



## **MAIN DIRECTIONS OF THE RECONCILIATION AND ENGAGEMENT POLICY OF THE SMRCE**

The Government of Georgia (GoG) pursues and actively implements the peaceful, pragmatic and constructive policy of reconciliation, engagement and confidence building with the aim to achieve conflict transformation, facilitate people-to-people contacts, assist the population on the ground and contribute to the peaceful settlement of the conflict.

In this regard, the GoG continues to implement the main dimensions of the State Strategy towards the Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation and its respective Action Plan with special emphasis on such components as healthcare, education, confidence building, socio-economic assistance, civil society development and international engagement.

SMRCE actively cooperates with the EU, USA and with other international partners to enhance its peace policy based on the principles of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Also, it actively participates in different formats and plays a leading role in their proceedings.

The GoG continues to seek the ways for sharing the benefits and opportunities stemming from the EU-Georgia Visa Liberalization Dialogue, EU-Georgia political association and economic integration process, with the populations residing in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia. The EU-Georgia high level political consultations are periodically held to discuss the existing local and regional challenges and assess the efforts undertaken towards the peaceful settlement of conflict in Georgia. The same issues are also discussed at the meetings of the Association Council and of the Subcommittee on Justice, Freedom and Security (the latest ones held on December 2 and June 16, 2016). Along with the existing situation the participants overviewed the implementation of the Engagement Strategy and Action Plan.

SMRCE holds intensive consultations with international organizations to ensure their presence in the occupied regions despite all the obstacles these organizations face in terms of accessing these territories and carrying out their activities on the ground.

SMRCE is actively engaged in the implementation of the Communication and Information Strategy of the GoG in the sphere of the European Integration. Informative video commercials concerning the Association Agreement were prepared and transmitted on Public broadcasting TV channel in 4 different languages, including in Abkhazian and Ossetian. Special booklets were printed and distributed in all these languages. In addition, with the assistance of the EU, SMRCE prepared short videos on the issues of visa liberalization, Association Agreement, education opportunities and "Life with barbed wires", which was screened at the Batumi International Conference in July and highlighted the existing situation and challenges of local population.

### **Implementation of the Engagement Action Plan**

#### *Healthcare*

Free healthcare represents one of the cornerstones of the engagement strategy. Residents of the occupied territories largely benefit from the state-sponsored Referral Program under which they



*Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality*

---

receive full-scale, needs-based medical treatment in any medical institution of Georgia. In April 2015 Hepatitis C elimination program (initiated through the support of US company “Gilead”) was launched and the participation was extended to the residents of the occupied regions.

Through the Liaison Mechanism (LM) effectively operating under the Action Plan for Engagement, the GoG regularly delivers to Abkhazia region necessary vaccines, including immunization and veterinary vaccines, diabetes and HIV/AIDS treatment and medicine for tuberculosis, also ambulance and other types of vehicle, medical equipment, etc. Annually the cost of delivered medicine amounts approximately to 250 000 USD.

In 2013-2015 Government of Georgia spent more than 5 million USD on the healthcare of the residents of occupied regions. In 2016 the amount on healthcare component already equaled to 3.5 million USD. It is important to underline that throughout the years the number of persons coming over for free healthcare treatment has more than doubled.

GoG continues the construction of multi-functional center, including the 200-bed hospital in Rukhi that is the closest point to the occupation line in the direction of Abkhazia region. The functioning of this high profile medical institution will make the receipt of the free of charge medical treatment even more accessible and convenient.

### *Education*

The GoG continues sponsoring the “1+4” program that offers simplified procedures for the representatives of ethnic minorities, inter alia, Abkhazians and Ossetians, to enroll in higher education institutions of Georgia by passing only one exam in their native language, with one year in Georgian language training followed by four years of undergraduate studies in a program of their own choice. At the same time, the GoG maintains the operation of the International Education Center (IEC) which offers the funding of the MA and PhD education to the residents of the country, including the one in the occupied territories.

For these purposes and with the aim to simplify the existing procedures for the recognition of education received inside the occupied territories, the SMRCE in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia elaborated the amendments to the Order of the Minister of Education and Science of December 1, 2009 on the Rules for the Recognition of Higher Education Received in the Occupied Territories that entered into force on January 11, 2017. The introduced amendments to the Order created possibilities for the persons residing inside the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia to obtain the recognition for the high education received inside the occupied territories via status neutral solutions and simplified procedures - online or through the assistance of international organization, without the need to travel to the rest of Georgia, to take Georgian ID or to present witnesses that was necessary before. On its side, the issued act certifying the receipt of education inside occupied territories authorizes the person to continue study in higher education institution in the rest of Georgia or abroad and to participate in international student mobility and education programs.



### *Trade*

Multi-functional trading center was constructed in closest vicinity of occupation line in Rukhi in 2015 and launched in April 2016 that will facilitate trade and business contacts across the divide. The center also includes bank, veterinary clinic, post office, drug store, small refrigerators for storing the goods and collection points for agriculture products.

The GoG continues to actively work on further facilitating and encouraging trade, business ties and confidence building across the ABL and for creating favorable and conducive environment in this regard.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is funding a program entitled The ZRDA Activity in Georgia. The goal of it is to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth in targeted regions. The activity purpose is to improve livelihoods and resilience in targeted communities in Georgia, through improving MSME development and growth, increasing productivity of rural households, facilitating market linkages between producers and buyers, promote local economic development by establishing networks. USAID intends to provide a total of approximately \$15,000,000 funding over a 5-year period.

### *Liaison Mechanism*

The LM continues to serve the important functions of conveying messages between Tbilisi and Sokhumi, effective and regular delivery of the medicine and medical equipment to Abkhazia region and assistance of international organizations in the implementation of bilateral confidence building projects. Apart from this, LM directly participated in the implementation of several confidence building projects. In particular, LM was involved in the arrangement of Abkhaz Corner in the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia with the aim to promote the Abkhaz literature, culture and history, in the publishing of “Mokvi Gospel” in Georgian, Abkhazian and English languages that was distributed in Abkhazia region and conducted joint trainings of Georgian and Abkhazian doctors in Istanbul on the treatment of Hepatitis C.

In 2016, the LM has delivered to Abkhazia region a special vehicle with spray equipment necessary for preserving box-trees and respective pesticides channeled by the GoG. It has also provided Sokhumi Child Center with ultra sound device allocated by the Ministry of Health of Georgia.

### *CBMs*

In close cooperation with the LM and the CoE, SMRCE continuously facilitates the implementation of bilateral Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian confidence building projects that includes the meetings, seminars, trainings, study visits etc. of various groups of people – teachers, doctors, cultural heritage experts, civil society representatives, etc. – on neutral territories. The number of such projects is increasing.

In particular in 2016:

- Georgian-Abkhazian young women participated in training on women empowerment in Yerevan;



- “Series of European lectures” were held in Sokhumi for teachers and lecturers, also with the participation of several Ossetian representatives;
- Georgian-Abkhazian doctors participated in study visit to Berlin on the issues of drug prevention and treatment. As a result CoE mission took place to Sukhumi and Tbilisi for Pompidou Group experts;
- Georgian-Abkhazian psychology and psychiatry specialists working with traumatized children participated in training in Budapest;
- Georgian-Abkhazian archive specialists participated in follow-up meeting concerning the Soviet time materials in Yerevan, Tallinn and Paris as a result of which a joint publication will soon be made;
- Georgian-Abkhazian teachers participated in last workshop in Graz on the methodology of teaching of foreign languages;
- Georgian-Abkhazian human rights defenders and civil society representatives met in Budapest and Venice on follow-up meeting to discuss human rights issues;
- Georgian-Abkhazian interpreters two times participated in training on translation technique in Budapest;
- Georgian-Abkhazian museum experts participated in training on museum management issues in Budapest;
- Field visit was implemented to Gudauta with the participation of CoE experts as a continuation to Georgian-Abkhazian cultural heritage project;
- Training of trainers for Georgian-Abkhazian teachers on Human Rights education to children of 8-13 years based on CoE materials “Compasito” was held in Budapest.

SMRCE supports the operation of COBERM – EU funded financial mechanism – that enables the implementation of bilateral confidence-building projects by non-government and international organizations.

The SMRCE maintains flexible and transparent operation of the Modalities for Conducting Activities in the Occupied Territories of Georgia and continues to issue Non-objection Orders with respect to the submitted projects which concern the activities of international and non-governmental organizations in the occupied territories, including the confidence-building initiatives. In 2016, additionally 58 new projects were granted with non-objection (overall 345 projects); none was ever refused.

#### *Communication between the divided societies*

SMRCE engages in any kind of platform and tries to use any given opportunity to help re-establish effective communication among the divided communities. In February and June of 2015 and April of 2016 informal dialogues were held in London between the representatives of Georgian and Abkhazian communities, amongst them politicians, experts and international organizations. Meetings of similar format were also held in September 2015 in Bern, Switzerland and in Berlin, Germany. Recent political developments had been discussed and the existing situation had been analyzed. At the same time, the SMRCE continues to actively take part in Civic Point of View meetings that is a platform for the meeting of representatives of Georgian-Ossetian communities.

In the frames of GoG’s peaceful policy of reconciliation, confidence building and engagement and as a result of agreement directly reached with the de-facto authorities, Georgian and Ossetian



prisoners were released at Enguri Bridge on March 10, 2016. In particular, 14 citizens of Georgia held in illegal custody on the territories of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and 4 Ossetians convicted under Georgian legislation were released from detention. The exchange of prisoners had a positive impact on peace process and confidence building between the divided communities.

#### *Assistance of conflict affected population*

GoG actively continues the efforts to alleviate the consequences of the installation of barbed wire fences and other physical barriers by the Russian militaries in villages adjacent to the occupation line. In the frames of the Interagency Commission, the GoG together with international partners restored the provision of irrigation and potable water in communities affected by Russian-built barbed wire fences, completed gasification works, provided local population with financial assistance during winter time, built and renovated several schools and kindergartens, created and rehabilitated ambulatories, restored roads and developed infrastructure, supported local youth in covering their university tuition fees and helped farmers in their agricultural work. The rehabilitation works and delivery of assistance to the local population continues annually.

In 2016, due to the efforts of the GoG and with the assistance of international organizations (UNDP, UNHCR) the surface of the Enguri bridge was renovated. Also, the bus became operational on the bridge, following eight years of restrictions. Consequently, the residents of the occupied territory are able to benefit from free-of-charge transportation.

On 5 March 2017, representatives of the occupation regime abolished two so-called crossing points along the occupation line in the villages of Nabakebi and Otobaia, the Abkhazia region. The announced closure of two crossing points along the occupation line which are used daily by hundreds of commuters, will be detrimental to the freedom of movement of the population, including school children, on both sides of the occupation line. It will likely increase the risk of incidents, especially detentions.

Such a unilateral decision would go against commitments to work towards enhanced security and improved living conditions for the conflict-affected population. Furthermore, it would be contrary to efforts to normalise the situation by creating an atmosphere that is not conducive to longer-term conflict resolution and overall stability in the region.

#### *GID and IPRM*

First Deputy State Minister of SMRCE heads the Second Working Group of Geneva International Discussions (GID) on humanitarian issues. Georgian delegation regularly raises issues of utmost importance, such as return of IDPs and refugees and grave violations of human rights and basic freedoms of the population residing in the occupied territories (e.g. freedom of movement, right to education in native language, right to unimpeded access to healthcare, etc.). Other important issues - such as the provision of water and gas, protection of the cultural heritage sites, fate of the detained – are also being raised.



*Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality*

---

In the spirit of its constructive approach in 2015 and 2016 the GoG handed important archive materials to Abkhaz participants and an international expert on cultural heritage issues was enabled to visit Bedia and Likhny temples in Abkhazia region and elaborate a subsequent document on their current condition; another expert on healthcare issues conducted training on diabetes in Sokhumi. The potential cooperation on environmental issues, in particular, addressing a shared problem endangering the endemic box tree population in Georgia, including in Abkhazia has been also discussed.

SMRCE actively participates in Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meetings, which are held along the ABLs with Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia on a regular basis. As a result of agreement reached during the 35<sup>th</sup> round of GID, IPRM was resumed in Gali after four year suspension.

Within the IPRM framework the issues of human rights violations in the occupied territories, including but not limited to illegal detentions, prisoners, deprivation of property, issues related to provision of potable and irrigation water as well as vital security and livelihood issues are being discussed. The hot lines remain operational and thanks to them kidnappings have been diminished substantially.