations, the Meskhetian Turks Society of America⁶⁴ (he probably meant Ahiska, the Turkish-American Community Center). On October 12, the Caucasian Geopolitical Club website published the article by Y. Mavashev, “The Games around the Meskhetian Turks” in support of including Ahiska Center on the “patriotic stop list”. The article characterizes the center as “a destructive force, seeking to turn the peoples living in Russia into a “bargaining chip” in its confrontation with Moscow.”⁶⁵

INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

Georgia’s Position

On June 11, 2007, the Georgian parliament adopted the law number 5261-RS “On repatriation of persons forcibly displaced from Georgia by the Soviet authorities in the 1940s.” In accordance with this law, Meskhetian Turks, who wished to be repatriated to Georgia, had until 1 January 2009 to submit documentation, necessary for obtaining immigrant status to the Ministry of Refugees and Resettlement of Georgia or to a Georgian consulate in their country of residence, and to take the test on their knowledge of Georgian language and the history of Georgia. The list of documents was as follows: an identity card or a proof of citizenship of a country, a birth certificate, certificates of residence, marital status, health status, criminal record and so on. After checking all information, the relevant state structures of Georgia were to issue permits. However, the law only established a procedure for obtaining immigrant status, but left unclarified many other questions, including the place of their future settlement. The authors of the law noted that Georgia was taking no obligations to provide returnees with housing or issue of any property compensation. On February 21, 2009, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia G. Vashadze stated that the program had attracted only several hundred applications. “We have extended the time for submission of applications, but we don’t think it would change anything,” said the Minister. As a result, only 22 families of Meskhetian Turks were able to settle in the Akhaltsikhy region of Georgia via the repatriation program. For the majority of Ahiska, collecting all the required documents was an insurmountable task.

On March 30, 2010, the Georgian Government adopted a decree “On conferring citizenship through a simplified procedure for persons with repatriate status.” Georgia started issuing repatriate status to Meskhetian Turks. The Georgian Orthodox Church expressed its willingness to facilitate the restoration of Ahiska’s rights and their return to their historic homeland.

⁶⁴ The patriotic stop list will help in making Russia safer, *Vzglyad*. 07. 01.2015. URL: <http://www.vz.ru/politics/2015/7/1/535067.html>.

⁶⁵ Mavashev, Y. *Igri vokrug turok-meskhintsev* [“The Games around the Meskhetian Turks”], *Kavkazskiy geopoliticheskiy klub* [Caucasus Geopolitical Club], 10. 12.2015. URL: <http://www.kavkazgeoclub.ru/content/igry-vokrug-turok-meshetincev>.

In December 2013, President of the Federal Union of European Nationalities⁶⁶ H. H. Hansen drew international attention to the problem of the return of Meskhetian Turks to Georgia in his letter to the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The position expressed in the letter was also supported by Vatan International Society.

Georgian Foreign Minister M. Panjikidze, in the course of her meeting with the foreign ministers of Turkey and Azerbaijan, noted that certain contentious issues arise due to dual citizenship.⁶⁷

In 2015, Minister of Corrections and Legal Assistance of Georgia S. Subari informed the Government that up to 500 Ukrainian asylum seekers would receive refugee status under an expedited procedure.⁶⁸ Nothing was reported about the resettlement of Ahiska from Ukraine to Georgia.

Turkey's Position

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ahiska migration to Turkey intensified. On July 2, 1992, the Turkish Grand National Assembly (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*, TBMM) passed Law No. 3835 “On Immigration and Resettlement of the Meskhetian Turks in Turkey,” which guaranteed them entrance into Turkey, either independently or via resettlement programs, provided that their number does not exceed an annual limit. The law also exempted the newcomers from all taxes, duties and fees, and provided for establishing commissions, responsible for assisting immigrants with employment and temporary settlement sites.

Today, Meskhetian Turks residing in Turkey are granted a temporary right to obtain Turkish citizenship through a simplified procedure. About 60 thousand Meskhetian Turks living in Turkey were able to obtain Turkish citizenship in 2009, The Turkish side demands that Georgia extend the term of the above-mentioned Law on the repatriation, establish a clear repatriation mechanism and provide territory for compact living. Numerous Turkish-Georgian negotiations on the Ahiska repatriation have brought no tangible results. Besides, Meskhetian Turks, as a rule, do not intend to move to Georgia due to an unstable situation in the region and lack of guarantees from the Georgian Government to ensure their dignified return and phased repatriation.

The conditions for Ahiska in Turkey are thought to be generally satisfactory, and, despite their bureaucratic difficulties in obtaining the necessary documents, they adapt well to the Turkish environment.⁶⁹

In May 2015, Turkey announced its intention to take 677 families of Meskhetian Turks from the conflict zone in Ukraine.⁷⁰ In October, it was reported that the Turkish authorities have decided to settle them in the eastern provinces of Kars and Erzincan.⁷¹

The Situation in the USA

In July 2013, Director of the Ahiska Turkish American Community Center (ATASS) in Dayton, Ohio Islom Shakhbandarov and his colleagues met with the US officials from the State Department, members of Congress and representatives of international human rights organizations, and raised the issue of opening a new expanded resettlement program, similar to the previous one.

US Representative from Illinois A. Kinzinger criticized the president of Russia for persecutions against the Meskhetian Turks “solely due to their ethnic or religious affiliation” in the US House

⁶⁶ Federal Union of European Nationalities—an umbrella organization representing the civil society of the autochthones, national minorities and regional or minority languages in Europe. In 2012 it included 90 organizations. Website: <https://www.fuen.org>.

⁶⁷ More in Karastelev V. *Polozheniye Turok-Meskhetintsev ...*

⁶⁸ Up to 500 Ukrainian asylum seekers would receive refugee status in Georgia under an expedited procedure, Georgia-online. 01. 29.2015. URL: <http://www.apsny.ge/2015/pol/1422582154.php>.

⁶⁹ Guryev, A. *O Turkakh-Meskhetintsakh v Turtsii*. [On the Meskhetian Turks in Turkey] Moscow: Institut Blizhnego Vostoka, 03.13.2009. URL: <http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2009/13-03-09b.htm>.

⁷⁰ Turkey will take in 677 families of Meskhetian Turks in 2015, RIA Novosti 05. 18.2015. URL: <http://ria.ru/world/20150518/1065182513.html>.

⁷¹ The Turkish Government will resettle about 3 thousand Meskhetian Turks from [the] Donbass to Kars and Erzincan, PanARMENIAN.Net. 10. 20.2015. URL: <http://www.panarmenian.net/rus/news/199208/>.

of Representatives in Washington on October 29, 2013. The congressman, whose district is home to many Turkish immigrants, added that Meskhetian Turks, who migrated to the United States, “now embody the American dream come true.”⁷² In December, Democratic Representative A. Hastings made an appeal to the US Congress in defense of Ahiska. Honorable Representative M. Turner visited ATACC, which was hosting a photo exhibition on the history of the Meskhetian Turks, and expressed his support for opening the resettlement program for Ahiska from Russia.

On January 27, 2014, A. Hastings, Republican Representative S. Stivers and 37 other members of Congress signed a letter to US Secretary of State John Kerry calling on him to, once again, recognize the Meskhetian Turks living in the south of Russia as “a group of special humanitarian concern,” thus giving them priority level two (P-2) for obtaining refugee status.⁷³ The congressmen believed that Meskhetian Turks, living in Russia, should, once again, be granted the status of P-2 refugees, and the resettlement program, which in the past had proved successful, including for the United States, should continue.⁷⁴ On February 5, they received a response, which contained nothing about the possibility of launching the new program, and recommended Meskhetian Turks, who have left their country of residence, to contact the UNHCR.

On May 23, 2015, Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio sent John Kerry a letter in support of Ahiska. On July 14, Leonid Stonov, Director of the International Bureaus and Activities in the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union and the president of the American Association of Jews from the former USSR, appealed to Mrs. Leslie Comb, Chief of Staff, Chicago and Evanston Offices of Honorable Congresswoman Janice Schakowsky, to send a letter to Secretary of State regarding the possibility of continuing the Meskhetian Turks resettlement program in the United States.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Russian Federation

Conduct a comprehensive review of the enforcement in the south of Russia of the legislation of the Russian Federation that establishes the right of citizens to freedom of movement and choice of residence, the equality of citizens, and prevents actions aimed at inciting national or religious hatred.

To the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation

Strictly fulfill the passport control provisions, which contain an exhaustive list of situations in which the police has a right to check passports.

Undertake measures to eradicate and prevent forcible actions (including unauthorized document checks) against ethnic minorities.

Prosecute police officers guilty of violating the citizens’ right to equal treatment.

Audit a number of local Federal Migration Service offices for corruption (Zimovnikovsky and Semikarakorsky Districts of the Rostov Region).

Develop and implement educational and training programs for the law-enforcement personnel, aimed at increasing their level of legal awareness and ethnic tolerance.

Federal and Local Authorities

Take all the necessary steps to provide resident Meskhetian Turks with legal status ensure their residential registration and restore all their rights.

When enforcing the legislation on violations of the rules of entry and stay in the country, obtaining work permits and so on, any public statements linking these offences with specific ethnic groups should be avoided; large campaigns should be avoided as well.

⁷²Young M. Lawmaker Slams Putin Over Treatment of Meskhetian Turks, RIA Novosti, 10. 30.2013. URL: <http://en.ria.ru/world/20131030/184422599/US-Lawmaker-Slams-Putin-Over-Treatment-of-Meskhetian-Turks.html>.

⁷³ Hastings and Stivers Call for P-2 Refugee Status for Ahiska Turks, US Congressman Alcee L. Hastings. 27.01.2014. URL: <http://alceehastings.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=367844>.

⁷⁴ More in Karastelev V. *Polozheniye Turok-Meskhetintsev...*

Civil servants should have no right to express publicly, not only intolerance, but also disrespect toward any minorities. Legislation on civil service should include effective sanctions against such acts. These penalties should be made public.

Non-Governmental Organizations

Conduct workshops with the ambassadors of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan to address the problems with obtaining documents.

Organize a free legal program to assist in submitting documents to the Federal Migration Service.

Create a regularly updated website and periodically print out and distribute an informational leaflet reporting on the lawyers' actions.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Some of these recommendations have already been offered. See: Osipov, A. *Rossiyskiy opyt etnicheskoy diskriminatsii: meskhetintsy v Krasnodarskom kraye* [Russian experience of ethnic discrimination: the Meskhetian Turks in the Krasnodar Region], HRC Memorial. URL: <http://www.memo.ru/hr/discrim/meshi2/index.htm>. However, these recommendations have not been taken into account, so we have to repeat them.

ABBREVIATIONS

ATO—Anti-Terrorist Operation
CAO—Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation
CC—Criminal Code
ECtHR—European Court of Human Rights
FSB (*Federal'naya sluzhba bezopasnosti*)—Federal Security Service
FMS—Federal Migration Service
FRS—the Federal Registration Service
ICR—the Investigative Committee of Russia
KBR—The Kabardino-Balkar Republic
LDPR—Liberal Democratic Party of Russia
MIA—Ministry of Internal Affairs
MFA—Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MHG—Moscow Helsinki Group
NHRC—Novorossiysk Human Rights Committee
NGO—Non-Governmental Organizations
OMON (*Otryad militsii osobogo naznacheniya*)—Riot Police Unit
TRP—Temporary Residence Permit
RF—Russian Federation
SOVA Center—SOVA Center for Information and Analysis
USSR—Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
USA—United States of America
UN—United Nations
UNHCR—Office of the High Commissioner of the United Nations for Refugees
USE—Uniform State Exam
ZAGS ([*Otdel*] *Zapisi aktov grazhdanskogo sostoyaniia*)—Office of Civil Registration

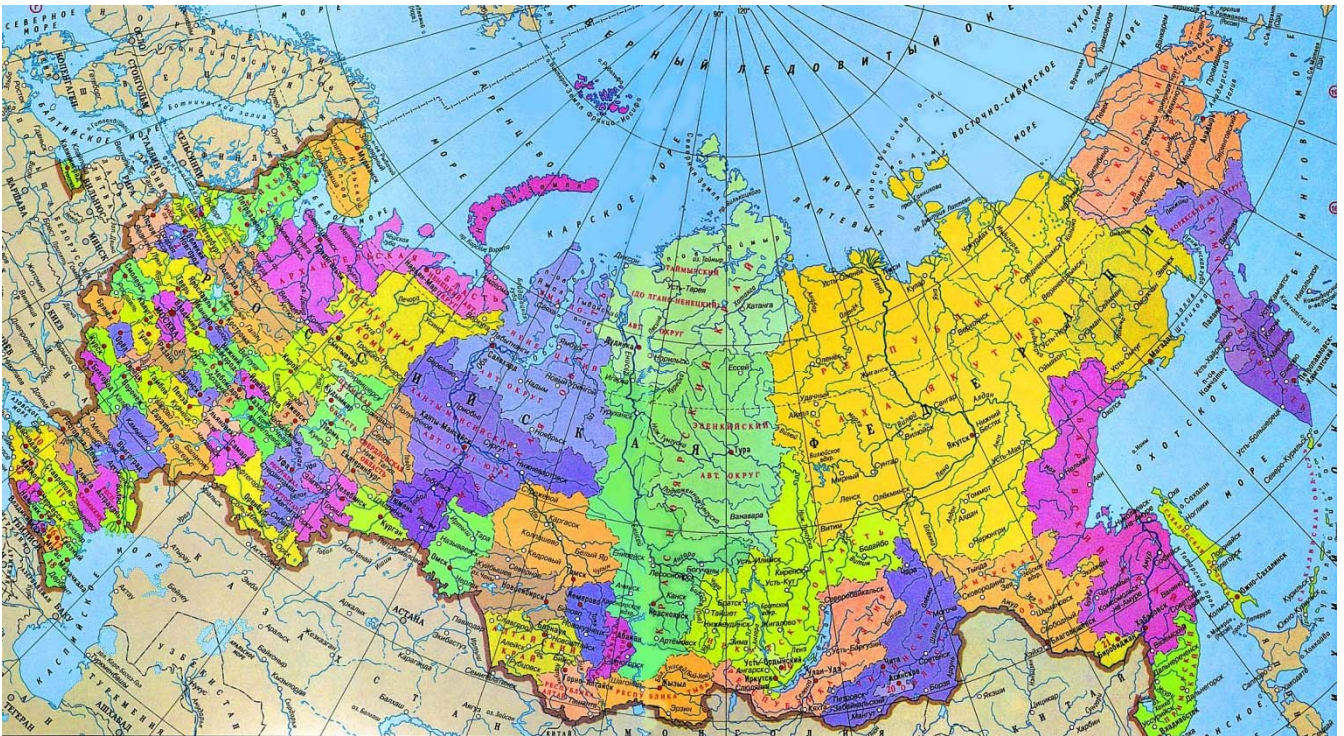
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APPENDICES

Maps

Map of Russia



Map of the South of Russia



Selected Interview Excerpts

I., Visly, the Rostov Region

“My parents have been here since the fall of 1989... we came here to live in Visly, in Semikarakorsky District of the Rostov Region. I arrived in 1997, in December. I came here when my parents were sick; my brother left for Turkey, so I had to come here. I thought it was a temporary thing, but I ended up staying for good. I came with a Soviet passport. I am not a citizen of Georgia, Moldova, or Armenia; I am a citizen of the Soviet Union.”

“Where is your spouse?”

“My spouse was deported. She is a citizen of Uzbekistan; she lived with me for 12 years. It was we, who went to court, but the court ended up deporting her. Thank God, I have my father’s house. I have been living here for 19 years already. With the passport of the USSR. I applied for a passport many times; in the past ten years I have stopped applying, because it is useless. Money, money, money, which I do not have...”

“Who extorted the money?”

“Employees of the Passport Office engage in extortion. I do not even know their last names. I have lived for 18 years without a passport. Soon I will reach retirement age. How will I get my pension if I have no passport? Once I went to Rostov and was detained by traffic police. They asked for an ID, I showed them my passport, and they said it was not an ID, but I have nothing else. They took 500 rubles and let me go. It was near Aksai.”

“So, you don’t leave the house with this passport?”

“No, I stay home. I am afraid to go out or travel with it. That is how it is. Now, what do I do? Die?.. I do not know what to do... That’s how I live... I keep cattle that is how I survive. My wife was taken away a year ago, so the garden has not been planted; I cannot do it alone, I am too sick...”

S. (mother of two), Malomechetnoy, the Rostov Region

“...I do not want to offend the Russians or our kind; they are all people to me. Although I live in an apartment, I have no money and no documents. Thank God, I will never abandon my children. I suffered so much with these children, but I never thought of abandoning them. I hear a lot about those, who have financial or other problems, so they give birth and leave them, but I never thought about leaving them. We do not do that. We only want one thing—give us the identity documents do not torment us—that is all. We bother nobody; we work in the fields; we suffer. I cannot even explain to you how we live, how our life goes. We build [homes] here, we do all these things; we buy cars—none of this falls to us from the sky. We work. In the morning, we get up at three a.m. to work at the “balagans.” I am a woman, but I drag heavy bags for the sake of my children, not even for myself—I am no longer thinking about myself.”

The Kh. Family, Nikolavevsky Farm, the Rostov Region

Father. “It so happened that I had to get my youngest son married to a citizen of Kyrgyzstan. I went to the passport office with a question: if my son marries a citizen of Kyrgyzstan, will there be a problem. The staff assured me, that there would be no problem. There was a wedding, and the children went to the FMS for a passport. They were refused. The staff demanded money from them, four thousand. They took a piece of paper and wrote on it “4000.” Then, the employees said, “Either take us to Rostov on your transport for free or pay four thousand.” I told them that I have no transport to take them to Rostov. They said, “We accept the papers and take them to Rostov, and for that you have to pay four thousand.” I ask: “And if we don’t have such an amount, what do I do?” They say “then, you’ll pay the warrants.” Therefore, we are paying the warrants. They also told me “Aren’t there enough girls here? Why Kyrgyzstan? You could have found a bride here,” I told them, “Can’t argue with the heart. Love. My parental duty is to make my son happy.” They said, “Live any way you want.” They still have not issued the documents.

Son and son's wife. "The marriage was registered in 2012. We have a son who was born on the Russian territory. We are expecting the second child. My wife cannot get Russian citizenship."

"Have you received any help from the head of the Federal Migration Service?"

Son. "He tells us that we have to go to Moscow. Alternatively, that my wife must be officially employed. He asked my father for money, "to go to Rostov and take your documents to obtain Russian citizenship."

Son's wife. "I cannot get a job. I have a temporary residence permit valid until 2018. When I went to get my documents, the head of the FMS Directorate told me in a rude manner "Who are you? What are you doing here?" He also went back on his word—declined to confirm that he had previously given us a different list of documents—and ordered me out of his office."

Son. "The chief of the Martynovsky District FMS Directorate told me in 2014: "Why don't you go to Turkey?" There are no jobs in the village. I worked in Tolyatti and Rostov, got deceived and received no money. Now I work on "shabashki." Sometimes I get paid a thousand rubles, sometimes five hundred."

Son's wife. "Head of the Federal Migration Service has promised to deport me immediately. This is despite the fact that I have a residence permit until 2018. We have a child and expecting the second."

"What are you hoping for?"

"We hope that they will feel some pangs of conscience."

The K. Family, Grom-Gora, the Rostov region

Mother. "Six of us came to Russia from Azerbaijan in 1998—my husband, four children and I. Out of six people, only the daughter and I have obtained Russian citizenship. We began the process of obtaining documents in 2002, and were going back and forth for ten years before receiving citizenship. We traveled for 12 hours to get a spot in line. We went there almost every day; we lived there. The Migration Service is 18-20 km away from us. We walked. The bus does not come here. Sometimes we hitchhiked. A taxi costs 150 there and 150 back—300 rubles just for the trip. It is expensive for us."

"Why didn't the others get their citizenship?"

"I do not know. The husband has his USSR passport, issued in 1985. He served in the army in Lithuania in 1983, and he is stateless."

Husband. "I never leave Martynovsky District. The sons also never go out; we are afraid."

"So your movement was restricted for past 13 years?"

"Yes."

Son. "I work on "shabashki" and earn 600–700 rubles a day. Once I went to Krasnodar, made some money. Had to give a thousand rubles to the police, because they detained me and began to ask me questions, "Who are you? What are doing here?"

"Are you thinking of marriage?"

"I am thinking of it, but I have no documents. I will turn 26 soon. Nobody will marry off their daughter to a man without a passport. Everyone says, "no citizenship—no daughter, no wife".

"Your brothers also don't have citizenship?"

"The eldest one does not. The middle one has a residence permit. We submitted all the documents; they returned half of them, saying they were fake."

"What are you hoping for?"

"We've got a cow. She is our only hope."

ABOUT ORGANIZATIONS

SOVA Center for Information and Analysis

Sova Center was created in October 2002. Information about its activities can be found on <http://sova-center.ru>, with daily updated sections. The general principles of the website functioning are: news, resumes of public debates, and our own articles and reports structured thematically, with links given to the maximum of useful sources.

On the site, you can see statistics of hate crimes as well as the statistics of criminal law enforcement—both legitimate and illegitimate in the sphere of application of anti-extremist legislation.

Subject-Specific Sections of the website:

“Racism and Xenophobia”—hate crimes and manifestations of nationalism and xenophobia, attempts by government and civil society to counteract it, and public discussions on this subject.

“Religion in Secular Society”—news and discussions relating to interfaith relations, and the varied conflicts between secular institutions and religious confessions.

“Misuse of Anti-Extremism”—a misuse of anti-extremism legislation in order to unjustly limit civic freedom.

You can also sign up to a daily newsletter for the entire site or for any individual section. Since 2008, SOVA has published about 30 books, including collections of annual reports “Xenophobia, Freedom of Consciousness and Anti-Extremism in Russia,” in Russian and English; two issues of methodological recommendations “Aggressive Xenophobia Monitoring;” collections on Russian nationalism, the last one—“Russia is not Ukraine: contemporary accents of nationalism” (2014); a reference book “Radical Russian Nationalism: Structures, Ideas, Faces” (2009), a collection of translations “Racism: Modern Western Approaches” (2010), monographs “Political Orthodoxy” (2003), “Ethnicity and Equality in Russia: Specific Perception” (2012), “What Is Ethnic Discrimination and What can Be Done About It?” (2012), “State Policy regarding National-radical associations. 1991–2002” (2013), “Criminal Law in OSCE countries against hate crimes, incitement of hatred and hate speech” (2014).

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Moscow Helsinki Group (Moscow Helsinki Group on Assistance to Implementation of Helsinki Accords)

MHG—regional public organization since its foundation 1976 deals with revelation of human rights violations and taking measures on respect of international obligations in the sphere of human rights taken by the Soviet Union and later by Russian Federation. Creation of Moscow Helsinki Group gave start to emergence of independent human rights groups in the OSCE countries as well as to the development of human rights movement in the world, known as Helsinki Movement. Democratic state can not exist without a strong civil society. Therefore, after its reconstruction in 1989, MHG is doing everything possible to strengthen and promote civil society in Russia, providing full and versatile promote human rights and social movements in the regions of the Russian Federation.

Moscow Helsinki Group implements human rights monitoring and performs enlightenment programs, participates in the system of public control, assists in provision of legal aid and consultations, recognizes outstanding human rights achievements by annual MHG Human Rights Award. Moscow Helsinki Group is member of international human rights coalitions, such as International Civil Solidarity Platform (<http://www.civicsolidarity.org/>), Coalition in Protection of Fundamental Rights in Eurasia (<http://www.ihahr-nis.org/>), and Coalition Against Hate (<http://stop-hate.org/>).

Moscow Helsinki Group prepares annual general and specialized reports on situation with human rights in regions of Russian Federation. All reports, historic reviews and books can be found at www.mhg-main.org. The organization also leads quite a few thematic websites, including on monitoring newly adopted legislation in Russia <http://mhg-monitoring.org/>, monitoring the police in Russia <http://mhg-police.org/>, and multiple social network pages.

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