

Political Statement – Interministerial Commission for the Post-Conflict Immediate Actions for the social and economic revitalisation of the communities and cultural environment in the municipality of Gori (Georgia)

The Georgian Government is acting on the consequences of the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008, which embraced the whole region across the administrative border toward Gori, and intends to reverse the severe consequences of the conflict. Living conditions in this culturally rich area were already quite difficult before the Russian military aggression, but to the existing situation, the war added suffering and scare, which make the local communities distraught.

Reconstruction is a priority. The process to be implemented must include restoring the social cohesion which prevailed before the war, and even be an opportunity to improve the global situation, in order to re-establish and maintain the living and development potential of the communities. What is at stake is to restore life, not only restore stone.

The involved national institutions join their forces and efforts in a joint programme “Post-Conflict Immediate Actions for the Revitalization of Communities and Cultural Environment of the Gori Region” (PIAG) supported by the Council of Europe. The specific approach fostered in this multiple project regards a “rehabilitation” process, aiming at recuperating and preserving the cultural and built environment of the populations and at recreating the suitable conditions for economic development. The purpose is to preserve a certain lifestyle which could contribute to convincing the displaced persons to return and the inhabitants to remain in their villages, making sure that the region will not face a post-conflict trauma with progressive impoverishment or even abandonment of this rich land. In this perspective, the return of internally displaced persons is not a simple physical and material problem, but includes social and cultural issues in order to sustain the restored communities.

The objective of the PIAG aims practically at providing the national, local and international authorities with detailed plans and strategies for guiding the reconstruction processes being implemented since the Russian-Georgian war, for fixing the terms of the rehabilitation. Three courses of individual but complementary action are pursued :

- a. Guidelines for the assessment of the villages, in order to help the authorities in charge of their subsequent repair and reconstruction to carry it out mindful of the need to maintain and respect the rural identity and character of the villages.
- b. A feasibility study to assess measures that should be taken to repair the most seriously affected buildings in the Nikozi village, including the monastery, in order to provide satisfactory residential accommodation, community life and jobs, and visitors facilities. The global rehabilitation should become an example and generate snow-ball effects in proposing bankable long-term investment projects in the region.
- c. A local and regional sustainable development plan for the region around Gori in order to be integrated into the post-conflict revitalization process taking advantage of the natural and cultural resources.

In reference with the Faro Framework Convention on the role of the heritage in the modern society, what is at stake is to rebuild and develop the infrastructures, housing, the landmarks and symbols allowing the local multicultural communities to continue to live in these places damaged or targeted by the war. The PIAG will help for deciding the best possible strategies to be implemented over a middle- and long-term investment and reconstruction processes.

The Georgian authorities are launching a political and professional integrated dynamic based on a strong commitment by the national institutions concerned, the direct involvement of the local authorities, and the participation of all the stakeholders. The “PIAG Interministerial Commission” set up for the needs of the project, will guaranty the implementation of integrated approaches, the exchange of information between the State institutions, a well coordinated and coherent action capable of avoid overlapping between the international, national and regional interventions, and the identification and promotion of the national priorities in order to integrate them into the investment perspectives.