

Statement from the Interregional Society of Meskhetian Turks "Vatan".

In the context of the topic under discussion, I would like to share the experience of the Meskhetian Turks, who were faced with the problem of implementing legal mechanisms for repatriation to their historical homeland.

I would remind you that the Meskhetian Turks are the indigenous people of the southern regions of Georgia, forcibly deported to Central Asia by the Stalinist regime of the USSR during the Second World War. And legal mechanisms for repatriation of the deported population, in the form of laws and by-laws, were adopted by the Georgian Government as undertakings made upon joining the Council of Europe.

The "efforts" of the Georgian authorities were not crowned with success, since, as soon became obvious, this was initially not their aim and they were created purely for formally satisfying Council of Europe requirements. A clear confirmation of the collapse of the repatriation programme is that not one person from among the deported population has been returned to Georgia or restored to citizenship under this repatriation mechanism.

There are many reasons for this, including exclusion of representatives of the minority itself from participation in this process, both at the rule-making stage and during the implementation of adopted norms, and the Georgian Government's rejection of the ethnic and cultural identity of the deported population, which is manifested in the rejection of the ethnic self-name of the minority, which is a breach of fundamental human rights. Our main recommendation is therefore to promote effective, broad and open participation by minorities both in the decision-making process, which will directly affect their fate, and in the process of implementing these mechanisms.