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# Georgia For Georgians?

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MIKHAIL SAKASHVILI'S POLICY AGGRAVATES ETHNIC PROBLEMS IN GEORGIA; President Saakashvili's policy mounts ethnic tension in Georgia and foments immigration.

Tbilisi invited Tskhinvali to attend a meeting of the state commission for determination of South Ossetian status within Georgia.

State Minister for Conflict Settlement, David Bakradze, said he had already cabled the invitation to Tskhinvali. The state commission was established on President Mikhail Saakashvili's order. Chaired by Prime Minister Zurab Nogaideli, it includes Interior Minister Gela Bezhuashvili and some other heads of ministries and departments.

South Ossetia declined the invitation as "groundless", to quote Foreign Minister Murat Jioyev. "Trying to persuade the West that they too contribute to the process of conflict settlement, the Georgian authorities are simply aggravating Georgian-Ossetian relations," Jioyev said.

Regardless of what Tbilisi might be claiming, Moscow never received any cables from it concerning work on the status of South Ossetia, according to Ambassador-at-Large, Yuri Popov, who represents the Russian Federation in the Joint Control Commission. Commenting on Nogaideli's promise to invite the EU and government of Russia to participate, Popov said, "Actually, I'm not sure at all that Russia will want participation because it implies the necessity to negotiate with Dmitry Sanakoyev, the head of the provisional administration..."

Moscow does not regard Sanakoyev as a participant in the talks."

Russia is convinced that no negotiations over the Georgian-Ossetian conflict settlement or status of South Ossetia are possible without the actual involvement of the South Ossetian side.

The matter was discussed by President of South Ossetia, Eduard Kokoity, and OSCE Chairman's Envoy, Jose Barella, who told the South Ossetian leader he knew how dangerous Sanakoyev's administration was because its activities could foment another conflict. All the same, Tbilisi keeps insisting on having Sanakoyev in the talks. The government of Georgia sponsors his administration and strengthens its security's might. Saakashvili needs South Ossetia back under Tbilisi's control or everything will have been in vain. Unless the conflicts are settled, Tbilisi can forget about EU and NATO membership. The premise was aired by an obscure Lithuanian official, but the implications are clear. "Established borders are of paramount importance for NATO and the EU. Even if all membership rules are observed but conflicts on the borders remain unsettled, Georgia's entry will be extremely problematic and everyone knows it," one Kestutis Kriciunas, adviser to the defense minister of Lithuania, said.

The haste with which Saakashvili is trying to settle ethnic conflicts in Georgia does not improve the image of Georgia in the eyes of the international community. Ossetians and Abkhazians are not the only ones to be encountering problems in its relations with the Georgian leadership. The Azerbaijani diaspora in the Marneul and Bolnis districts of the republic regularly complain of harassment. Similar reports come from Samtskhe-

Javakhetia where the Armenians live. The Greeks are leaving Georgia en masse, clearly scared of last year's incidents in Tsalka. The Russian-speakers' exodus from Georgia is nearly over. The "Advance guard" of the Dukhobor community from the Ninotsmind district of Georgia settled in the Tambov region of Russia over a month ago. Gorelovka, Bogdanovka, Zhdanovka, Spasskoye and other settlements are abandoned. Over 3,000 families moved to Bryansk, Voronezh, and other Russian regions. The Dukhobors discovered their rights encroached on in Georgia. The authorities refused to sell them land, claiming that their settlements were located in the five-kilometers wide border zone. The Dukhobors were left without anything because agriculture and cattle-breeding are their life. Over 273,500 Russians left Georgia since 1999, depleting the Russian diaspora in this country by more than 80%.

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