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Meskhetian Turk resettlement: Q&A

What is the language/religious/cultural background of the Meskhetian Turks?

The Meskhetian Turks are Turkish in origin, gaining the Meskhetian prefix due to the region they come from, Meskhetia. Their religion is Islam, though their practice of faith has been modified over the years. They adhere to dietary regulations of Islam and will not eat pork, will not drink alcohol, and will pray before meals. They would appreciate being resettled near a mosque, though their attendance at mosque is irregular. Religious ceremonies like marriages, births, and deaths are important. They speak a Turkish that is influenced heavily by Uzbek and Russian. Their Russian is excellent, and Russian should be used for translation unless interpreters are Meskhetian Turks or others who speak that Turkish dialect. They are close-knit and emphasize an extended family as opposed to a nuclear family. The most recent generation will consist of two parents and two or three children, though the parents may come from seven to eight children families. The Meskhetian Turks consider the extended family as their family.

How can Meskhetians in other regions of Russia live peacefully and with rights?

The wholesale denial of legal status is unique to the Krasnodar Krai. Meskhetian Turks in other regions of Russia have been granted citizenship or legal status by those regional authorities and enjoy the rights of other Russian citizens. Also, in the Krasnodar Krai, all ethnicities from the southern Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) and non-ethnic Russians from Russia (Chechens, Ossetians, Tatars, etc.) suffer discrimination in the region, but the Meskhetians bear the brunt of the abuse. This xenophobia is not as pronounced in other areas of Russia where Meskhetians reside.

Why don't the Meskhetians in the Krasnodar Krai go to another region of Russia?

The Meskhetians in the Krasnodar Krai have come to the region from other areas. The Krasnodar Krai was not one of the areas they were relocated to after the events in Uzbekistan. They have a stated preference for warm weather and balked at the idea of living in the Siberian cold.

Why is resettlement in the U.S. the best option for the Meskhetian Turks?

Other options for a durable solution have been exhausted with the Meskhetian Turks. Their stated preferences is for legal status within the Russian Federation, though that is not possible given the administration's tendencies in the Krasnodar Krai. Georgia agreed as a condition of admission to the Council of Europe to accept the return of the Meskhetian Turks, yet they have not fulfilled their pledge, or when Meskhetians are accepted for return, impose conditions upon the Meskhetians that they "Georgianize" if they want to return.

Turkey likewise will not accept the Meskhetian Turks. In the 1990s, Turkey put together a scheme whereby less than one hundred families (numbering in the low hundreds of people) would be resettled. From those few families, relatives came to Turkey as tourists (on USSR passports requiring no visas) and subsequently were forced to leave by Turkish authorities. Misunderstanding about their status as tourists, and not resettled persons, lingers with the

Meskhetian Turks and the Turkish authorities, ending the possibility of resettlement in Turkey. After sixty years of displacement, the chance for U.S. resettlement will bring some finality to the Meskhetian Turks journey.

What is the education level and profession of the Meskhetian Turks?

Average education is eight to ten years of general schooling, though some people are better educated. Many are employed in agriculture, though they also express a desire to work as laborers (mechanics, drivers, maids). When in Uzbekistan, some fulfilled positions in medical and dental clinics as well, though they were not able to continue in those positions in the Krasnodar Krai. Meskhetian Turks work very hard and are enviously noted for their work by others in the Krai.

What is the Meskhetian Turk lifestyle in the Krasnodar Krai?

The Meskhetian Turks live in rural areas, in compact villages consisting of 10,000 to 60,000 people. They live in large extended families and are very close to one another. There are persistent rumors that all the Meskhetians are wealthy and that they engage in illegal behavior via the drug trade or mafia activity. For the most part, their hard work has allowed them a small measure of success, but they are not tremendously wealthy or well-off compared to those around them. For example, some have built greenhouses at their homes which allow them to produce fruits and vegetables year round to supplement their food production. Their houses and property though are subject to raids and inspections by Cossacks and they occasionally have to pay a “fine” for their so-called illegal residences.

Are the Meskhetian Turks “modernized” to the amenities of today?

Meskhetian men are able to drive and some do own cars. As with most people in the Krasnodar Krai, those with enough money have purchased cellphones and the children will know (to varying degrees) how to use a computer and the internet. Meskhetian women are in charge of cooking and would be familiar with stoves and ovens, but not a microwave or other high-end appliances (blenders, mixers, etc.). The Meskhetians are exposed to conveniences, though they do not dominate their lives.

What is the role of women in the family and community?

Women generally do not work outside of the home, and girls receive less education than boys. Meskhetian Turk society is male-dominated. Meskhetian girls tend to marry young, in their teens, usually to boys whom they know. Both sets of parents would approve of the marriage.

How will Meskhetians deal with Russians and other post-Soviet nationalities upon resettlement to the U.S.?

The problems the Meskhetian Turks have in the Krasnodar Krai originate from the authorities in the Krai, not necessarily the Russian people. Actions and words by the authorities manifest themselves into violence by Russians, but the Meskhetians have said they do not have a problem with Russians (or other nationalities) per se.

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Credits/Sources:

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