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EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR MINORITY ISSUES

Obstacles Impeding the Regional Integration of the Kvemo Kartli Region of Georgia

Jonathan Wheatley

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I. Introduction

This report is intended to provide an overview of the current social, economic and political situation in five *rayons* (districts) of Kvemo Kartli province in south-eastern Georgia: Gardabani *rayon*, Marneuli *rayon*, Bolnisi *rayon*, Dmanisi *rayon* and Tsalka *rayon*. By identifying and providing information about the current problems impeding the regional integration of those parts of Kvemo Kartli province in which national minorities are concentrated, this working paper will act as a guide for defining priorities and ensuring more informed intervention in the area.

Most of the fieldwork for this survey was carried out in these five *rayons* during the period 3 – 17 September 2004 and is informed by data obtained from a total of forty-two interviews and two focus group discussions. This fact-finding mission was also successful in serving an additional purpose at the grass roots level as it identified key stakeholders for a planned stakeholders' meeting which will be initiated by ECMI in the near future.

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II. Background Information

Geographic Features and Ethnic Demography

The province of Kvemo Kartli consists of six *rayons* or districts: Gardabani, Marneuli, Tetritsqaro, Bolnisi, Dmanisi and Tsalka. The administrative centre of Kvemo Kartli, Rustavi, is situated just 25 km from the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, and the towns of Marneuli and Gardabani are also close to the capital (at distances of 39 km and 42 km respectively). The western *rayons* of Kvemo Kartli (Dmanisi, Tetritsqaro and Tsalka) are not only more remote from Tbilisi geographically, but are also rather mountainous; the town of Tsalka is situated approximately 1,500 metres above sea level.

This report will only consider five *rayons* of Kvemo Kartli: Gardabani, Marneuli, Bolnisi, Dmanisi and Tsalka, as it is here that national minorities are concentrated. The demographic balance in both the city of Rustavi and in Tetritsqaro *rayon* does not differ significantly from the rest of Georgia; these locations will therefore not be discussed in this paper.

The three principal national minorities concentrated in Kvemo Kartli are Azeris, Armenians and Greeks. Azeris are by far the most numerous of the three groups; according to the 2002 census, 284,761 Azeris live in Georgia (6.5% of the population) and 78.9% of these live in Kvemo Kartli. According to the same census, Azeris form an absolute majority of the population of Marneuli, Bolnisi and Dmanisi *rayons* and more than 40% of the population in Gardabani *rayon* (see Table 1). The origin of Georgia's Azeri population can be traced back to the eleventh century, when the first nomadic Turkic tribes entered the region. Their numbers swelled further by a subsequent wave of migration by the Iuruq and Qizilbash Turks in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[1] The majority of Azeris in Georgia belong to the Shi'ite branch of Islam, although in Kvemo Kartli religion is rather weak and little distinction is made between the two branches of Islam (Sunni and Shi'ite).

Armenians and Greeks in Kvemo Kartli are mainly concentrated in Tsalka *rayon*, although communities of both nationalities can also be found in other *rayons*. Both groups settled in the region in the first half of the nineteenth century after leaving the territory of the Ottoman Empire

[1] George Sanikidze and Edward W. Walker, *Islam and Islamic Practices in Georgia*, Working Paper for the Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies (University of California, Berkeley, Fall 2004) at http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~bsp/publications/2004_04-sani.pdf.

(mainly Anatolia). According to the 2002 census, a majority of the population of Tsalka *rayon* is Armenian, as most Greeks have left the area to resettle in either Greece or Russia. A large number of Georgians have been arriving to replace them, mainly from Ajara and Svaneti (see below). The estimated 22% listed as Greek in Table 1 may be an overestimate since more Greeks have left since the census was taken. As a result of their provenance from the Ottoman lands, most of Tsalka's Greeks are Turkish speaking.

Table 1: Ethnic Composition of Five Rayons of Kvemo Kartli (2002 Census)

Rayon	Georgians	Azeris	Armenians	Greeks	Russians
Gardabani	53.20%	43.72%	0.93%	0.21%	0.87%
Marneuli	8.04%	83.10%	7.89%	0.33%	0.44%
Bolnisi	26.82%	65.98%	5.81%	0.59%	0.56%
Tsalka	12.02%	9.54%	54.98%	21.97%	0.60%
Dmanisi	31.24%	66.76%	0.52%	0.78%	0.56%

Georgians have traditionally formed a small minority in these five *rayons*. However, their numbers increased in the early 1950s, as inhabitants from other regions of Georgia, particularly Imereti, began to settle there. For example, the villages of Tsereteli and Orjonikidze in Marneuli *rayon* were founded by settlers from Sachkhere and Tchiatura *rayons* in 1950. A second wave of (Georgian) immigration occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s when migrants from Svaneti arrived after escaping landslides and avalanches in their homeland. These new migrants settled in all five *rayons*, but the largest number settled in Gardabani *rayon* and the town of Dmanisi. A further wave of migration from Svaneti began in 2004 as a result of floods and mudslides in the district of Mestia. Many of these new migrants came to Tsalka *rayon*, especially to the town of Tsalka. Finally, two waves of migration of Georgians from the mountainous regions of Ajara occurred. The first of these waves, which began in the late 1980s as a result of landslides, had limited impact on Kvemo Kartli, as most of the new migrants settled in Samtskhe-Javakheti. The second wave of migration from Ajara began in 1998 as rural inhabitants from the mountainous regions of Ajara (mainly Khulo *rayon*) left their land, once again as a result of landslides and soil erosion. This wave of migration, which was continuing at the time of writing, has had a very major impact on the demographic balance of Tsalka *rayon*. The figure given in Table 1 for the Georgian population of Tsalka *rayon* (12%) is probably an underestimate, given that most new arrivals from Ajara have simply occupied houses deserted by the Greek population and are

therefore not officially registered. Moreover, since the time the census was taken, many more migrants have arrived. Only one village in Tsalka *rayon* (Rekha) is originally ethnic Georgian.

According to the 2002 census, Kvemo Kartli is the province in Georgia that has been subject to the highest levels of emigration. Figures for 2002 show an 18.2% reduction in the population of Kvemo Kartli in comparison with 1989. As Table 2 (below) shows, the steepest decline in the population has occurred in the Dmanisi and Tsalka *rayons*. The fact that the population of Tsalka *rayon* is less than half what it was in 1989 probably reflects the emigration of the Greek population.

Table 2: Population Figures in Five Rayons of Kvemo Kartli (from the 1989 and 2002 Census Figures)

Rayon	1989 Population	2002 Population
Gardabani	114,762	114,348
Marneuli	120,394	118,221
Bolnisi	81,547	74,301
Tsalka	44,438	20,888
Dmanisi	51,844	28,034
KVEMO KARTLI	608,491	497,530

Economy and Infrastructure

Vegetable-growing is the main economic activity and potatoes are the main crop. One source estimated that 126,000 tonnes of potatoes were produced in Kvemo Kartli in 2000, which made up 41.8% of all potatoes produced in Georgia. According to this source, in the same year, Kvemo Kartli produced 25.4% of all vegetables produced in Georgia.[2] Fruit and grain (mainly wheat and maize) production is also significant, particularly in the Gardabani and Marneuli *rayons*. Livestock-breeding also plays an important role in the local economy, especially in the mountainous regions where hayfields make up a large proportion of agricultural land.

A major problem involves the distribution of land that previously belonged to collective farms (*kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy*). According to a 1992 decree, which stipulated how *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz*

[2] Figures were provided by the Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development.

land was to be distributed, the strip of land within 21 km of the Georgian border could not be allotted to private individuals. This strip included much of the Gardabani, Marneuli, Bolnisi and Dmanisi *rayons*. Moreover, according to the 1996 "Law on Ownership of Agricultural Land," the government reserved the right to retain control of land resources within that border zone and therefore much of the land close to the border with Armenia and Azerbaijan remained in the hands of various government agencies. In Marneuli *rayon*, for example, land around the villages of Kachaghana, Takalo, Kapanakhtsi and Sadakhlo was nominally owned by the Ministry of Defence. However, the soldiers never used it and the land was instead exploited for private profit.

For the most part, *sovkhoz* and *kolkhoz* land that was not privatised was leased out in a non-transparent manner. Very often the bulk of this land was rented by "local notables," often former *sovkhoz* directors or individuals with close personal links to members of the local administration. Most of these individuals were ethnic Georgians, since many Azeri directors of collective farms were replaced by Georgians (often "resettlers" from Svaneti) during the wave of nationalist mobilisation in 1989-91. Only a small minority of these "notables" were Azeri. Some private individuals renting the land even lived in other areas of Georgia. On occasions these "latifondisti" sub-let the land to local residents at vastly inflated prices. This practice was particularly prevalent in Bolnisi *rayon*, where potato growing provided a relatively high cash crop. Several local respondents in Bolnisi *rayon* complained that land was sub-let at prices of up to 600 USD per year, in comparison with a state price of 60-70 Lari (approx. 35 USD) for top-quality land.

Although the law prohibiting the distribution of land to private individuals in the 21km border zone was relaxed somewhat in the mid-1990s, allowing inhabitants to own small household plots, the (mainly Azeri) residents of Gardabani, Marneuli and Bolnisi *rayons* received only a fraction of the land that rural households received in most other regions of Georgia, where collective farm land was fully privatised. Most households received between 0.1 and 0.3 hectares of land. In Dmanisi *rayon*, more of the former *sovkoz* lands were distributed to the population, probably because of the relatively low quality of the land in the upland parts of the *rayon* (generally used to produce hay for livestock).

A further problem was that after the collective farms had been abolished, most of the farm machinery was either sold by the former collective farm directors or fell into disrepair. Many villages are therefore left with no machinery to cultivate or irrigate the land, and villagers are

forced to tend their plots by hand. Thus, despite the high quality of the soil, agricultural productivity is rather low and the economic potential of the land is far from being fully realised.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the productive capacity of local industry fell to a fraction of what it had been and continued to fall throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s. The electricity-producing unit Gardabani GRES was previously considered the main industrial entity in Gardabani *rayon*. However, according to the Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD), following the closure of some blocks and the privatization of others, the number of people working for Gardabani GRES fell from 1,800 people to around 200.[3] Due to the non-payment of electricity bills, often many of those still working there did not receive their salaries. The Madneuli gold mines near Kazreti in Bolnisi *rayon* are also a significant source of employment for the local population, but only for those living close to the mines (i.e. in Bolnisi *rayon* and parts of Dmanisi *rayon*).

On the other hand, by late 2002, the volume of trade had increased significantly, particularly in Marneuli *rayon*, thanks to the growth of the market at the Red Bridge on the border with Azerbaijan. However, this market is unregulated, so the government receives virtually no money from taxation and it is notorious for the transit of narcotics and other contraband. In May 2004 an attempt was made to crack down on the trade of contraband on the Red Bridge.

Emigrant remittances also provide an indispensable source of income for some rural families, particularly amongst ethnic Armenians in Tsalka *rayon*. Most migration is seasonal and involves the economically active male population, who go to Russia for temporary employment, often in the construction sector. Although a significant minority emigrate permanently, most return to their villages during the winter period to tend their crops.

As in most rural areas of Georgia, Kvemo Kartli suffers from serious infrastructure problems. The supply of electricity and water is highly irregular, particularly in the more remote highland areas far from Tbilisi. In most rural zones villagers have to rely on natural sources, such as well and springs, in order to obtain drinking water – often with deleterious effects on their health. In most areas, the roads are in a state of disrepair; this is particularly true of the more mountainous regions. In Tsalka *rayon*, one road (leading to Tetritskaro) has recently been rehabilitated by British Petroleum (BP) as part of the BTC (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan) pipeline project; the rest are

[3] *Ibid.*

little more than dirt tracks and are often closed in the winter. Gas supplies are another problem. Very few settlements are provided with natural gas. Finally, cultural and educational facilities are often in very poor condition; most schools need repairing and most villages have no kindergartens, libraries or sports' centres.

For most of the province there is relatively easy access to Tbilisi, except in the more remote areas of Dmanisi and Tsalka *rayons*. Marneuli is 45 minutes by car from Tbilisi, Gardabani – 60 minutes, Bolnisi – 90 minutes, and Dmanisi and Tsalka – two to two-and-a-half hours. Minibuses (*marshrutki*) make frequent journeys (every 20-30 minutes) from Tbilisi to Marneuli and Gardabani, and travel somewhat less frequently to Bolnisi, Dmanisi and Tsalka. There is also a railway line from Tbilisi to Tsalka via Tetritskaro, but trains to Tsalka are infrequent and unreliable.

Another major feature of the local infrastructure is the BTC oil pipeline, which will pass through Gardabani, Marneuli and Tsalka *rayons*. However, despite the fanfare, the pipeline has provided few benefits for the inhabitants of these districts, except for those whose villages lie in the direct path of the pipeline (see below).

Local Structures of Administration

At the *rayon* level and below, the administrative structure in Kvemo Kartli is, like in other parts of Georgia, a legacy of the communist period. The first layer of local government consists of locally elected bodies or *sakrebulos* for each of the five major towns (Gardabani, Marneuli, Bolnisi, Dmanisi and Tsalka) and for villages or communities (i.e. groups of villages or *temi* in Georgian) in rural areas. Gardabani, Marneuli and Bolnisi have their own directly elected mayors, as do all of the main cities of *rayons* with a voting population of more than 5,000. As the voting population in the towns of Dmanisi and Tsalka is less than 5,000, the head of the executive branch in these two towns is the chairperson of the *sakrebulo*, as specified by law. Since the new local election law came into force in 2001, for *sakrebulo* elections, voters are presented with a list of candidates and the candidates obtaining the most votes are declared the victors. In most community *sakrebulos*, as well as in the *sakrebulos* of Dmanisi and Tsalka towns, five candidates are elected to the *sakrebulo*. In the towns of Bolnisi and Gardabani, as well as in certain larger rural communities of Marneuli, Bolnisi and Gardabani *rayons*, seven *sakrebulo* members are elected. Finally, in the city of Marneuli, with a voting population of more

than 10,000, nine members are elected. In Kvemo Kartli most *sakrebulos* include between one and eight villages (see Appendix 1).

The role of the *sakrebulo* in Georgia is mainly supervisory: they have the right to amend the local budget, approve long-term development plans and they can evaluate the work of the executive bodies. They also have limited powers to impose and remove local taxes.

Real power, however, rests with the executive branch of local government, or *gamgeoba*, at the second level of local government, i.e. at the *rayon* level. The head of the *rayon gamgeoba*, known as the *gamgebeli*, is appointed by the President of Georgia from amongst the chairpersons of the town and community/village *sakrebulos*. Prior to the 2001 law, *rayon gamgebelis* were not required to be elected to a *sakrebulo*. The new legal stipulation that they be elected has made little difference, as in all five *rayons* considered in this paper the incumbent *gamgebelis* were able to retain their posts during the 2002 local elections by arranging to be elected to local *sakrebulos*. Since the "Rose Revolution" of November 2003, all the *gamgebelis* in the five *rayons* have been replaced. However, none of those appointed to replace them had been elected to a *sakrebulo* in June 2002. As such, their formal position is that of "acting *gamgebel"*'.

A third unofficial level of government was introduced by the government of Eduard Shevardnadze in 1994. These are the nine provinces or *mkhare*, which more or less correspond to the historical regions of Georgia and which are administered by an authorised representative or "governor" appointed by the President of Georgia. Originally the governor's post was entirely informal and not defined by law and, although the provinces acquired legal status when a new law on administrative territorial arrangement was passed in February 1997, the competences of the governor remain poorly defined.[4]

From 1994 until September 2003, the post of governor in Kvemo Kartli was held by one individual – Levan Mamaladze. Following Mamaladze's decision to stand for the post of deputy for the single mandate constituency of Bolnisi in the parliamentary elections of November 2003, Zurab Kobiashvili was appointed governor in his place. His term of office lasted only until the so-called Rose Revolution of November 2003, when Zurab Melikishvili was appointed to replace him. Following Melikishvili's appointment as State Minister in charge of regional policy and local self-government in February 2004, Ioseb Mazmishvili was appointed to the post of

[4] See Ghia Nodia (ed.), *Political System in Georgia*, (Tbilisi: Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, 1998) at www.cipdd.org/cipdd_g/pdf/eurob_e.pdf.

governor. However, in December President Mikheil Saakashvili dismissed Mazmishvili and reappointed Melikishvili following a land dispute over a horse farm in the village of Kulari, in which an elderly woman was killed (see Section V below). Another reason for Mazmishvili's replacement was that little progress had been made in combating smuggling along the border with Azerbaijan.

Unlike in Javakheti, where top posts at the *rayon* level, such as *gamgebeli*, district prosecutor, chief of police and head of the tax inspectorate are held by ethnic Armenians, in Kvemo Kartli all of these posts are held by Georgians, even in Marneuli *rayon*, where Azeris make up over 80% of the population. In Marneuli, Gardabani and Bolnisi *rayons* the first deputy *gamgebeli* is Azeri.

III. Recent Historical Events

The wave of national mobilisation that occurred amongst ethnic Georgians in 1989 was to have negative consequences for the Azeri inhabitants of Kvemo Kartli. In late 1989, the 800 or so families that had hitherto been living in the city of Bolnisi were forced to leave their homes. Henceforth, Bolnisi became an ethnically homogeneous Georgian city. At the same time many Azeris who had previously held top posts in the state administration as directors of agricultural or industrial enterprises were replaced by Georgians. Many ordinary Azeris who held lower ranking posts in the state administration were also dismissed. This process aroused great unrest amongst the local Azeri population and at the end of 1989 a local initiative group was formed with the idea of establishing a kind of "popular front" for the Azeri population. As a result of this initiative, the organisation *Geyrat* held its inaugural conference in February 1990. *Geyrat* united Azeris from different backgrounds, although the Azeri intelligentsia played a particularly significant role.

The aims of the new movement were first to halt the rapid emigration of Azeris from Georgia, and second, to establish a dialogue with the Georgian national liberation movement. With this end in mind, *Geyrat's* leaders met Georgian nationalist leaders such as Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Giorgi Tchanturia and Irakli Tsereteli. The movement achieved a certain degree of success in establishing a rapport with Tchanturia and his National Democratic Party (NDP) and one member of the organisation was elected to the National Congress on the NDP's party list.[5] However, the Azeri community faced renewed pressure after the victory of Zviad Gamsakhurdia's "Round Table - Free Georgia" bloc in the October 1990 elections to the Georgian Supreme Soviet. The pressure lessened somewhat as a result of the war in South Ossetia, which broke out in January 1991, as Gamsakhurdia's attention was focused elsewhere.

During the period 1992-94, Kvemo Kartli fell under the influence of various criminal gangs associated with the *Mkhedrioni* and other criminal organisations. The province suffered from a particularly high level of bandit activity because the main roads to Armenia and Azerbaijan were used for smuggling contraband and were therefore controlled by paramilitaries. For example, the village of Vakhtangisi in Gardabani *rayon*, which is located on the border with Azerbaijan, was a major trading post for drugs and was controlled by the Mkhedrioni as well as an Azeri

[5] The National Congress was an alternative parliament established by those parties that were boycotting the official elections to the Supreme Soviet that were held on 28 October 1990 (and won by Gamsakhurdia's "Round Table" bloc). Elections to the National Congress were held on 30 September 1990.

paramilitary group. Only after a joint anti-criminal operation was carried out in the village in March 1995 by the Georgian and Azerbaijani governments was some semblance of order restored. Kidnapping for ransom was also a common occurrence and Azeri residents felt that they were disproportionally singled out for such attacks.

During this period *Geyrat* helped to protect the security of Azeri citizens. Under their initiative, patrol groups of *druzhinniki* (vigilantes) were formed in many villages to protect local residents. The organisation was strongest in Marneuli and it successfully prevented mass emigration from this town, which many people consider to be the "capital" of the Azeri-populated Georgian lands. However, in areas where *Geyrat* was weaker, such as Dmanisi, emigration of the Azeri population continued.

From 1995 stability returned to Kvemo Kartli as the government of Eduard Shevardnadze completed its crackdown on the *Mkhedrioni* and other paramilitary groups. At the provincial level power was now in the hands of Levan Mamaladze, an ambitious young politician who had previously belonged to the Green Party. During the period of Mamaladze's governorship of Kvemo Kartli, stability was preserved by means of patron-client networks, which provided a channel of communication between the state and influential figures from within the Azeri community. Members of *Geyrat* were gradually co-opted into the local power structures, first by being offered posts in the local administration and later by playing an active role in the pro-government party, the Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG). In the 1999 parliamentary elections, Zumrud Qurbanov, one of the leaders of *Geyrat*, was elected to parliament on the CUG party list, and another Azeri, Azer Suleimanov, was elected as a single mandate member of parliament for Marneuli, with *Geyrat's* backing.[6]

The majority of the population of Kvemo Kartli now overwhelmingly backed both Eduard Shevardnadze as President and the CUG as the ruling party. This trend was already evident in the 1995 parliamentary and presidential elections and was further strengthened in the 1998 local elections (when the CUG garnered around 70% of the vote in Kvemo Kartli) and in the 1999 parliamentary elections. According to official figures, in the 2000 presidential elections, 98% of those eligible to vote in Marneuli *rayon* voted and 99% of these voted for the incumbent, Eduard Shevardnadze.[7] While electoral fraud clearly played a role in these unrealistically inflated

[6] *Rezonansi No. 295*, 27 October 1999.
[7] Laurence Broers and Julian Broxup, *Crisis and Renewal in Georgian Politics: The 2003 Parliamentary Elections and 2004 Presidential Elections* (a report written for the London Information Network on Conflicts and State Building, 2004) at http://www.rrz.uni-hamburg.de/Ethnologie-Kaukasus/html/aktu/crisis.pdf.

figures, it remains true that an overwhelming majority of voters supported the incumbent. Voters belonging to national minorities felt that the best way to protect their interests was to show complete loyalty to the Georgian President. The return of peace and stability which accompanied Shevardnadze's victory over the paramilitary groups also contributed to securing that loyalty. Moreover, the support given to Shevardnadze by Azerbaijan's President, Heidar Aliyev, also helped win the support of Azeri voters. Many Azeris saw Aliyev as their "natural leader" (see below).

Despite the support shown to Shevardnadze and the CUG by the Azeri population of Kvemo Kartli, *Geyrat's* decision to co-operate with the authorities to the extent of accepting positions in the local bureaucracy and in the party undermined the movement's reputation as an independent defender of the public interest. The movement began to split. In 1998, *Geyrat* members passed a vote of no confidence in Alibali Askerov, who was then the Chairman of the organisation. Askerov and Qurbanov then left the organisation to form a breakaway group. Although *Geyrat* was reunited the following year with Askerov once again at its helm, the rift weakened the movement. Nevertheless, *Geyrat* continued to play a mediating role between society and the state and remained active in defending the rights of members of the Azeri community who had been unfairly treated by the police or other organs of power.

Mamaladze had informal control over all appointments in Kvemo Kartli province, including the nomination of candidates from the province to the national Parliament.[8] He actively promoted the candidacies of ethnic Azeris; six Azeri deputies who were elected to the 1999 parliament later joined the "Alliance For a New Georgia" faction that was formed under his initiative when the CUG collapsed in late 2001. The members of parliament for the single-mandate constituencies of Gardabani, Marneuli, Bolnisi, Dmanisi and Tsalka (three Georgians, one Azeri and one Armenian) also joined this faction.[9] At the same time, Mamladze's clientele in local state organs (for example, the *gamgeobas*) remained dominated by ethnic Georgians, particularly former officials of the Communist Youth League (Komsomol).

[8] Officially the President was responsible for the nomination of *gamgebelis*; informally he appointed upon the recommendation of Levan Mamaladze.

[9] Five of the six Azeri deputies entered parliament through the CUG party list, presumably on Mamaladze's recommendation. The sixth (Azer Suleimanov) was elected member of Parliament for the single mandate constituency of Marneuli. The Georgian members of Parliament for the single-mandate constituencies of Gardabani, Bolnisi and Dmanisi (Leonide Japaridze, Guram Avkopashvili and Teimuraz Tsikhelashvili), as well as the Armenian member for Tsalka (Iurk Khchoyan) also joined Mamaladze's "Alliance for a New Georgia" faction.

As well as being the key figure behind the appointment of local officials, Mamaladze also seems to have had considerable control over local economic resources, in particular the Madneuli gold mines located near the village of Kazreti in Bolnisi *rayon*. The former director of the mines, Zurab Lobzhanidze, was a client of Mamaladze's, as was a former deputy director, Guram Avkopashvili, who was elected Member of Parliament in the single-mandate constituency of Bolnisi in the 1999 parliamentary elections. Mamaladze was also the driving force behind the creation of the Confederation of Entrepreneurs in February 1999. This united leaders of the Rustavi metallurgical plant, executives at Madneuli, heads of some smaller enterprises and representatives of banks in the province. Merab Asanishvili, Mamaladze's first deputy, was named the President of the Confederation.[10] Following the so-called 'Rose Revolution', many members of Mamaladze's clientele and even members of his family were indicted for corruption.[11] Lobzhanidze was accused by Georgian prosecutors of attempting to smuggle gold out of Georgia and Mamaladze himself was placed on Interpol's wanted list for fraud.

The first major challenge to Mamaladze's hegemony in Kvemo Kartli came from Mikheil Saakashvili's opposition National Movement in the run-up to the November 2003 parliamentary elections. Mamaladze had decided to stand as a candidate for the pro-presidential "For a New Georgia" (FNG) bloc in the single-mandate seat of Bolnisi. At the same time, the National Movement put forward their own candidate for the constituency, the ethnic Azeri Kamal Muradkhanov, and began actively campaigning in the province. This led to a violent clash between supporters of Saakashvili and supporters of Mamaladze in the village of Talaveri (Faraklo) near Bolnisi in late September.[12] Many people from both sides were injured, including the *gamgebeli* of Bolnisi *rayon*, Zurab Japaridze. Although the National Movement failed to make any real inroads in Kvemo Kartli during those elections, this event was highly significant as it boosted the party's support in the country as a whole.

As in previous elections, the November 2003 parliamentary elections were highly controlled, especially in the *rayons* of Gardabani, Marneuli and Bolnisi, where FNG won by a wide margin and Mamaladze's chosen candidates managed resounding victories. Once again, electoral fraud was a highly significant part of the story, but not the only part. Most (but not all) Azeris remained loyal to President Eduard Shevardnadze. In Dmanisi and Tsalka, however,

[10] *Georgian Times*, 26 February 1999, quoting *Dilis Gazeti*, 24 February 1999; *Resonance*, 94, 27 April - 3 May 1999.
[11] Sources: TRACCC, *Survey of the Georgian Press* at http://www.traccc.cdn.ge/georgian-press/2003, accessed August 2004; Maia Mosiashvili, "Levan Mamaladze's Brother-In-Law Declared Wanted", *24 Hours* (16 April 2004).
[12] Talaveri is the Georgian name of the village, while Faraklo is the original (Azeri) name.

Mamaladze's control over the electoral process was much weaker; in the single-mandate seat of Dmanisi, independent candidate Kakhaber Okriashvili beat another independent, Akaki Dautashvili, by a very narrow margin, pushing the former *gamgebeli*, Shota Tsikhelashvili, into third place. In Tsalka, ethnic Armenian Aik Meltonian, a staunch opponent of the *rayon gamgebeli*, was elected Member of Parliament with the support of the bloc "Industry Will Save Georgia".

Following the so-called "Rose Revolution" and Eduard Shevardnadze's resignation on 23 November 2003, Levan Mamaladze left the country. Presidential elections were held on 4 January 2004 and repeat elections for the 150 members of parliament elected by party list were held on 28 March 2004 (the results of the November elections to single-mandate constituencies were left to stand). In both elections voters in Kvemo Kartli expressed support for the new authorities in much the same way as they had for the old. In the repeat parliamentary elections 76% of voters voted for the bloc that supported the new government "National Movement – Democrats" compared with 67% in the country as a whole.[13] Once again the tried and tested methods of electoral fraud were employed, although this time the authorities were somewhat less prepared to tolerate such practices and as a result the returns from around thirty precincts from Gardabani, Marneuli and Bolnisi *rayons* were declared invalid.

[13] Tea Lobzhanidze, "Georgia: Azerbaijanis Back Saakashvili" CRS No. 225, 1 April 2004 on the website of International War and Peace Reporting www.iwpr.net.

IV Actors in the Local Arena

The Local Authorities

Throughout Shevardnadze's presidency (1995-2003) by far the most powerful figure at the local level was Levan Mamaladze and most members of local power structures in Kvemo Kartli (at least outside the city of Rustavi) owed their positions to Mamaladze's patronage (see above). At the same time, at the *rayon* level the *gamgebelis* (also mostly clients of Mamaladze) wielded considerable power, especially in Marneuli and Bolnisi *rayons*, where they were seen as powerful figures in their own right. Zurab Japaridze, *gamgebeli* of Bolnisi *rayon* until the 'Rose Revolution,' became an especially popular figure in the city of Bolnisi as a result of rehabilitation work carried out on the city's public buildings (such as schools, the library, the sports stadium) in 2000-2001. Critics, however, claim that the funds for reconstruction were obtained illegally from the Madneuli gold mines (see above).

In the Azeri-populated areas of Gardabani, Marneuli and Bolnisi *rayons*, villages are considerably larger than in other parts of Georgia and community (*temi*) *sakrebulos*, which typically consist of several villages, may include a population of up to ten thousand people.[14] Under these circumstances, the *gamgebeli* at the community level is often perceived as a more powerful figure than in other *rayons* of Georgia, where *sakrebulos* include a few hundred or, at most, a couple of thousand inhabitants. However, despite being formally elected by the population, the *gamgebelis* of these large communities are almost invariably perceived as representatives of the authorities rather than accountable to the people who ostensibly elected them. This is particularly so because the authorities at the *rayon* level generally "recommend" who to vote for at local elections and their "recommendation" is generally heeded, especially in Azeri villages. Electoral fraud also plays a significant role. Thus, at least informally, most community *gamgebelis* are subordinate to the *rayon gamgebeli*.

[14] The most populous *sakrebulos*, according to the 2002 census, are Nakhiduri (in Bolnisi *rayon* – 9,026 inhabitants), Aghtakala (Gardabani *rayon* – 11,306), Martqopi (Gardabani *rayon* – 10,646), Sartitchala (Gardabani *rayon* – 10,599), Algeti (Marneuli *rayon* – 13,380), Sadakhlo (Marneuli *rayon* – 11,299), Kapanakhchi (Marneuli *rayon* – 10,196) and Shulaveri (Marneuli *rayon* – 9,007). Of the thirty-four villages included in these seven *sakrebulos*, thirty are mainly Azeri.

Ethnic Balance in the Recruitment of Personnel

Following the two rounds of parliamentary elections in November 2003 and March 2004 the number of Azeri deputies fell from six to just three. The three Azeri members are Adil Jafarov, elected in the single-mandate constituency of Marneuli in November 2003 with the support of FNG, Alakhverd Umbatov, former member of Zurab Zhvania's "United Democrats," elected through the party list of the bloc "National Movement – Democrats" in March 2004, and Kamal Muradkhanov (see above), also elected through the party list of the bloc "National Movement – Democrats" in March 2004. Following Mamaladze's decision to leave the country, in March 2004 repeat elections were also held in the single-mandate constituency of Bolnisi (which, according to official figures, Mamaladze had won with 86.86% of the vote in November). Victory went to Sophiko Lartsuliani, former deputy *gamgebeli* of the *rayon* (under Zurab Japaridze) and a close associate of the parliamentary chairperson Nino Burjanadze.

Generally speaking, local power structures in Kvemo Kartli are dominated by ethnic Georgians. Ethnic Azeris are particularly under-represented, especially in comparison with Armenians, in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda *rayons*. During the communist period many top posts were held by Azeris (see above) and throughout much of the 1980s the post of *raikom*, First Secretary of Marneuli, was held by an Azeri, K. Mamedov. Today the highest post in the local administration to which an Azeri can aspire is the post of first deputy *gamgebeli*. At the time of writing, the *gamgebelis*, district Prosecutors,[15] the district chiefs of police, the heads of the Tax Inspectorate and the heads of the district education department in all five *rayons* were Georgians. In Gardabani *rayon*, two out of four deputy *gamgebelis* are Azeri. In Marneuli, Bolnisi and Dmanisi *rayons*, despite the fact that the majority of the population in all three *rayons* is Azeri, at the time when this study was being carried out only one out of four deputy *gamgebelis* was Azeri. In Tsalka, the first deputy *gamgebeli* was Armenian. The under-representation of the Azeri population in local power structures is particularly marked in Bolnisi and Dmanisi *rayons*, where all or almost all of the Azeri population no longer live in the *rayon* centre; here even the police force is almost exclusively Georgian, except for the occasional Azeri policeman in the villages. Generally, throughout Kvemo Kartli the top ranks of the police force are dominated by Georgians, although in Marneuli and Gardabani *rayons* there are many lower ranking Azeri police officers.

[15] At the time of writing reforms were underway in the Prosecutors' Office and as a result the Prosecutors' Office of Tsalka *rayon* had been combined with that of Marneuli *rayon*, while the Prosecutor's Office of Dmanisi *rayon* had been combined with that of Bolnisi *rayon*.

In addition, there is a tendency for local cadres (both Georgians and members of national minorities) to have weak links with the districts in which they work. Many are not local and come from either Tbilisi or Rustavi. The appointment of non-local personnel to local power structures became prevalent during the governorship of Levan Mamaladze, but has continued to the present day. On occasions, individuals are appointed who have spent their childhood in the district or have kinship links with local inhabitants, but still have little knowledge of the area in which they are supposed to work. Following the "Rose Revolution," some local stakeholders have complained that since the end of 2003 administrative structures in Kvemo Kartli have become increasingly dominated by young personnel who simply gained their positions by participating in the "Revolution" but who lack experience working in the province.[16] Others link this state of affairs to the fact that there are simply no sufficiently qualified personnel who speak the state language (i.e. Georgian) and who live permanently in the rural districts of Kvemo Kartli.

In Marneuli *rayon* the turnover of personnel in local power structures since the "Rose Revolution" has been particularly marked. Here even the *gamgebelis* of villages and communities (*temi*) have been replaced in a manner that hardly conforms to the spirit of the law. Out of the seventeen village and community *gamgebelis* elected in Marneuli *rayon* in the local elections of June 2002, by mid-2004 eleven had been "persuaded" to write letters of resignation to prevent "compromising material" (*kompromat*) from being used against them for alleged past "misdeeds" committed during Mamaladze's time as governor. Out of eleven ethnic Azeri community *gamgebelis*, seven resigned. All three Armenian *gamgebelis*, as well as the one Greek *gamgebeli*, also resigned. The three Georgian *gamgebelis*, however, retained their posts. This led to complaints by some representatives of national minorities that their own people had been subject to particular pressure.

In Tsalka *rayon*, the former *rayon gamgebeli*, Eldar Khvistani, was removed from his post in a rather dramatic fashion at the end of 2003 as a result of action by mainly Armenian and Greek inhabitants. Khvistani, a Svan, was accused of favouring newcomers from Ajara and Svaneti at the expense of "locals." As a result, a group of angry inhabitants burst into the *gamgeoba*

[16] The governor and deputy governor of Kvemo Kartli, as well as some newly-appointed *gamgebelis* and deputy *gamgebelis* belong to this new generation. Some had begun their political career relatively recently as activists for the National Movement.

building and beat him severely. This episode illustrates the tensions that have arisen lately in Tsalka *rayon* between "local residents" and "newcomers."

Political Parties

Political parties play virtually no role whatsoever in the life of most ordinary inhabitants of Kvemo Kartli, except during election time. As mentioned above, voters in Kvemo Kartli – especially members of national minorities – voted overwhelmingly for the CUG prior to its collapse in 2001-2002. After the "Rose Revolution," in the parliamentary elections of March 2004, their allegiance shifted to the bloc that represented the new government – the bloc 'National Movement – Democrats.' However, the reason for the support given first to the CUG and later to the National Movement was clearly not related to the policies these two parties stood for, but to the fact that the parties represented the current authorities and had the backing of the President of Georgia.

Opposition political parties have featured only if a certain well-known member of the local political elite broke with the authorities and attempted (usually unsuccessfully) to form an alternative power base. Thus, in 1995 a former police chief, Amiran Shubitidze, was elected as the independent member of parliament for the single-mandate seat of Marneuli and soon found himself in opposition to the governor of Kvemo Kartli, Levan Mamaladze. Shubitidze later joined the Popular (*Sakhalkho*) Faction in Parliament and in the 1998 local elections, the Popular Party gained 16.53% in Marneuli *rayon* and 17.57% in the city of Marneuli, according to official figures. Later, after the collapse of the CUG, Akhalverd Umbatov, the former Chairman of Marneuli *rayon sakrebulo*, joined Zurab Zhvania's opposition "United Democrats" party and appeared on this party's list in the (later discredited) November 2003 parliamentary elections. According to (probably unreliable) official figures (based on fifty eight out of fifty-nine precincts), this party finished in second place in Marneuli *rayon* in these elections with 9.73% of the vote (compared to 70.63% for the pro-government "For a New Georgia" bloc). Finally, in Tsalka – where direct interference in electoral procedures was somewhat less marked – the local businessman Aik Meltonyan won the single-mandate seat for the bloc "Industry Will Save Georgia" in November 2003. In all of these cases, votes were cast for specific individuals, not parties.

Social Organisations, NGOs and Media

As mentioned above, *Geyrat* played a very significant role in the communal life of the Azeri population of Kvemo Kartli during the early 1990s and continued to play the role of a "bridge" between the state and the Azeri community during the Shevardnadze period. *Geyrat's* leaders would often mediate in the event of a dispute between members of the Azeri community and the authorities. On occasions they would use their influence with the state authorities to secure the release of individuals who had been arrested unlawfully by the police. Nevertheless, at the same time, their proximity to the authorities undermined and weakened *Geyrat*, and provoked divisions from within the movement (see above).

Following the "Rose Revolution," these splits within *Geyrat* deepened still further. Some *Geyrat* activists pledged loyalty to the new authorities, while the leaders of the movement, Alibali Askerov and Zumrud Qurbanov, adopted a critical stance towards Mikheil Saakashvili's government and vigorously opposed the new local authorities. *Geyrat* now has little or no influence with either the local or the national authorities. The fragmentation and "disenfranchisement" of *Geyrat* has led some local observers to comment that the organisation today consists of little more than Askerov and Qurbanov as individuals. Nevertheless, this may be overstating the case somewhat; the movement is still held in esteem by many local Azeris and its leaders retain close links with political and media circles in Baku. In May 2004, *Geyrat* lent its support to a demonstration in Marneuli that demanded the dismissal of Amiran Shubitidze (see above), who was acting *gamgebeli* of Marneuli *rayon.*[17]

Another feature of Azeri society is the institution of the *aksakals* (literally "white beards") – respected elders of the community whose traditional role was to mediate in disputes within the Azeri community and to help solve communal problems. Such figures also exist amongst other Turkic-speaking peoples of the former Soviet Union, for example in Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan. In Kvemo Kartli, the definition of what constitutes an *aksakal* is rather vague and informal, especially today. Some claim that every family has its own *aksakal*, others claim that there are only one or two *aksakals* in any village. Some even describe the elected heads of community (*temi*) *sakrebulos* as *aksakals*, although most observers do not subscribe to this point of view. The majority of Azeri informants in Kvemo Kartli agree that *aksakals* must be independent of the authorities, that in a village there can be anywhere from one to fifteen *aksakals* and that

[17] BBC Monitoring Service, 24 May 2004, from a report by a private TV channel in Baku, *Azad Azearbaycan* (24 May 2004).

aksakals normally settle problems that are domestic in nature (for example disputes involving the choice of a marriage partner) and generally have no relation to state matters. *Aksakals* are often educated people, such as schoolteachers, although sometimes they may not have formal education, but rather what one observer calls a "human education," i.e. knowledge of the Islamic behavioural code, *adat*. In most cases, the position of *aksakal* is an informal one, although in some villages a rather more institutionalised "council of *aksakals*" exists. Some observers point to co-operation between *aksakals* and village *gamgebelis* in solving communal problems such as a lack of water for drinking or irrigation. On occasions, *aksakals* have been known to recommend to citizens who to vote for in local or national elections. In a very few villages *aksakals* are seen as having more influence than the official authorities of the village (i.e. the *sakrebulo* and the *gamgebeli*). However, this is the exception rather than the rule.

The fact that village *gamgebelis* are sometimes described as *aksakals* may be attributed to a deliberate policy by the local and central authorities to undermine the institution of the *aksakals*. According to some sources, during Mamaladze's period as governor attempts were made by the authorities either to "buy" *aksakals* by offering them land or other resources in exchange for their loyalty or to promote "parallel *aksakals*" whose loyalty could not be questioned. The general picture seems to be one of *aksakals* losing their authority over time both as a result of the authorities' policy of "divide and rule" and because of the poor state of the local economy and infrastructure. As one observer points out, "*aksakals* can do very little while people are forced to carry water in buckets." Therefore, one can generally say that while *aksakals* remain a feature of Azeri society in Kvemo Kartli, they enjoy significantly less authority than they once did and have little influence on state power.

Formal non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are a new phenomenon in Kvemo Kartli due to the fact that the donor organisations that provide grants to NGOs have been more or less absent in the province until very recently (see below). Nevertheless, in the past two years there has been a surge of NGO activity, especially in Marneuli and Gardabani *rayons*. In early 2004, there were estimated to be around twenty-five registered NGOs in these two *rayons*, although only a minority of these are active grant-seekers. The most active and well-established NGO is probably the Union of Intercultural Cooperation in Kvemo Kartli Region – "Bridge," founded in 2000 to promote cross-cultural communication in Kvemo Kartli. Its aim is to bring together the different communities in Kvemo Kartli through civic education and youth work. Following the "Rose Revolution," the director of "Bridge," Ramin Bairamov, was appointed first deputy *gamgebeli* of Gardabani *rayon*. Another important NGO is the Union of Azeri Women of

Georgia (UAWG), also founded in 2000. UAWG has provided free legal advice to residents of Kvemo Kartli, as well as training on women's rights and human rights more generally. It also provided pre-election training in villages in Kvemo Kartli prior to the January 2004 presidential elections and the repeat parliamentary elections held in March 2004. The NGO sector in Bolnisi, Dmanisi and Tsalka *rayons* remains very weak and has virtually no impact on the lives of members of national minorities living there.

Three national NGOs also have influence in those parts of Kvemo Kartli in which national minorities are concentrated. The public movement "Multinational Georgia" has played a particularly important role by encouraging a network of NGOs in Kvemo Kartli with a view to enhancing their participation in the social and political life of Georgia. Both "Bridge" and UAWG are part of this network. CIPDD has also played a role by organising round table meetings in Kvemo Kartli and in Tbilisi that bring together representatives of national minorities, NGOs and political parties. The other national NGO that has been active in the province is the election monitoring group "Fair Elections." It was as a result of complaints by "Fair Elections" that the results from several precincts in Kvemo Kartli were declared invalid due to violation of election procedures in March 2004.

The local media in all five *rayons* is underdeveloped. Due to the language barrier, most members of national minorities have no access to the Georgian media, and there are no current projects to provide simultaneous translations of Georgian news programmes on local television channels as there are in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda in Samtskhe-Javakheti.[18] Due to the presence of a transmission mast in Azerbaijan close to the border with Georgia, many Azeri residents of Kvemo Kartli are able to receive television programmes from Azerbaijan. This link, while providing vital information to the Azeri population, reinforces their cultural isolation from the Georgian state.

Several media outlets accessible to national minorities do exist, although they are frequently of poor quality and (in the case of newspapers) appear irregularly. These include the Marneuli-based television channel "Algeti" (established under the initiative of the previous *gamgebeli* of Marneuli *rayon*, Gocha Loria, and virtually a mouthpiece of the local authorities), the Azeri-language newspaper *Gurjistan*, and *Geyrat's* own newspaper, which shares the same name as the organisation.

[18] See Jonathan Wheatley, "Obstacles Impeding the Regional Integration of the Javakheti Region of Georgia". *ECMI Working Paper* No. 22 (September 2004) at www.ecmi.de/doc/public_papers.html.

Main Donors and Implementing Partners

Until 2001 Kvemo Kartli was more or less ignored by international donor organisations. However, in the last three years several such organisations have established projects there. First and foremost among these is GTZ's Food Security, Regional Co-operation and Stability Programme (FRCS), which operates in Marneuli and Gardabani *rayons* and which aims to promote sustainable food production, to enhance cross-border co-operation with Armenia and Azerbaijan (especially through trade), and to reduce conflict potential by building the capacity of civil society at local level. With this end in mind, GTZ has established revolving seed funds in rural areas, created business centres in Rustavi, Marneuli and Gardabani, and at the time of writing was establishing information points at the Red Bridge and Sadakhlo markets on the borders with Armenia and Azerbaijan, where traders will be able receive up-to-date information on who is buying and selling what, as well as current prices and customs regulations. They have also founded Community Unions that bring together community *gamgebelis* from one *rayon*, in which each *gamgebeli* presents a development project for his or her community and submits it to the Union which then itself decides whether to accept or reject the proposal on the basis of jointly agreed rules and criteria. This fosters not only co-operation, but also competition for the funds that GTZ make available.

GTZ has had considerable success in establishing revolving seed and vegetable funds and these are now administered by independent farmers' associations. The Community Unions, however, have faced certain "teething problems," partly because of the somewhat arbitrary rules and criteria that the Unions have employed to assess proposals, and also because of the fact that in Marneuli *rayon* most community *gamgebelis* have been replaced (see above). Nevertheless, in Gardabani *rayon* in 2004, eight infrastructure projects were approved by the Community Union costing between 4,000 and 40,000 Georgian Lari. In Marneuli *rayon*, six projects were approved, although the selection procedure was carried out by GTZ themselves due to the inability of the Community Union to do so.

Mercy Corps has also implemented infrastructure rehabilitation projects in Gardabani, Marneuli and Bolnisi *rayons* through community mobilisation initiatives. This work belongs to two major projects: the Georgia Community Mobilisation Initiative – East (E-GCMI) and the Community Investment Project – East (CIP-E). The former was launched in September 2000 and aimed to

promote community development in twenty *rayons* in eastern Georgia. From 2002, E-GCMI began work in Bolnisi and Marneuli *rayons* after opening an office in Bolnisi. By March 2004, E-GCMI had established six community initiative groups (CIGs) in each of the two *rayons* and had implemented twenty-four projects to rehabilitate the local infrastructure (thirteen in Marneuli *rayon* and eleven in Bolnisi *rayon*).[19] CIP-E has focused on community mobilisation and infrastructure rehabilitation in villages that lie on the path of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline. The project is funded by BP and is implemented by Mercy Corps in Marneuli and Gardabani *rayons*. CIP-E has carried out rehabilitation in those villages in Marneuli and Gardabani *rayons* that are affected by the pipeline. A parallel project, the Community Investment Project – West (CIP-W), also funded by BP but implemented by CARE, carries out community mobilisation and infrastructure rehabilitation in villages affected by the pipeline in Tsalka *rayon*. The question of payment of compensation to communities affected by the pipeline will be dealt with in the section below.

Finally, as part of their human rights project "Inter-communal Centres for Youth – Georgia," World Vision is attempting to establish youth centres in Bolnisi and Marneuli, and has recently opened an office in Marneuli. The aim is to unite young people from different ethnic groups in order to reduce the potential for the ethnicisation of socioeconomic conflicts. The project is funded by the European Commission (80%) and World Vision Germany (20%) and is implemented by the NGO Multinational Georgia (see above) and the Association for the Promotion of Rugby in Georgia.

British Petroleum and the Baku-Ceyhan Pipeline

The decision to build a major oil pipeline through the territory of Georgia from the Azeri port of Baku to Ceyhan in Turkey was hailed as a landmark decision that would contribute enormously to the economic potential of Georgia. Such high expectations were also raised in the regions through which the pipeline would cross. However, the failure of the pipeline project to provide instant economic benefits has, in certain communities, given rise to a sense of disillusionment. Although some local labour was hired in the construction process, this was mainly confined to low-paid digging jobs and the impact of the project on the local economy was minimal. Moreover ecological costs were increasingly perceived by the local population as being too high;

[19] Mercy Corps Georgia, *Georgia Field Study: Understanding the Legacy of Community Mobilization*, available at http://www.mercycorps.org/pdfs/1092332405.pdf.

this refers not only to the potential economic costs in the event of an accident, but also to the effects of the dust produced during the digging process, which many observers claimed was detrimental to health and which was not covered by the compensation scheme of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline Company (BTC Co). Thus, inaccurate information that portrayed the pipeline as something of a panacea for all ills led inevitably to a degree of disappointment and even mistrust.

However, the construction of the pipeline has had an enormous impact on communities living along its path. Many communities have benefited considerably both through the funding of infrastructure implemented by CARE and Mercy Corps (see above) and through the direct provision of compensation. At the same time, the new resources available have, on occasions, also given rise to conflict.

In Marneuli and Gardabani *rayons* in 2003, the distribution of work places on the pipeline project was the cause of some discontent. Members of the Azeri community complained that local managers whose task was to hire workers for the construction process accepted bribes in exchange for employment and discriminated against ethnic Azeris in the selection process. In June 2003 a protest meeting was held in the village of Jandara in Gardabani *rayon* and subsequently more local Azeris were employed in the pipeline project. In Marneuli *rayon*, however, little changed as the majority of those employed were not even residents of the *rayon*.[20]

The most thorny question, however, was that of compensation for land, and nowhere was it more so than in Tsalka *rayon*, where it coincided with a process of rapid migration both into and out of the *rayon* (see above). Above all, two ambiguities gave rise to conflict: first, of who was entitled to receive compensation (i.e. whether it should only be long-term residents or whether new settlers should be included), and second, the question of who should receive compensation for communal village land. In is worth looking at these two ambiguities in turn.

BP has purchased a 44 metre corridor of land from villagers whose land plots lie along the pipeline's path (with full compensation to the affected households) and also pays compensation to villages that lie within 2 km of the pipeline. However, compensation is only paid to inhabitants who are legally resident in these villages. This excludes most of Tsalka's newly-arrived migrants from Ajara and Svaneti, as in most cases these new arrivals have simply

[20] Information provided by the Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development.

occupied the abandoned Greek houses and have no legal claim to the dwellings. The problem is compounded by the fact that many of the original Greek inhabitants cannot be traced and therefore buying the property from them would be problematic. Although the government launched a scheme to buy the abandoned houses in the mid to late 1990s, this scheme came to nothing as a result of inefficiency and corruption. A further plan by Saakashvili's government to buy the houses and distribute them among the newly-settled population was launched in the autumn of 2004 and it is clearly too early to judge the success of this scheme.

However, this comes too late for claims for compensation from most new-arrivals. Although a few of the new settlers managed to buy the abandoned houses, most had neither the knowledge nor resources to do so. In the village of Avranlo, for example, where 160 Greek families live alongside around a hundred newly-arrived families from Ajara (most of whom have arrived in the past eighteen months), only the Greek inhabitants received compensation from BP. This has caused resentment amongst the new arrivals, who have become more assertive as their numbers have swelled.

The second ambiguity – and potential source of conflict – stems from a lack of clarity in the Georgian legislation on the privatisation of land. Georgian law does not clearly establish the ownership of communal pasture land, stating instead that it belongs to the "village" (*sopheli*) – a term that is not defined by Georgian law. In most cases villagers come to an informal arrangement as to how this land is to be used and distribute it according to individual needs.

However, BP's intervention complicated this picture somewhat. BP agreed to pay compensation both to individual households whose land is intersected by the pipeline route and to communities whose pastures lie on the pipeline's path. How this communal compensation was to be distributed amongst villagers remained unclear and was open to challenge. For example, villagers who had more livestock could claim that they needed more pastureland and were therefore entitled to more compensation. In many cases, the community *gamgebeli* was given the responsibility of distributing compensation for communal land, and in two communities in Tsalka *rayon* the *gamgebeli* abused his position by pocketing the compensation and leaving the country.

The issue of community compensation also gave rise to conflict between original inhabitants and new settlers. Once again in the village of Avranlo, the Greek-dominated community-based organisation (CBO) that was in charge of distributing compensation for high mountain pastures

and hayfields decided not to award compensation to seven resettled families from Ajara. The families went to the district court to appeal – and won – but the CBO then launched a counter-appeal.[21] Thus, there is a situation in which the intervention of an outside actor (BP) combined with inadequate institutional arrangements in the host country increased the conflict potential at the village level.

Foreign States

Of all foreign states the one that has had the most influence over Kvemo Kartli province is Azerbaijan. The crucial factor for the Azeri population is the personal relationship that exists between the Presidents of Georgia and Azerbaijan. The Azeri population supported Eduard Shevardnadze because of his close relationship with Azerbaijan's President, Heidar Aliyev. It is said that in presidential elections in Kvemo Kartli, local Azeris even looked for the name of Heidar Aliyev on the ballot paper.[22] Although some analysts feared that the replacement of the president in both Georgia and Azerbaijan would weaken the "special relationship" between the two countries and lead to instability in Kvemo Kartli, the two new presidents moved quickly to cement their personal relationship. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili visited his new counterpart Ilham Aliyev in March 2004, describing Aliyev as his "brother," and Aliyev returned the visit in June when he also went to Marneuli and received a horse as a gift from the new Georgian President.

The main influence of Azerbaijan on society in Kvemo Kartli is cultural. As noted above, the population of much of Kvemo Kartli is able to receive television from Azerbaijan, which provides them with their main source of news. Moreover, local Azeris frequently cross over to Azerbaijan for purposes of trade, mainly in agricultural products – and especially to buy flour which is normally cheaper in Azerbaijan than in Georgia. Another symptom of the strong cultural bonds between the Azeri population in Kvemo Kartli and Baku is the fact that many Azeris from Kvemo Kartli come to Baku to attend certain important social events – the funeral of the former President of Azerbaijan, Heidar Aliyev, was a case in point. Finally, due to the language barrier, those young people who obtain a higher education are unable to obtain it in

[21] Georgia SRAP Expert Panel Review (February 2004), available at http://www.caspiandevelopmentandexport.com/Downloads/MediaLibrary/Download/79/Social%20and%20Resettlement%20Action%20Plan%20Review%20Part%20A.pdf.

[22] "Georgian Azeris Locked out by Language". Source: Minelres Archive, http://lists.delfi.lv/pipermail/minelres/2004-February/003206.html, reproduced on http://www.us-

Tbilisi and many of them therefore go to Baku. This practice was already widespread during the Soviet period and as a result many members of the local intelligentsia have relatives in Azerbaijan's capital. Even members of ordinary families in Azeri villages in Kvemo Kartli often have relatives living in Azerbaijan, especially Baku. Most large villages in the Azeri-populated areas of Kvemo Kartli have a direct bus link with Baku and/or other major urban centres in Azerbaijan. Thus, there are many personal networks that extend across the Georgia-Azerbaijan border.

Finally, the mass media in Azerbaijan sometimes airs the grievances of the Azeri population of Kvemo Kartli. During 2004, the Baku-based Russian language newspaper, *Zerkalo*, published complaints of harassment from certain sectors of the Azeri population in Kvemo Kartli and on occasions interviews the leaders of *Geyrat*. The newspaper has also referred to Kvemo Kartli by the Azeri name of Borchalo, a term that gives rise to a degree of unease amongst Georgians.[23]

Following the death of an elderly Azeri woman in a land dispute over a horse farm in Marneuli *rayon* (see Section V below), some parts of the media in Azerbaijan covered the incident extensively and the tone of their reports was at times somewhat critical of the Georgian authorities. Demonstrators in Baku even handed over a protest letter to the Georgian embassy there to demand justice.[24] Moreover, the fact that the Azeri ombudsman, Elmira Suleimanova, was sent to Tbilisi and to Marneuli to diffuse tensions in the aftermath of this incident shows how the Azeri government still has a vital role to play in the continuing stability of Kvemo Kartli province.

Despite some cases of adverse publicity in Azerbaijan's media, the government of Azerbaijan has made every effort to maintain a good relationship with Georgia and has, in general, done its utmost to avoid exploiting tensions in Kvemo Kartli. Azerbaijan also finds itself in a similar situation to Georgia in terms of the loss of its territorial integrity following the war in Nagorno Karabakh, and, like Georgia, often feels threatened by Russia's desire to maintain its influence in the Caucasus. Its membership (together with Georgia) in the GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova) alliance as a counterbalance to Russian hegemony within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) reflects its geopolitical stance.

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english.org/foundation/research/olp/viewResearch.asp?CID=58&TID=4, by Zaza Baazov, a freelance journalist based in Tbilisi, March 2002.

[23] "Azeris in Georgia Protest about Illegalities in Municipal Elections", excerpt from A. Rsaidoglu's in *Zerkalo* on 30 May 2002 entitled "Georgian-style Elections". Available at http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/georgia/hypermail/200205/0082.shtml.

[24] BBC Monitoring Service, 9 December 2004, from ANS TV, Baku, in Azeri, 9 December 2004.

As well as through its often troubled relationship with Georgia, Russia also has direct influence over Kvemo Kartli, by acting as a magnet for would-be migrants from Kvemo Kartli, especially amongst members of the Azeri and Armenian communities who go to Russia for seasonal work or even emigrate permanently. As many of these migrants send remittances to their relatives in Georgia, Russia's policy towards Georgia clearly has a crucial impact. In this respect, changes in the visa regime between Georgia and Russia may cause major disruption to the local economy. Such changes may also affect the trade of agricultural products between Kvemo Kartli and Russia.

The Georgian State

The policy of the Georgian state towards Kvemo Kartli during Shevardnadze's term as President can best be characterised by the term "benign neglect." The Georgian state established control over national minorities in the province by means of patron-client linkages and made few efforts to integrate the non-Georgian population with the rest of the country in any meaningful way. While outwardly espousing the need for all citizens to know Georgian, the Georgian government at the same time took advantage of minorities' poor knowledge of both the language and their own civil rights in order to deliver the required number of votes to the incumbent President and to the dominant party, the Citizens' Union of Georgia. While avoiding direct methods of control over the non-Georgian population, the Georgian authorities skilfully manipulated the patron-client relationships that had been established so as to weaken any independent centres of power. In this way both the public movement *Geyrat* and the institution of the *aksakals* were rendered pliant and lost the ability to challenge the government in any meaningful way. The powerlessness of these "home grown" institutions was reinforced by the desperate economic situation; the lack of independent resources inhibited the development of any meaningful form of civil society at the local level. The Georgian government appeared to lack not only a coherent policy as to how to integrate national minorities in Kvemo Kartli, but also any notion as to how to revive the province's economy.

Since the "Rose Revolution", the new government has worked hard to limit the influence of the old patronage networks in Kvemo Kartli. Considerable effort has been spent in removing the last vestiges of Levan Mamaladze's power structures in the province, and this zealous campaign has been carried out in Marneuli *rayon* in particular. However, while the old patron-client system

may not have benefited the non-Georgian communities in the long run as “clients” gradually became servants of the state and ceased representing their communities, it was still one (albeit weak) link between the non-Georgian population and the authorities. It is therefore the challenge of the new government to replace this system with a new mechanism in which national minorities are able to express their “voice” within the framework of institutions based on democracy and the rule of law. Failure to develop such a mechanism will inevitably lead to the re-emergence of patron-client ties and will further delay the social, cultural and economic development of the province. In addition, the new government needs to elaborate a strategy to both revive the economy of the province and integrate the non-Georgian population in a realistic, step-by-step manner.

V. The View From the Local Population: Priorities and Grievances

Members of national minorities in Kvemo Kartli often voice concerns relating to socioeconomic and infrastructural matters but tend to be reluctant to voice complaints about ethno-political and cultural matters. Representatives of national minorities who hold positions in the local administrations often give the impression that there are no ethnic or cultural problems at all. However, respondents who do not belong to state structures and feel that they can express their feelings more openly often voice harsh criticism of the attitude of the national government or the local authorities towards national minorities. This feeling is expressed most vehemently amongst ethnic Azeris in Marneuli and Bolnisi *rayons*. Presented below are the priorities and grievances expressed by members of local elites and ordinary citizens from all ethnic communities both to the author of this report and to the Georgian and Azeri press in Marneuli, Gardabani, Bolnisi, Dmanisi and Tsalka *rayons*. Although these priorities are divided into two categories – economic/infrastructural and political/cultural – these two categories overlap, especially with regard to the sensitive question of land use.

Economic/Infrastructural Priorities

The main economic and infrastructural priorities and grievances listed by respondents from Kvemo Kartli relate to the high level of unemployment, the poor quality of the roads, the parlous state of industrial production, schools and medical facilities, the irregular supply of water for drinking and irrigation, shortages of electricity, and problems over land distribution. Of the fourteen infrastructure projects approved by GTZ in Gardabani and Marneuli *rayons* (see above), and which reflected the priorities of the inhabitants, three involved the rehabilitation of water supplies, three for school repairs, two for road repairs, two for garbage collection, two for the construction of a gas pipeline, one for construction of a medical centre, and one for telephones for *sakrebulo* offices[25].

Probably the most commonly voiced concern is the lack of water for drinking and irrigation. Very few homes in rural areas are connected to water pipes, and most villagers relay on natural sources of water, such as wells. This often has a negative affect on their health. Even those who do receive piped water receive it very intermittently. A focus group from the village of Kvemo

[25] Information provided by GTZ consultants.

Kharaba in Tsalka *rayon*, mainly inhabited by new settlers from the Khulo district of Ajara, complained that their only source of water was a spring one kilometre from the village and that this source was frequently contaminated and caused ill health. Water for irrigation is also a major problem as non-irrigated land is almost worthless. According to a member of Gardabani *sakrebulo*, there is high competition for well-irrigated land near to the irrigation canal but almost no demand for the poorly irrigated land. According to the Levan Noniashvili, former deputy *gamgebeli* of Dmanisi *rayon*, in rural areas of the *rayon* there is no water for irrigation at all, except in those few villages that are situated close to a lake.

Electricity is also a major concern amongst the population of Kvemo Kartli. At the time the interviews were carried out, the inhabitants of most districts would receive around six hours of electricity per day. Respondents complained that the situation is considerably worse than this in winter. Although the supply of electricity appears to be no worse in Kvemo Kartli than in the rest of rural Georgia, the situation remains unacceptable, especially in the upland areas where winters are cold and harsh.

The state of the roads – another widely-articulated grievance amongst the local population – is similar in most of Kvemo Kartli to other areas of Georgia. However, in Tsalka *rayon* the roads are especially bad. The only road that is in an acceptable state is that built by BTC from Tsalka to Tetritskaro. This road was built primarily for the use of those working for BTC, although local residents also use it. The old road from Tsalka to Tetritskaro, as well as the roads to Tbilisi and Ninotsminda are no more than dirt tracks that can only be navigated by a four-wheel drive vehicle and only then when weather conditions are not too harsh. The roads to remote villages in Tsalka *rayon* are in an even worse state. Another road that is in urgent need of repair is the road from Marneuli to the Red Bridge on the border with Azerbaijan – repairs to this road are a particularly pressing need given its role as a corridor for trade with Azerbaijan.

Basic facilities are lacking in most villages, especially in upland areas. Most villages have no health centre, no cultural facilities, no library and no kindergarten. Most village schools are in very poor condition. In the words of one new settler from Ajara, presently living in a village in Tsalka *rayon*, "life is worse than where we came from." It is possible that the situation in which Greek inhabitants find themselves in the villages of Tsalka *rayon* is even harder, as many, if not most, Greeks are past retirement age, find it harder to work the land, and are more prone to the cold and to ill health. In addition, they feel threatened by the new settlers (see below).

Lack of access to agricultural land is another very common complaint, particularly among Azeri respondents. There are two main sources of grievance: the lack of good land and the perception that land has been distributed unfairly. The first grievance is inextricably linked with problems relating to irrigation, described above. Good land is well-irrigated land and this is a scarce resource.

As to complaints regarding the distribution of land, these complaints are most commonly voiced amongst the Azeri population in Marneuli *rayon* and Bolnisi *rayon*. The main complaint is directed towards wealthy individuals, mainly Georgians, often from other regions of Georgia, who make large profits by sub-letting land to local residents, often on the basis of a 49-year lease. This has given rise to a considerable degree of resentment as well as a feeling that Azeris have been unfairly deprived of land. As has been mentioned in Part II, many Azeris living near the border received disproportionately smaller plots than other rural inhabitants of Georgia during the privatisation process. Many respondents demanded that the land presently under lease be redistributed amongst the local population.

Frustration over land distribution broke out into the open in December 2004 when local residents in the village of Kulari, in Marneuli *rayon*, staged a protest meeting demanding land belonging to a 1,155 acre horse farm, currently leased by the Tbilisi-based Jockey Club. The demonstrators, who had gathered around the farm, were fired upon by unknown assailants and a 65-year-old Azeri woman was killed. This provoked widespread anger amongst the Azeri population of Kvemo Kartli, who accused the management of the farm of firing at peaceful protestors. The dismissal of Ioseb Mazmishvili (see Section II above) was, at least in part, precipitated by this incident.[26]

Another demand that was voiced amongst rural inhabitants was the need for credit to revive local agriculture. According to some respondents, three or four years' credit would help buy farm machinery or establish a mini-factory to process agricultural products. Respondents asserted that they would be able to repay all loans within the space of a few years. However, they complained that no banks or credit organisations were prepared to give micro-credit to rural areas. CARE's representative in Tsalka stated that even the credit organisation CONSTANTA, a partner of CARE, does not work in Tsalka *rayon*.

[26] Sofo Bukia, "Azeris Angry Over Georgia Killing", *Institute of War and Peace Reporting*, No. 266, December 16, 2004 at www.iwpr.net.

Some respondents complained of difficulties faced by the local population when engaging in trade, especially to Azerbaijan. Buying and selling products in Azerbaijan has, in recent times, always involved the payment of bribes. However, according to several respondents, since a crackdown on contraband trade on the Red Bridge (on the border of Georgia and Azerbaijan) in May-June 2004, the situation has become considerably worse. The effect of the crackdown, they claim, was not to eliminate the payment of bribes, but merely to push up the size of the bribe that had to be paid.

Finally, several respondents complained about the lack of international organisations (IOs) operating in Kvemo Kartli. One NGO leader mentioned the fact that there was far more involvement by IOs in the Armenian-populated areas of Javakheti than in Kvemo Kartli. Respondents stressed the need for IOs to become more involved in those parts of Kvemo Kartli that are inhabited by national minorities and recommended that they establish offices in Kvemo Kartli.

Political/Cultural Priorities

Aside from economic and infrastructural problems, the problem that seems to be the subject of most discussion amongst representatives of national minorities in Kvemo Kartli is the language barrier. Representatives of both governmental structures and NGOs expressed great concern about the isolation of the Azeri community both from the Georgian state and from Georgian society. The two most widely expressed concerns related to the information vacuum that most Azeris experience, and to the lack of a common language between young Azeris and young Georgians.

The only language used in government offices and in most of the media in Georgia is Georgian. At the same time most members of national minorities who live outside Tbilisi are unable to speak this language. According to representatives of national minorities living in Kvemo Kartli, this leads to two very undesirable consequences. First, as mentioned earlier, most Azeris, Armenians and Greeks who live in Kvemo Kartli are unable to understand the Georgian media. They therefore only receive information about what is going on in Georgia through Russian or Azeri media. Second, they are unable to understand Georgian laws, are unable to make full use of the Georgian legal system (as the language used in the courts is Georgian), and are mostly unaware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens of Georgia.

As to the possibility of cultural exchange and communication between members of national minorities and the Georgian population in Kvemo Kartli, this is extremely limited as a result of the language barrier and because most villages are mono-ethnic (see the Appendix). It is especially limited amongst young people from all communities, who often do not know Russian. There is a real danger that the new generation in Kvemo Kartli will live in total isolation from – and in total ignorance of – other ethnic communities.

Almost all respondents of all nationalities who mentioned the language barrier agreed that it was desirable for members of national minorities to learn Georgian. There were several complaints that so far the teaching of Georgian to national minorities in Kvemo Kartli had been purely symbolic. Some (Azeri) respondents who were not a part of official state structures expressed unease at suggestions that the Georgian government may attempt to ensure that teaching in all schools be carried out in Georgian within the next few years. The general view was that this was unrealistic, and one Azeri respondent voiced concerns both about the threat of assimilation and about the risk that a lack of knowledge of the Georgian language would be used as an excuse to dismiss teachers and other state servants from their jobs. Several respondents stressed the need for a careful and well-thought out programme of teaching Georgian to be implemented over a period of at least ten years. As to the information vacuum, one respondent asked why there was no project for the simultaneous translation of TV news from Georgian into Azeri, when such a project already existed in Javakheti, where news programmes are translated from Georgian into Armenian.[27] Another respondent stressed the need to translate legal texts into Azeri, or at the very least into Russian.

Another complaint voiced by Azeri respondents from Marneuli *rayon* who were not working for state structures related to the appointment of staff to the local bureaucracy. The complaint was that Azeris were underrepresented in local bureaucratic structures. An additional complaint was that many of those who work in local power structures at the *rayon* level – irrespective of their ethnicity – are from outside the *rayon*, typically from Tbilisi or Rustavi. One respondent complained that in Marneuli *rayon* there were more Svans working in state structures than Azeris, despite the fact that the Azeri population of Marneuli *rayon* was over 100,000 while there were only around 1,000 Svans. The fact that these complaints were voiced most strongly in

[27] Here he was referring to the OSCE's Conflict Prevention and Integration Programme. Within this programme and with the assistance of the news agency Internews, two local television studios in Javakheti have provided simultaneous translation into Armenian of two Georgian news programmes.

Marneuli *rayon* was likely the result of the resignation (some would say "forced resignation") of eleven community (*temi*) *gamgebelis* there, which was perceived by some as evidence of an anti-Azeri bias (see Section IV above). In relation to these events, several respondents expressed the desire for genuine local self-government, including direct elections for *gamgebelis*, arguing that the present system was a mere façade for local self-government.

There were also a few complaints of criminal acts committed by Svan settlers against members of national minorities. On several occasions mention was made of an incident in February 2004 in which an ethnic Azeri was murdered by a Svan in Dmanisi *rayon*. However, according to one (Azeri) respondent from Dmanisi *rayon*, the murder was the result of a personal dispute between former friends and the ethnic identity of perpetrator and victim were not relevant. This incident demonstrates how easily conflicts of an everyday nature can be (wrongly) interpreted as ethnic conflicts and how this can lead to suspicion and mistrust between communities when there is a lack of genuine inter-communal dialogue. The danger of misinterpreting ordinary conflicts as ethnic conflicts was highlighted by several respondents.

Inter-communal grievances were most commonly expressed in Tsalka *rayon*, where rapid out-migration and in-migration have led to radical changes in the demographic balance of the *rayon* and the resulting struggle for scarce resources has been complicated by the pipeline project (see above). Typically conflicts have broken out between the original inhabitants (mainly Greeks and Armenians) and the newcomers (Georgians from Ajara and Svans). In 2004, two incidents of violence were recorded between Georgians and Armenians in Tsalka *rayon* – one following a drunken argument at a wedding and another after a football match. The Greek community feels particularly under pressure as most are elderly and unprotected, and therefore feel threatened by the influx of newcomers. Elderly Greek residents in one village claimed that new settlers from Atchara had been occupying their houses, stealing their land and livestock and even physically assaulting them. Their claims could not be corroborated.

Another grievance connected with ethnic identity concerns place names (toponyms). In Bolnisi *rayon*, several respondents expressed strong dissatisfaction with the fact that the names of their villages had been changed from their original Azeri names to Georgian names. Apparently this had happened in the early 1990s when Gamsakhurdia was President. One respondent even claimed that his elderly father had been forced to change the name of his village of birth on his passport so that it conformed to the new (Georgianised) name. The same respondent recalled how, in 1999, the *sakrebulo* (council) in one Azeri village had passed a motion demanding that

the name of a village be changed back to its former (Azeri) name. After 20 days, he claims, the decision was annulled by the authorities.

VI Summary and Recommendations for ECMI

There is a potential for conflict in Kvemo Kartli and the two main *foci* for potential conflict are perceived discrimination against the Azeri community in Marneuli and Bolnisi *rayons* and the struggle for resources between original inhabitants and newcomers in Tsalka *rayon*. The first of these two potential conflicts has both political and socio-economic aspects, while the second is mainly socio-economic.

The fact that the Armenian population of Javakheti expresses its discontent much more openly than the Azeri population of Kvemo Kartli often leads observers to categorise Javakheti as a potential "trouble spot" and at the same time to neglect the underlying tensions in Kvemo Kartli. Generally speaking, Azeris in Kvemo Kartli do not express their grievances openly. Any protest, when it occurs, is characterised by a short emotional explosion in response to a particular event and is normally over in the space of a couple of hours. However, conflict avoidance – the failure to address potential sources of conflict and to find solutions to problems that may cause discord – does little to prevent conflict in the medium to long term. As we have seen in this report, many Azeris in Kvemo Kartli, especially members of the intelligentsia in Marneuli and Bolnisi *rayons,* feel that they are treated as second class citizens both in terms of representation in local power structures, and in terms of access to resources (especially good quality land). At present, there are no signs that the "latent conflict" that exists will become active as there is no outside "agitator" in either Georgia or Azerbaijan prepared to exploit the grievances of Georgia's Azeris. However, changes in the outside environment at some time in the future – particularly in the political structure of Azerbaijan – could conceivably provide a fuse that could turn this conflict into one that is expressed more openly or even violently.

As well as political problems, there are also serious socio-economic problems that are common to most of Georgia. However, in Tsalka *rayon*, where economic problems are particularly serious and where the local infrastructure is more degraded than elsewhere, large-scale migration processes and the consequent competition for land and other resources have led to conflict between original inhabitants and new settlers. One lesson to be drawn from Tsalka is that intervention from outside, even if motivated by good intentions, can increase rather than reduce the potential for conflict, as BTC's compensation programme has demonstrated.

To date, as we have seen, there has been little activity by international organisations in Kvemo Kartli province. There is an urgent need for action, providing it is carefully planned and well

thought out. It is therefore highly recommended that ECMI work in Kvemo Kartli. Having already opened an office in Akhalkalaki and having begun working with the mainly Armenian population of Javakheti, ECMI may damage its image if it fails to engage with the (marginally more numerous) Azeri population.[28] As I explained in the previous paragraph, the needs of all national minorities in Kvemo Kartli are just as great as those of the population of Javakheti.

As to the role an international organisation such as ECMI could play, there is great need for a mechanism to establish a flow of reliable information from the *rayons* of Kvemo Kartli to the centre. One problem with Kvemo Kartli is that the administrative centre of the province, the city of Rustavi, is situated just 25km from Tbilisi and therefore many of those who administer the province are either from Rustavi itself or from Tbilisi and have little idea of what is going on in the villages. In addition, there is a Georgian stereotype of Azeris as slow-witted and passive, which leads many to believe that either the Azeri population has no grievances at all, or that those grievances are not to be taken seriously. By establishing a dialogue between citizens of all ethnic groups from Kvemo Kartli and decision-makers in Tbilisi, it may be possible to combat such stereotypes and provide the Georgian government with reliable information around which to formulate policy.

The need for a mechanism to voice one's concerns and fears is particularly pressing for the elderly Greek inhabitants of Tsalka *rayon*, who feel that their way of life is increasingly threatened. The lack of community leaders who can mediate with the authorities makes the position of rural Greek communities particularly vulnerable. The Greek population of Tsalka has been reduced dramatically in the last fifteen years and there is a real risk that those who remain will also leave. There is also a need to provide assistance to the Georgian government in regulating the flow of newcomers into Tsalka *rayon* and to provide them with housing in a controlled and legal manner.

Considerable work is needed to integrate the various communities in Kvemo Kartli, especially to develop contacts between young people from different ethnic communities. Any such initiative should involve co-operation with World Vision, who have already begun work in this direction in Marneuli and Bolnisi *rayons*. There is also room for a project that is already underway in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda *rayons* – that of providing simultaneous translation of Georgian news programmes on local television. Possibly such a project could draw on the experience

[28] According to the 2002 population survey, Azeris make up 6.51% of Georgia's population, while Armenians make up 5.69%.

already gathered by the OSCE/Internews project in Javakheti. Another direction that should be explored is the possibility of translating relevant Georgian laws into Russian or Azeri and making available to the non-Georgian population of Kvemo Kartli translations of laws that already exist.

There is also considerable scope for assistance in developing economic opportunities for the province. Much of the land in Kvemo Kartli is extremely fertile and there is real potential to develop the agricultural sector. One step that may significantly promote development in this direction is access to credit for rural communities in order for local farmers to buy functional machinery. In this respect, it would be highly desirable to kindle the interest of banks and credit organisations and encourage them to provide loans to Kvemo Kartli's small farmers and growers.

APPENDIX: LIST OF VILLAGES IN THE FIVE RAYONS

Below are listed data from the 2002 Census concerning all villages in the five *rayons* about which this report is concerned. As the published version of the Census does not provide the breakdown of the population of the *rayon* centres in terms of ethnic groups, the figures given for these cities have been extrapolated from general data on the population of *rayons* and village-by-village data from rural areas.

RAYON/SAKREBULO	TOWN/VILLAGE	POPULATION	ETHNICITY
Bolnisi rayon			
Bolnisi City	Bolnisi	17650	82% Georgian 8% Armenian 5% Azeri 2% Russian 2% Greek
Tamarisi Town	Pharizi	1205	98% Azeri
	Tsurtavi	2319	98% Azeri
Kazreti Town	Balitchi	1023	96% Georgian
Akaurti Community	Akaurti	1174	85% Azeri
	Bertakari	289	100%Azeri
	Geta	698	99% Azeri
	Itsria	249	100% Azeri
	Senebi	157	96% Azeri
	Photskhveriani	724	98% Azeri
	Dzedzvnariani	779	98% Azeri
	Dzveli Kveshi	2183	98% Azeri
Bolnisi Community	Bolnisi village	2333	90% Armenian
	Samtsevrisi	361	90% Azeri
	Pholadauri	495	63% Azeri 18% Georgian 16% Russian
	Shua Bolnisi	618	100% Azeri
Darbazi Community	Darbazi	3743	98% Azeri
	Tsiphori	522	97% Azeri
	Tchreshi	181	97% Azeri
	Khakhalajvari	359	98% Azeri
Mamkhuti Community	Mamkhuti	2841	100% Azeri
	Zemo Arkevani	604	96% Azeri
	Kvemo Arkevani	1053	99% Azeri
	Khataveti	192	100% Azeri
Nakhiduri Community	Nakhiduri	4876	100% Azeri
	Balakhauri	502	100% Azeri
	Mukhrani	893	100% Azeri
	Mtsqneti	286	100% Azeri
	Tchapali	1623	100% Azeri
	Khidisquri	846	99% Azeri
Ratevani Community	Ratevani	1582	96% Georgian
	Zvareti	501	99% Azeri

Ratchisubani Comm.	Ratchisubani	795	98% Georgian
	Vanati	530	96% Azeri
	Samtredo	541	97% Azeri
	Khatissopheli	480	98% Georgian
Talaveri Community	Talaveri	6891	99% Azeri
	Patara Darbazi	40	100% Azeri
	Savaneti	1717	98% Azeri
Tandzia Village	Tandzia	613	99% Georgian
Kvemo Bolnisi Village	Kvemo Bolnisi	6766	100% Azeri
Kveshi Community	Kveshi	440	92% Georgian
	Kianeti	492	96% Armenian
	Mushevani	1194	100% Azeri
	Sabereti	112	100% Azeri
	Javshaniani	829	99% Azeri
Gardabani Rayon			
Gardabani City	Gardabani	16145	47% Georgian
			44% Azeri
			2% Armenian
			2% Russian
			1% Greek
Didi Lilo Town	Varketili	2932	93% Georgian
	Nasaguri	1409	82% Georgian
	Patara Lilo	663	100% Georgian
	Tsinubani	1189	98% Georgian
Kojori Town	Dideba	175	97% Georgian
	Kveseti	12	100% Georgian
	Kiketi	173	92% Georgian
	Samadlo	17	100% Georgian
Aghtakla Community	Aghtakla	4229	93% Azeri
Qaratakla Community	Qaratakla	2936	98% Azeri
Qarajalari Community	Qarajalari	4141	98% Azeri
Akhali Samgori Village	Akhali Samgori	2223	98% Georgian
Akhalsopheli Comm.	Akhalsopheli	1827	98% Georgian
	Mukhrovani	618	84% Georgian
	Satskhenisi	565	99% Georgian
Gamarjveba Village	Gamarjveba	5282	97% Georgian
Vakhtangisi Village	Vakhtangisi	2592	90% Azeri
Teleti Community	Zemo Teleti	847	99% Georgian
	Akhaltsqaro	487	97% Georgian
	Mukhran-Teleti	93	100% Georgian
	Kvemo Teleti	798	98% Georgian
	Tsalasquri	561	98% Georgian
Kalinino Community	Kalinino	1156	94% Azeri
	Ambartaphi	131	81% Azeri
			13% Georgian
	Akhalsheni	1184	87% Azeri
	Birliki	1655	98% Azeri
	Tazakendi	1856	98% Azeri
Krtsanisi Village	Krtsanisi	2560	87% Georgian
Kumisi Village	Kumisi	2182	97% Georgian
Lemshveniera Comm.	Lemshveniera	1931	98% Georgian
	Mzianeti	413	96% Georgian

	Nagebi	481	91% Georgian
Martqophi Community	Martqophi	7666	99% Georgian
	Vaziani	2694	79% Georgian
			11% Azeri
	Saakadze	286	76% Georgian
			12% Greek
Nazarlo Village	Nazarlo	5808	97% Azeri
Norio Community	Norio	3968	99% Georgian
	Kvishiani	285	92% Georgian
	Tsitelubani	373	91% Georgian
Sartitchala Community	Sartitchala	7041	90% Georgian
	Mughanlo	3558	99% Azeri
Tabakhmela Community	Tabakhmela	2036	97% Georgian
	Shindisi	1543	99% Georgian
	Tsavkisi	1199	99% Georgian
Phonitchala Village	Phonitchala	5698	89% Azeri
Kesalo Village	Kesalo	5612	98% Azeri
Jandara Village	Jandara	3118	97% Azeri
Dmanisi Rayon			
Dmanisi City	Dmanisi	3427	82% Georgian
			12% Azeri
			3% Russian
			2% Armenian
			1% Greek
Amamlo Community	Amamlo	1596	97% Azeris
	Angrevani	162	98% Azeri
	Bezaklo	763	97% Azeri
	Mamishlo	908	99% Azeri
	Sapharlo	738	99% Azeri
	Tqispiri	53	98% Azeri
Gantiadi Community	Gantiadi	816	96% Georgian
	Tnusi	454	100% Azeri
	Javakhi	628	97% Georgian
Gomareti Community	Didi Gomareti	802	97% Georgian
	Mamula	80	99% Georgian
	Pantiani	11	100% Georgian
	Patara Gomareti	174	97% Georgian
	Chitakhi	79	99% Georgian
Guguti Community	Guguti	178	99% Georgian
	Kamisho	355	99% Azeri
	Lokjandari	258	100% Azeri
Didi Dmanisi Comm.	Didi Dmanisi	871	96% Georgian
	Boslebi	667	98% Georgian
	Vardisubani	403	98% Georgian
	Patara Dmanisi	169	97% Georgian
Dmanisi Community	Iaqublo	498	99% Azeri
	Pantiani	410	99% Azeri
	Shindiliari	467	100% Azeri
Irganchai Village	Irganchai	2678	97% Azeri
Kamarlo Community	Kamarlo	713	100% Azeri
	Kariani	108	98% Azeri
	Shakhmarlo	341	100% Azeri

Kirovisi Community	Kirovisi	481	96% Azeri
	Bakhchalari	149	100% Azeri
	Dagarakhlo	711	100% Azeri
	Ormasheni	206	100% Azeri
	Saja	106	100% Azeri
	Qazilajlo	341	100% Azeri
Mashavera Community	Mashavera	864	97% Georgian
	Ukangori	10	80% Georgian
Sakire Village	Sakire	49	41% Greek 37% Azeri
	Gora	38	47% Azeri 47% Greek
Sarkineti Community	Sarkineti	63	43% Georgian 41% Greek
	Ganakhleba	33	42% Greek 36% Georgian
	Velispiri	64	56% Georgian 31% Greeks
Kv. Orozmani Comm.	Kvemo Orozmani	660	99% Azeri
	Dalari	313	100% Azeri
	Vake	317	90% Azeri
	Zemo Orozmani	901	100% Azeri
	Mtisdziri	243	98% Azeri
Qarabulaghi Comm.	Zemo Qarabulaghi	1114	99% Azeri
	Akha	93	99% Georgian
	Gedagdaghi	362	100% Azeri
	Mamishlari	102	100% Azeri
	Salamaleiki	98	100% Azeri
	Soghutlo	27	100% Azeri
	Useinkendi	135	100% Azeri
	Kvemo Qarabulaghi	333	100% Azeri
Qizilkilisi	Qizilkilisi	774	99% Azeri
	Kakliani	640	100% Azeri
Marneuli Rayon			
Marneuli City	Marneuli	23695	70% Azeri 19% Azeri 9% Georgian 1% Russian 1% Greek
Shaumiani Town	Akhqula	150	99% Azeri
	Qudro	43	100% Armenian
	Khikhani	304	100% Georgian
Algeti Community	Algeti	5017	99% Azeri
	Azizkendi	2170	100% Azeri
	Ajiiskendi	750	100% Azeri
	Tazakendi	2230	100% Azeri
	Sabirkendi	3713	100% Azeri
Akhkerphi Community	Akhkerphi	742	96% Armenian
	Chanakhchi	235	100% Armenian
Damia-Giaurarkhi Com.	Damia-Giaurarkhi	1815	100% Azeri
	Akhlo Lalalo	805	100% Azeri
	Damia	334	100% Armenian

	Kirovki	706	98% Azeri
Tamarisi Community	Tamarisi	1690	88% Georgian
	Alavari	288	97% Azeri
	Akhali Dioknisi	296	100% Georgian
Kasumlo Community	Kasumlo	2921	99% Azeri
	Aghmamedlo	2867	100% Azeri
	Baitalo	400	100% Azeri
	Beitaraphchi	483	100% Azeri
	Kushchi	452	99% Azeri
	Ulashlo	859	100% Azeri
Ophreti Community	Ophreti	158	78% Greek
			9% Georgian
			8% Russian
	Khokhmeli	81	95% Armenian
Sadakhlo Community	Sadakhlo	9486	97% Azeri
	Burma	200	91% Azeri
	Tazakendi	433	99% Azeri
	Molaoghli	1180	100% Azeri
Kapanakhchi Comm.	Kapanakhchi	1383	100% Azeri
	Ambarovka	1249	96% Azeri
	Ilmazlo	1033	100% Azeri
	Meore Kesalo	1587	100% Azeri
	Pirveli Kesalo	1622	100% Azeri
	Keshalo	3322	100% Azeri
Kurtlari Community	Kurtlari	1711	100% Azeri
	Baidari	1236	100% Azeri
	Didi Mughanlo	1815	100% Azeri
	Lezhbadini	1538	100% Azeri
	Khutor-Lezhbadini	177	100% Azeri
Qachaghani Comm.	Qachaghani	3974	98% Azeri
	Tekali	1682	97% Azeri
	Karach-Mughanlo	1155	99% Azeri
	Khanji-Gazlo	436	99% Azeri
Qizil-Ajlo Community	Qizil-Ajlo	7124	98% Azeri
Qulari Community	Kvemo Qulari	628	96% Azeri
	Budionovka	163	55% Armenian
			34% Azeri
	Dashtapha	1462	97% Azeri
	Zemo Qulari	1704	98% Azeri
	Kirikhlo	1262	100% Azeri
	Qirmizkendi	1072	78% Armenian
			19% Georgian
Shulaveri Community	Shulaveri	1787	53% Azeri
			23% Russian
			21% Georgian
	Araphlo	1118	100% Azeri
	Akhali Mamudlo	758	99% Azeri
	Enikendi	492	100% Azeri
	Zemo Sarali	1135	100% Azeri
	Imiri	1445	93% Azeri
	Seidkhojalo	527	100% Azeri
	Kvemo Sarali	1745	99% Azeri

Tserakvi Community	Tserakvi	248	Not available
	Sioni	351	62% Georgian 33% Armenian
	Jankhoshi	20	55% Georgian 40% Azeri
Tsereteli Community	Tsereteli	2206	89% Georgian
	Orjonikidze	1470	99% Georgian
	Didi Beglari	200	100% Azeri
	Norgiughi	567	63% Armenian 22% Azeri
	Patara Beglari	395	100% Azeri
Khojorni Community	Khojorni	842	78% Armenian 21% Azeri
	Burdadzori	58	91% Armenian
	Gulbaghi	273	99% Armenian
	Tsopi	746	62% Azeri 34% Armenian
Tsalka Rayon			
Tsalka City	Tsalka	2411	59% Greek 23% Georgian 11% Armenian 2% Russian 1% Azeri
Bediani Town	Khamhesi	118	39% Armenian 34% Greek 20% Georgian
Trialeti Town	Chapaevka	88	93% Georgian
Avranlo Community	Avranlo	717	81% Greek
	Tarsoni	9	78% Azeri 22% Georgian
Arjevan-Sarvani Comm.	Arjevan-Sarvani	794	99% Azeri
	Gedaklari	73	100% Azeri
	Cholmani	295	99% Azeri
Ashkala Village	Ashkala	2043	99% Armenian
Akhaliki Community	Akhaliki	112	71% Greek 14% Russian
	Kvemo Kharaba	303	91% Georgian
	Shipiaki	35	89% Greek
Bashkoi Community	Bashkoi	207	66% Greek 29% Georgian
	Imera	74	84% Greek
	Livadi	134	62% Greek 25% Azeri
	Qarakoni	177	73% Georgian 19% Greek
Burnasheti Village	Burnasheti	468	97% Armenian
Beshtasheni Comm.	Beshtasheni	373	87% Greek
	Kariaki	152	74% Greek 17% Georgian
	Shua Kharaba	54	87% Greek
Gumbati Village	Gumbati	471	82% Georgian
Guniakala Village	Guniakala	236	72% Greek

			18% Georgian
Darakoi Village	Darakoi	814	98% Armenian
Dashbashi Village	Dashbashi	367	96% Armenian
Edikilisa Village	Edikilisa	351	96% Greek
Aiazmi Village	Aiazmi	595	99% Armenian
Tejisi Village	Tejisi	607	100% Azeri
Tikilisa Village	Tikilisa	167	77% Greek
			17% Georgian
Kaburi Village	Kaburi	491	100% Armenian
Kushchi Village	Kushchi	893	98% Armenian
Nardevani Village	Nardevani	1516	99% Armenian
Ozni Village	Ozni	754	99% Armenian
Oliangi Village	Oliangi	405	94% Armenian
Rekha Village	Rekha	525	79% Georgian
			20% Greek
Qizilkilisa Village	Qizilkilisa	1848	98% Armenian
Chivtkilisa Village	Chivtkilisa	468	99% Armenian
Tsintsqaro Community	Tsintsqaro	168	67% Greek
			20% Georgian
			10% Azeri
	Santa	84	83% Georgian
Khando Community	Khando	187	98% Georgian
Khachkoi Community	Khachkoi	863	98% Armenian
	Tazakharaba	137	99% Armenian
Jinisi Village	Jinisi	304	92% Greek