South Ossetia: Could Refugees Return Already?

In his recent interview to the “Ajaria” channel B.Ivanishvili have noted the recent improvements in the trade and economic cooperation between Russia and Georgia, but at the same time he commented the territorial integrity of Georgia - the main source of controversy in the bilateral relationships of the two countries. He said that there’s a real chance to rebuild Georgia in its old borders without the military force usage: “First of all, we want to show our brothers in Abkhazia and Ossetia that we’re building a decent country, a country people will be happy to live in, this is the way to deal with this question”.

Yet it’s clear that everything that had happened in and around South Ossetia before it was recognized as a state by Russian, would render any rhetorics and steps that can be taken by the Georgian authorities completely useless. And it seems that the Georgian side does understand that, for this reason it tries to bring Moscow in settling the most pressing of the Georgian matters in the Ossetian question. To achieve this they try to create a certain background through the carefully crafted media coverage in hopes this should be sufficient to gain them the upper hand in the bilateral negotiations.

Take notice of the statement the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia Ilia II has made recently. According to his words, Moscow will assist the Georgian citizens in returning to their abandoned houses in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The most curious thing of this statement - is its timing since it was made after his meeting with the Russian President Vladimir Putin. It turned out that during the Moscow talks that were held for examining the troublesome state Christians have found themselves today on the Middle East. According to the sources that were present at this meeting, Geogian side tried to persuade Russia in adding South Ossetia to the final draft of the document that was to be prepared after the meeting. Despite numerous attempts, nobody did agree to put South Ossetia on the same level with "Al Qaeda".

As for the refugees mater, it has been examined numerous times by the Georgian side, but examined rather selectively. Last year the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that was titled “On refugees and internally displaced persons from Abkhazia, Georgia and the Tskhinvali region, Georgia”. Even though this resolution was to be treated “as recommendations”, it stressed the importance of returning the refugees to their homes. Russia tried to prevent this resolution from being signed due to a number of objections it had against it, the most important of which was the possible escalation of tension in the region that might provoked by this resolution. The facts are the resolution really did complicate the bilateral relations of Georgia and South Ossetia, since the near-the-border activity of the former ones, caused the latter toughen the measures taken to secure the border, and Russia had a direct involvement in this situation. In the recent years there was a number of “peace processions” that were aimed at South Ossetia. The Georgian security forces did their best to hire as many people to join this processions, as they could. But the most destructive of them are now the achievements of the ancient past since the Saakashvili era in Georgia is over now.

*Andrey Areshev, an expert at the Center of Central Asia and Caucasus Studies by the Institute of Oriental Studies RAS, exclusively for New Eastern Outlook.*