

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

THE PROBLEM OF JAVAKHK IN REGIONAL SECURITY:  
A STUDY OF POTENTIALS FOR AN ETHNIC CONFLICT

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this Master's Essay is to examine today's tense situation in Javakhk, Georgia, which is a geopolitically important region with a large and compactly living Armenian population and an area of interest for major powers.

The study examines several factors which can trigger a conflict in Javakhk. One of them is the possible repatriation of Meskhetian Turks into Javakhk. The findings show that this factor by itself is sufficient for triggering large scale ethnic conflict.

The study also looks at the political situation in Javakhk which Georgian as well as Armenian governments do not want to consider and address. The study shows that the danger of the situation rests upon the fact that in terms of lack of an adequate reaction to the existing political tension in the region and absence of efforts to transmit it into the way of a constructive and controllable dialogue the tension could be negatively used by third parties. The paper also discusses severe socio-economic and cultural problems of the region, which, as analysis shows, are results of special minority policies pursued by Georgian government.

The withdrawal of Russian military base from Javakhk is also discussed in the essay. The study concludes that it is a factor which would affect an important sector of the population, the economy of which is related to the base, yet, it is wrong to consider base as a factor for development. Another issue examined by this study is planned construction of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad. The findings indicate clearly that this factor can have dangerous implications for Javakhk and Armenia as it would consolidate the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey axes.

Finally, the study looks at interests of different major powers for which Javakhk and the internal policies of Georgia are of significant importance. It is argued that further neglect and inactions of Georgian as well as Armenian governments with regard to the problems in the region can turn Javakhk into potential trouble spot for Georgia and can have very dangerous implications for the regional security.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The tense situation in Javakhk (also known as Samtskhe-Javakheti region) is one of the most delicate minority situation in the South Caucasus today. Several triggering factors could destabilize the situation in Javakhk and spark unrest and armed conflict, and the regional implications of such a conflict are large and possibly devastating. Thus, the purpose of this Master Essay is to study today's complex situation in Javakhk, which is conditioned by different factors, and try to find out deeply rooted reasons as well as provide analysis and recommendations.

The escalating tensions in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia serve to underline the fragility of the Georgian State.\* These conflicts have compounded the negative economic consequences of Georgia's transition to a market economy. The conflicts have also weakened the government's ability to reform and expand the economy and improve the countries infrastructure. It is important to mention that the economic burden has not been shared equally amongst the different regions in Georgia. This paper also focuses on how the economic and social as well as political neglect of Javakhk region in southern Georgia is raising the specter of a secessionist movement. The importance of Javakhk lies in its strategic location, bordering Turkey and Armenia, and more importantly, because it lies in the path of the Baku-Gehyan pipeline.

The economic and political crisis in Javakhk is leading to a rapid destabilization of the region and therefore, there is a necessity for quick and resolute action by the Georgian government as well as by Armenian government and other powers to contain the problem before

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\* Abkhazia, located in the northwest of Georgia and South Ossetia, located on the north east of Georgia, declared independence during the early 90's.

it erupts into full-fledged conflict. Such a conflict in Javakhk will seriously threaten the planned use of Georgian territory for the export of energy from Azerbaijan and also will threaten the already weakened authority of the central government.

This essay holds that Javakhk has all ingredients for turning into a potential trouble spot for Georgia and the region at large: it is a geopolitically important area with a large and compactly living ethnic minority, which has severe economic, cultural and political problems and is an area of interest for major powers in the region. My contention is that primary problems in Javakhk are not economic and social but ethno-political. Thus, all above mentioned problems need to be addressed in order to avoid more serious ones in the future.

The Master's Essay will test the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis #1:** The tense situation of continuous character experienced by Javakhk can lead to large scale ethnic conflict or even to war.

The essay will also give answers to the following research questions:

**Research Questions #1-2:** Is 'the repatriation of Meskhetian Turks' by itself sufficient factor for triggering large scale ethnic conflict? Which are Turkey's and Azerbaijan's interests in bringing Meskhetian Turks into the region?

**Research Question #3:** Is today's tense situation in Javakhk conditioned only by socio-economic problems?

**Research Question #4:** Is there a relationship between withdrawal of the Russian military base and worsening of the security and standard of living of Javakhk Armenians?

**Research Question #5:** Will Armenian government's involvement in the problem contributes to the settlement of the conflict and end discriminatory and non-constructive policies pursued by the Georgian authorities?

**Research Question #6:** What possible implications can have the construction of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway on the security situation of the region?

**Research Question #7:** Which are the role and possible effects of Baku-Geyhan pipeline on the situation in Javakhk?

**Research Questions #8-9:** What is the role of the world powers (U.S., EU and Russia) and regional powers (Azerbaijan, Turkey and Iran) in Javakhk in pursuing their self-interest to gain influence in the region? What are the interests pursued by each power and what influence can they have in the region and change direction of events?

## **Methodology**

The study utilizes historical/comparative analysis methodology. The resources for analysis include books, articles in specialized journals, official documents. The internet and media were used to follow the current events in Georgia and Javakhk and to locate articles written about the problem from people with a wide range of opinions.

## **Outline of the Paper**

The paper is divided into six chapters: 1) introduction; 2) historical background; 3) the socio-economic and political problems that could lead to conflict; 4) the geopolitical importance of Javakhk and interests of world and regional powers; 5) and a conclusion. The introductory chapter gives an overview of the major topics that will be discussed in the paper. The next section explains the methodology. The third section is the outline of the paper.



Chapter two is the background chapter. There are provided brief geographic and demographic information about Javakhk. The second section provides historical background. And the third section outlines the current debates with regard to Javakhk. It touches upon the factors which can destabilize the region: economics, politics and Russian military base.

Chapter three looks at socio-economic and political situation in Javakhk and how each could be cause for the conflict in the future.

The chapter four examines the geopolitical importance of Javakhk. There are analyzed the geopolitical importance of Javkhk to Armenia, Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, the US and EU. Javakhk is important to Armenia because of several issues which include military and trade. Because Javakhk is overwhelmingly inhabited by ethnic Armenians, Armenia needs stability in Javakhk so as not to be seen as being hostile to Georgia. In addition, even though Javakhk might seen remote and unimportant, it is at the heart of a power struggle between three powerful states (Russia, the US and Turkey) over the eventual economic and military influence over the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Chapter five is the concluding part of this paper. It includes several policy recommendations that are meant to bring about stability in Javakhk. These recommendations will vary from calling on the Georgian government to build up the region's infrastructure to calling on it to grant autonomy to Javakhk.

## CHAPTER II

### GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY AND DEMOGRAPHY

**Javakhk** is a region in southern Georgia, with Akhaltskha as its capital. It is bordered by Guria and Imereti to the north, Kartli (Shida Kartli and Kvemo Kartli) to the to the north-east and to the east and by Armenia, Turkey and Ajaria (Online Encyclopedia). Javakhk lies about twenty kilometers east-southeast of Ajaria\*, shares a roughly 80-90 kilometer border with Turkey to its west and south west, and has approximately 45-50 kilometers of common border with Armenia, which lies to its south and is just west of the ethnic Azeri populated region of Marneuli (see appendix one) (Guretsky 1998). Javakhk has historically contained the districts of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, and several years ago, was incorporated by the Georgian central government into a much larger administrative unit (mkhare) known as the Samtskhe-Javakheti region which encompasses nearly 6,413 square kilometers (nearly 9.3 percent of Georgia) and has a population of almost 235 000.

Today Samtskhe-Javakheti is composed of 6 districts (Adigen, Aspinza, Akhalkalak, Akhaltskha, Borjomi and Ninotsminda (see appendix two)) with Akhaltskha as the regional center (Guretsky 1998). *This territorial redistricting was a conscious attempt to dilute the Armenian majority by altering the demographics of the region. By incorporating the Armenian districts of Akhalkalai and Ninotsminda into a greater region with four other districts, the Georgian government sought to gradually diminish the Armenia majority and to reassert Georgian control over its southern areas.*

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\* Ajaria is an autonomous region of Georgia located on the south western part of the country. It borders Turkey and the Black Sea.

There are seven major towns, 66 smaller administrative units, and over 250 villages in Javakhk (Giragossian 2001).

Armenians have long been the dominant minority in Georgia, surpassing the Russian presence and far outnumbering the ethnic Azeri and Turkish populations. The Georgian capital Tbilisi has been home to more Armenians than Georgians for much of the past two hundred years. These factors, however, have also adversely affected Armenian-Georgian relations and have led to intermittent conflict and territorial disputes including military confrontation during the early period of independence from 1918-1920 (Giragossian 2001). When after the war with Turkey (1828-1829) Russia obtained the Black Sea coast from the Kuban to Poti and the largest portion of the Georgian provinces of Meskheta and Javakheti the Armenians living on the Turkish territory began to massively resettle to the territories of the Russian empire. It was during this process that Armenians settled in the Akhalkalaki district (Javakheti), where they soon outnumbered indigenous Georgians (Guretsky 1998).

After 1829, 2,536 Armenian families resettled to the neighbouring Meskheta (centre - the city of Akhaltskha) from Erzerum, while smaller groups of their compatriots had lived there earlier as well. On the eve of the Bolshevik coup, Armenians amounted to as much as 82% of the entire population of the Akhaltskha district.

Under the Soviet rule, the share of ethnic Armenian population in the Georgian SSR slowly, albeit systematically declined, forming the average of 10% (still maintaining the second place numerically after the Georgians) (Guretsky 1998).

After the seventy years of Soviet rule, Georgians once again claimed their independence as a sovereign state. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of April 1990, the newly formed Georgian parliament declared its

independence. Zviad Gamsakhurdia\* was elected president. His hard-line, militant-ultra nationalism worsened the relations between Georgians and the minorities that made up thirty percent (Antonenko 2001) of Georgia and his “Georgia for Georgians” campaign\* discriminated against all minorities and exacerbated the tensions within the country. Conflicts simultaneously broke out in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the Georgians quickly lost control over those two regions.

As Abkhazia and South Ossetia were revolting, tensions began to surface in Javakhh. Historically, the Javakhh region has alternated between Armenian and Georgian rule until the 11<sup>th</sup> century when it was incorporated into the Georgian Bagratid kingdom. In 1829, the region was fully absorbed into the Tsarist Russian Empire. By 1916, the Armenian population of Akhalkalak had comprised nearly 84 000 out of region’s 107 000 population, with an Armenian majority continuing to this day (Guretski 1998).

The first signs of tension in the region erupted in 1989 with an aggressive campaign by a group of Georgian nationalists led by former President Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Meraba Kostava. The nationalists sought to further alter the demographic majority held by the Armenians of Javakhh by introducing new settlements of ethnic Svans, allegedly for resettlement due to heavy flooding in the Svan's native districts. The nationalist campaign was seen by many to have an overtly anti-Armenian tone, a situation compounded by their distinction between ethnic Armenian and Azeri and their strongly pro-Azeri sentiment. This was also evident in the electoral record of the Gamsakhurdia presidential election, as he received over 86 of the votes in the ethnic Azeri Marneuli region and barely 52 percent in the Armenian Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts (Giragosian 2001).

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\* He was a well-known dissident of the Brezhnev era.

\* The “Georgia for Georgians” campaign stressed that minority groups were to be thought of as guests in Georgia. And as guests they should be welcomed, but they should not expect to permanently stay in the Georgia.

Following the establishment of independence in Georgia and the coming to power of the nationalists, the Armenians of Javakhk were faced with more strained relationship with the central Georgian government. Newly installed Georgian president Zviad Gamsakhurdia made no secret of his contempt for the Armenians of Javakhk and specifically favored the ethnic Azeri minority over the Armenians. The Gamsakhurdia government instituted a series of discriminatory policies in governing Javakhk. But the most damaging policy for Javakhk was one of economic neglect (Giragosian 2001).

For decades, Javakhk was the most underdeveloped region of the country. But since independence, the Georgian government's irresponsible policies, mismanagement and neglect laid the foundations for the economic suffering and hardship that plagues Javakhk today.

In 1988 the national-popular movement Javakhk (the Armenians for Javakheti) was created whose influence rapidly grew among the local Armenians. The official goals of the organisation were the preservation of Armenian cultural heritage, science and history of Armenia in local schools, protection of national institutions and also the development of the region. According to David Rstakyan, one of the Javakhk leaders and Chairman of the Coordinating Council of the public and political organizations of Javakhk, initially Russians, Georgians and Greeks too were among the Javakhk leaders. Only after Gamsakhurdia came to power, did the organization assume the role of a protector of the rights of the region's Armenian population "frightened by the threats on the part of the Georgian nationalists. From the very beginning, however, the goal of Armenians in Javakhk was at least to obtain autonomy, if not to unite with the region with Armenia. The centrifugal aspirations of Armenians (as well as Abkhaz and Ossetians) had from the very start been supported by Moscow. The aim of their policy was to maintain control over Georgia which then resolutely strove to gain independence, yet being

weakened by those centrifugal movements, was forced to seek help in the Kremlin. In its turn, Yerevan tried to quell the secessionist aspirations of Armenians in Javakhk. Armenia wanted to avoid fight on two fronts and realized that in the event of conflict with Georgia, it would find itself virtually blockaded (the borders had already been sealed by Azerbaijan and Turkey). Both processes (Russia's support of the centrifugal trends in Javakhk and opposition of these trends by Armenia's official leadership) intensified in the subsequent years (Guretski 1998).

During the early 1990s, the Javakhk Armenians refused to recognize the authority or jurisdiction of the Gamsakhurdia-appointed governor (or presidential plenipotentiary representative) and launched a broad campaign of passive resistance by refusing to serve in the Georgian army during 1992-1995. Armenians refused to accept three consecutive prefectural candidates sent from the capital because they were Georgian. This was done in the following manner - the armed crowd gathered in front of the administrative building in Akhalkalaki, and did not let candidates from Tbilisi into the building. The protests were organized by Javakhk. David Rstakyan offers the following explanation:

*“Prefectures were introduced in the period of transition from totalitarianism to democracy, but we considered that they led to dictatorship as they consolidated the executive power. We attached critical importance to the nationality of the prefect since in a non-democratic state with no civil society and where no fair rights and freedoms are guaranteed by the Constitution, the fate of a nation is contingent upon individuals serving in this position. We did not trust the central authorities and therefore wanted an Armenian to be their representative in Akhalkalaki”* (Guretski 1998, 4).

The local population, although never prone to the outright secessionist tendencies in nearby Ajaria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, began to forge a sense of self-sufficiency. The

situation fostered the formation of new indigenous organizations, playing an increasingly important role in defending and articulating the demands of the Javakhk Armenians. This tendency was reinforced by the inability, and unwillingness, of the Armenian government of the time to raise their concerns and highlight their plight with the Georgians. The proximity of the Russian military base at Akhalkalaki also helped to create an overall self-sufficiency for the Javakhk Armenians that culminated in the Georgian hesitance to directly impose its rule in Javakhk for much of the first half of the decade (Giragosian 2001).

In light of the poor state of relations with the Gamsakhurdia regime, the Armenians began to establish ties to other Georgian groups and political parties united in a loose anti-Gamsakhurdia grouping. This early "foreign policy" formed new relationships with the Abkhazians and with the neighboring Ajarian leadership.

As the Gamsakhurdia regime collapsed under its own internal dissensions and conflict, culminating in a military coup in a January 1992, Gamsakhurdia was forced from power and Eduard Shevardnadze \* was invited to Georgia to temporarily assume the country's leadership. On August 24, 1995, a new Constitution was adopted and new presidential elections were held in November of that same year. Eduard Shevardnadze assumed the presidency of Georgia on November 26, 1995. Presidential election in 2000 resulted in Shevardnadze's winning his second, five year term (Giragosian 2001).

The new leadership publicly attempted to ease the concerns of Javakhk. President Shevardnadze initially adopted a hard-line response, however, and moved against the Armenians of the nearby Akhalitskhe district. Seeking to avoid a direct confrontation with the Javakhk Armenians, Shevardnadze targeted the more vulnerable Armenians of Akhalitskhe. The

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\* Eduard Shevardnadze was the former (and last) Soviet Foreign Minister and former Secretary of Georgian Communist Party in the 1960s.

Armenians of this district, although part of the overall region, were suffering a higher degree of emigration and the Armenian parity with the native Georgians in this district was decreasing significantly during the Gorbachev years. Tbilisi deployed units of the local Georgian “Mkhedrioni” (Horsemen), a paramilitary militia affiliated with the standing National Guard but subordinated to direct presidential control (Giragosian 2001).

The Mkhedrioni militia, eventually disbanded and outlawed for its excesses and abuses of the population, was utilized to restore central control over the surrounding districts of Javakhk and hinted at the start of a new effort to restore Georgian rule over the entire southern region by military means.

The Georgian government also thought to modify the Javakhk Armenians demands for autonomy by forging an intergovernmental agreement with the Armenian government allowing Yerevan to supply textbooks for the Armenian language schools in Javakhk, president Shevardnadze has also discussed Armenian proposals calling for a new initiative for Armenian investment in the development of infrastructure in the region, including plans to provide electricity.

However, the general hard-line reaction by Shevardnadze fostered a strong resentment of the central Georgian government and edged Javakhk away from any hopes that their future lay with Tbilisi. Later efforts to repair Tbilisi's relations with Javakhk continued to be hindered by the severity of this period and were also strained by Georgia's increasingly close relations with both Azerbaijan and Turkey. This led to the Georgian government's current policies of avoiding any overt presence in the region. But this pretense of non-interference in Javakhk also includes a continuation of economic and political neglect and underdevelopment.



With the election in 2004 in Georgia, popular opposition National Movement leader Mikhail Saakashvili was elected as the country's new president, garnering more than 96 percent of the vote. But Saakashvili's election victory seems turned out to be as much punishment as reward for his successful ouster of President Shevardnadze.

The new Georgian leadership has inherited the very same problems that allowed them to rise to power on a wave of discontent and despair. In general terms, it seems assured that this new Georgian leadership continues to pursue the traditional foreign and local discriminatory policy of the Shevardnadze. There is a continuation of policies largely driven by the overriding imperative to strengthen statehood in the wake of a severe decline in state power and control. This is matched by a deepening of Georgia's pronounced pro-Western strategic orientation, a direction rooted in the recognition of a mounting external threat from an assertive Russia and from an internal collapse of authority and a loss of territory and sovereignty (DerGhoukassian and Giragosian 2004).

For the Armenians of Javakhk, these factors exacerbated an inherent insecurity and fear, and only compounded a daunting set of threats, to their very existence.

### **Current Debates around the Problem of Javakhk**

During the Gamsakhurdia presidency, nationalist politicians in Tbilisi saw Javakhk as only an area with less of an immediate threat to its security or to its military. The much more intense conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia meant that the lack of any real ethnic conflict in Javakhk placed the southern region far down the list of the Georgian government's priorities.

This was demonstrated by the increasingly severe policy of economic neglect and underdevelopment by the Georgian Government regarding Javakhk.

Over a long term, however, serious Georgian annalists and officials were concerned over the situation in Javakhk, especially given the region's pattern of conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabagh – each being ethnic conflicts, and each sharing similar backgrounds. They were all territories that had large ethnic populations and had once been contested areas and were heavily armed. As it is already mentioned above Javakhk's population was and still is over 90 percent Armenian, and Armenia and Georgia had fought a war over it in the early 1900's. It had once constituted a part of a "Greater Armenia". When fighting broke out between the Abkhaz and Georgians in Abkhazia, the local Armenians sided with the Abkhaz, but whether it was willingly or by necessity, that is by created situation, is unclear. And when the conflict in Nagorno-Karabagh flared up, the Armenians of Javakhk went to their aid. These various factors made Tbilisi wary of the Armenians in Georgia, and especially those in Javakhk. Their concerns were heightened during the last stage of Gamsakhurdia's presidency. During his harsh anti-minority rule, Javakhk operated outside of Tbilisi's control from the late 80's until 1991 (Cutler 1999).

But, after Gamsakhurdia was forced out of office, the residents of Javakhk no longer felt threatened and they once again willingly came back under Tbilisi's control. But that did not end the problems with Javakhk. During Shevardnadze's presidency, the residents complained about the growing decline in the socio-economic situation in the region. Their concerns were no longer directed at the anti-minority policies of Tbilisi but rather with what had been their concern from the beginning, Tbilisi's neglect and failure to develop the region. Tbilisi continued to pass over Javakhk and as a result, today, Javakhk is the least invested part of Georgia (Guretski 1998).

There is a continuous debate over the nature and roots of the problem in Javakhhk and their implications for destabilizing the region. There are several ideas as to what could lead to a destabilization of Javakhhk. The first concept argues that the problem is only in poor economic situation in Javakhhk, that is, it is the main factor that could cause instability in the region. The idea is that further erosion of the economy could lead to an outbreak of violence. The allies of this idea are *Richard Giragosian, Robert Culter, Rostom Sarkissian, Aris Khazinian, Ruben Nahapetyan* as well as Georgian and Armenian authorities. Moreover, the latter do not want to consider and address political and ethnic problems as the main cause of tension and mask them under socioeconomic ones. It is important also to mention that if all Georgian researchers the “separatist” movements of local Armenian population consider as the main cause of possible conflict than, Armenian and many foreign experts, the situation in Javakhhk analyze from the stance of discrimination of Armenian national minorities and protection of their rights in taking part in political, economic and cultural life (Minasyan 2006). Along with this many foreign researchers examine the region from the position of geopolitical planning of future South Caucasus.

A second argument points to ethnicity and politics as being the main reason why there could be conflict in the region. Many political annalists (*Armen Aivazian, Sergey Minasyan, David Darchiashvilli, Hasan Kanbolat, Nazmi Gu and etc.*) believe that problems might arise in the future mainly because of ethnic issues between the overwhelming Armenian majority that lives in Javakhhk and the Georgian Government. The third rationale argues that conflict would arise because of the presence of Russian military base\* in Akhalkalaki. Because Russia has its

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\* Russia has had military presence in Javakhhk since 1828 when the area was conquered from Turkey. In the Soviet time the military presence was massive and Russia inherited the Soviet Base facilities after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia made a temporary agreement with Shevardnadze, the second Georgian President allowing them to keep this and other base facilities in Georgia. However the Georgian government under President Saakashvili

own strategic interests in the region, and serves as a security guarantee for the local Armenians, if it is made to leave, some believe that it would initiate a conflict. There are also other factors like, the repatriation of Meskhetian Turks into the region or the construction of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway which together with other factors can bring to conflict. These grounds also would be discussed below.

Richard Giragosian, a known analyst of the Caucasus, argues that the most pressing problems in Javakhk are economic. In his article he writes that the overwhelming needs tend to exacerbate the overall economic decline in the rest of the country and that the relative poverty of Javakhk, consistently below the national level, only heightens Javakhk's vulnerability and insecurity (Giragossian 2001). He focuses on the lack of employment and the poor conditions of the economic infrastructure as being the main reason for discontent and instability in the region. Dr. Robert Cutler like Giragossian also believes that one of potential dangers in Javakhk is economics. He thinks that the economic situation for many Armenians could drastically worsen if the Russian military departed from the region and Georgian authorities would be ill-equipped to fill the economic void created by the departure of Russian troops (1999).

Whereas Giragosian, Cutler and several other people have argued that the main problem are due to economic issues, there have been others that have argued that ethnicity plays the main role in the rise of future problems. Although ethnicity is a concern in the political circles in Tbilisi, some analysts will agree that ethnicity can be a factor in any future problems. David Darchiashvilli says that the concern of regional countries around Southern Georgia is explained by the apprehension that local ethnic tensions may have regional repercussion. He implies that

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demands that the Russians end their military presence and in spring 2005 the agreement was made that Russia will close down their base in Akhalkalaki by 2008. At the present moment the base has much less personal and equipment than before and the presence is largely symbolic.

future problem in Javakhk would be ethnic because of the ties between Armenia and the leaders of the region (Darchiashvilli 2000).

The Turkish perspective is provided by Hasan Kanbolat and Nazmi Gul. In an article for the Center for Eurasian Strategic Studies, they argued that any conflict in Javakhk would be based on ethnic issues because the Armenians want to create “mono-ethnic structures” and drive other people off the land. This means that if any conflicts or tensions do arise, then they will have something to do with ethnicity because that’s what Armenians try to achieve: mono-ethnicity (Kanbolat and Gul 2001).

Additionally, other analysts (Sarkissian and others) argue that Russian security concerns could be the primary factor driving future problems in Javakhk. These people think that a great deal of problems could arise from the closure of the Russian military base that is located in Akalkhalaki. The closure of the base is a contentious issue in Russian-Georgian relations and has ramifications for Javakhk and the rest of the region. The Georgians see the base as a remnant of the old Soviet system, that must be disbanded and the Russians see the base as a strategic defense mechanism to protect its southern flank from Turkey. Voitsekh Guretski, one of the first Westerners who did detailed research about Javakhk thinks that if the Kremlin decides to preserve the south Caucasus in the zone of its influence at any expense, it would try to trigger a conflict in Javakhk (1998).

The issue of the Russian military base, while very political, is viewed by the locals as a part of economic argument. While the base does provide for the defense of the local population against feared threats by Turkey, the economic nature of the base is among the major concerns for most locals.

Now before the paper begins going into detail about regions geopolitical importance in order to understand why do people care about Javakhk, one need to understand the economic and political situation in Javakhk which together became rather strong factor to cause discontent and conflict in the region.

## CHAPTER III

### CURRENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SITUATION IN JAVAKHK

The economic, social, cultural and political turmoil following the collapse of the Soviet Union hit Javakhk harder than most other regions of the former Soviet Union – though the effects of this turmoil were felt everywhere. In Javakhk the economic decline has continued up to today, and the major problems concerning the replacement of the collapsed system by new and effective social and institutional structures have yet to be solved. The region and its population suffer from economic hardship, poverty, unemployment, collapse of state supply systems, massive emigration and isolation from Georgian political life. In short, Javakhk can be described today as a society characterized by regression back to survival on subsistence agriculture. Armenians working in Russia provide the main flow of cash income. Many Armenian men from Javakhk spend the summer period in Russia to build roads and houses.

So, the residents of Javakhk are constantly faced with a great deal of problems that if to deepen could be the cause of future unrest for the region. The residents of Javakhk are content with being citizens of Georgia and have never demonstrated any secessionist sentiments or calls for outright independence, but their patience with Georgian government has begun to run thin. During the ultra-nationalist Zviad Gamsakhurdia presidency and the beginning of Shevardnadze presidency, Georgia saw the situation in Javakhk as an ethnic one and reacted accordingly. They reasoned that moving against the region as was done in Abkhazia and Ossetia would trigger violence, so the authorities left Javakhk alone. They not only stayed out of Javakhk, but at times they acted as though Javakhk did not exist. Investments were not undertaken and social needs not tended to.

Thus, the economic problems are very pressing for residents of Javakhk. Prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Javakhk's location on the border with Turkey made it a strategic region. In the 1950s, the frontier zone with Turkey along Javakhk was expanded up to 78 kilometers, which meant that only those living in and permitted by the Soviet authorities could enter the region (Melkonyan 2003). This designation made the region off limits to Georgia and Georgian obliged by not investing in the region. This imposed isolation on the residents of this region from the rest of Georgia negatively affected the region's economic integration with the rest of the country and the residents began to express discontent. During the late 1980s, the Government of Georgian SSR adopted an economic and social program to appease the local population out of fear of local unrest. But, nonetheless, the situation was not drastically changed and Javakhk is still "...the least invested part of Georgia" (Guretski 1998). So, the isolation of Javakhk is not only ethnic and linguistic but also physical since the roads leading to Javakhk are extremely bad and the railroad does not work regularly.

In the second part of 1980s, during the development of disturbance in Karabakh, the Georgian government adopted a program of socio-economic development for population in Javakhk. Most likely, it was an act of making secure themselves from development of that kind of events. But that program has been limited only to those in mountainous regions who suffered from natural disaster. In 1997 the authority of Georgia approved a new program of socio-economical development of Javakhk region, but this one like previous and next projects remained on the paper. It became clear for local population that central authority simply does not want to solve socio-economic problems of region and by this way stimulates migration of Armenians (Minasyan 2006). The result of this is an extremely poor condition of Javakhk's economy.



Until today Javakhhk faces a dilemma that relates to it being located close to the border with a country that is seen as a threat to the local (Armenian) population: should the border with Turkey remain closed or almost closed, the region will continue to be very much a peripheral region and will stand last in the queue for investments and funding. However, potentially, Javakhhk can be transformed into a transit hub not only between Georgia and Turkey but also between Georgia, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia.

Closely intertwined with the economy is the amount and degree of social services a region receives. In Javakhhk's case, its relative isolation from the rest of Georgia made it economically less valuable for allocating social services compared to other regions like Ajaria. So, along the economic hardship the lack of social services offered to the residents is also causing a great deal of anger and resentment for the residents of Javakhhk. This frustration with respect to social services makes instability more likely. The issue of the state language is a huge problem. After the collapse of Soviet Union the state language has shifted from Russian to Georgian. But the Armenians as a rule do not speak Georgian and they still use Russian language as a means of interethnic communication in Georgia as well as for their seasonal employment in Russia.

This chapter looks at the problems associated with the local economy. It details the problems with the regions infrastructure (roads, energy situations, etc.) as well as the chapter looks at other problems that hamper the region's economic growth. Next the chapter focuses on two social services (education and health care) which are not adequately met and on political situation in the region. This section suggests how the above mentioned problems could lead to a destabilization of the region and even to the armed conflict.

## **Economic Problems in Javakhk**

### **Physical Conditions**

Javakhk is located on a high steppe in South-Western Georgia and because of the mountainous conditions the climate is very harsh and winters are long and cold. Most villages in the region are located 1700-2000 meters above sea level. In the lower areas it is possible to grow mainly potatoes, but some residents grow also vegetables and even cereals, however, these are usually for consumption or limited sale. Thus, Javakhk's main source of income is agriculture (Minasyan 2006). There is, however, a scarcity of fertile land for farming. In the higher regions there is an abundance of land suitable for pasture, but it is sometimes of rather poor quality. The soil in the Javakhk region is "black soil" and thus considered to be of high quality. The main factor limiting farming is the harsh climate.

The villages can be divided according to their altitude above sea level. In the relatively lower-lying areas land is scarce and the main activity is potato growing combined with cattle breeding and gardening for domestic use. In the higher areas, on the contrary, the main activity is animal breeding, combined with potatoes and some modest gardening for domestic use. The local roads in the region that connect the villages are in very poor condition and are often closed in winter (Hertoft 2005).

Because of being far from the ports of Batumi and Poti the trade in Javakhk was always largely dependent from the imports of goods from Armenian, South Ossetia and to a certain extent from Russia. After South-Ossetian events in 2004, the arrival of goods ceased. Nowadays, there are also problems with delivery of goods from Armenia because of one sided toughening of

passing regime on Armenian-Georgian border by Georgian authorities. All these negatively affected life standards of population (Minasyan 2006).

There are almost no natural forests in the Javakhk region, except at the northern border near Bakurian. However, a considerable expanse of pine forests was planted in the 1950s and 1960s (Hertoft 2005). In the early 90s, however, much of the wood from these forests was exploited as the economy collapsed with the demise of the Soviet Union and it was the only source of heating for the local population. The forests have not been able to meet the region's needs for firewood for a considerable period of time and the rather small trees are not particularly suitable for timber anyway.



## **Agriculture**

As it is already mentioned above the majority of the population in the region is involved in agriculture. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the collective sector of agriculture

collapsed very rapidly. Therefore, most of the collective structures ceased to work around 1992. In 1992 there was a land reform in Georgia that granted each family 1.25 hectares, with the remaining land being included in the state land reserve. Furthermore, in many villages there is access to pasture lands in the higher mountainous areas for a small fixed yearly price per head of cattle and sheep. Cereals are not grown on a large scale in the region. Wheat is only grown on some plots where the climate is favorable, and the region is not self-sufficient in flour for bread. Barley is grown in many villages, but mainly to feed animals with fodder. Thus, most households in the villages are involved in subsistence farming producing potatoes, meat, milk products, eggs and vegetables for domestic consumption and limited sale. The agricultural sector further produces potatoes, meat and milk-products\* for marketing outside the villages in the regional centers (Hertoft 2005). Some of the potatoes are sold in Armenian and Georgian markets, but this usually entails a great deal of difficulty because of the poor transportation infrastructure and the extensive corruption by police and customs officials. Sometimes some farmers travel to Gyumri (Northern Armenian city) to trade or barter (mainly with grapes) their products with the farmers there (Sarkissian 2001). So, as one can imply potatoes is the main crop in Javakhk, and substantial in feeding the population, but give little income to the region due to the low prices and high transport costs.

The population of domestic livestock in Javakhk declined dramatically between 1990 and 2004. The number of cattle in 2004 is roughly one third of that in 1990, and for sheep the decrease is even more dramatic, with today just over one fifth of heads of sheep as compared with 1990. The situation is similar with respect to poultry. This reflects both the collapse of the collective farming structure and of the purchasing and processing structures in Georgia. The

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\* Most milk produced in Javakhk does not undergo pasteurization so it becomes a commodity that can not be sold to outside markets. And even when the milk is pasteurized, the process and technology available to the locals is not of the highest quality, so it spoils within a few days after a milk has been extracted from the animal.

number of horses and donkeys has increased, which cannot, however, be considered a sign of economic health, but rather the opposite, since these animals are used for transport and agricultural work instead of tractors (Hertoft 2005).

### **Factories**

Factories are nearly non-existent in Javakhk. Even during the Soviet period, industrial production was limited to quarries, meat processing plants and dairy processing plants. After the collapse of SU, these few plants have closed or cut back. Because of this the subsistence farming became the only means of survival for many locals (Minasyan 2006). Today there are a few meat and dairy processing plants which provide a local an opportunity to sell some of their products, although mostly on the local markets. Thus, the lack of factories becomes another economic factor fueling resentment against polices of the Georgian state.

### **Unemployment: Temporary and Permanent Migration**

Because of the economic hardship faced by the residents of Javakhk many males have traveled abroad, predominantly to the Russian Federation, to find temporary work in the summer period and send some money to their families. Some of the locals go there to do seasonal farm work and others to work on construction sites. The effects of migration for seasonal work have

drained some villages of their able bodied populations, causing uncalculated harm to the development of the local economy.\*

This temporary labor migration was greater before. It has been decreasing in the last few years following the introduction in 2000 of costly visa requirements for citizens of Georgia traveling to the Russian Federation. The income, which the migrant workers save and return to the region is the biggest cash inflow into Javakhk and, thus, it is of vital importance for the region, for the survival of the migrant workers' families and for any private economic development, which demands even small investment. Before 1990 the Javakhk region experienced emigration to both Russia and Armenia. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, only Russia has attracted permanent migrants from Javakhk (Minasyan 2006). Today the temporary migrants face a greater problem, because of Russia's ban on giving visas to Georgian citizens. The only choice they have to leave Russia for another country (Peuch 2006).

Some time ago the residents of Javakhk were full of hope that the construction of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline in its territory will allow to create considerable amount of work places. According to initial project the pipeline should cross Akalkhalak region and reach to Turkish border near Armenian village called Karzakh. However, under the pressure of Georgian government another political decision was adopted to change the route, which finally passed via Borjomi and Akhaltskhi regions (see appendix three). It left out Javakhk from taking part in large scale investment projects. Economic projects of assistance in millions of dollars, which were foreseen by project for construction of pipeline, also bypassed Javakhk (Minasyan 2006).

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\* According to the Akhalkalaki Business Centre until early 2004 more than 8000 people have left the region, 5950 from Akhalkalaki and 2200 from Ninotsminda.

## **Russian Military Base**

There are some experts who think that, outside of farming and remittances, the Russian military base in Akhalkhalaki is a factor that largely affect the Javakhk's economy. They believe that it is the largest and only reliable source of employment in Javakhk, serving as the core of local economy.

The 62<sup>nd</sup> Divisional Russian base at Akhalkalaki is home to the Russian 147<sup>th</sup> Motorized Rifle Division. The five thousand hectare military facility supports nearly 3000 soldiers, half of which are local Armenian Javakhk residents. For local Armenians to work in the base they must apply for Russian citizenship and, in most cases, their citizenship requests were accepted. For people in Javakhk it is a huge economic benefit to work in the base (Minasyan 2006).

The base also affects the economy in two other ways: by providing soldiers that spend money purchasing local products and by serving as a black market for goods. It contributes in development of trade and businesses. The base receives supplies and goods from Russia and some of those goods are sold illegally for a lower price than they might if they were properly imported into the country (Sarkissian 2001). The base has also other indirect effects: it gives privileges for energy and heat supply to nearby (surrounding) inhabited quarters, for children education in garrison school, for services in military hospital, etc. This means that locals directly benefit from the continued existence of the base and the calls from the Georgian politicians for the closure of the base is unacceptable to them.

President Mikheil Saakashvili has promised that the Georgian government will fill the void left by the Russian military, whose departure is a great cause for celebration in Tbilisi, despite years of protest by Armenians living both in Armenia and Javakhk. Particularly,

Saakashvili proposed to use the products consumed by Russian troops to feed Georgian troops instead, but many analysts have suggested that inviting Georgian soldiers to Akhalkalaki would likely add kindling to the tension. Recognizing this, Saakashvili altered his remedy on a visit to Javakhk in late April 2006, saying “We are not planning to set up a new military unit there and offering social programs and business training for people affected by the Russian pullout. These people must not feel they will lose out on the deal. On the contrary, they must benefit from the fact that Georgia is developing,” Saakashvili said (Young 2006). However, despite the many formal and declarative statements official Tbilisi made after the “Rose Revolution”, there are no any developments in creating new job places and people of Javakhk are not ready (especially psychologically) yet to except withdrawal of Russian military base. This is precisely why the hopes of the Armenians of Javakhk for an improvement in the region’s socioeconomic and political situation are not being justified. It can be said that the methods being used by the new Georgian government are reminiscent of the policy of Eduard Shevardnadze’s era. The local Armenian population also fears for its physical safety, especially since there are no alternative mechanisms for ensuring it after the 62nd Russian military base is completely withdrawn from Akhalkalaki.

It is also important to mention that the withdrawal of military bases from Georgia could pose a serious threat to Russian-Armenian military cooperation because the integrated air defense system in the southerly direction will be violated, since many command points of the Russian air defense system deployed in the region since as early as Soviet times are located on Georgian territory. This will lead to a significant reduction in control over the air space in the Southern Caucasus and a decrease in the efficiency of Armenia’s air defense, which is correlated with the Russian air defense system of the North Caucasian Military District. The closing of the



bases could also create serious problems with military transit to Armenia, which is a very active member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). This means that, in the event of a crisis situation (for example, if hostilities with Azerbaijan resume), it may be impossible for the CSTO allies to supply the Republic of Armenia with weapons and hardware (Minasyan 2006).

However, one must not forget also about the political nature of the base, which will be discussed in the next chapter. It is often argued that the influence the base has over the region and its population is not of a political nature, but exclusively economical. The support among local Armenians for the base to remain in the region is mainly seen as a reaction to the loss of income its removal will cause, since the main reason why locals of Javakhk are dependent on Russia and Russian troops is that they are provided with salaries and citizenship from Russia (Nilsson 2005). Yet, these economical connections between locals and Russian troops have purportedly been part of Russian strategy as a means for consolidating Russia's position in Georgia. However, due to the strictly economic nature of this dependence, local Armenians are not perceived to make any difference between Russian and Georgian troops, as long as the region is provided with money-spending soldiers and job opportunities. On the other hand Georgian government officials mainly perceive negative attitudes towards the removal of the base, related to security concerns, among local Armenians as an effect of Russian propaganda.

Finally, as for the situation in "Samtskhe-Javakhetia", official Tbilisi is making loud statements about its willingness to resolve the political and socio-economic problems facing the local Armenian population. But if after the withdrawal of the 62nd Russian military base in Akhalkalaki, Georgia takes some forceful action aimed against the Armenian political groups and movements (particularly in light of the political processes going on recently in the region and the demands of the local population for broader self-government), it could become a serious

threat to the prospects for South Caucasian regional security. After all, official Yerevan will not remain impartial to the fate of its fellow countrymen living in Javakhk.

### **Roads and Railroad**

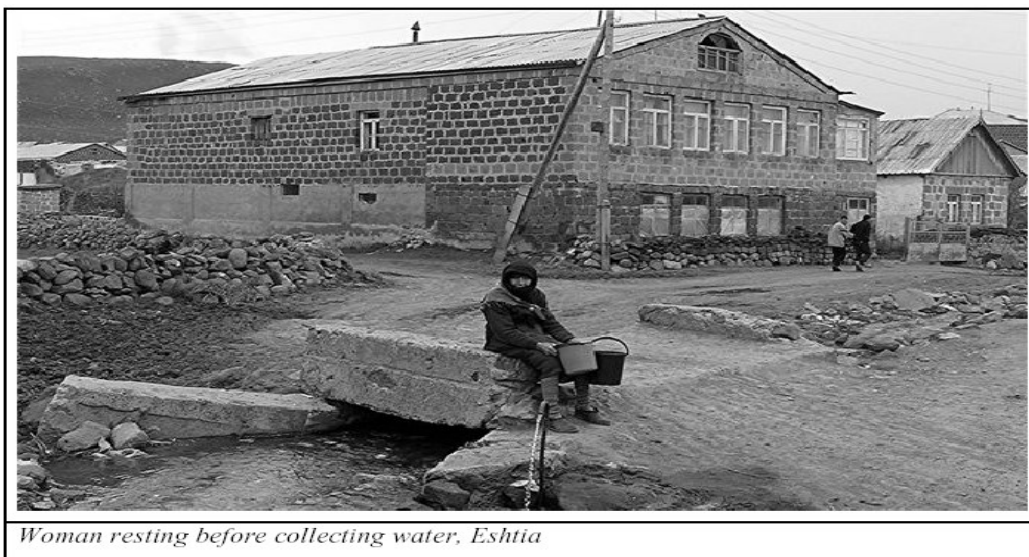
One of the biggest problems faced by residents of Javakhk is the conditions of roads coming in and out from the region. This factor negatively affects trade relationship between the region and the rest of Georgia. In addition the road from Akhalkalak to Armenia is also poor, further depriving the population of crucial Armenian markets for their goods. Of course, much has been said about the disastrous state of the roads to Javakhk and, unfortunately, every word is true. For example, the shortest route from Tbilisi to Akhalkalak, via the town of Tsalka, is only around 170 kilometers long but can only be used by a four-wheeler and to get there takes more time than the journey along the 275 kilometer-long road. The internal roads are even worse, with the exception of the road between Akhalkalak and Ninotsminda, which is in a good condition. Finally, the physical isolation of the region is also due to the fact that the railroad does not function regularly, the railway lines are in a bad condition and the stations stand in ruins (Hertoft 2005). The improvement of the basic infrastructure is a precondition for any improvement in living standards in the region.



*The road to Sulda and Karsakh (Turkish border) 3 May 2005*

## Water Supply

Well over 50% of villages have some kind of water supply to individual houses. However, often only parts of the villages have water and there are frequently problems with supply, even where the necessary water pipe infrastructure exists. In villages where water is not supplied to each individual home it is often very hard work for women to collect the water since the water has to be taken from wells and rivers far away from the houses (Hertoft 2005).



## Electricity

Another major factor that affects not only the living conditions of the residents of Javakhk but also the overall economy is electricity. The energy shortage is one of the biggest problems of the region. All the villages are presently electrified, although population experience several periods during which the supply was interrupted. These breakdowns are due to a combination of harsh weather conditions and bad maintenance. It has to be stressed that the

electricity situation today has improved considerably compared to several years ago. This improvement is due to an agreement between Armenia and Georgia under which Armenia supplies Javakhk with electricity from an Armenian nuclear power plant. The agreement is, however, temporary, and thus there is no guarantee for future stability in the power supply to Javakhk. The distribution of electricity can only be maintained if regular payments are made to the Armenian side by Georgian power distributors.

The energy sector in Georgia is hampered by non-payment, an aging infrastructure and the embezzlement of funds. The feasibility of the aging nuclear power plant in Armenia, which provides the electricity, also raises concern. The fact that it is from the Soviet period and is located in an earthquake area is already bothering. Therefore, it is of vital importance for Javakhk to make greater use of the potential for hydro-energy in the region. A major project to develop a large-scale hydropower plant has been advanced, but so far it has not materialized. Nevertheless, research and development of this potential can be recommended as a pre-condition for a more sustainable electricity supply (Hertoft 2005). One must not forget that Javakhk is on the international map of energy supply routes another way. Already now the Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan pipeline runs through the region, and there are further plans to build a gas supply line from Iran to Europe through Armenia and Georgia.

Because of the shortage of electricity and gas all the villagers rely on individual means of heating, mainly stoves. The fuels for these stoves are firewood and dung. Firewood is the predominant fuel both in the towns and in the lower-lying areas. In the chaotic years following 1991 many trees from local forests were cut down, but today this non-sustainable practice has been stopped. Nowadays the wood from the forest is only used on a modest scale to provide heating to the socially vulnerable and sometimes also to schools.

## **Social Problems in Javakhk**

### **Education**

During the Soviet period, Russian language was mandatory in all schools, but the schools did not necessarily have to teach in Russian. Within Georgia there were “Armenian”, “Azeri” and “Abkhazian” schools. After the collapse of Soviet Union the Georgian language became mandatory. Georgia’s independence was married with ethnic conflicts and secessionist movements. Preservation of its territorial integrity became Georgia’s most important priority and all other concerns, including education, took back seats to the conflict (UNDP in Georgia 2000). Although Georgia’s system of education as a whole was adversely affected, the schools outside of Tbilisi were hurt the most. Of course the state of an education in Javakhk is not enough of an issue to destabilize the region, but its continued neglect is dangerous. In Javakhk, the public schools are in bad condition, poorly insulated and difficult to heat, teachers do not get paid on time and even textbooks have to be donated by government of Armenia. The classrooms’ temperature drops in the winter beyond sustainable levels, affecting the pupils’ education and health, and during the coldest month it is not uncommon that classes are suspended because of the cold. Toilets are always primitive facilities located outside the school (Sarkissian 2001).

Generally, teachers are available and present in Javakhk but are poorly motivated because of extremely low salaries. The qualifications of teachers are sometimes poor, especially in the field of the main Western languages. The central Georgian government does not supply the required amount of educational materials to schools in which the language of instruction is Armenian or Russian. They do, however, provide Armenian Language textbooks on Georgian history, and Georgian language. Armenian textbooks are delivered free of charge from Armenia.

The Russian embassy in Georgia distributes Russian textbooks to Russian-language schools in Javakhk. None of the schools in Javakhk are equipped with functioning computers (Hertoft 2005). The problem with the school infrastructure can be very problematic in the long run. Without adequate schools, many residents will not receive a proper education further relegating them to work as subsistence farmers. The lack of good education will further isolate them from the rest of Georgian society, and increase their anger with the Georgian government.

### **Health Services**

Another major social issue that the residents of Javakhk suffer from is the chronic shortage of hospitals. There are only two hospitals in Javakhk, which are old and poor equipped. In order to receive proper medical care, residents have to go to Armenia (Minasyan 2006). The Russian military base serves as an emergency center for those who can not travel to Armenia to get medical service.

The medical personnel have not been paid regularly or are badly qualified. Therefore, many positions were abandoned because the staff moved or retired. In most villages the medical units closed down, or no longer offer regular service. The remaining medical personnel usually offer services to fellow villagers on a private basis (Sarkissian 2001).

### **Cultural Activities**

There is a depressing lack of cultural activities in Javakhk. In most villages there are “houses of culture” but they were built in the Soviet period and very few are functioning today

on a regular basis. In some cases, the roofs of these buildings have already collapsed and others have no windows, heating or furniture.

During the Soviet period, youth clubs, sport events and other cultural activities were organized regularly and on a permanent basis. These activities have almost completely ceased. However, some elements of cultural life persist in the villages. For example, On the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the Armenian genocide, on April 24th 2005, several villages organized memorial events. Some village schools organized cultural events for the children.

## **Other Factors**

### **Corruption**

Corruption is prevalent in every country of the Former Soviet Union and Georgia is no exception. Corruption is evident at the national and local level in Georgia and its effects are detrimental for the development of the country. The corruption in Javakhk even reaches unimaginable sizes. Especially, there are difficulties in relationships of Armenian population with officials of provincial frameworks. These officials are mostly ethnic Georgians and there are no limits to their discretions (Minasyan 2006). For the residents of Javakhk, corruption by the police and border guards is most distressing. Of course police corruption is not so different than in any other part of Georgia, but because of Javakhk's distance from Tbilisi and poor road conditions, this form of corruption becomes very detrimental. Corruption at the Armenian border stifles the region's trade with Armenia and adds to the economic difficulties faced by the locals.

The high level of shadowed economy also negatively affects on social situation of Javakhk. According to statistics of governmental department of Georgia it amounts 40% (decreased number).

## **Political Problems in Javakhk**

After discussing economic and social situation in Javakhk it is necessary to look at political situation in the region. It is important to realize that severe socio-economic conditions alone can not lead to large scale conflict. There are serious political problems in the region which must be considered and addressed, in order not to make the situation uncontrollable and conflict inescapable in the future. During his visit to Akhalkalaki on April 19 2005, Saakashvili promised to put an end to Javakhk's isolation in Georgia, beginning with the construction of a road from Akhalkalaki to the capital of the neighbouring Samtskhe region, Akhaltsikhe, and another connecting Akhalkalaki to Tbilisi. The construction would be funded by the U.S. Millennium Challenge Account. According to Saakashvili roads and development are the things that Javakhk needs most nowadays (Young 2006). He thinks that these infrastructure developments would boost local agriculture and attract new businesses to the area and by this all the problems in Javakhk will be solved. With policies like these, it seems that Tbilisi is hoping to engage friendly Javakhk Armenians by encouraging interaction between Georgia's diverse ethnicities. Georgian decision makers may reckon that better transport will lead to better cooperation and perhaps enough assimilation to quell separatist rhetoric and ambitions. In fact, economic and humanitarian gains could help integrate and intertwine the Georgian and Armenian communities but these are not the gains that the Armenians insist they need most. Tbilisi refuses to give



Javakhk broader self-governance or autonomy package because such policies are seen as just as likely to isolate Javakhk even further. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that today Armenians in Javakhk need broader self-governance or autonomy in order to preserve its language, religion and culture. Moreover, an autonomous Javakhk, at this time, represents the most prudent and most promising avenue for securing a stable Georgia.

After the mass protest acts and demonstrations by the Armenian population (6000 people) against the resolution of Georgian parliament concerning the withdrawal of the 62nd Russian base in March 2005, experts predicted that in order to establish more effective control and reduce tension in Javakhk, official Tbilisi might take a “new approach” which differed slightly from the methods used at one time there by Edward Shevardnadze. But in reality, as it is mentioned above, the new situation proved to be little different from the previous: the Georgian government is still putting its stakes on provoking controversy between the political groups of Javakhk. Consequently, it can be said that the policy of Mikhail Saakashvili’s government toward Javakhk is a direct continuation of the “divide and rule” method used by official Tbilisi as early as Shevardnadze’s era (Elbakidze 2002). What is even worse, due to the patronage of the central authorities, in Javakhk and several contiguous regions populated by Armenians, incidents of discrimination are continuing and the rights of national minorities still violated.

In order better understand the harsh political situation of the region, it is necessary to look at and discuss several incidents which took place within last two years in Javakhk and which had clear political and ethnic basis.

In July 2005 in the village of Samsar in the Akhalkalak District, a group of Georgian students, priests, and nuns, with the connivance of the gubernatorial authorities forced their way onto the grounds of the village’s Armenian church, destroyed several ‘khachkars’ (stone

crosses), and tried to get into the church sanctuary. The local residents, after blocking up the entrance with stones, prevented them from breaking into the church. The dispute quickly turned physical and left a number of people seriously injured. Only police intervention helped to prevent an open clash (Ghazinyan 2005). The Georgian analyst Anjaparidze labelled this incident as anti-Georgian developments saying that students and nuns from Tbilisi merely wanted to help restore a local church dating to the 12th century (2005).

Another incident took place in October 2005, Tbilisi tax officials closed 10 small Armenian-owned shops in Akhalkalak for financial irregularities, setting off protests by hundreds in front of the district's state administration building. Local police tried to disband the demonstrators with rubber truncheons and by firing gunshots into the air, injuring many of them ("Police Quash Armenian Protest in Southern Georgia" 2005). And this year on 9 March, an ethnic Armenian was killed in a bar fight in Tsalka, a city in Javakheti's neighbouring Kvemo-Kartli region. Soon afterward, hundreds of ethnic Armenians marched in memory of the man they called a victim of the climate of ethnic intolerance (Regnum, 11 March, 2006). A Georgian ombudsman quickly tried to cut the tension with a finding that the Tsalka bar fight was merely a 'communal crime' without any ethnic basis. Only two days later, Armenians gathered in Akhalkalak to protest the dismissal of ethnic Armenian judges, which were fired for not knowing and using the Georgian language in court. Georgian officials continue to maintain that the judges were fired for misconduct alone. Nevertheless, in the past Tbilisi has appointed a number of judges in Javakhk who do not speak Armenian and must use translators to conduct judicial proceedings. "United Javakhk" organization issued statement condemning the judges' dismissals as cynically trampling on the rights of the Armenian-populated region (Young 2006).

On 11 October 2006 Vahagn Chakhalian, a leader of the “United Javakhk” organization was attacked and beaten. After the event happened, Vaag Chakhalyan was arrested by Armenian authorities, being accused of illegal state border’s crossing (Regnum, 16 October, 2006). According to Igor Muradyan, by this action Armenia fulfills the wish of the West (2006).

So, one can understand that the destructive trends in the Georgian government’s policies illustrate Tbilisi’s desire to crush the will of Javakhk’s Armenian population to protect its right to live in its motherland. What is more, after the Rose Revolution and advent of the new government headed by Mikhail Saakashvili, instances of discrimination by the country’s leaders against Armenians for national reasons, as well as other instances, have become more frequent in Javakhk.

The leadership’s unwillingness to take the opinion and rights of national minorities into account in its policy is also made clear by the new draft law on local self-government, which not only does not envision greater decentralization, but could even deprive the regions of a minimum level of self-government. Moreover, official Tbilisi refuses to accept most of the recommendations of the Venetian Commission, as well as of several other international organizations, which clearly indicate that the country should observe the obligations it assumed to decentralize power, encourage local self-government, and protect the rights and freedoms of national minorities (Nilsson 2006). This unwillingness become more obvious when despite the fact that Georgia loudly announces its willingness to enter European Union and deeper integrate into all possible European structures it does not hurry to join to Conventions of Council of Europe about protection minorities rights. It is done under the pretext, that adoption of those documents can only hinder integration of ethnic “non-Georgians” into Georgian community (Minasian and Agajanyan 2005). It is not secret that it is nothing else than assimilation of non-

Georgian population. The unwillingness of the Georgian authorities and political elite to reach compromises with the national minorities living in the country was confirmed in particular by the clash between the city's residents and employees of the Georgian power structures. This happened on 5 October, 2005 in Akhalkalaki. The incident was evaluated as an attempt by Tbilisi to exert pressure on the local population after they put forward their demands for autonomy (Minasyan 2006). Armenia is playing the part of a deterrent here by striving to alleviate the political demands of the Javakhsian Armenians, on the one hand, and preventing official Tbilisi from taking any rash steps in the region, on the other. The Georgian political elite recognize this, but nevertheless exaggerate the real influence of the 62nd Russian military base deployed in Akhalkalaki on the political processes in the region. However, above mentioned incidents show that the Georgian authorities should be extremely cautious and attentive in their actions, since even the slightest provocation could escalate into widespread clashes. *So, an important stabilizing factor in Javakhsk should be cooperation between Georgia and Armenia aimed, in addition to everything else, at resolving the acute socioeconomic and political problems of this region.*

In fact, the Russian military base located in Akhalkalaki provides an interesting example of the interplay between the relationship between Russia, the Georgian government and the Armenian minority. In reality, today, the base is hardly fulfilling any military functions since all heavy equipment has been removed and the number of deployed soldiers has decreased. It does, however, play an important role as Russian political leverage on Georgia and the issue of removing the base is a hot potato and a source of strained Russian-Georgian relations (Oku 2005). Russia agreed to withdraw its military bases in Georgia at the OSCE Istanbul Summit in 1999 and in May 2005 Russia and Georgia agreed on a timeframe for the Akhalkalaki base to be

removed in 2008 (Civil Georgia 2005). The Russian military base is an obvious political problem for the Georgian government and difficulties in relations between the central government and the population of Javakhk are frequently put in relation to the base. The agreed removal is seen as an important factor in reducing interethnic tension in the region. Government officials argue that when the Russian bases leave, the population of Javakhk, as well those of South Ossetia and Abkhazia will realize that they will “have to start thinking about their future and start negotiating with the central government.” The base is perceived as a “foundation for potential conflict that plays a negative role both in Georgian internal and external relations” (Civil Georgia 2005). Thus, most interviewed government officials perceive the base to be an important negative factor in relations between the central government and the Javakhk region and that the removal of the base will solve a number of political problems. However, the support among local Armenians for the base is perceived to be mainly due to their economic dependence on troops located there. Russia is, in turn, abusing this relationship in order to undermine relations between Javakhk Armenians and the government. Armenian residents of Akhalkalak seemingly have a quite different understanding of the functions performed by the Russian base.

Both Nodia and Elbakidze state, though, that the main motive for wanting the base to remain is the guarantee for security it is perceived to represent. According to Nodia, the base does not play an important role economically nowadays, since the number of locals employed there has decreased. The main reason for support of the base is related to the traditional view of Russia as a protector against the Turkish threat, against which the base poses a symbolical shelter. Fears are often displayed that if the Russian base will be withdrawn, Turkish influence over the region will increase (Huber 2004). Concerns have even been voiced that it might be replaced with a NATO base, manned by Turkish military units. The Russian base is, however,

not only perceived as protection against Turkey. It is also viewed as a defense against potential aggression from the Georgian state. In relation to this, the time of Gamsakhurdia is frequently recalled as the base is by some perceived as needed to remain as protection “in case another Gamsakhurdia comes to power” (Elbakidze 2002). Also, since the central government is in some circles perceived as having an ambition of forcing the population of Javakhk to emigrate or assimilate them, the base is perceived as providing additional protection against this. Negotiations and debates over the closure of the base have not passed unnoticed in Javakhk. In March 2005, two large sized demonstrations were organized in support for the base to stay deployed (“Demonstration in Javakheti Marks Increased Tensions in Armenian Populated Regions of Georgia” 2005).

“Virk” leader David Rstakyan voiced a quite dramatic view on the potential consequences of withdrawing the base. According to him, if the Russian base will be removed, local people will automatically support it to stay as long as they don’t have the status of autonomy. He thinks that after removing the Russian base, the Georgian army will enter Javakhk but the people won’t let them. After taking out the Russian base, they will not have any more problems with Armenians and they can all be assimilated. The main function of the base is to prevent the wolf from eating the sheep: “We are the sheep, Georgia is the wolf and Russia is the bear. And they prevent the wolf from eating the sheep. This is why we seek support from Russia. We will seek support from practically anyone who is prepared to give it to us (except Turkey) (Young 2006).

To summarize, opinions and perceptions of the functions of the military base differ somewhat, to put it mildly, between interviewed government officials and Akhalkalaki residents. It is interesting to note that, while there is some recognition among government officials for the

protection, the base is perceived as providing against Turkey (even though this threat perception is viewed as ridiculous and mainly an effect of Russian propaganda), there seems to be very little understanding of the fact that the base is also perceived as providing protection against the Georgian government.

Much of the public protest over Tbilisi's poor treatment of its Armenian citizens actually comes from political parties in the Armenian ruling coalition, which have a greater capacity than their counterparts in Javakhk. For example, "Hzor Hayrenik" (Mighty Homeland) was even formed by natives of Javakhk. Other parties, such as "Nor Serund" (New Generation), the "Armenian Democratic-Liberal Union", and "Ramkavar Azatakan" all have similar agendas for the security of the Armenians in Javakhk who, according to them, live in fear of ethnically motivated harassment and violence. Nearly all these parties argue that increased political autonomy and self-governance in Javakhk are necessary given Javakhk's ostracized culture and its security concerns. These moderate parties often call on the Saakashvili administration to pay more attention to the needs of Javakhk and its residents, while seldom encouraging the outright secession of Javakhk (Young 2006). However, it must be stressed that the Armenian lobby in the Georgian parliament is far from united. Many parliamentarians often hear voices saying they aren't hard enough for Javakhk interests. For example, according to Van Bayburt the Georgian authorities are not imposing any restrictions on Georgia's Armenian population, and it is unrealistic for Javakhk's civil society to demand a heightened status for the Armenian language in Javakheti. During his interview in an October 2005, Bayburt even indicated that he believed Russia and Armenian radicals were to blame for Javakheti's dangerous separatist leanings. As a result of such things, Javakhk Armenians feel they must look for help from Armenia and, to a lesser extent, Javakheti's local government and civil society (2005).

In response, the Georgian government and media often paint Javakhk's Armenian advocacy groups as instigators of separatist and anti-Tbilisi sentiment in the region and the authorities cite such concerns as a basis for keeping civil-society groups from becoming recognized political parties. However, it should be mentioned that the most leaders of local civic organizations, including "Virk"'s leader David Rstakian, hold an opinion that outright secession or reunion with Armenia is not necessary to ensure the safety and prosperity of the Javakhk people. The United Javakh-Democratic Alliance leader Vahan Chakhalian takes a less measured tone. According to him the Russian withdrawal will leave local Armenians defenceless and that his organization would be forced to retaliate if Georgian troops tried to use the base regardless of whether they, too, would purchase much of the locally grown produce (Young 2006).

On the other side of the border, Dashnaktsutiun, a radical century-old political party in Armenia, often reacts heatedly to Tbilisi's policies in Javakhk, even warning that discriminatory policies in Javakhk give the people no other choice than the use of force to protect their interests and dignity (Young 2006).

To sum up this chapter, all above mentioned facts unequivocally indicate that because of above mentioned conditions the regions inhabited by Armenians are close to humanitarian catastrophe. The economic, social, cultural and political conditions in Javakhk have become a cause for tension. As we saw subsistence farming, coupled with not existent manufacturing base has made Javakhk one of the poorest areas in Georgia. Bearing in mind the sad experience of post Soviet Georgia, the Armenians of Javakhk think, that one need to seek the reason of socio-economic and humanitarian problems mainly in politics of Georgian authority. This means that Javakhk's residents can solve their problems only by gaining broader rights of local self-governance in accordance to European standards. However, aggravation of political situation in



the region after Saakashvili's coming to power, the hopes for that "collapsed". Despite this, catastrophic economic, social and political situation of the region makes people intolerable, that is why, there is a big possibility of large scale conflict. In these moods, autonomy of Javakhk becomes an appealing option for solving all the problems mentioned above.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**GEOPOLITICAL APPROACH: INTERESTS OF DIFFERENT POWERS IN**  
**JAVAKHK**

The sudden collapse of Soviet Union had significant effects on the West and on the policies it pursued with respect to the Soviet Union. The collapse of SU meant a dramatic wave of independence for fifteen republics that once constituted the USSR, although Moscow has sought to maintain some degree of influence over the former area it once controlled so harshly. During the past decade, Soviet power has been replaced by a new Russian identity. Russian pursuit of influence, its rivalries with other regional powers, and the new forms of cooperation and conflict with the United States as the lone superpower, demonstrate the new stakes of the game of geopolitics.

Russia still remains a major actor in the region that once belonged to it. This is most evident in the struggle for geopolitical influence in the independent Georgia. Georgia is located on the crossroads between Europe, Asia and the Middle East and this fact, makes it an important country militarily and in the future trade between these regions. In addition to Russia, other international actors have been positioning themselves to have a say in the development of Georgia and to influence its orientation.

The United States, Europe, Turkey and Azerbaijan are forging close links with Georgia in the hopes of orienting it to the West, while Russia and China have been working to keep it oriented towards the East. And while the East-West struggle is important, Georgia's geographic location is even more critical. What happens in Georgia will influence the economic, military and political balance of the region for years to come. Thus, this chapter of the paper focuses on

Javakhk, in terms of its geopolitical importance to Armenia, Russia, Turkey, U.S., Azerbaijan and EU. As it is already mentioned above the Javakhk region borders Armenia and Turkey, is home to an important and strategic Russian military base, it is close to the path of the Baku-Geyhan pipeline, and in the pathway of the proposed Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway. All mentioned countries have a great deal to gain or lose depending on who eventually “wins” this geopolitical game. So, in this chapter theory of geopolitics\* will be used to explain the policies pursued by Turkey, Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, U.S. and EU vis-à-vis Georgia.

## **Armenia**

Armenia’ relationship with Georgia is largely determined by location. Armenia is located in the South Caucasus to the north of Iran, to the east of Turkey, to the west of Azerbaijan and to the south of Georgian (see Appendix one). Javakhk is important to Armenia for numerous reasons. First of all it is important for safety and security of Armenia’s southern border, otherwise, it can turn into dangerous zone as Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Azerbaijan borders and Armenia will have to spend huge human and financial resources in order to keep that border. Moreover, the presence of Armenians in Javakhk makes the implementation of the plan of the repatriation of Meskhetian Turks\* pursued by Turkey and European structures of Georgia impossible and unreal. This plan, if to happen, will automatically lead to full blockade of Armenia. Besides this, the fact that Javakhk is overwhelmingly inhabited by ethnic Armenians

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\* Geopolitical theory argues that geography dictates politics (<http://www.encyclopedia.com.html/g/geopolit.asp>).

\* Prior to their World War II deportation by Soviet Premier Stalin, the Meskhetian Turks resided in the district of Meskhetia (now known as Samtskhe) adjoining Javakhetia (Javakhk). The district itself was ceded to Georgia by the Adrianople peace treaty between Russia and Turkey and the Meskhetian Turks have always considered themselves as ethnic Turks, continuing to more closely identify themselves with Turkey than with Georgia proper. Following their deportation to Central Asia, their native lands in the district were repopulated by settlements of Armenians, Georgians, and to a lesser degree, by Russians. But with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Meskhetian Turks have renewed their demands to return to their ancestral homes in southern Georgia.

who keep loyalty to the interests of Armenia is a great obstacle for Georgia to pursue open anti-Armenian policies together with Turkey and Azerbaijan. The demographic issue also can not be underestimated with regard to Javakhk. There are 140 towns and villages in Javakhk which Armenia cannot afford to lose because it has serious demographic crisis nowadays (Aivazian 2006).

The resettlement of Meskhetian Turks is very threatening factor to the viability and security of the Armenian majority in Javakhk. An influx of Meskhetian Turks would significantly alter the already delicate demography of the region and would only exacerbate tensions. The issue could also conceivably arouse a renewed Turkish claim to the territory, making the implications severe for the future of the nearby Armenians. So, with the possible resettlement of Meskhetian Turks to Samtskhe-Javakhetia the Armenian influence in this area will cease to exist, and the Turkic ring around Armenian statehood will be completed. All gateways from Armenia lie on Turkic-populated territories: the south of Georgia and the north of Iran are populated by Azeris. Some experts believe that this issue is in fact a political one, and the Meskhetian Turks are financed by Turkey. This will allow Turkey to gain additional influence in the region (Ghazinyan 2005). So, if Georgians decide that they can not dominate the situation anymore, despite the fact that their aim is to assure the Georgian ethnic domination over other nationalities, they certainly will make alliance with other ethnic group in order to suppress Armenians.

It should be mentioned that today Javakhk is very important to Armenia also for economic reasons. Javakhk is next to Ajaria, a region of Georgia that is on the Black Sea Coast. The port of Batumi, where most Armenian goods are shipped to Europe and Russia is in Ajaria, so for Armenia Georgia's stability is seen as a key to its survival and growth. Georgia is not only

the shortest route to Europe and Russia; it is one of only two routes available to Armenia. Armenia's western and eastern routes have been blockaded by Turkey and Azerbaijan because of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabagh.\*

From 1988 until today, Armenia has been engaged in a standoff with neighboring Azerbaijan over the Karabagh enclave. This confrontation has led to a devastating blockade, forcing Armenia to become dependent on Georgia for trade. If ethnic conflict were to erupt in Javakhk, Georgia would most likely seal the Georgian-Armenian border, resulting in immediate economic harm to Armenia. By this partly can be explained the passivity of Armenian Government with regard to Javakhk problems.

Another reason why Javakhk is important to Armenia is because it allows Armenia access to Russia. If conflict ever erupted in Javakhk and the border was closed, Armenia would lose its trade route through Georgia, and be cut of its strategic ally as well. Russia plays a large role in Armenia's economy and has military bases in Armenia that serves as a defense against Turkey.\* By closing the border, Georgia could isolate Armenia from Russia and leave Armenia with only one outlet for getting its goods to foreign markets. Russia is the biggest exporter of goods to Armenia, and second biggest importer of Armenians goods (Statistical Yearbook of Armenia 2004), it is also number one supplier of military hardware.

Finally, Javakhk is important for Armenia because of Armenia's uneasy relations with Turkey. Turkey has been Georgia's main supporter for eventual NATO membership. Turkey has taken the opportunity to expand its influence into Georgia as a whole and the southern regions of Georgia in particular. For example, in January 28, 2001 Turkey repaired and reopened the Marneuli air base in south eastern Georgia (Interdelegationary Meetings Held between Turkey

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\* Nagorno Karabagh, an Armenian populated region, declared its independence from Azerbaijan in 1988.

\* Armenia and Russia signed a mutual defense agreement in 1997, paving the way for Russian troop deployment along Armenia's border with Turkey.

and Georgia 2001). The airbase was modernized according to NATO standards but because of Turkey's proximity to Georgia, it was in fact upgraded to meet specific Turkish military requirements, potentially allowing it to serve Turkish warplanes (Cevikoz 2002). So, as it is mentioned above, if Turkish presence is established in Javakhk, then Armenia will have to defend not only its western border but also its northern border. Thus, Turkey's penetration to Georgia is very dangerous for Armenia.

### **Russia**

Russia sees Georgia and the Caucasus as being in its sphere of influence and it is in competition with U.S. and Turkey for geopolitical influence for the region. Georgia is important for Russia because it is seen as a buffer zone on Russia's southern border against Turkish aggression. Security shapes Russia's policies towards Georgia. Realist theory argues that states must "plan for the worst and hope for the best." With that in mind, Russia sees Turkey's close proximity to its southern border, its growing military ties with Georgia and Azerbaijan, and the moves by Georgia and Azerbaijan towards closer integration with the West as causes for serious concern. Russian fears were heightened when reports claimed that arms had been shipped to Chechen rebels through the territories of Azerbaijan and Georgia (Bodansky 1999). For these reasons, Russia sees the Southern Caucasus as a possible threat and wants to continue its military presence (including its base in Javakhk) in Georgia.

As Georgia and Azerbaijan move closer to Turkey and the West, Armenia and Iran become even more important for Russia. Armenia, Russia's strategic ally in the Caucasus, is seen as the centre for Russian military influence over the Caucasus. By promoting a strong

military in Armenia, Russia is assured of a powerful regional ally in the face of possible future aggression by Turkey or the West. Maintaining a close military cooperation with Armenia and Iran, Russia puts Turkey in the position of having to strengthen its forces along the Armenian and Iranian borders, which means that Turkey will have fewer resources to pose a large threat to Russia. So, it can be said that for Russia, a military powerful Armenia coupled with Iran, is seen as a counterbalance to Turkey.

Given Russia's strategy towards Turkey, Javakhk again appears critical from a geopolitical standpoint. Javakhk and Ajaria both host Russian military bases, which serve not only to provide a first line of defence against Turkey, but as a transit centres for Russian arms shipment to Armenia and Iran. In the worst case scenario, if a major conflict, one that included Turkey and Russia in addition to the Caucasian as well as other states, were ever to erupt then Russia would be best served by arming its allies and keeping the conflict centred on the Caucasus. It is more likely that Russia will arm its allies in the hopes of gaining influence over their domestic and international policies. In any case, Javakhk would play a significant role in the military balance in the region.

An additional security factor for Russia is that, in addition to wanting to strengthen its "North-South" alliance with Armenia and Iran to counter the "East-West" alliance of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia, Russia also fears the spread of Turkish military hegemony into Central Asia. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, some in Turkey and Central Asia argued for Pan-Turkism. The idea was to create a single Pan-Turkic state, one that would unite the Islamic Turkish speaking peoples of Turkey, Azerbaijan and their Turkic kinsmen in the states of Central Asia (Badrettin). And although the idea is no longer discussed loudly as a foreign policy goal of those countries that would have composed the Pan-Turkic state, it is still seen by Russia, and not

without a reason, as a possible threat. The mere possibility of Turkish military hegemony in Central Asia would force Russia to refocus its efforts on strengthening its defence along its border with Central Asia. The Turkish military presence in Kazakhstan alone may destabilize Russia's 6,846 kilometre border with Kazakhstan (CIA World Factbook 2001). Just as Russia could arm Armenia and Iran, Turkey could arm the states of Central Asia. But, geographically, Turkey is separated from Central Asia by Armenia and Georgia. If a major war ever took place, Turkey will not be able to easily arm its friend without going through Georgia and/or Armenia. This again highlights the geographical importance of Javakhk. As Turkey recently expanded its military activities in key Georgian areas, Javakhk has become a last important obstacle to the free flow of Turkish arms and supplies to Central Asia. And the danger rests upon the fact that if Russia finally withdraws from its military base in Javakhk, which is agreed by year 2008, then Turkey could be invited to take over the base as in Marneuli; this is a big concern for Armenia as well. This would give Turkey influence over Southern Georgia and access to Azerbaijan and Central Asia. It must be mentioned that this can happen in case of having no Armenians in Javakhk or by force, which in its turn will bring to big conflict.

For geographical reasons, Javakhk is also economically important for Russia. One must not forget about Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline which adds economic importance for Russian foreign policy.

### **Turkey and Azerbaijan**

Since the fall of the SU, Turkey has sought close cooperation with Azerbaijan and the countries of Central Asia. For Turkey, these countries are seen as potential allies and as potential



new markets for Turkish goods. But, because Turkey does not have a common border with any of these countries, it has to go through Georgia in order to make trade possible. Javakhk borders Turkey and is along the shortest path to Azerbaijan, and from there to the rest of Central Asia.

One of the key reasons why Javakhk is important for Turkey and Azerbaijan is because of Baku Geyhan pipeline. The pipeline could generate several billions of dollars in potential long term revenue for Turkey and Azerbaijan. A pipeline through Turkey would tie Georgia and Azerbaijan more closely with Turkey. Because Azerbaijan does not have direct access to Europe and the West, it has to transport its oil through other states. Turkey already has military, political and economic relationship with Azerbaijan and pipeline adds even more leverage over it. So, the proximity of pipeline to the Armenians of Javakhk may invite an even greater Turkish military threat, under the guise of providing “pipeline security.” Thus, Turkey’s political and economic ties with the concerned countries in the Caucasus and Central Asian countries, especially with Azerbaijan, will be expanded in pursuance of pan-Turkish ideas. It also tends to encourage stricter Georgian political control and may increase corruption in the region.

Similar reasoning explains Turkey’s potential influence over Georgia. Azeri oil links Azerbaijan’s and Georgia’s economic fortunes. Azerbaijan relies on Georgia as a transit state, and Georgia relies on Azerbaijan for transit fees. Therefore, Turkey’s control over Azerbaijan means control over Georgia as well. The expected revenue of pipeline and the further orientation of Azerbaijan and Georgia away from Russia and towards Turkey only highlight the importance of Javakhk. Since the pipeline passes through Akhaltsikhe, any instability in the region could be detrimental to Turkish interests. Any instability in Javakhk will make investors worry about the pipeline, because their treasury could be deprived of billions of dollars (Jofi 2001).

Javakhk is also important to Turkey because it provides Turkey with the shortest route to Azerbaijan and Central Asia. Turkey's role as a regional economic and military power would be greatly expanded if it could have uncontested access to Central Asia. Economically, because of the Turkic speaking population of some central Asian countries and because of the historic bond between them and Turkey, Central Asia is seen as a natural market for Turkish goods. The free flow of goods between Turkey and Central Asia would be a big boost to Turkey's economy and would benefit Central Asian countries by opening up a large market for their goods. This trade will bring these countries together and further establish Turkey as a regional power.

Having indicated the main reasons why Javakhk is important to Turkey and Azerbaijan, it is necessary to mention about Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project, the construction of which can have very dangerous implications on the security situation of the region. The agreement has been made between the governments of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia to build a new railroad from Kars to Akhalkalaki. This is a costly project – estimated at about 420 million US dollars – and the construction has to be combined with the rehabilitation of the Akhalkalaki – Tbilisi line, which is also costly, since the railroad is in a very bad state. The Government of Armenia fears, and not without reason, that if this railway is built the country will be even more isolated and economic cooperation will develop between Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan, two of which - Turkey and Azerbaijan – have a great political interest in further isolating Armenia (“House Committee Opposes Funding for Railroad” 2006). Armenian Diaspora activists in the USA lobby to prevent US funding from realizing this project. In general the railroad project is met with hostility among Armenians, including the Armenians of Javakhk, which fear that such a development will be a threat to their position in the region.

US politicians also think that ignoring Armenia's interests will damage US-Armenian relations. Congress is in compliance with Yerevan's position, arguing that new project is economically unjustified, because a Kars-Guimri (Armenia)-Tbilisi-Baku railway already exists, but has been out of use since the Karabakh conflict (due to Turkey closing the border), even though, with minor repairs, it could be made fully workable. Armenia wants to revive this route while Azerbaijan considers it absolutely unacceptable until the Karabakh conflict is settled in its favour. So, one can understand that this railway will provide Turkey the shortest route to Azerbaijan and Central Asia, that is why it makes all effort to realize this plan. As a result the path of pan-Turkism will pass through Javakhk (Melkonyan 2006).

Hence, if Turkey had interrupted access to Central Asia it could become a regional hegemony by arming and supplying the countries of Central Asia. Only from 1997 to 2001, Turkey has provided Georgia with \$13 million in military aid (“The Caspian Pipeline System ...,” 2001). By drawing these states close to it, Turkey tries to create a counterbalance to a Russia-Armenia-Iran alliance. Turkey’s strategy is the inverse of Russia’s: strengthening the militaries of Georgia, Azerbaijan and the Central Asian Countries, Turkey wants Russia to redirect some of its resources to further fortifying its border. By arming its ‘friends’, Turkey places a credible threat along the Russian border, thus checking the threat Russia could pose to it. With the airfield in Marneuli in Turkish hands, turkey now sees Javakhk as the final piece in providing a bridge between itself and Central Asia. Turkey also understands how Armenians in Javakhk would play a key role in case of a major regional war. The fastest route for providing arms to Azerbaijan and Central Asia is through Javakhk the major opposition in which could delay or prevent the shipment of arms and supplies. Thus, for Turkey as well, the main importance of Javakhk lies in its geography.

## **The U.S. and EU**

The US is concerned about the region's potential of conflicts, moreover that "the American administration considers Yerevan in the role of a very serious long-term partner in the sphere of regional security". As well as, US and EU want to get influence in South Caucasus which is geopolitically very important region. The United States asserts its influence in favor of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline not only to secure substantial quantities of petroleum but also as a means of controlling the communication-transportation routes to the near exclusion of regional powers currently regarded as unfriendly.

So, because of Georgia's ideal geographical location on the crossroads between Europe, Asia and Middle East, it is in a great position to be a transit country for oil pipelines and other goods. The United States, the European Union, China in addition to a host of smaller states from Central Asia, Central and Eastern Europe have embarked on an effort to revive an ancient "Silk Road," a 6 400 kilometer trade route that connected Roman Empire with China (A Silk Road or The 21<sup>st</sup> Century). For its part, Europe has been active in the reconstruction of this route through its Transport Corridor Europe-Caucuses-Asia project (TRACECA). The ultimate aim of this project is to build an integrated network roads, railways, seaports and ferry services for the purpose linking the landlocked countries of the Caucasus and central Asia with the ports of Southern Europe and Romania and Ukraine.

As it was discussed in the essay above, Javakhk is also issue for EU with regard to human and nation rights violations (Nilsson 2006).

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

All above mentioned comes to prove that the situation in geopolitically important Javakhk is much like to an explosive weapon the future of which is unknown. However, one thing is clear, that if urgent actions are not taken the tense situation of continuous character experienced by Javakhk can lead to large scale ethnic conflict or even to war. Its large Armenian population and its economic, social and political depravation make Javakhk a region to be watched for some time to come. Nationalist Georgians will continue to watch it for any signs of ethnic unrest and the residents will watch to see if Georgia attempts to improve their life. However, it must be mentioned that the people of Javakhk understand very well that the Georgian Government hardly will change its policies without an involvement of third party. The locals do not expect much gain even from “Millennium Challenges,” nevertheless, the hope dies the last. Nobody can predict what will happen tomorrow, but if conflict will arise, it will occur because of political and ethnic tensions and not because of the poor socio-economic conditions of the region.

The region’s ethnic majority virtually governed itself from 1988-1991, during Gamsakhurdia’s rule, and not once did it proclaim its independence from Georgia or its wishes to join Armenia. The regions population might have cultural ties with Armenia, but they see no need in creating conflict because of it. But their nerves and patience is becoming thinner and thinner because in any circumstances Georgia neglects their problems. Only as long as they are

allowed to practice their religion, maintain their language and culture within Georgia and live like normal human beings with adequate economic conditions they will be happy.

Javakhk is also being watched not just by locals and Tbilisi but by many governments in the region. Its strategic location along the route to Europe, Asia and the Middle East makes it an important trade route. Because Baku-Geyhan pipeline crosses through the larger Javakhk (Samtskhe-Javakheti region), Javakhk becomes even more important. For the Turks, the pipeline will give them revenue and influence over Azerbaijan and Georgia. In addition, these countries are key for an expansion for Turkish military and economic influence into Central Asia. Some can argue that arms and supplies can be flown in and Turkish influence can be spread in other ways, however, one must not forget that it is the shortest route and about pipelines. The latter for normal functioning requires stability in the region. For the Russians, control over Javakhk would help them counter the growing strength of the Pan-Turkic alliance as well as maintain its influence over geopolitically important region.

The machinations and calculation by various countries with a stake in Javakhk is clearly evident from the actions that all sides have taken. But when it is all said and done, Javakhk is still Georgia's and to some degree Armenia's problem to deal with. A separatist movement in Southern Georgia would further cripple the weak central government by giving them three 'fronts' to fight on. In addition, because Georgia's army is relatively weak, it would look towards another country to help it stop the fighting. The Russia, judging from today's 'hard' relationships between Georgia and Russia, would not be allowed to involve itself in an internal Georgian conflict and that would leave the door open for the U.S. and Turkey. In any of these scenarios, Georgia would be at mercy of the intervening country spelling the end of its ability to control its own policies.

Taking all above mentioned into account, some policy recommendations are given below to help remedy the situation in Javakhk so conflict does not erupt in the future. These recommendations, if implemented by both Georgian and Armenian Governments, can improve the lives of the residents of Javakhk, moreover, bring stability to all of Georgia.

As for Georgia, first of all, it is very important to grant autonomy to Javakhk. With the continued deterioration of socio-economic conditions in Javakhk, the idea of political autonomy has been raised as a possible solution to the region's problems. The devolution of power to local self-governing units is an internationally accepted norm that is recognized by the Georgian Constitution. Autonomy would bring government closer to the people and give them a say in local decision making. And, while the idea of another autonomous region in Georgia raises some concerns in Tbilisi, autonomy can actually serve to stabilize Javakhk, and by extension Georgia.

Autonomy refers to the right of an ethnic group to govern its own affairs on a local level, within the national boundaries of the state they belong to. Autonomy "provides groups with opportunities to control decision that affect their daily lives with the authority to govern themselves where they live as minorities, partly in regions known as part of their historic homelands" (Rabie 1994, 185). It grants the power of taxation, education, law enforcement and justice to the local government, at the same time it does not extend to monetary policy, defense or foreign affairs. The concept of autonomy is an internationally acknowledged principle and is recognized within the Georgian Constitution, making the demands of the local Javakhk population wholly appropriate.

Autonomy for the region of Javakhk does not mean secession, rather a federalist form of government. Autonomy stems from the principle of self-determination, which is included in Articles 1.55 and 73 of the United Nations Charter (The Nagornon-Karabagh Crises: A Blueprint

for Resolution, Memorandum 2000). Because of the conflicts in Karabagh or Abkhazia, many in the Caucasus see the principle of self-determination as a demand for independence, but in the case of Javakhk, the demands are confined to the right for local self-government. Local self-government is also recognized by the Georgian Constitution in Chapter 1, Article 2, Section 4, which says, “The citizens of Georgia regulate matters of local importance through local self-government as long as it does not encroach upon national sovereignty” (Constitution of Georgia). So, the demands for autonomy are not inconsistent with the Georgian Constitution and would not require amending it. Because of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia’s governmental structure continues to remain ambiguous. Georgia has not designated whether it is a republic, a federation or a confederation. Chapter 1, Article 2, Section 3 of the Georgian Constitution says, “The internal territorial arrangement of Georgia is determined by the Constitution on the basis of the principle of division of power after the full restoration of the jurisdiction of Georgia over the whole territory of the country” (Constitution of Georgia). Once these conflicts are resolved, Georgia would begin discussing its status with all parties involved and autonomy for Javakhk should be entertained.

Thus, one can understand that autonomy will put the power of decision making into the hands of locals that best know the area and demands of residents. And because the people of Javakhk are faced with harsh socio-economic and ethno-political conditions, and feel neglected by Tbilisi, autonomy is an answer to their frustrations. Georgia’s government structure is very centralized, and decisions made in Tbilisi are implemented at the regional level. For the residents of Javakhk, this becomes a problem because the regional centre is not in Akhalkalaki, but in Akhaltsikhe, where residents of Javakhk have to go for every major and minor issue. In addition to distance, language serves as another problem for the residents of Javakhk when they go to



Akhaltzikhe. Georgian is the official language of the country and the regional center conducts business in Georgia, but very few residents of Javakhhk speak Georgian. Because there was very little Georgian presence and interaction with Javakhhk during the Soviet times, the residents never learned Georgian. When the latter became an independent state, Georgian immediately replaced Russian as the language of government. This automatically put the Armenian population of Javakhhk at a disadvantage and created another barrier for the integration of Javakhhk with the rest of Georgia because it became harder to conduct business with the government. So, if an autonomous region were created in Javakhhk, government business would most likely be conducted in Armenian. This will give the residents access to government and they will not feel detached from Akhaltzikhe and Tbilisi (Wheatley 2004). Of course the locals of autonomous Javakhhk region will all be Georgian citizens, but by receiving a sense of control, they could be at ease with being Georgian citizens of Armenian descent. Gamsakhurdia's Georgian nationalist "Georgians for Georgia" and "Reorganization" campaigns threatened the fabric of Georgian society by creating a distinction between Georgians, and those who were guests and should leave ethnic minorities. During that time period, ethnic minorities rejected the legitimacy of the Georgian State and the state became embroiled in conflict. Thus, autonomy would signal a drastic change from the policies of Gamsakhurdia. Autonomy would send a positive message to the residents of Javakhhk.

Finally, the most important reason why autonomy should be granted is because the economic development of Javakhhk has never been a high priority for Georgian government. The residents of Javakhhk have been promised an economic development program for the past fourteen years and have received nothing more than promises. In 1997, the Government of Georgia pledged to create an economic development program for Javakhhk, but never did. The

residents see autonomy as the only mean for achieving economic success as they do not accept the promises of central government seriously anymore. By having the rights to elect a local body that can collect taxes and provide local services, the socio-economic problems of the residents could be solved (Giragosian 2005). The problem of roads, infrastructure and the local economy could better be solved at the local level than at the national level and that is why autonomy is the best solution to these problems. So, granting autonomy to Javakhk would play a stabilizing role for Georgia by allowing a local self-governance. That is why for Georgia, autonomy for Javakhk is the best solution for keeping it as a part of Georgia.

However, it must be mentioned that the stabilization of situation in the Javakhk is not possible without an active involvement of official Armenian government. First of all, the Armenian Government should: 1) Recognize the presence of political problems in Javakhk and put the protection of minorities' and nation's rights above socio-economic and other questions; 2) Undertake all possible steps to stop displacement of Armenians from the region and help the Georgian government to solve the problems in compliance with international norms; 3) Use its diplomatic and other means to deliver the truth about situation in Javakhk to Armenian population and international community. Armenian Government also must provide legal and informational support to Javakhk people as well as to Armenian public and other organizations, promote economic, cultural and spiritual integration with Armenia and cease to please Georgian government by the directions of the West as well as to be silent about the fair demands of Javakhk (Aivazian 2006). The Armenian government has been careful to exert a calming influence on Javakhk in the past decade due to Armenia's dependence on Georgia for trade and access to the world. Top officials of both countries prefer not to touch the painful issues and tend to treat frequent appeals of Armenian organizations to grant autonomy to Javakhk as an initiative

of “hotheads” who do not reflect the public opinion. However, the danger of the situation rests upon the fact that in terms of lack of an adequate reaction to the existing tension in the region and absence of effort to transmit the tension into the way of a constructive and controllable dialogue the tension could be negatively used by third parties, because the nature adheres a vacuum especially in politics and, moreover, in a key region of South Caucasus, which is no doubt Javakhk.

As in any political problem (and the problem of Javakhk is primarily political) situation in Javakhk is much more problematic, the reasons and roots are much more deep and they demand more serious solutions. The analysis has demonstrated that despite the severe socio-economic situation in the region it alone can not lead to a conflict. There are serious political problems which Georgian as well as Armenian governments do not want to consider and address and mask them under economic problems. However, it must be mentioned, that the Georgian authorities are only hurting themselves by continuing to try and resolve the problems of Javakhk by means of administrative “peacekeeping” or by ignoring the sociopolitical initiatives of its population. This practice is primarily detrimental to the strategic goal which the country’s political elite has set itself with respect to national minorities - to integrate and incorporate them as much as possible into the country’s sociopolitical and cultural life despite its obligations it assumed entering Council of Europe. It is another attempt to avoid resolving several prime political problems (protection of human and national minority rights, and development of local self-government), which on the whole is also creating conflict potential in Javakhk.

So, the position and actions of Armenian authority and political elite of Armenia toward the issue of Javakhk must be well thought over and more principal. There is a need to look at problem differently; to do deep analysis taking into account the perspectives of long-term

developments of Armenian government. A broad Armenian-Georgian public dialogue must be maintained to resolve problems. And official contacts between the leaders of both states can only ensure that this dialog becomes more specific and targeted.

**Appendix 1: The TransCaucasus**



**Appendix 2: The Six Districts of Javakhk**



Appendix 3: Baku-Geyhan Pipeline Route



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