

RESEARCH OF VILLAGES SUBJECTED TO CREEPING ANNEXATION

POLICY PAPER SUMMARY



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Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Georgian National Platform is an association of local and international non-commercial legal entities registered in Georgia, aiming to promote and implement the goals set by the Joint Declarations of the Prague, Warsaw and Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summits and the EU-Georgia Association Agreement of European Neighborhood Policy and other joint events.

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Summary

It has been more than twenty years since Russia attempted to occupy Georgia through different forms and to eradicate its statehood from the political world map. In the beginning of the 20th century and in the 1920s this goal was achieved. From the 1990s onwards, however, Russia again tried to abolish Georgia's restored statehood and territorial unity.

Prime examples are the ethnic conflicts in Tskhinvali and Abkhazia – the war in Abkhazia in the beginning of the 90s and the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, including the six-year period after – have created artificial borders, iron fences and creeping annexation; causing a threat to Georgia's population no less than war itself.

Currently, International Organizations are phasing out their aid providing social-economic support to the population. Single projects carried out by non-governmental organizations (UN Women Fund, Fund Taso, Center Abkhazia) lay the grounds for positive development, but unfortunately are unable to achieve actual economic development (completion of the project milestones and completion of the process). In addition, there are no long-term State programs available.

However, the population in the conflict-affected areas does require support and assistance to this date. Especially youth needs assistance to avoid large-scale immigration from the regions, leaving rural areas with an elderly population exposed to Russia's increasing creeping annexation.

This study was conducted in the villages near the administrative border line (ABL). The territorial borders of the study include the Gori and Kareli districts.

The methodology applied is the random analysis methodology by conducting one-on-one interviews and focus groups, through connections with active local citizens.

The most active group during the research were women, however, they have no actual hard power in influencing local authorities and the current processes.

The findings of this research exposed that:

- Locals have not sufficient access to irrigation water for processing the existing lands;
- There is no actual market to sell the crop harvested;
- Arable, grazing lands and fruit gardens are located on the other side of the border lines, while the local population does not receive any compensation for their lost property;
- Business which worked effectively in the past are now closed down;
- Lands are still not registered in the Public Registry, making it easier for occupants to take such territories.

Skepticism among the population is in part the result of political parties nominating politicians with no direct link to the local population. In return, elected politicians feel only responsible to the party and the government, ignoring their electorate (this excludes participation in mass meetings).

This study found each village had different problems to face, but exposed a lack of qualified public servants. The governing chain depends on the vertical distribution of power while decentralization principles are not implemented.

Therefore, the authors of this paper recommend:

- To develop the long-term project from political, economic, social-cultural and security perspectives considering the existing reality and due to the different activities of the occupant country. A special permanent group with professional and qualified personnel should be established for this purpose, to study the events and processes in details, analyze them and prepare a plan for Georgia to overcome this situation and attain territorial unity again.
- To increase civil servants' efficiency by supporting professionals focused on public diplomacy through sufficient training, or increased engagement.
- To sufficiently educate local qualified personnel and increase their involvement in the governing chain.
- To halt migration of the population by creating and developing small industries.
- To engage active representatives of the society and locally acceptable politicians in the elections from the region, despite the difficulties. These representatives should hold responsibilities not only before their parties, but also the local population.
- To envision a long-term program with specific programs for each village, basing each on the past experience by identifying specific connections of the villages to the occupied region.
- To restore trade relations by establishing a local market in one of the bordering villages (based on this research, a small local market functioned for several years in Mejriskhevi, where both parties traded), as it heavily influences the results of conflict and possible war. In the 1990s, the population of Mejriskhevi protected Ossetians, while the Ossetian party managed to protect the village from destruction and arson.
- To restore and transform existing relations between the conflict affected areas on both sides of the administrative borders through bilateral business relations.
- To actively protect and restore Georgian cultural monuments within the occupied areas to avoid full elimination of Georgian symbols in the occupied territory.
- To create cultural and legal aid centers in the villages based on these studies.
- To support youth employment by demanding the banking sector to ensure their representatives in several regions.

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