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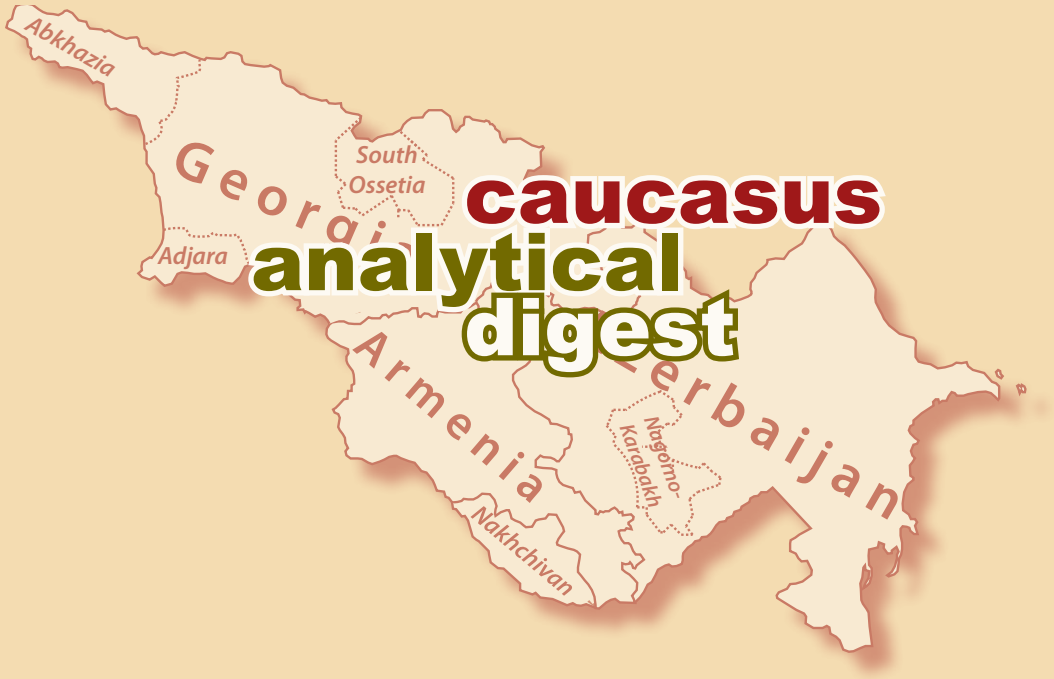

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MIGRATION, REFUGEES AND IDPS

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Analysis

Leaving and Being Left Behind: Labor Migration in Georgia

By Teona Mataradze and Florian Mühlfried, Halle/Saale

Abstract

A survey of labor migration in two villages shows contrasting trends as some migrants seek long-term employment, while others are primarily interested in temporary jobs. However, recent political and economic developments have greatly influenced these patterns. While fewer men now seek construction work in the Russian Federation, women still find employment as maids and nannies in Italy and Greece. The result is changing gender roles in the village. Remittances are declining, having a negative impact on Georgia's economy overall.

Russia Cracks Down

On 14 October 2006, the Russian immigration office and the Federal Security Service (FSB) branches in Dagestan jointly launched the special operation "Avtostrada," with the goal of cracking down on illegal labor migrants. During this operation, the authorities detained the Georgian citizen Giorgi Gogitidze (name changed) and deported him to Georgia, even though he held a valid one-year visa. He had not registered in Dagestan, however, and consequently violated Russian residence regulations.

According to Gogitidze, he tried to register, but was unable to do so because the Dagestani administration refused his request, even when offered bribes. In earlier years, registration was never a major obstacle for Gogitidze, but after Georgia arrested four alleged Russian spies in the summer of 2006, things became difficult for Georgians like him who came to the Russian Federation as seasonal workers. He heard about mass deportations of Georgians from Moscow and St. Petersburg in the news, and his inability to register turned him into a potential deportee, too. Before he was actually deported to Georgia, Gogitidze said that he was held at a camp close to the Dagestani border for a couple of days and forced to work. Yet, his main complaint was that he was not able to secure the money he had expected to earn in Dagestan to support his family.

The case of Gogitidze is far from unique. According to Georgian sources, approximately 4,000 Georgians were deported between September 2006 and February 2007 on grounds of violating the Russian residency rules. After their return home, however, many of the deportees managed to enter the Russian Federation again, despite being officially banned from the country for a couple of years. Some of them bribed the border guards, but most considered the border between Georgia and the Russian Federation too difficult to cross. Consequently, most Georgian labor migrants took other routes, either via Ukraine (a country they can enter without a visa), or South Ossetia. The latter route was considered relatively safe, but expensive. According to Gogitidze, one had to pay approximately $1,500 on the way to diverse state employees and other authorities.

After the outbreak of war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, the South Ossetian transit corridor to the Russian Federation ceased to exist. At the same time, the world economic crisis crippled other countries favored by Georgian labor migrants, such as Spain. The combination of events has had severe consequences for the many Georgian families dependent on incomes generated abroad, as well as for the Georgian economy in general.

In the following sections, we sketch the current state of migration affairs in two Georgian villages and outline the local consequences of international and national politics. In our conclusion, we extrapolate from the comparison of our two field sites to identify general trends regarding labor migration in Georgia. The empirical data for this comparison come from our one-year fieldwork conducted in the two respective villages in 2006/07 within the framework of the research group 'Caucasian Boundaries and Citizenship from Below' at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology.

Migration in Sats'ire (Western Georgia)

Sats'ire is located in the Tq'ibuli district (Western Georgia), which has the highest rate of outmigration in Georgia. Within the last twenty years, the population in Tkibuli city has dropped from 22,000 to 13,900 persons, and the decline in Sats'ire is equally dramatic. Forty-six of the officially registered 275 households have left the village, meaning that roughly one fifth of the families are now gone. Twenty-seven of the 100 households we interviewed in Sats'ire (2007) have migrants residing either abroad, or in the Georgian capital Tbilisi (qualified by the villagers as "migrants", too). The overall number of migrants from these families is 48.

The gender and age distributions of the migrants say a lot about the general pattern of migration. 75% of migrants are men and 25% are women. The largest group of migrants (41.7%) is between 31 and 40 years old. Accordingly, middle-aged males make up most of the migrants. Their absence from their native villages and the disproportionately high number of women, children, and old men who remain have drastically changed the structure of labor power at the local level.

The educational background of the migrants contradicts popular "brain drain" arguments, since only 25% of the Satsire migrants had higher education. We should note, however, that higher education is more common in Georgian cities, than villages. Additionally, the specific features of the Tkibuli District have to be taken into account. During Soviet times, it was a highly industrial area, acquiring less qualified labor power, which influenced the number of people with higher education. Postsoviet Georgia liquidated the enterprises (mines, factories, agricultural units), where the majority of the local population worked, and jobs for poorly qualified labor became a scarce resource. Before migrating, the local migrants were mostly employed within state institutions (35.4%) or were unemployed (35.4%).

In their host countries, half of the migrants live without legal documents. The lack of appropriate papers is the first restraint for the migrants, since it deprives them of access to lucrative and legal employment, and forces them to take jobs for unskilled workers (39,6% of migrants are construction workers). The villagers have some ideas about which destinations are more profitable or easily accessible, but the decision on where to go depends on various factors: having social connections there, employment possibilities, language skill, and so on. The Russian Federation is the destination for the largest number of local labor migrants (70,4% of outmigrants are living and working in Russia). The massive migration flow from Sats'ire to Russia started around 1993–94 because villagers had an easy opportunity to go there. In the village, a local middleman organized groups of construction workers, taking them to the city of Irkutsk in Siberia. The middleman ended his activities in 2000 mainly because the Russian Federation instituted a stricter visa regime with Georgia. For Georgians, migrating to other former Soviet countries requires fewer financial resources and less legal hassle than going to Western countries. The only people who are able to migrate to Germany (8,3%) or the USA (2.1 %) are those who participate in au-pair, green card and other kinds of official programs.

Migration in Kvemo Alvani (Eastern Georgia)

The village Kvemo Alvani, with roughly 3,500 inhabitants, nestles among the foothills of the Caucasian mountain range in the province Kakheti. It is predominantly inhabited by ethnic Tushetians, traditional highlanders who were settled to Kvemo and Zemo Alvani by the Soviet authorities mainly in the 1950s. While Sats'ire is located in a region with the highest rate of outmigration in Georgia, the percentage of households with outmigrants is even higher in the village of Kvemo Alvani (26.2%). These high figures reflect the fact that seasonal migration has been a part of the Tushetian household economy for centuries, an explanatory factor we elaborate further in the conclusion.

In Kvemo Alvani, the majority of migrants are men (59.5%), but women play a far more significant role (40.5% vs. 25%) than they do in Sats'ire. This difference is directly related to the migration destination: Whereas the Russian Federation (27%) is considered to be a place for male labor migration, primarily for construction work (total 29,7%), women favor countries like Greece (37,8%) and Italy (10,8%) where they can work as maids and nannies (total 35,1%). Most of the migrants are between 21 and 40 years old (67,5%), but people older than 50 also leave their hometown (21,6%), usually driven by need and despair.

As in Sats'ire, most migrants from Kvemo Alvani were formerly either unemployed (29.7%) or worked in state institutions (24.3%). In contrast, however, at least 16.2% were involved in agriculture before migrating – a sector of no relevance in Sats'ire. In Kvemo Alvani, even fewer migrants have finished higher education (18.9%), which again points to the fact that no "brain drain" can be observed in the Georgian countryside.

A striking difference between the two cases is the time span of migration. Whereas most migrants from Sats'ire had been away for at least 2 years (79.2%), almost half of the Kvemo Alvanian migrants (43.2%) left their village in the previous few months. A large portion of these migrants consists of male construction workers, who were mentioned as real and potential deportees from the Russian Federation in the introduction. Most of them take jobs in the Northern Caucasus, particularly Dagestan and Chechnya (18.9% of the 27% leaving for the entire Russian Federation). As one of our informants jokingly said: "At first, the Russians completely destroyed Chechnya. Now, they are pumping in an endless stream of money for its reconstruction". As the wages are much higher in the Russian Federation, rebuilding Grozny is popular among young men from

Kvemo Alvani. And most of them find ways to return to Grozny even after their deportations.

Conclusion

Two migration patterns are clearly distinguishable in comparing our Eastern and Western Georgian field sites, The first pattern, observed in Kvemo Alvani, is seasonal in character and based on dynamic households, whose members act as semi-autonomous units. According to this pattern, certain household members temporarily go abroad. Mostly, these are men looking for work in a neighboring area, like the Northern Caucasus. This kind of migration pattern has a long history among Tushetians and is common among other mountain communities in the Alps and the Carpathians. It is embedded in a system of economic diversification aimed at the reduction of risks, which are always imminent in geographically precarious regions like the mountains.

The second kind of migration, identified in Sat'sire, is more permanent in character and based on entire households changing residence. Whereas in Kvemo Alvani, abandoned houses are a rare sight, they are quite common here. The large number of absent families marks the real difference between the two villages. The fact that so many families have recently left Sats'ire may be explained historically. Many of the families arrived here relatively late, in Soviet times, when the region was promoted and there were plenty of jobs. Their relatively short residence in Sats'ire probably did not allow for the creation of deep roots in the village.

Despite differences in the migration patterns, both communities are deeply affected by recent political and economic trends. First, the worsening political climate increasingly complicates migration to the most popular destination, the Russian Federation. Rumors concerning discrimination against Georgian labor migrants in Russia further enhance villagers' political alienation and feelings of insecurity about living and working there. Although Russia resumed issuing visas to Georgians at the beginning of March 2009 in a limited way, Georgian labor migrants will have great difficulty obtaining legal work and resident permits in the near future.

Second, the world economic crisis gravely influences migration to other popular destinations, particularly Spain. The Spanish economy has declined dramatically in the past months, and the formerly booming construction sector is particularly affected. As this is the sector where most Georgian labor migrants have been employed, many of them have left Spain and returned home. Although Italy and Greece are also struggling with the global crisis, migrant work in these countries is less at risk, as most work in the domestic sector. So far, the global financial crisis in the European Union has not seriously damaged the financial basis of most households, and domestic help is needed even in times of crisis. The coming months will show if the domestic sector can escape the large-scale series of bankruptcies and if the related labor migration remains more or less stable.

For the time being, at least, female labor migration to Greece and Italy seems to be the safest and most rewarding option. As for Georgian men, they either face increasing difficulties, decreasing status and illegality when migrating, or simply stay home. Consequently, the number of male household heads having to take care of their children and possibly parents without the support of their absent wives will increase considerably. Given the enduring popularity of the patriarchical image depicting the man as the breadwinner and the woman as raising the children, this new situation causes tremendous stress both within the family and in the village community.

Last, but not least, the drop of remittances caused by the decline of labor markets in the Russian Federation and the European Union will seriously harm the economic situation in Kvemo Alvani and Sats'ire, as in the whole of Georgia. Already, the total remittances sent to Georgia declined by 12.5% in January 2009 compared to the previous year. This is all the more problematic for the many families we met during our fieldwork, who rely on remittances as their main source of income. For them, remittances are the only efficient way to tackle the lack of social support from the state.

About the authors

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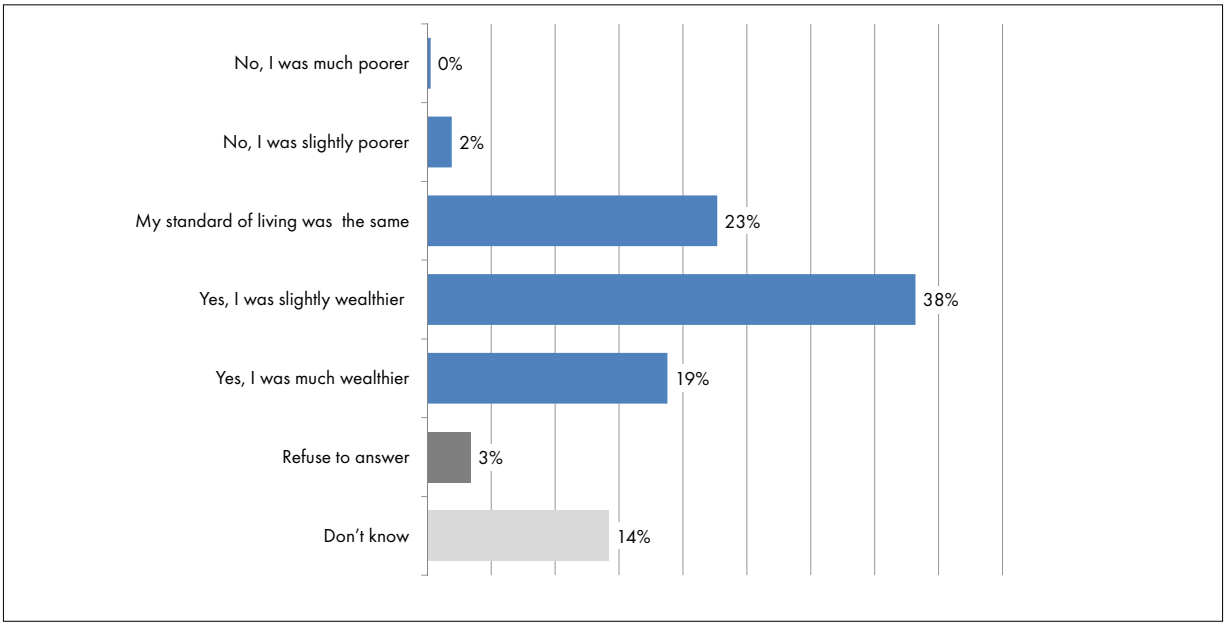
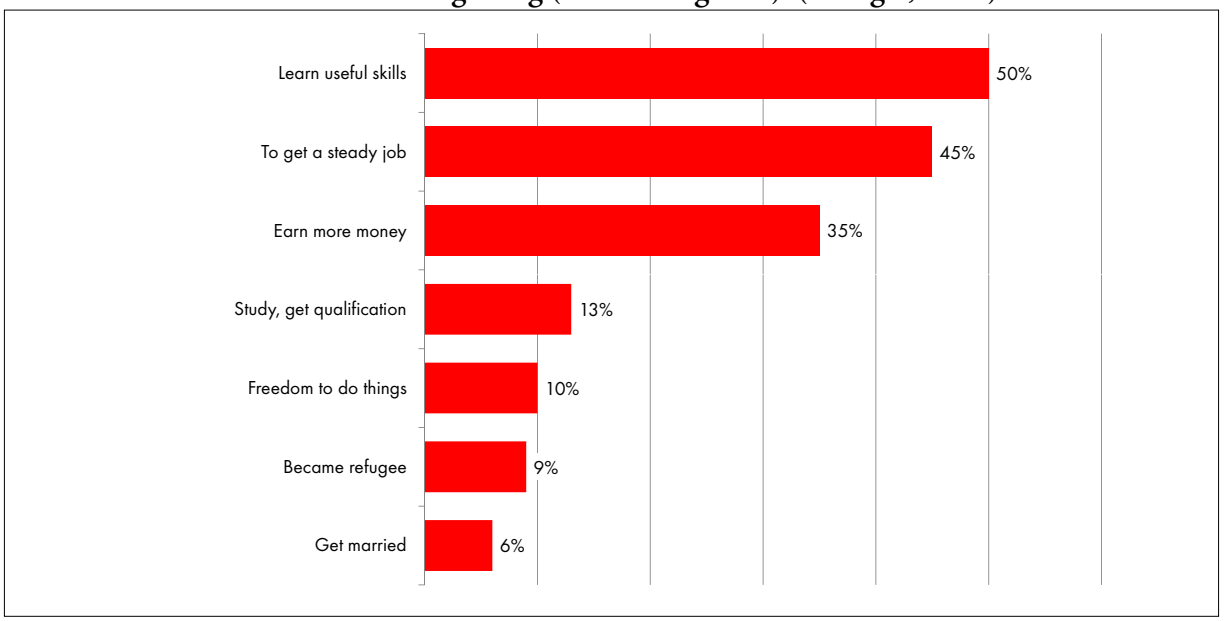
Opinion Poll

Motives and Views of Migrants from Georgia

Would You Say That Overall You Were Wealthier Whilst You Were Living Abroad Than Before You Left Georgia? (Georgia, 2008)



The Most Common Reasons for Migrating (Absent Migrants). (Georgia, 2008)

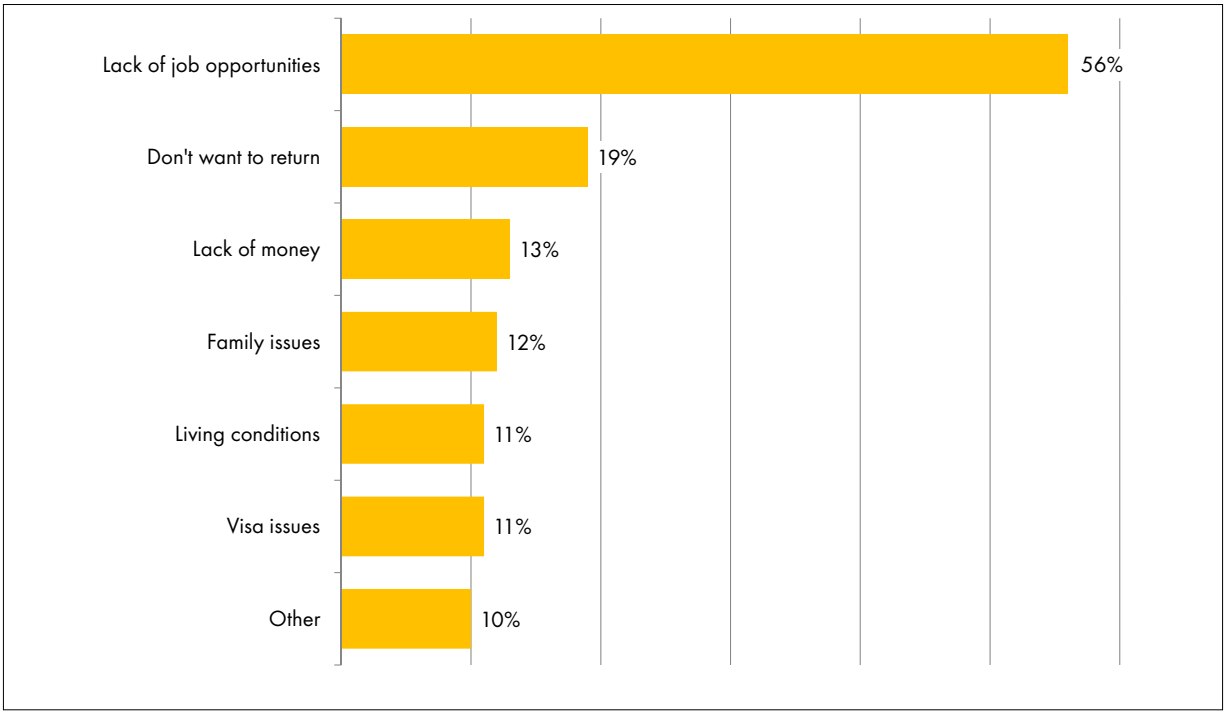


Source: "Measuring and Optimizing the Economic and Social Impacts of Migration in Georgia" survey conducted by CRRC and ISET for Global Development Network (GDN). Georgia, 2008

1940 Households sampled: Non Migrants – 620; Absent Migrants – 660; Returned Migrants – 660. Crude response rate of 73%.

Main countries of residence: Russia – 35%; Western Europe – 24%; Greece – 14%; other former Soviet Union – 7%; Turkey – 5%; North America – 3%.

Reasons for NOT Returning to Georgia (Absent Migrants). (Georgia, 2008)



Source: "Measuring and Optimizing the Economic and Social Impacts of Migration in Georgia" survey conducted by CRRC and ISET for Global Development Network (GDN). Georgia, 2008
1940 Households sampled: Non Migrants – 620; Absent Migrants – 660; Returned Migrants – 660. Crude response rate of 73%.
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Interested in further research on migration? The Caucasus Research Resource Centers (www.crrccenters.org) have conducted various projects on migration across the South Caucasus. Among other projects and broader surveys, CRRC did focus groups on return migration, detailed impact studies (with the Global Development Network), and an innovative study on elite migration in Armenia (which might be worth replicating in other transition countries). Contact Aaron Erlich at aaron@crrccenters.org in case you want more information.

Analysis

The Hardships of Becoming "Locals": Refugees Before and After the State Housing Program in Armenia

By Milena Baghdasaryan, Halle/Saale

Abstract

This article outlines some of the challenges refugees living in dormitories in Armenia still face. Twenty years after fleeing their homes in Azerbaijan, the provision of housing is among the crucial issues in order for these people to overcome their sense of being "refugees". On the basis of anthropological fieldwork conducted over the course of a year, the author depicts the life of the refugees in the dormitories of a town in Armenia, analyzes the effects of the state housing program and asks whether the provision of housing helps refugees in becoming "locals".

The Importance of Housing

"Can one be a refugee for more than 18 years? Does this exist in other countries? One can be a refugee for 5 years, maybe a bit more, but not 18!" (M., 52 years old, 2007)

Words like this, filled with frustration and bitterness, could often be heard from refugees in Kotayk in 2006–7. They came as a strong critique of the Armenian state, which until then had not provided for their well-being. The word "refugee" was understood by many as a temporary condition, which should have been left behind a long time ago, as soon as their lives would more or less resemble their past lives, or those of "locals" in contemporary Armenia. However, for them this condition lasted for almost two decades.

How does one stop being a refugee, and what does one become then? Throughout their lives in Armenia, refugees would have identified different factors for this transition, be it income, job, language, or emotional attachment. Nowadays, however, housing has become the most pronounced topic: according to interviews which I conducted in Kotayk, the many refugees shared the opinion that a "refugee" could "become a local" through the private ownership of a house or a flat. On the one hand, Armenian society is described as a society where the majority owns housing (UNECE 2000), and this marks one of most important differences between "locals" and refugees. Since 2003 the state in Armenia has launched a housing program, and the refugees were anxious whether they would be able to receive housing.

These and other related factors have made housing the "hottest" issue among refugees: when I asked them what kind of policy they would expect the state to provide for refugees, the majority said "let the state first of all provide us housing, we could do the rest on our own". But do the refugees indeed become "locals" after receiving houses, as they expressed? What is the result of the housing program on the lives of refugees?

Housing, Layers of the Refugee Population, and Refugee-Local Relations in Kotayk

Around 360,000 refugees arrived in Armenia beginning in 1988 soon after the anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait and outbreaks of mass violence in other towns in Azerbaijan (De Waal 2003; Movsesova and Ovanyan 1991). The refugees arrived in different waves, depending on the situation in their towns and on personal factors. Some were able to exchange housing, or sell and purchase homes. Many had to move into rural homes instead of a central city flat. Others only brought belongings, while many were compelled to flee and arrived, as they said, "only with clothes they wore". Azerbaijani neighbors and friends of those who became refugees often assisted them to protect themselves and transport their property to Armenia. The then existing Soviet Armenian state tried to organize relief for the refugees: housing was provided in all suitable public buildings, including hotels, dormitories and rest houses. For some of the refugees arriving early on and without property, the state was able to provide private housing, such as the first wave of refugees from Sumgait. Therefore, there were initially significant differences in the refugees' conditions.

Kotayk, a town close to Yerevan, with about 45,000 inhabitants (RA 2006), was a Soviet industrial town, where intensive construction went on during the 1960–80s. According to my interviews with officials from the state Refugees Department (RA Migration Agency), the city is the second largest host of refugees in Armenia after Yerevan. It seems to have attracted refugees since it is close to the capital, having centrally located and numerous dormitories, and enterprises which still worked at the end of the Soviet Union. Many refugees moved to Kotayk directly, while others migrated later on from other regions in Armenia. More than 50 percent of the interviewed sample mentioned having relatives in Kotayk as one of the main reasons for settling there. Others had found a job in one of its industrial or

educational enterprises, which the majority lost again after the collapse of Soviet industries. Hence, it is difficult to speak of a complete exclusion of refugees from the local society. They certainly were partly excluded from the labor market (mainly due to the economic crisis and restructuring and partly because of language incompetence), had fewer informal connections, but at least the majority had relatives, who could host them and provide emotional support.

The relationships of the refugees with the local population have been contradictory since they arrived (Baghdasaryan 2005). On the one hand they were received as part of the nation and suffering compatriots: the pogroms against them in Azerbaijan were perceived within the history of genocide against the Armenian people (ibid). Additionally, they were recognized and welcomed by the then socialist Armenian state and granted administrative support. The local population, at the height of nationalist feelings at the end of 1980s, shared this perception of the refugees as a group, supported them by hosting and helping then find employment, or by giving them some basic furniture, and caring for other needs. This support was mainly provided by relatives and friends, i.e. people with whom the refugees had personal connections, though strangers did offer some short-term help too. On the other hand, however, as in many societies, there were tensions between the arriving refugees and the local population. One of the major problems was that a significant number of refugees were Russian-speaking, while many locals at that time perceived using Armenian language for communication as a marker of national identity. Therefore, often Russian-speaking refugees were rebuked and requested to speak Armenian by certain layers of the local population (ibid). Today such tensions have mostly receded, while certain stereotypes and prejudices, connected both to the origins of refugees and living in the dormitories are still widespread.

Nowadays in Kotayk refugees live in various kinds of housing. There are those who received, bought or invested in housing in city districts. This is a rather invisible group of refugees, who mainly consider themselves to be former refugees. They mix and interact with the non-refugee population of the city. Some have their own small or big enterprises. There is also a group of refugees living in a district of cottages provided by an international organization. People still and often say that "refugees live there", although there are also many non-refugees living in this district. In contrast, many others live in dormitories, in temporary dwellings provided by their workplace, in illegally constructed housing and, a few, in metal wagon-houses. Certainly there were refugees who did not have their own housing but lived with their relatives.

The Hardships of Life in Dormitories

In Kotayk there were many dormitories inhabited by refugees. In some, refugees and non-refugees lived together, while, in others, refugees formed an overwhelming majority. One of the hardships identified by the refugees in the dormitories was the harshness of their living conditions. The buildings they inhabited were built in late 1980s – early 1990s, and the refugees were the first inhabitants there. However, since then the infrastructure was not maintained, and they had many problems with freezing water-pipes in the winter, or leaking pipes in the bathrooms. Some state officials complained that refugees received a new building and destroyed the infrastructure over 20 years, while the refugees complained that the state, which is responsible for the buildings, has not done anything for maintenance. Indeed, the lack of resources and organization on both sides resulted in the subsequent deterioration of living conditions. In winter 2006–2007, for instance, the water pipes in one building froze for about two months and the whole sewage system stopped working, preventing people even from using the toilets.

The general condition of the dormitories during my stay in 2006–2007 was alarming: the basement of one of the buildings was flooded. The walls were quite moist. There was no gas and no heating in the buildings. Because many refugees did not have material resources to purchase the cheapest heating material – wood, many had to survive winters in cold rooms. Consequently, elderly and middle aged people complained about their worsening health conditions, and were afraid to visit doctors because doing so involved additional expenditure. The inhabitants used either wood, small electrical heaters or gas tanks for cooking, which was often done in rooms, corridors or even bathrooms. Only very few dormitory rooms were renovated by their inhabitants due to the lack of resources: many did not wish to invest their scarce resources in renovating public buildings which they hoped to abandon as soon as they could afford to do so. The sanitary facilities were hard to endure: they were often for common use, sometimes for several families. The use of public spaces of a dormitory caused emotional stress and increased the refugees' feelings of not being settled. Additionally, living in the dormitories triggered various prejudices and mechanisms that excluded refugees from certain social relations: for example, the absence of a permanent home made it difficult for young male refugees to marry.

Other than lacking private property and living in detrimental conditions, the main problems of dormitory inhabitants included poverty connected to low-wage employment, depreciation of skills, partial exclusion from the job market, the lack of initial resources to establish their own enterprises, limited social connections and lack of state support. The family cash incomes of about 60 percent of the interviewed ranged between $0–200 per month at that time, while approximately 22 percent received $200–300. The informants were mainly involved in blue-collar work; a very small percentage included teachers or people working in state institutions, such as the police and the military. The majority were pensioners and housewives. The NGO "Mission Armenia" provided some support for the needy, which the refugees appreciated, but it was minimal and aimed at the elderly (like giving them basic medical assistance) and pupils (i.e. organizing after-school classes for them). The problems in the refugee dormitories were aggravated by the fact that the elderly made up a large part of the population: many young people and families migrated to Russia in the mid-1990s in search of work and for starting a new life in Russia, while elderly family members stayed in the dormitories. Many of these elderly refugees were lonely and needed social support.

The State Housing Program and its Outcomes: New Challenges and an Emergent Sense of Security

The state housing program for homeless refugees started functioning in 2003, parallel to a program implemented by the UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council.[1] Since then, the program has addressed various regions in Armenia. While the state program is supposed to provide certificates for purchasing housing to refugees living in temporary, state-provided, administrative dwellings, the international organizations are supposed to build houses for those who already own land or live in wagon-houses or half-built houses. The state provides certificates to refugee families that were registered in a dormitory or who had similar temporary housing by 2003, and lived there constantly, i.e. with no other available living space. The lists of refugees were checked against the availability of property and actual residence in the dormitories. Those refugees who did not have their own housing, but lived at relatives' places were not included in the current program, resulting in contestations. At the same time, those registered in the program were anxious about whether the amounts declared on the certificates would be enough for purchasing housing (the value of the certificate was calculated according to local market prices for housing).

After the program began in Kotayk in October 2007, 180 out of the 240 originally-eligible refugee families bought housing, while 60 could not, or did not receive the certificates, according to a state official I interviewed. For example, one of my informants, an elderly woman living alone, did not receive the certificate because she did not live in the dormitory constantly: on several occasions, she visited grandchildren in Russia for long periods of time. Another informant mentioned two single women of mature age and one family (mother and son) among her neighbors, who could not purchase housing in time.

I interviewed three informants who were able to purchase flats and they explained the general situation of neighboring families as follows: the value of the certificates was higher than many pessimistically had guessed and they enabled them to purchase property. Families of 1–2 people received AMD 6,750,000 (roughly EUR 14,000), of 3–4 people AMD 8,250,000 (EUR 17,000), and 5–6 people AMD 9,000,000 (EUR 18,500).

However, the amount was minimal and mainly allowed for the purchase of un-renovated apartments, many not inhabited for a few decades, with barely functioning infrastructure, usually on the top floors of socialist-style block buildings, either on the outskirts of Kotayk or outside of it. Many, however, used this chance to purchase apartments in order not to lose the money they were offered. Some families purchased housing in a small settlement not far from Kotayk, in buildings which were formerly constructed for refugees, but left uninhabited due to their marginal location and the out-migration of the refugees.

In fact, for some refugees with 1–2 person families, the minimal amount of the aid provided meant that they had to purchase housing outside of Kotayk, and then spend a long time commuting to their workplace, or any other part of town. Given the bad living conditions in cheap flats that were similar to conditions in

1 This article only concentrates on the current state housing policy for refugees. It must be mentioned, however, that since the refugees arrived, the state has treated them, at least discursively, as compatriots, and has taken the responsibility to provide housing for them. Beyond a few specific rights which only citizens or refugees have, the state treats them similarly in most legal and policy aspects. However, the assistance provided to the refugees with no property was hardly enough to give them a living standard equal to that of the locals. Significant numbers of refugees were among the poorest in Armenia (UNDP 1999). The state representatives explained this fact by pointing to limited resources of the state due to the war and economy crisis. Ghazaryan (N.D.) offers a critique of the state naturalization program.

dormitories, their remote location from the city center (a contrast to the central location of the dormitories), and lack of resources for renovation, some simply found it more convenient to continue living in the dormitories. Others did not manage to find an appropriate offer. Usually families who purchased flats in the city districts either added a sum of money to the certificate (often with relatives' help), or purchased housing in a dormitory for families, which was organized more like private flats.

All three informants had moved into their own flats only several months after purchasing them, because initially it was not possible to live in them. Two of the flats were on the top floors and their roofs had been damaged with rainwater flowing in, leaving the walls full of moisture. The flats had not been inhabited for about two decades. The floors, windows, doors were old and partly destroyed. The refugees hoped to renovate them. One family, a widow with two young sons, both blue-collar workers, purchased a remote, 2-room-flat in a settlement near Kotayk for AMD 7,000,000 (about EUR 14,000) which was on the top floor of a nine-storey building, but did not have a working elevator. They had saved AMD 1,250,000 for renovations and started renovating the flat immediately while staying in the dormitory. The mother worked as a cleaner and did housework, while the sons worked two shifts a day: they used to visit their flat after the working day and do repair work in the evenings. Working alone, they first repaired the building's roof, benefiting the neighbors as well. They connected the flat to the gas network, replaced the windows and installed a new toilet. They also changed the electrical wire and water pipes in their flat. They had to install a pump for the water system, because without it the water simply did not reach the 9th floor. However, they quickly ran out of money. The floors consisted of bare concrete and were quite cold. The mother covered the floor with old cloth to survive the winter. In October 2008, the family was planning to move into their new flat, which still needed considerable work. The family, however, was eager to keep on working, earning, and saving in order to continue the renovations.

Instead of a Conclusion: Finally Becoming "Locals"?

In general the refugee families who purchased flats were very enthusiastic despite the new hardships: at least they had a goal to work toward and a way to accumulate the results of their labor. If earlier they saw no real end to their precarious living conditions, now life had become more meaningful for them, at least with expected improvements, which were under their own control. For the first time, they felt they were able to add to their well being. Indeed, the state program has given refugees greater agency, at least those who purchased housing. Obviously, the stereotypical view of refugees as passive and only waiting for state support is misleading: the families I met worked quite hard. The scarcity of state provisions, however, made their current living conditions hardly different from those of dormitories: cold, damp, and a general lack of resources.

This discussion leaves open many questions. I have worked with refugees at a moment of transition. Will they ultimately be able to establish a life with which they will be satisfied after the first excitement passes? Will they be able to establish connections with their neighbors and get rid of the "refugee" label?

Notes:

In order to preserve the anonymity of the informants, I use the name Kotayk instead of the real name of the town where I conducted my fieldwork. Kotayk is the name of the region in which the town is located.

About the author:

Milena Baghdasaryan is a PhD candidate at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale, Germany. This article is based on anthropological fieldwork carried out in Kotayk in 2006–2007 among the refugees from Azerbaijan living in dormitories. The fieldwork is a part of a research project at MPI for Social Anthropology.

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Analysis

Russia's "Internal South Caucasus:" The Role and Importance of Caucasus Societies for Russia

By Sergey Markedonov, Moscow

Abstract

Large diasporas from the three South Caucasus countries live inside Russia, though estimates vary on their actual size. None of these groups are monolithic and politicians and the media often fail to understand their diversity and the role they play. The diasporas have an impact on the development of relations between Russia and its South Caucasus neighbors, not least through the large money transfers flowing from Russia to the region. The experience of productive ties between Sochi officials and the Georgian community living in the area could serve as a model for improving Georgian-Russian relations. To date, Russia has underestimated the role that its diasporas could play in advancing its interests.

A Zone of Special Interest

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia declared the South Caucasus a zone of its priority national interests. At the end of August 2008's "five-day war," Moscow came to see this Eurasian region not only as an important priority, but as a sphere of geopolitical influence. Accordingly, the South Caucasus is important for Russia not only as a foreign policy problem, but as a major influence on the security of the North Caucasus republics, which are part of the Russian Federation. Present-day Russia is a state with numerous diasporas, representing the various ethnic groups of the independent South Caucasus states. Thus, we can speak about "an internal South Caucasus" in Russia, which plays a significant role in the development of Russian business, domestic, and foreign policies.

Calculating the Size of the Diasporas

Russia's Armenian community is the largest diaspora from the South Caucasus. According to Russia's 2002 census, there are 1.13 million Armenians living in the country. This ethnic group is the fourth in absolute size, following the Russians, Tatars, and Ukrainians. In some Russian regions, such as Stavropol and Krasnodar, the Armenians became the second largest ethnic group, after the Russians, in the post-Soviet period. There are 350,200 Armenians in Stavropol, 274, 600 in Krasnodar, and 230,000 in Rostov.

In October 2003, the Union of Armenians of Russia helped form the World Armenian Organization, which brings together representatives of Armenian diasporas in 52 countries. Ara Abramian, an influential Russian entrepreneur, was elected its president. Abramian helped renovate the Kremlin in 1994-1999 and served as an official supporter during Putin's 2000 and 2004 presidential campaigns. The Novo-Nakhichevan and Russian diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church (centered in Moscow) are active in Russia and Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov has noted the close ties between the Armenian and Russian Orthodox churches. In recent years, the Russian Orthodox Church has sought to achieve ideological and political dominance in Russia.

Russia's Georgian diaspora numbers about 198,000 and is considered the largest of all Georgian diasporas. However, the Georgian diaspora in Turkey may be larger, but that country does not provide data on the size of its ethnic groups and many Georgian there have assimilated.

Russia's Azerbaijani diaspora is the world's second largest, following the one in Iran. The 2002 census listed 621,840 Azerbaijanis in Russia, spread among 55 regions. The largest groups are in Dagestan (111,700), Moscow (94,542), St. Petersburg (approximately 90,000), Volgograd Oblast (14,000), and Tver Oblast (4,600). Azerbaijani businessmen work at the highest levels in Russia, including Vagit Alekperov, the head of Lukoil, Tel'man Ismailov (AST holding and Moscow's Praga restaurant) and El'man Bairamov (Mosazervinzavod).

According to the leaders of the diaspora organizations and representatives of the law enforcement agencies, the Armenian, Georgian, and Azerbaijani presence inside Russia is significantly higher than the official figures. The leaders of the All Russian Azerbaijani Congress count 1.5 to 2 million Azerbaijanis in Russia. In 2001 Azerbaijani President Heidar Aliev cited a figure of 1.2 million. Abramian claimed that there were 2 million Armenians living in Russia at the beginning of the 2000s. According to Georgian ethnic associations, there are between 300,000 and 500,000 Georgians in Russia. The differences between the official and unoffical figures reflects the presence of illegal and labor migrants, whose goal is not to integrate into Russian society, but to find temporary work or study in Russian universities.

What is a Diaspora?

None of the Caucasus societies are monolithic in their origins, make-up, or even language. This is particularly true of the Armenian and Georgian diasporas. For example, the Armenian society of Rostov Oblast can trace its roots to the end of the 18th century. Many of its members do not speak Armenian. The Georgian village of Greater Sochi in the Plastunik Raion has been around since the 1880s. Many members of the three diasporas have Russian passports and speak Russian, while many others are citizens of the three South Caucasus states. However, holding a passport or even knowing the language is not a decisive factor. For example, the representation of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic in Moscow (which works out of the Armenian embassy) is staffed with Muscovite-Armenians who barely speak Armenian.

Frequently, the Russian media tries to give the term "diaspora" legal substance. It views the diaspora as some sort of organically-united association, something like an estate, but with an ethnic base. Professor Viktor Dyatlov, the famous Russian expert on migration, was right when he said "this wild primordial discourse is particularly characteristic for bureaucrats and journalists trying to deal with the phenomenon of multiethnic associations." Thus we see such formulations as "The Armenian Diaspora Specializes in the Hotel Business" (as the Krasnodar media frequently write), or "the law enforcement agencies agreed with the diasporas" (as I saw in an Irkutsk newspaper) and "Azerbaijanis control the Moscow markets," (as Moscow-based publications frequently write).

In reality, the situation is much more complicated. If we are talking about "agreements or negotiations between the authorities and the diasporas," then we mean meetings of bureaucrats with the leaders of social or cultural organizations of Georgian, Armenians, or Azerbaijanis. But what role do these ethno-cultural non-profit organizations really play? In our view, such social structures cannot represent the interests of an entire ethnic group. First, there is no accepted procedure to legitimize the positions of the leaders (the leaders of one or another social-cultural organization were not elected by all the Armenians or Georgians in Moscow or Krasnodar Krai). Second, what we describe as a "diaspora" is a closer to an "ideal type," useful for describing an ethnic community in theoretical terms. Usually, as noted above, these communities are not monolithic, including citizens of a variety of countries and sub-ethnic groups. In the Armenian diaspora in Rostov Oblast, one can find Armenians who descended from migrants who left the Crimea in the 18th century (Russian citizens who speak Russian as their native language), refugees from Azerbaijan (also with a Russian passport and in many cases, Russian-speaking), and labor migrants from Armenia and Georgia (with Armenian and Georgian passports respectively). Among the Azerbaijanis in Moscow, there are native Muscovites (people who were born, grew up, and were educated in the Russian capital) as well as people who emigrated from Azerbaijan and Georgia (the Kvemo Kartli region).

Accordingly, formulations of the type that "the Armenian diaspora controls the banks" and the "Azerbaijani diaspora controls the markets" are incorrect from the academic point of view. From a political perspective, they are simply dangerous because they encourage xenophobia and flagrant racism. Among the Russian Armenians, Georgians, and Azerbaijanis, there are doctors, entrepreneurs, teachers, and naturally criminals. Therefore, designating "spheres of specialization" to the ethnic groups is a great mistake. In particular, researchers face considerable difficulties in finding reliable statistics saying how many people of each group are working in which sphere.

The Role and Influence of the Caucasus Factor

The role and influence of the "Caucasus factor" inside Russia on determining Russia's foreign policy to the

region deserves much greater attention than it has received to date. It is particularly important for Russia to understand the role that representatives of the Caucasus diaspora play in advancing Russia's interests in Eurasia. Moreover, the diasporas can play a part in regulating the conflicts that shape the region, such as the Armenian-Azerbaijan dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh, and reviving the Russian-Georgian dialogue that was effectively halted by the events of the 2008 "five-day" war.

The socio-economic influence of representatives of the diaspora on their "historic homelands" also deserves serious attention. In conditions of the global financial crisis, this influence takes on great importance. The most intense monetary flows go from Russia to Azerbaijan. Annual remissions make up $1.8 to $2.4 billion, according to Ruslan Grinberg, director of the Institute of the Economy of the Russian Academy of Sciences. In 2006, Russian Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin claimed the flows were $2 billion a year. Somewhat less intensive flows go from Russia to Georgia and Armenia. According to the Bank of Russia, during the first quarter of 2008, flows from Russia to Georgia were $142 million. The National Bank of Georgia claimed that from January to May 2008, Georgia's commercial banks received from abroad $378 million, of which $223.7 million came from Russia. Thus almost 60 percent of foreign money sent to Georgia comes from Russia. According to the Central Bank of Armenia, 70 percent of "foreign transfers" to Armenia come from Russia. Of course, these official figures are only the tip of the iceberg since many Azerbaijanis, Georgians, and Armenians transfer money by hand.

The entire post-Soviet period is replete with examples of how the disaporas shape bilateral Russian-Armenian, Russian-Georgian, and Russian-Azerbaijani relations. The anti-Armenian policy pursued by Krasnodar Krai governor Aleksandr Tkachev significantly affected relations between Moscow and Yerevan. In 2003, the presidents of Russia and Armenia discussed the statements of the Krasnodar governor. Subsequently, he had to explain himself to the Armenian president and then the anti-Armenian rhetoric stopped. However, even today xenophobia (along with the Kremlin's ambiguous position toward Karabakh, the intense pressure exerted by the Russian oligarchs on business in Armenia, and Moscow's displeasure at Yerevan's contacts with the USA and the EU) remains one of the key points of discord between Russia and Armenia.

The Azerbaijani diaspora played an active intermediary role in improving Russian-Azerbaijani relations in 2000-2001. These relations had soured in the beginning of the 1990s, during and after the Karabakh conflict. President Heidar Aliev initiated the creation of the influential diaspora organization, the All-Russian Azerbaijani Congress, in 2001. He made it a state priority to maximally unite all Azerbaijanis living outside of their "historic homeland." During the years of its activity, the Congress sought to play the role of an exclusive intermediary between the authorities, law-enforcement agencies, and ordinary Azerbaijanis, particularly migrants.

The most complicated Caucasus relationship is between Russia and Georgia. After Mikheil Saakashvili came to power through the Rose Revolution, the ethno-political conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia began to thaw. The Georgian community living in Russia became a hostage of the countries' bilateral relationship. Most importantly, it became difficult to travel between Georgia and Russia. In December 2000, ostensibly as part of its battle with terrorism, Russia introduced an entry visa requirement for Georgian citizens seeking to visit Russia even though this policy violated the agreements establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States, which set up a visa-free zone. In March 2001, the so-called "adaptation period" ended and it was no longer possible to cross the border with a Soviet passport in the absence of a foreign passport with an entry visa. Although these conditions created extra hardships for Georgians visiting Russia and Russian Federation citizens visiting Georgia, the hope remained that the two countries would eventually return to the pre-2001 order. Moreover, during periods of thaw between the two states, such as the spring of 2008, Russian and Georgian diplomats discussed the possibility of canceling the visa regime. Generally, before the 2008 war, the process of securing a visa in either direction was not difficult, and there were easier procedures for some categories of citizens, such as Georgian citizens who worked and lived in the Russian Federation and were registered in a Russian city or town.

During the Fall 2006 downturn in Georgian-Russian relations, Russia forcibly deported Georgians from its territory. This fact helped bolster the popularity of the Georgian leader, who employed nationalist rhetoric and presented himself as the "president of all Georgians." It also dealt a blow to Russia's international prestige, increasing xenophobia in day-to-day life as well as at the official level. However, the Kremlin learned lessons from the experience of 2006. In the first day of the "five-day war" President Dmitry Medvedev publicly emphasized that the tragedy in South Ossetia in no way should affect the fate of Georgians who were citizens of Russia or any other country.

Additionally, it is worth noting that there are examples of successful cooperation between the Georgian com-

munity in Russia and the local authorities. Most illustrative is the experience of the Georgian community in Sochi, which will be the site of the 2014 Olympics. After the tragic events in Abkhazia of 1992-3, many Georgian refugees fled to the Plastunka Raion near Sochi. In 1999 the Sochi city authorities estimated that 12,000 refugees had arrived. Two years earlier, employees of the Georgian embassy in Moscow estimated that the number of Georgians living in Krasnodar Krai was 17,000 individuals, including 11,000 in the greater Sochi area. Despite some difficulties between the krai and local authorities, there is no evidence of any conflict between local Georgians (including refugees from Abkhazia) and the local population (including ethnic Abkhaz)! According to the Russian human rights organization Memorial, "the good relations between the Sochi administration and the national-cultural organizations have a positive impact on the situation of the forced migrants. In greater Sochi there are 14 national-cultural associations (societies, diasporas) whose main goal is preserving and developing national cultures, languages, and customs. Representatives of the city administration are also in touch with the cultural center Iveria and provide aid in opening Georgian language classes and holding folklore festivals."

The experience of Moscow, home to many from the South Caucasus, is also useful. It is well known that during the Russian-Georgian crisis of 2006, the city authorities refused to provide lists of Georgian students in middle schools and universities, blocking attempts to create problems for these students.

Thus in drawing up possible scenarios for the development of a Russian-Georgian dialogue, the "Sochi experience" can be used as a positive model of potential "small steps." A similarly positive model is the contacts between the Russian and Georgian autocephalous Orthodox churches. The visit of the Georgian Patriarch Ilia II (according to all Georgian polls, one of the most popular and trusted public figures in the country) to Moscow during the burial of Patriarch Aleksei II in December 2008 was a signal for the Russian and Georgian intelligentsia, including the diaspora. Ilia II brought many authoritative figures of Georgian culture on his trip. In Moscow, members of the local Georgian community met with him. Additionally, in contrast to representatives of official Tbilisi, the Georgian patriarch was able to meet with leaders of the Russian state.

Nevertheless, after Georgia and Russia severed diplomatic relations in August 2008, crossing the Russian border became much more difficult. Following the war, citizens cannot get visas directly from the other country's embassy, but have to appeal to Swiss intermediaries who look after each side's interests. Thus Georgian citizens have to obtain a visa from the Russian section of the Swiss embassy's consulate. For Russian citizens, the situation is a little easier, since they can obtain a single-entry visa for Georgia upon landing at the airport, though multi-entry visas can only be obtained through the Swiss intermediaries. These procedures create significant problems since the number of visas for Georgian citizens seeking to visit Russia is limited, as is the number of multi-entry visas for Russian citizens entering Georgia.

Russia's Official Policy toward Migrants

Russia's official policy toward migrants and diasporas never supported discriminatory measures and the events of 2006 and 2008 were an exception to this rule. A separate article would be required to examine the migration policies of individual regions. At this level, in some cases, individual governors attempted to impose restrictions on migrants, for example in Krasnodar and Stavropol krais. Krasnodar Krai represents a special case. There the peak of xenophobia was the events of 2002, when the governor declared the need to defend the "Kuban's Cossack land" and restrain migrants. However, today in anticipation of the 2014 Olympics and the need to preserve strategic relations with Yerevan, the krai authorities have effectively reduced their tough xenophobic propaganda. Nevertheless, at the same time, Russia's law enforcement agencies and the general procurator (including its regional branches) are not very active in investigating cases of xenophobia and prosecuting the perpetrators. As a rule, they classify the attacks of various nationalist groups (from the skinheads in Moscow to the neo-Cossack formations in the south) as "ordinary conflicts" that are not driven by ethno-political motivations.

In any case, Russia can use the diasporas (in all their complexity) to advance Russian interests in the South Caucasus more actively. Moscow should have long ago given up its practice of reducing all contacts to the official level and questions of status. There are many channels for influence, not only on the political elites, but on intellectuals, businessmen, and ordinary citizens. In this "unofficial" work, the diaspora is one of the most important, and unfortunately until now, most underestimated, resources.

About the author
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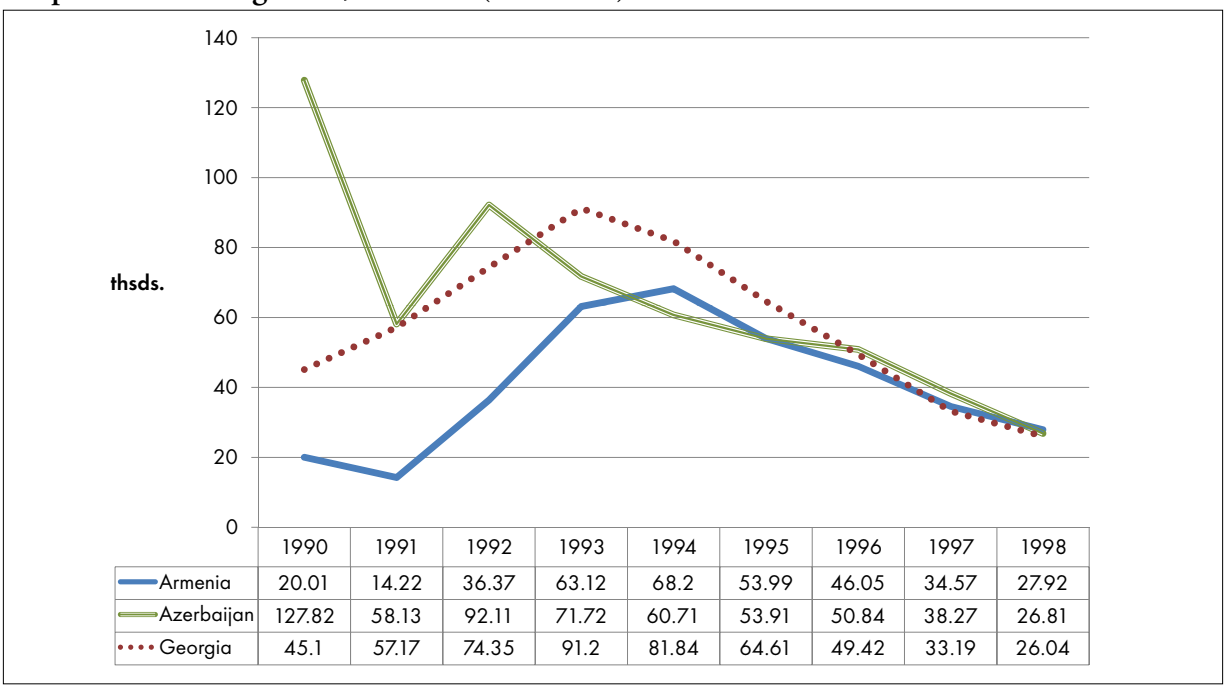
Statistics

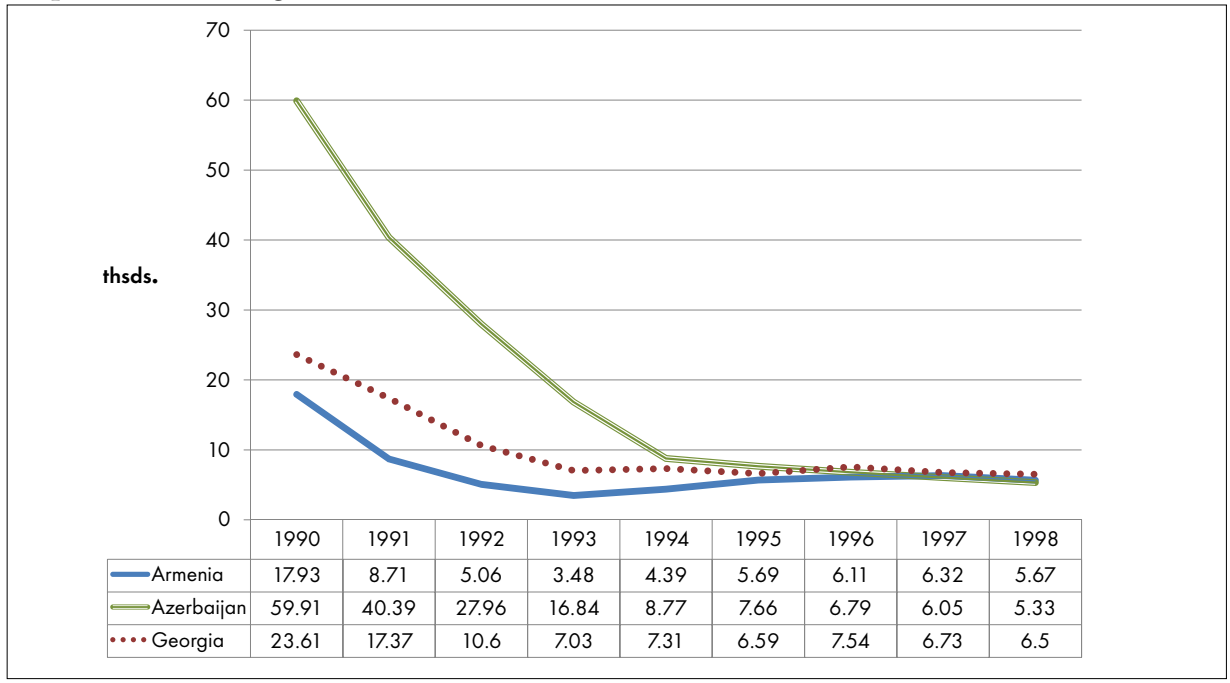
Migration from and to the Countries of the South Caucasus, 1990–98

Graph 1: Total Emigration, 1990–98 (thousands)



	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Armenia	20.01	14.22	36.37	63.12	68.2	53.99	46.05	34.57	27.92
Azerbaijan	127.82	58.13	92.11	71.72	60.71	53.91	50.84	38.27	26.81
Georgia	45.1	57.17	74.35	91.2	81.84	64.61	49.42	33.19	26.04

Graph 2: Total Immigration, 1990–98 (thousands)

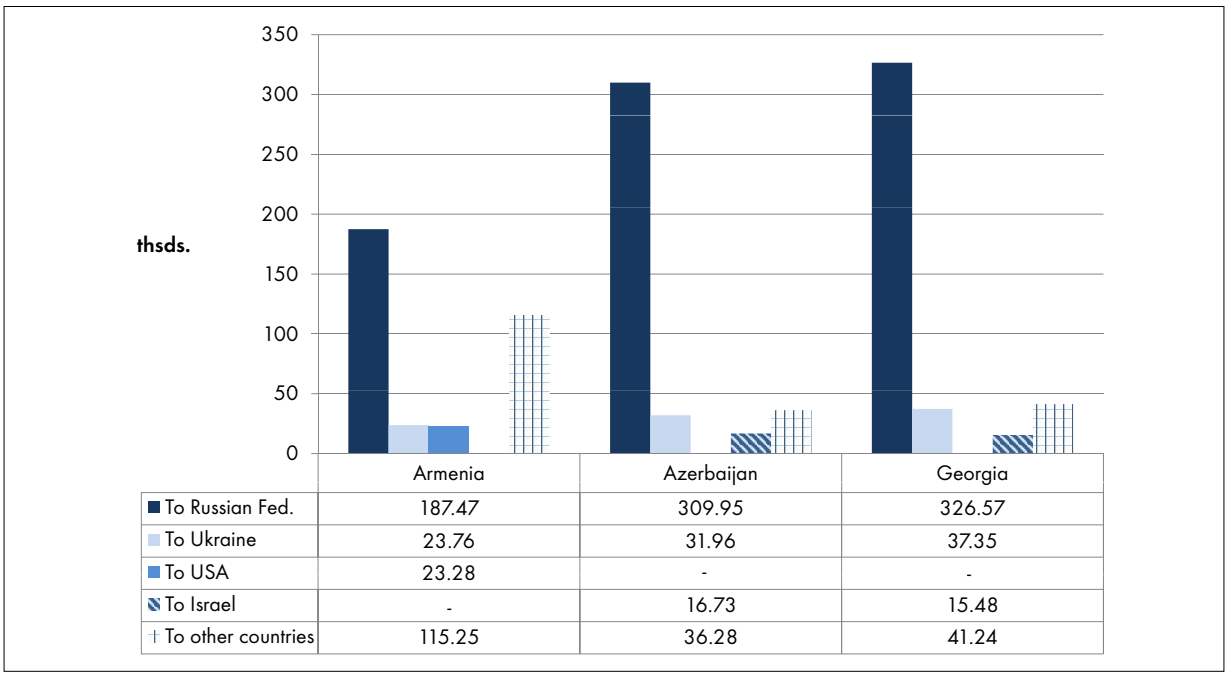


	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Armenia	17.93	8.71	5.06	3.48	4.39	5.69	6.11	6.32	5.67
Azerbaijan	59.91	40.39	27.96	16.84	8.77	7.66	6.79	6.05	5.33
Georgia	23.61	17.37	10.6	7.03	7.31	6.59	7.54	6.73	6.5

Note: Total migration to countries with economies in transition and countries with established market economies.

Source: UN – International Migration Report 2002.
http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/ewmigration/E-W_Migrationreport.pdf

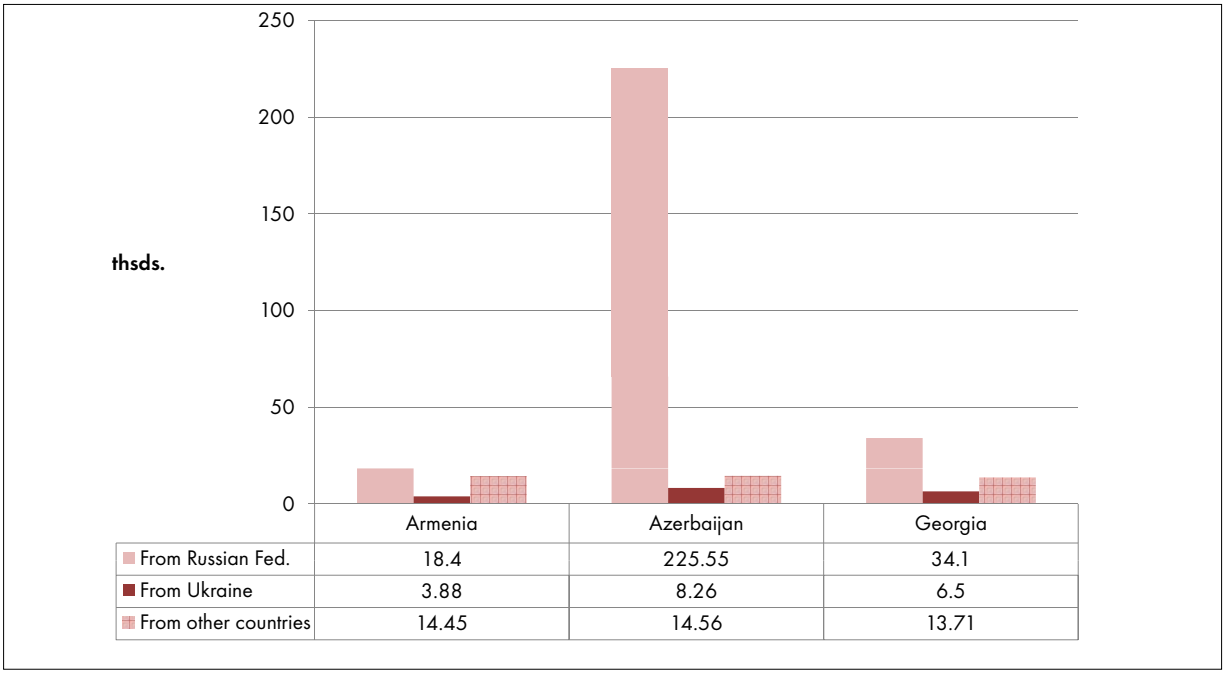
Graph 3: Total Emigration from the South Caucasus, 1992–98 (thousands)



	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia
To Russian Fed.	187.47	309.95	326.57
To Ukraine	23.76	31.96	37.35
To USA	23.28	-	-
To Israel	-	16.73	15.48
To other countries	115.25	36.28	41.24

Note: Data for the former states of the USSR were first published in 1998 in Belgium, in 1997 in Denmark and in 1995 in Italy. Austrian data are available only from 1996 on.

Graph 4: Total Immigration to the South Caucasus, 1992–98 (thousands)

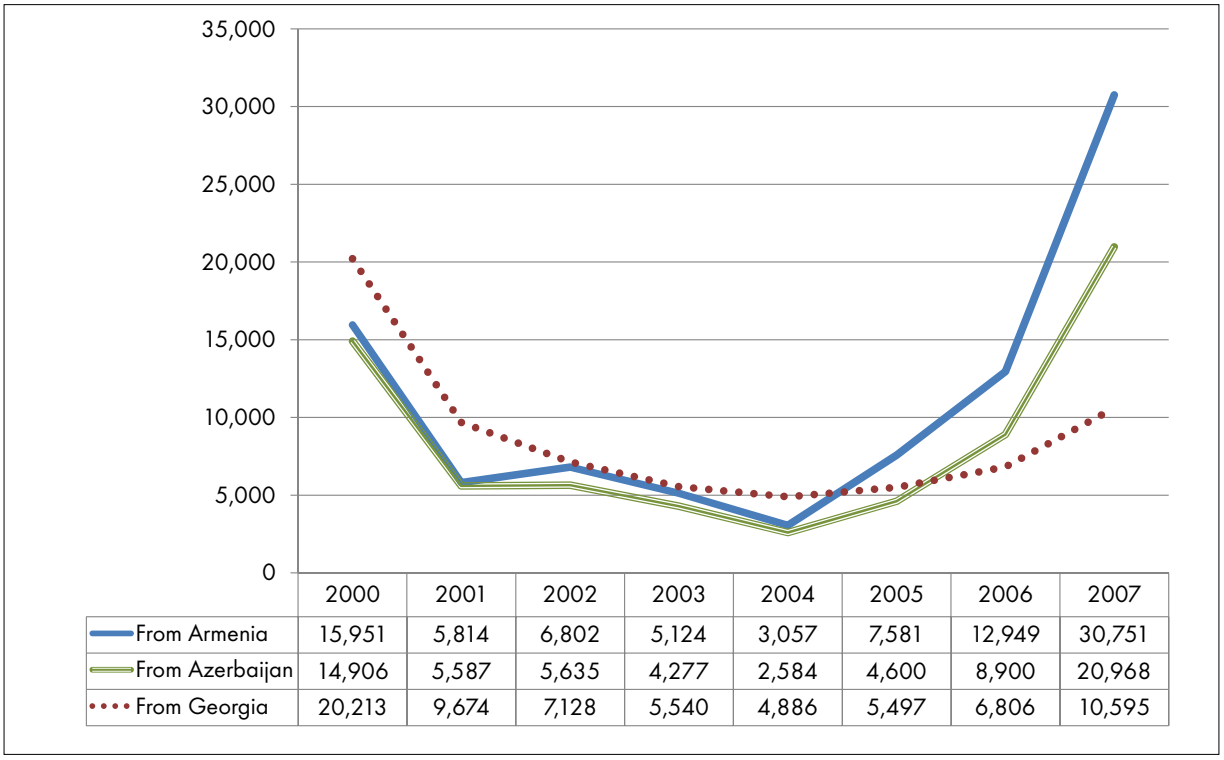


	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia
From Russian Fed.	18.4	225.55	34.1
From Ukraine	3.88	8.26	6.5
From other countries	14.45	14.56	13.71

Note: Canada, France, Greece, Israel, Portugal and the United States do not collect outflow data.

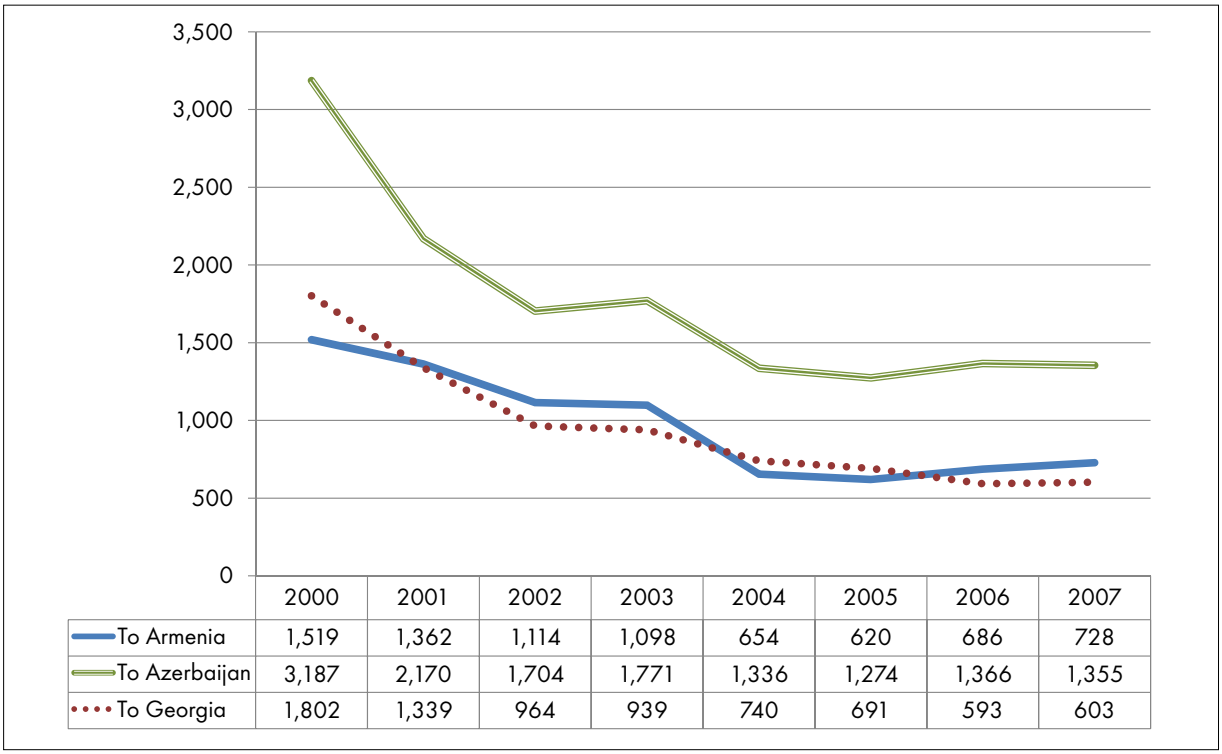
Source: UN – International Migration Report 2002.
http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/ewmigration/E-W_Migrationreport.pdf

Graph 5: Emigration from the South Caucasus to Russia, 2000–2007



	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
From Armenia	15,951	5,814	6,802	5,124	3,057	7,581	12,949	30,751
From Azerbaijan	14,906	5,587	5,635	4,277	2,584	4,600	8,900	20,968
From Georgia	20,213	9,674	7,128	5,540	4,886	5,497	6,806	10,595

Graph 6: Immigration to the South Caucasus from Russia, 2000–2007

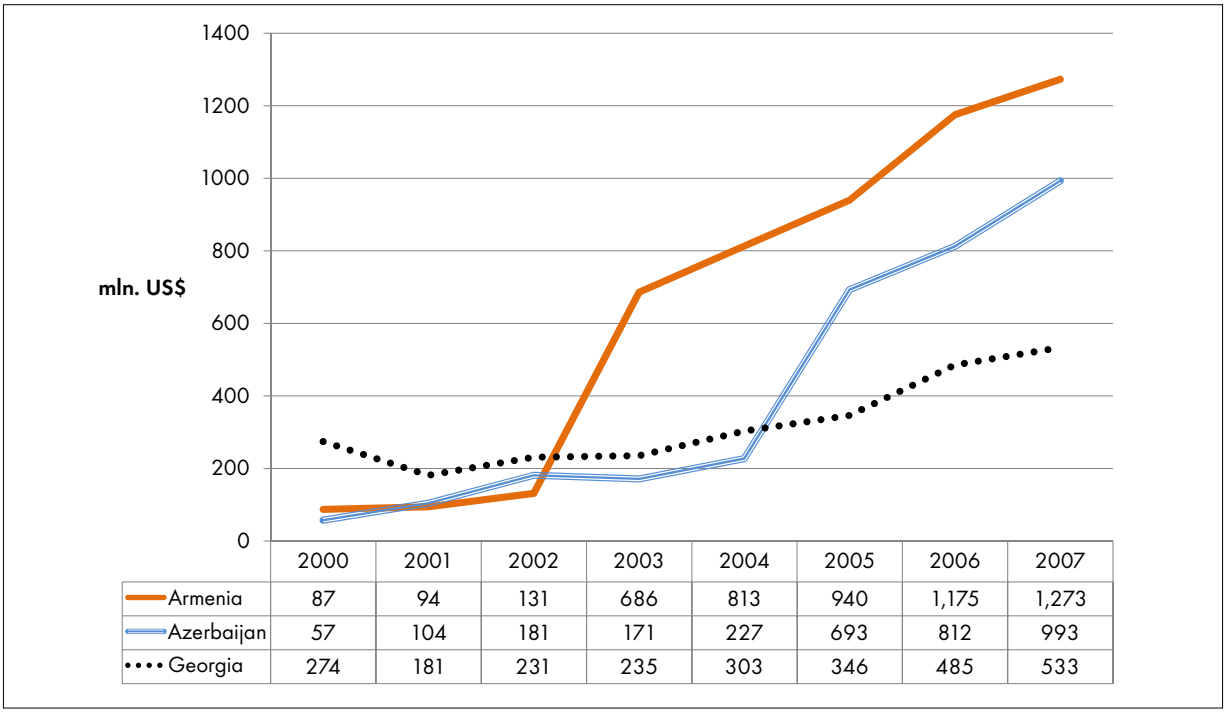


	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
To Armenia	1,519	1,362	1,114	1,098	654	620	686	728
To Azerbaijan	3,187	2,170	1,704	1,771	1,336	1,274	1,366	1,355
To Georgia	1,802	1,339	964	939	740	691	593	603

Source: Russian Statistical Yearbook 2008.

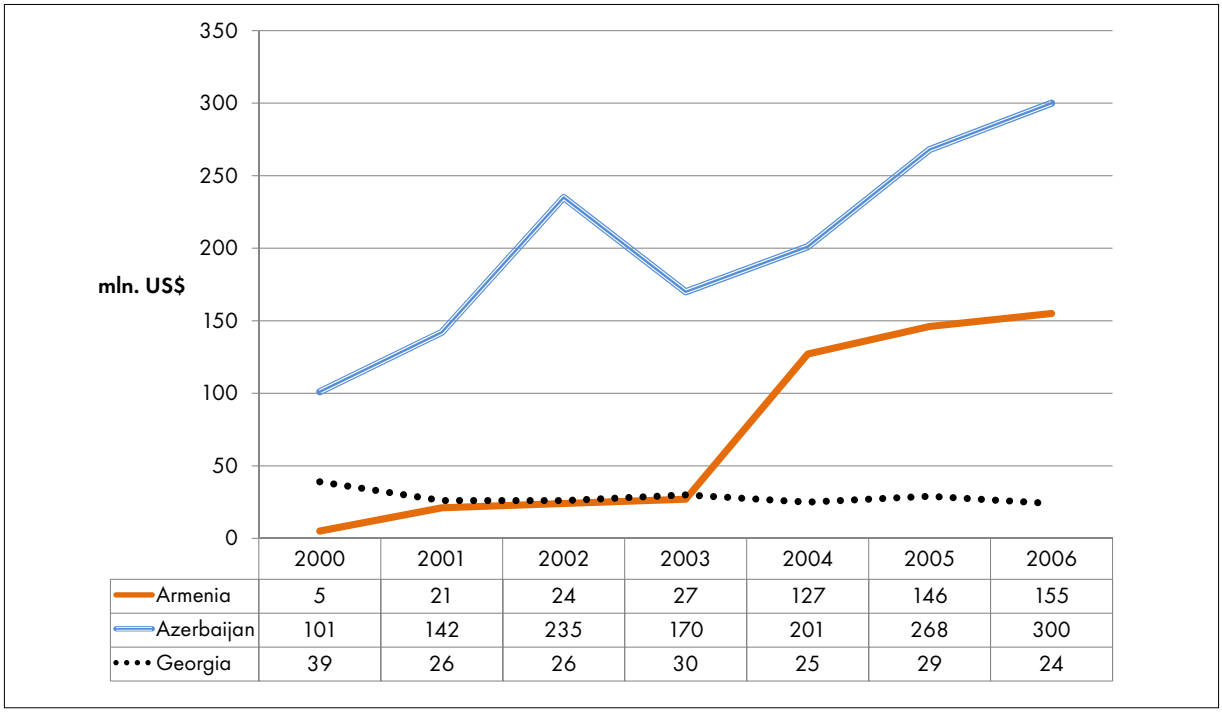
Remittance Flows

Graph 1: Total Inward Remittance Flows 2000–2007 (million US$)



	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Armenia	87	94	131	686	813	940	1,175	1,273
Azerbaijan	57	104	181	171	227	693	812	993
Georgia	274	181	231	235	303	346	485	533

Graph 2: Total Outward Remittance Flows 2000–2006 (million US$)

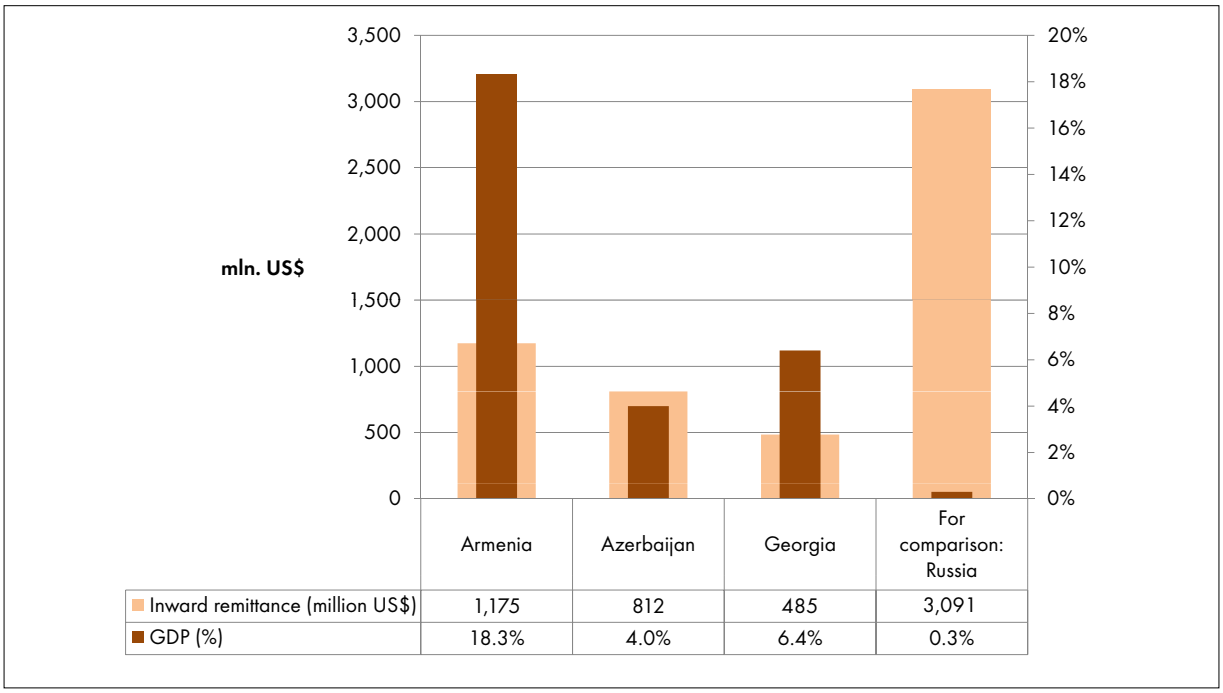


	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Armenia	5	21	24	27	127	146	155
Azerbaijan	101	142	235	170	201	268	300
Georgia	39	26	26	30	25	29	24

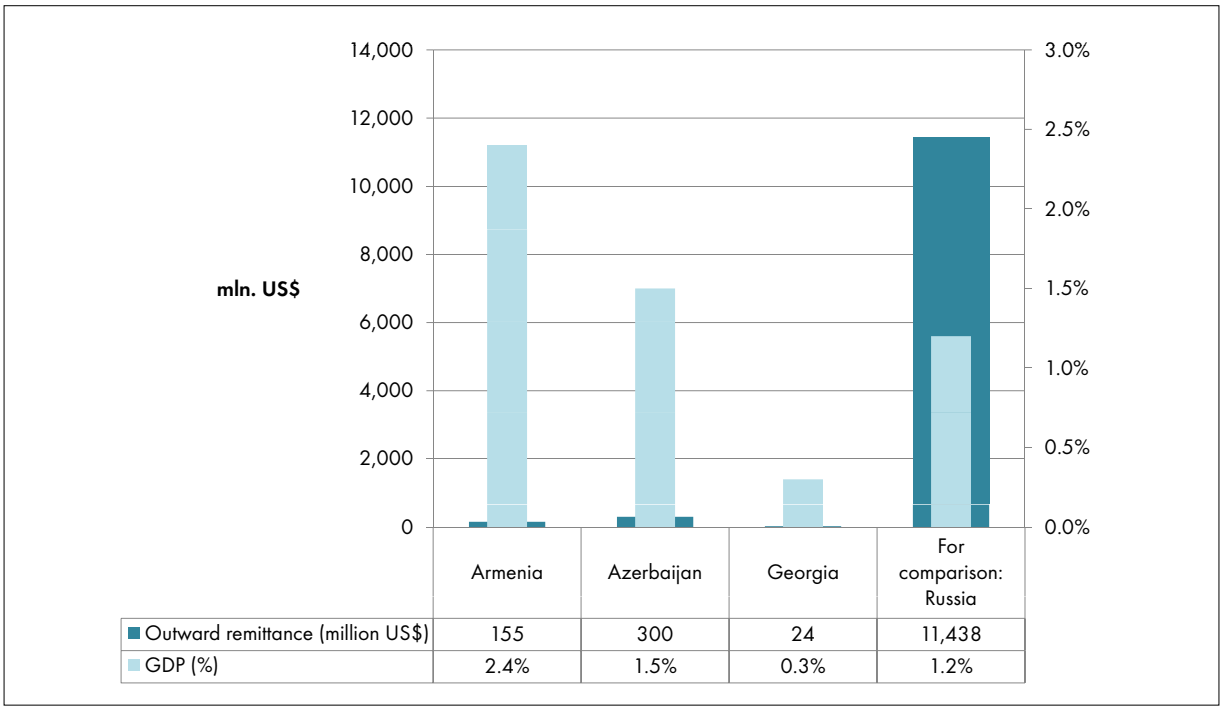
Source: The World Bank, Migration and Remittances Factbook 2008.

http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTDECPROSPECTS/0,,contentMDK:21352016~menuPK:3145470~pagePK:64165401~piPK:64165026~theSitePK:476883~isCURL:Y,00.html

Graphic 3: Total Inward Remittance (in million US$ and as % of GDP), 2006



Graphic 4: Total Outward Remittance (in million US$ and as % of GDP), 2006



Source: The World Bank, Migration and Remittances Factbook 2008.

http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTDECPROSPECTS/0,,contentMDK:21352016~menuPK:3145470~pagePK:64165401~piPK:64165026~theSitePK:476883~isCURL:Y,00.html

Refugees

Table 1: Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the South Caucasus (by Country of Asylum, End-2007)

	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia
Refugees	4,566	2,352	1,047
Asylum-seekers	98	75	10
IDPs protected/ assisted by UNHCR	-	686,586	273,193

Note: Refugees are Persons recognized under the 1951 UN Convention/1967 Protocol, the 1969 OAU Convention, in accordance with the UNHCR Statute, persons granted a complementary form of protection and those granted temporary protection. In the absence of Government estimates, UNHCR has estimated the refugee population in 24 industrialized countries based on 10 years of individual refugee recognition.

Asylum-seekers are Persons whose application for asylum or refugee status is pending at any stage in the asylum procedure.

Protected IDPs are Persons who are displaced within their country and to whom UNHCR extends protection and/or assistance. It also includes people in IDP-like situations. This category is descriptive in nature and includes groups of persons who are inside their country of nationality or habitual residence and who face protection risks similar to those of IDPs but who, for practical or other reasons, could not be reported as such.

Source: UNHCR, Statistical Yearbook 2007, June 2008.

http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?id=4981c3dc2&tbl=STATISTICS

Table 2: Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from the South Caucasus (by Country of Origin, End-2007

	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia
Total refugees and people in refugee-like situations	15,436	15,916	11,810
Asylum-seekers	3,983	1,902	4,066
IDPs protected/ assisted by UNHCR	-	686,586	273,193

Note: Asylum-seekers are Persons whose application for asylum or refugee status is pending at any stage in the asylum procedure.

Protected IDPs are Persons who are displaced within their country and to whom UNHCR extends protection and/or assistance. It also includes people in IDP-like situations. This category is descriptive in nature and includes groups of persons who are inside their country of nationality or habitual residence and who face protection risks similar to those of IDPs but who, for practical or other reasons, could not be reported as such.

Source: UNHCR, Statistical Yearbook 2007, June 2008.

http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?id=4981c3dc2&tbl=STATISTICS

Compiled by Stefanie Zabel

Chronicle

From 17 February to 17 March 2009

17 February 2009	Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze visits Poland
17 February 2009	Col. Koba Lachkepiani appointed as new commander of the land forces in Georgia
18 February 2009	Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze says that Georgia will send troops to Afghanistan
19 February 2009	Azerbaijani Russian-language website day.az is shut down
20 February 2009	Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze visits Armenia
23 February 2009	Prime Minister of breakaway republic of Abkhazia Alexandr Ankvab visits Moscow
23 February 2009	Activists collecting signatures to protest a referendum on presidential term limits in Azerbaijan are arrested in Baku
24 February 2009	The EU's special representative to the South Caucasus Peter Semneby meets Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian and opposition leader Levon Ter-Petrossian on a visit to Armenia
24 February 2009	State Oil Company of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) suspends money allocated for environmental projects in 2009
25 February 2009	Georgia commemorates the anniversary of the 1921 Red Army invasion
26 February 2009	Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze visits Ukraine
28 February 2009	Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigori Karasin meets Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mamedyarov on a visit to Azerbaijan
1 March 2009	Georgian President Saakashvili visits Abu Dhabi and Ras Al Khaimah emirate of UAE
3 March 2009	Armenia's national currency, the dram, goes into free fall after the Central Bank ceases its support
3 March 2009	Russia resumes limited visa service for Georgian citizens
3 March 2009	EU's war inquiry mission visits Abkhazia
4 March 2009	Russian President Dmitry Medvedev meets with Abkhaz leader Sergey Bagapsh in Moscow
5 March 2009	A meeting of the NATO-Georgia commission is held in Brussels
5 March 2009	Leader of the opposition movement Alliance for Georgia Irakli Alasania meets with the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana in Brussels
5 March 2009	U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton says NATO should continue to help Georgia and Ukraine to meet NATO standards
5 March 2009	Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili says that he rules out a new "military adventure" by Russia in Georgia
6 March 2009	The EU's war inquiry mission visits Tskhinvali in South Ossetia
6 March 2009	Leader of the opposition movement Alliance for Georgia Irakli Alasania calls for a joint "action plan" with other opposition parties to achieve the resignation of Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili
6 March 2009	Abkhaz leader Sergey Bagapsh says that Russia will soon sign an agreement with Abkhazia to allow the stationing of a Russian military base in the Gudauta district of Abkhazia for a term of 49 years
10 March 2009	The International Monetary Fund (IMF) officially approves a 540 million US dollars loan to Armenia
10 March 2009	Armenian Ombudsman Armen Harutiunian criticizes Armenia's "oligarchic" political system in annual report
11 March 2009	Georgia withdraws from the Moscow Eurovision Song Contest
12 March 2009	Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian criticizes Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's comments on the "collapse" of the Armenian economy
13 March 2009	U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza visits Georgia
16 March 2009	Georgian National Electricity Regulatory Commission (GNERC) takes over management of the Kazakh-owned gas distributor company KazTransGaz-Tbilisi
17 March 2009	Russia pledges 149 million US dollars aid package for Abkhazia and South Ossetia

About the Caucasus Analytical Digest

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