



DILEMMAS IN PEACEBUILDING PRACTICE IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

Conference report

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Introduction

This conference on 'Dilemmas in peacebuilding practice' was the concluding event of the *South Caucasus Mediation and Dialogue Initiative*, which has been financed by the European Union and consisted of three phases.

The first phase involved a reflection on peacebuilding work undertaken by civil society since the mid-1990s, including work with politicians, economic actors, women, media, academia and cultural figures. The aim of this reflection was to draw lessons and improve the quality of future initiatives, and the results are published in the book *Mediation and Dialogue in the South Caucasus: A Reflection on 15 years of Conflict Transformation Initiatives*.¹

The second phase consisted of the "Myths and Conflict" strand, a region-wide research project that attempts to shed some light on the ways in which myths and dominant narratives associated with the conflicts in the South Caucasus are constructed, transmitted and used in the region, through history textbooks, political discourse and the media, including the blogosphere. This research is published in two volumes under the title of *Myths and Conflict in the South Caucasus*.²

The third phase consisted of a training strand, using the findings of the other two strands to develop and launch a *Training Manual in Critical Thinking* in relation to the conflicts in the South Caucasus.

This conference aimed to draw together some of the more profound dilemmas thrown up through this process of study and reflection, to have an honest conversation about how the perceptions of peacebuilding hinder its effectiveness and what we can do to resolve the dilemmas faced not only in order to "do no harm", but to actually "do some good". With such a large number of actors, international local, intergovernmental, non-governmental involved in "peacebuilding" in the South Caucasus, there are equally a number of different approaches, methodologies, codes of conduct and formats for their work, often combining concepts of conflict prevention, transformation, "confidence building" and dialogue with security, justice, democratisation, participation, inclusion, free media, and so on. While a holistic approach is necessary for "positive peace", the accumulated effect for those on the receiving end of "peacebuilding initiatives" can be a cacophony of mixed messages and contradictions. The professionals engaged in the sector have to acknowledge, that peacebuilding – in all its guises - has failed to meet the inflated expectations of it that were built up either for political or financial expediency, which combined with the political sensitivities of such work has resulted in increasingly cynical attitudes towards the true motivations of those initiating and participating in

1 Mediation and Dialogue: A Reflection of 15 years of Conflict Transformation Initiatives (2012). London International Alert. Available at <http://www.international-alert.org/es/node/4529>

2 O. Karpenko and J. Javakhishvili (Eds.) (2013) Myths and Conflict: Instrumentalisation of Historical Narratives. London International Alert. Available at <http://www.international-alert.org/resources/publications/myths-and-conflict-south-caucasus-vol-1-english>;

J. Javakhishvili and L. Kvarchelia (Eds.) (2013) Myths and Conflict: Instrumentalisation of Conflict in Political Discourse. London: International Alert. Available at <http://www.international-alert.org/resources/publications/myths-and-conflict-south-caucasus-vol-2-english>



such initiatives. This leaves the stage of peacebuilding open to manipulation by those whose interest is in the status quo, often equating “peacebuilders” with the “enemy”.

In this respect, the purpose of the conference was to develop a shared understanding of the complexities and ethical dilemmas influencing decision making of different peacebuilding actors in the field and thus to contribute ultimately to improving the effectiveness of our collective efforts.

Summary

The three panels were divided according to three themes each of which in their own way challenge the identity, purpose and modalities of peacebuilding. Alert did not expect to achieve consensus on one type of peacebuilding, indeed many organisations have their own values and approaches. The challenge is to understand the theories behind different approaches, to challenge them, and to allow a more differentiated understanding of what is peacebuilding, to avoid generalisations such as ‘peacebuilding has failed’. However, the three panels: ‘Risk-taking versus the principle of “do no harm”’; ‘Politicisation versus neutrality in peacebuilding’; and ‘Peacebuilders – Western imperialists or donor clients?’ in reality were interconnected, and the summary below is presented not according to panel, but according to the central arguments put forward by the panellists.

Impartiality, neutrality and politicisation

Most mediators pride themselves on their impartiality, but building peace is inherently political, and the mediators come from organisations or countries that have political objectives. Even if a peacebuilder is genuinely impartial, they can still be perceived as carrying certain values and (double) standards associated with his/her nationality or organisational affiliation.

Papers written for the conference by Liana Kvarchelia on the ‘Politics of non-recognition’, Arda Inal Ipa on ‘Perceptions of peacebuilding’ and Ivlian Haindrava on ‘Politicisation of neutral mediators’, articulate this well. Maria van Ruiten talks about the different dilemmas faced by unofficial and official mediators, and how civil peacebuilding could be more effective if it were more linked-in to official peacebuilding. Yet civil peacebuilders also face the risk of politicisation by getting too close to official processes. So how do civil peacebuilders find the balance? Phil Champain distinguishes between impartiality in *processes* and *output*. Peacebuilders must have a vision of peace in order to move towards it (output), but that vision is imbued with values and a worldview (i.e. is not neutral). This worldview cannot be forced onto anyone. Therefore, the *process* for achieving that vision has to be inclusive and reflect an impartial approach.

Changing and manipulating worldviews

That peacebuilding is inherently about changing worldview may seem controversial – tantamount to importing “foreign values” – until one understands that conflict itself is perpetuated by manipulation of worldview. Anar Eyubov talks about the deliberate use of history teaching as a propaganda tool, promoting a specific worldview and fomenting a specified set of values and attitudes to world events among its audience. This involves cultivating enemy images deep in the public consciousness and



encourages an absolutist approach to the “enemy” and problem solving in general. To describe this way of thinking he uses a Russian synonym for enemy, *nedrug* – literally ‘non-friend’. In other words, if you are not my friend, you must be an enemy. This brings us back to the concept of impartiality. It is not uncommon for civil peacebuilders to be told there is no such thing as impartiality – “either you are with us, or against us”. Working on transforming these attitudes and prejudices is very challenging indeed and often goes against the grain of public opinion.

The new dissidents - creating scandals for peace?

Risk taking versus “do no harm” was another major theme of the day. If you want to make progress in any kind of social or political transformation, it is essential to take risks. The skill is in calculating those risks in a way that avoids harming progress towards peace. Gevorg Ter Gabrielyan argues that, in general, peacebuilders are too risk-averse, and advocates more ‘positive scandals’ that could challenge the ‘*prevailing myth or the boundaries of the discourse...*’. Calling peacebuilders ‘the new dissidents’, he states that ‘*if a bolder approach to peace work is adopted, one cannot escape the possibility that, in the beginning, it may generate larger and more prolonged resistance*’. But at the same time he warns against creating scandals motivated by self-promotion under the guise of stimulating debate.

Motivations and perceptions

The question of motivation is elaborated by Jana Javakhishvili, who proposes a useful framework for understanding what drives peacebuilding at different levels. She differentiates between three motivational clusters that: a) meet basic human needs, or are driven by b) civic values or c) political/national interests. These generally relate to peacebuilding at a micro level (people to people contacts), meso (civil society) and macro levels (official processes). But it often happens that motivations get mixed up between the levels, and this is when you get politicisation of civilian peacebuilding, or “professional” peacebuilding primarily for income where moral and ethical values take second place. This naturally contributes towards cynicism towards “peacebuilders”, leading to question of in whose interests they are working.

Conclusion

A self-critical approach to peacebuilding was the theme of the day, putting difficult dilemmas normally discussed only behind closed doors into a public forum to get a shared understanding of why we are not being more successful in building peace. Self-criticism was indeed was the hallmark of the three-year *South Caucasus Mediation and Dialogue Initiative*, the main aim being to contribute towards a qualitatively different discourse, and to raise the bar of critical thinking towards the conflicts and create some tools to build resistance to the manipulation of the conflict identity.

Peacebuilding interventions must be designed based on sound analysis, reflection, self-reflection and an understanding of all the dynamics. Otherwise interventions will be based on false assumptions and inertia. From this perspective, we believe that this project has contributed to enhancing the analysis of the network of peace activists engaged in it, forming a sound basis for future peacebuilding programming in the region.



PANEL 1:
RISK-TAKING VS THE PRINCIPLE OF
“DO NO HARM” IN PRACTICE



Comparative dilemmas inherent in official and unofficial peacebuilding

Maria van Ruiten, Conciliation Resources

The theme of our discussion this morning is dilemmas of peacebuilding: how to take risks versus the principle of “do no harm”. I would like to discuss some of the different dilemmas in official and “unofficial” peacebuilding.

In the South Caucasus, peacebuilding – in all its guises – has failed to meet the high, and often inflated, expectations of its work. Such high expectations, combined with the political sensitivities and the need to show tangible results, have resulted in increasingly cynical attitudes towards track-one and track-two peacebuilding.

Unrealistic perceptions of peacebuilding can hinder its effectiveness and what we can do to resolve the dilemmas faced not only in order to “do no harm”, but to actually “do some good”. There is a need for more realistic expectations of what peacebuilding can achieve in practice, while recognising that there are inherent dilemmas that peacebuilders face both at political and at civil society level.

Track-one and track-two peacebuilding

Official peace processes (track-one diplomacy) typically involve high-level political leaders and focus on peace talks, treaties and agreements. Civil society peacebuilding (track-two diplomacy), on the other hand, involves a non-political dialogue and activities with people affected by conflict which are aimed at building relationships and encouraging new thinking.

For peacebuilding efforts to be effective, we need to ask ourselves how do our respective efforts – of the EU and civil society alike – contribute to conflict transformation or prepare people for peace? If we define peacebuilding as ‘a long-term process that aims at creating conditions for peace’, then track-one and track-two peacebuilders share that same aim. However, officials and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may have different approaches in implementing their peacebuilding efforts.

Parallel processes

Official peace negotiations and civil society peacebuilding are often seen as parallel processes. There are high, if not inflated, expectations of what peacebuilding could achieve in practice. High-level officials in peace processes are often not fully informed about the views and experiences of people directly affected by violence and instability. Local understandings of the causes and dynamics of a conflict are often overlooked. Policymakers and negotiators do not always have sufficient access



to information from the ground to understand what responses are both necessary and possible, or to appreciate the potential contribution of local actors to building peace.³

Track-one: little or no progress

Official peace processes in the South Caucasus (Geneva Talks, Minsk Process) have shown that principal positions on status issues could result in mutually exclusive political positions. There is little progress at official peace negotiations in the South Caucasus, which leaves track-one peacebuilding currently at a stalemate.

NGOs – more room to manoeuvre

Peacebuilding NGOs have more room to manoeuvre than politicians or diplomats. They are working directly with conflict-affected people and are present in the field. They usually interact more freely and more independently than high-ranking officials, as they are more impartial and do not have a political agenda. NGOs with a track record and established partnerships in a particular context can therefore often undertake research and access populations that governments and multi-lateral actors cannot.

Interaction between track-one and track-two peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is a balancing act for actors in both track-one and track-two processes. In their respective roles, the EU and civil society could complement each other's peacebuilding efforts. There is a need for more interaction between the EU and NGOs. On the other hand, explicit links between track-one and track-two peacebuilding can cause dilemmas and problems.

Dilemmas for the EU

EU: political actor of track-one diplomacy versus donor of track-two

The EU is active as a political actor in track-one diplomacy, supporting official political peace processes (Geneva Talks, Minsk Process). However, it is also active as a donor, using its "soft power" by funding civil society peacebuilding projects in track-two processes.

Being an actor in both track-one and track-two processes gives the EU extra leverage, but it also creates dilemmas. A key point is that the dividing line between the EU as a foreign policy actor and a donor is often not clear. As a result, the EU could have its soft power motives questioned, which may have a detrimental effect on the work of those NGOs it is supporting, especially when high EU visibility is required.

³ See also the conclusions and recommendations of the EU-funded project, People's Peacemaking Perspectives, available at www.c-r.org/PPP. (Between October 2010 and March 2012, 18 analyses of conflict situations around the world were produced by Conciliation Resources and Saferworld, including conflict analysis of the Georgian-Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts).



What if the NGOs do not support the EU's (political and legal) position? What can the EU do as a political actor to support the non-political efforts of NGOs? It is important for peacebuilding NGOs to maintain their independence in order to create and maintain "safe spaces" for interaction and dialogue with people affected by conflict.

Dilemmas for NGOs

Risk of politicisation

Civil society peacebuilders, on the other hand, may be non-political but they are operating in an environment that is often highly politicised. Without political will or support, NGOs will not be able to implement their activities.

Capacity building: few or many?

In many situations, local civil society actors lack the skills, confidence and access to engage with complex international organisations or high-level political negotiators. These track-one actors, in turn, lack opportunities for direct contact with the communities their interventions are designed to help and an understanding of the issues affecting them.

The longstanding partnerships of peacebuilding NGOs have built a network of key local civil society actors. Although civil society peacebuilding includes new and more people, the core group of local civil society peacebuilders has not greatly expanded and the outreach in their own societies is relatively limited. After 20 years of peacebuilding efforts in the South Caucasus, there are no solid or widespread networks of citizens who are united by commitment to the non-violent resolution of their problems.⁴

This fact has led some critics to conclude that peacebuilding NGOs have therefore had only a limited impact by cooperating with a small group of key local actors. Dialogue meetings with key peacebuilders in third countries are sometimes merely dismissed as mere "conflict tourism".

High or low visibility?

While expectations of the work of peacebuilding NGOs at the political level are often high, the overall awareness about peacebuilding initiatives of NGOs in local societies or within the international community is relatively low.

If we want to increase the visibility of track-two peacebuilding and broaden the outreach by involving more people, we need to find a way to do so while maintaining the "safe spaces" for people to meet. After all, wider outreach and higher visibility could also mean that the people we work with are put at risk in their own communities. Their true motivations of initiating and participating in such

⁴ See also Laurence Broers, 'Walking the tightrope in Kazan: The summit and its aftermath', Commonsplace.eu, 10th July 2011. Available at http://www.c-r.org/sites/c-r.org/files/WalkingthetightropeinKazan_201107_ENG.pdf.



initiatives may be questioned, and they may even be branded as “traitors” or accused of engaging with the “enemy”.

Some peacebuilding activities have a more public character – for example, when working with journalists or filmmakers. Other activities, however, require a low profile to protect participants. The pros and cons of wider outreach should therefore be carefully weighed for each peacebuilding activity.

We need to constantly analyse the context we work in to avoid negative impacts, understanding that in trying to do good, we may end up doing harm. For example, perhaps inadvertently, we could end up contributing to a possible worsening of divisions between conflicting groups, putting local peacebuilders in danger or increasing cynicism.

Process or impact?

When we reflect on the impact of civil society peacebuilding efforts, we should bear in mind that peacebuilding is not only about results and impact but also about process. In ensuring the continuation of dialogue and people-to-people contacts across the conflict divide, the process can be of peacebuilding value in itself, especially in politically turbulent times.

The EU and NGOs have both recognised the importance of conflict analysis as a way to identify opportunities and mitigate risks of peacebuilding initiatives. There are opportunities to promote and share conflict analyses more widely between track-one and track-two peacebuilding. It is important to ensure that conflict analyses are participatory and reflect the local voices of those most affected by conflict. Conflict analysis should focus more on responses: we need to look not only to the past, but also to the future. Rather than a sole focus on features or causes of conflict, we should look more at what could be done, by whom and how, in finding ways to deal with the dilemmas of peacebuilding.⁵

Conclusion

Peacebuilding in the South Caucasus is a constant balancing act of weighing opportunities against risks – both for the EU and NGOs.

There is a need for more realistic expectations of what peacebuilding can achieve in practice in the South Caucasus. At the same time, we need to recognise that peacebuilders face dilemmas and challenges at both political and civil society level.

There needs to be distance between track-one and track-two peace processes. Civil society initiatives should be able to work independently to ensure continuity of their activities.

⁵ See also the conclusions and recommendations of the EU-funded project, People’s Peacemaking Perspectives, available at www.c-r.org/PPP.



However, the top-down approach of track-one peacebuilding or the bottom-up approach of track-two peacebuilding are not sufficient to resolve conflicts by themselves. Signing a political agreement is no guarantee for achieving peace in society. Nor is the bottom-up approach of people-to-people contacts enough to prepare people for peace without sufficient political will.

A key dilemma for peacebuilders of both track-one and track-two peace processes is whether we prefer to stay in our “comfort zone” with lower visibility and limited impact, or whether we embolden and try to reach out, thereby also taking risks.

In the end, track-one and track-two peacebuilding depend on each other and could complement each other to become more effective and increase the impact of their efforts. The EU and civil society could do more to work in partnership and get a better understanding of each other’s peacebuilding efforts by sharing analyses. At the same time, they could seek to work in a constructive way and interact in a collaborative manner to deal with the different dilemmas of peacebuilding.



Creating a scandal to make a point – in whose favour?

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan, Eurasia Partnership Foundation

Introduction

The term “scandal” has an ancient Greek origin, signifying in ancient times, as it does today, a disturbance and a peculiar feeling of embarrassment which occurs when somebody challenges the prevailing myth, discourse, or narrative in a certain social group. For instance, it may be scandalous in some Caucasus societies or subgroups for a bride to declare that she is not a virgin. One of the most famous scandals is described in Hans Christian Andersen’s tale about the boy who declared that the king was naked. The Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin studied scandal as an essential instrument in Dostoevsky’s palette of tools, which the latter used as a device to raise difficult questions, such as ‘If there is no God, then everything is allowed?’⁶ Another philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, interpreted scandal as a way for society to get to the higher, even religious truth.⁷ Indeed, one can see that scandal is often associated with a truth larger than the societal or group morality allows or is ready to accept.

Another way to understand scandal is to recognise that social groups and societies are inherently conservative due to the effect of, what Jack Ellul once described as, “sociological propaganda” – the “inadvertent” self-construction of a society or a community in a way which pays more attention to its self-conservation, survival and security than to its development.⁸ We can call scandals which challenge this paradigm “positive scandals”. There are also negative ones: for instance, when a derogatory or racially oriented remark is expressed in a group which does not accept such behaviour, the rules of political correctness are violated. There is also another type of negative scandal – when a scandal is purposefully initiated in order to get publicity that otherwise would not be attainable. It is often difficult to decide whether the scandal has a positive or negative nature, which explains the stupor or incapacity to properly react to it, and the frequent desire to avoid it. Political correctness is good, but if it borders on prudishness, it should be challenged. Peace projects are good too, but if they generate a backlash from large groups, their initiators may think twice before embarking on them.

6 M. Bakhtin (1963). *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Bakhtin regards scandal as a particular case of expression of a carnivalesque attitude to life, where carnival is the root concept rather than scandal. See also M. Bakhtin (1965). *Rabelais and his World*.

7 For Kierkegaard, existence was absurdist and religion anti-rational; therefore, both situations (existence without religion and vice versa) were scandalous vis-à-vis each other. In addition, Kierkegaard’s own writings in fact generated several scandals, particularly vis-à-vis the Danish Church, which embarked on reforms partly due to his writings. It appears to me that the famous expression, ‘Christianity is a scandal’, was taken from Kierkegaard and made into a fashionable motto by Albert Camus in his book *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Kierkegaard has referred to scandal in many of his works, but most of his ideas in relation to it are summarised in his last work, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

8 J. Ellul. *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes*, translated by Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner. New York: Knopf, 1965. New York: Random House/Vintage, 1973.



In all types of scandals, it is the behaviour or actions of the minority (an individual or a group) that challenge the inadvertent consensual limits of the prevailing myth or the boundaries of the discourse acceptable to the larger group.

Scandals in peace work

Scandals arising from peace work in the Caucasus are no different from what is described above. They may also be dangerous for their initiators and generate more consequences than just disquiet among society. Over the years of peace work, I have encountered several cases of scandals, some of which were significant, resulting in considerable consequences.

Immediately after the first round of wars – in the mid to late 1990s, when the first significant attempts at civil society dialogue and reconciliation started – there was no well-defined public discourse concerning the wars, whose most heated stage had largely passed by then. The proponents of dialogue as well as those against it were not yet united in clear-cut, identifiable groups. Moreover, the public discourses were underdeveloped, since the Soviet public space had crumbled and new national public spaces had not yet been fully constituted also due to the economic and social downfall that all Caucasus societies experienced because of the collapse and the wars.

Therefore, the first dialogue projects did not generate a very significant outcry, particularly a negative outcry. However, the societies were trying to recuperate after their traumatic experiences, but without the perspective of a just and consensual resolution of the conflicts. The result was that all Caucasus societies embarked on building nationalist discourse as their major myth or narrative. Weak state leaders, in an attempt to rally around the flag and strengthen their grip on unstable power, used the nationalist rhetoric to build their ideologies. For instance, there were several cases where a genuine peace actor was refused a visa to enter this or that society on the basis that their activities would damage national security. These were smaller scale scandals, which remained mainly in the private sphere and were not covered by the media. In some, more widely publicised cases, people were publicly declared as *persona non grata*: parliaments would pass resolutions on them, the media would declare them unacceptable figures, their projects or publications would be declared as treacherous, etc. However, the public disquiet generated by these cases proved to be short lived. Peace projects continued and intensified, although they became more cautious. The desire to avoid the spotlight, for fear of generating a highly charged negative outcry, diminished the potentially positive impact of many peace projects. This was also used by individuals or organisations with counterproductive approaches. For example, these entities would use the fundraising opportunities provided by the international community to initiate fake peace projects; the fact that these projects were not under the spotlight provided them with ample opportunities to do so. This, in turn, generated further mistrust in the societies towards such projects in general, as well as casting a negative light on many genuine peace actors.

Peacebuilders – the new dissidents?

In parallel, the Caucasus societies were building their polities, as I already mentioned, using nationalism and the enemy image as the glue. Gradually, at different times for different societies, embarking on a peace project became like becoming a dissident in soviet times: if societies,



particularly their actively nationalist segments, learnt about these projects, their protagonists were declared unacceptable and possibly even threatened. However, although this made it more difficult for peace projects to be implemented, it by no means reduced their number. If anything, the number of such projects probably increased over time, despite the new escalation of conflict, such as the war of August 2008. Unfortunately, the threat of scandal reduced their effectiveness. New generations – isolated from their former neighbours by the ceasefire lines and the conflict memory of their predecessors – were being educated according to the narratives of denial of the other side’s humanity. The ideology of exclusion, intolerance and xenophobia advanced significantly. Nevertheless, the societies did not become fully closed: opportunities arose to communicate and interact with the outside world; there was the advent of information technologies (IT) and mobile communications; and education and even seasonal work abroad helped societies to preserve the minority of peace-oriented individuals, people with a larger view of the order of things.

Currently, therefore, you have a situation where the majority of people are extremely nationalist, but where there are also minority groups who are sometimes quite vocal and who balance out this nationalism. However, the situation is more complex than this, because even those who are fighting for values such as democracy and human rights may have significantly nationalist views when it comes to the issue of conflict resolution. Another observation is that none of the scandals concerning any of the peace projects has been long lived. Despite the continuing growth of IT, which allows for public campaigns of any kind to be generated and maintained, including against peace activists, scandals generated by peace projects remain short lived – whether they are initiated by peace actors themselves or by opposing groups. Some of the scandals have resulted in injustices against the peace actor: in some cases, such actors have suffered personally, have experienced exclusion or been fired from work, or have been ousted from their place of residence or imprisoned. However, these cases are an exception rather than a rule. Moreover, the reason for the short-lived effect of scandals related to peacebuilding is the obvious fact that they are mostly artificial, generated by political power and usually with the aim to distract public attention away from its shortcomings and from the real problems facing societies. Nonetheless, despite the limited negative effects of each particular scandal, the situation in the Caucasus is gradually deteriorating further in terms of peace prospects. That is why peace actors should still remain cautious and think strategically: if a bolder approach to peace work is adopted, one cannot escape the possibility that, in the beginning, it may generate larger and more prolonged resistance. This underlines the importance of smaller scale projects, which prepare the ground for less resistance to the strategic process when it starts.

Strategies for avoiding “peacebuilding” scandals

A useful piece of advice for those designing peace projects is **to factor in the risk of scandal**. This means having systems in place to react fast to an evolving scandal; to design activities so that such projects and their communication strategies lower the chance of a scandal; and if a scandal emerges, not to shy away from it but to have a bold, rapid response strategy in place to provide support to those who are at the centre of it and to lower its impact. The flipside of this approach is that it may result in overcautious strategies, which lower the project’s impact or even violate the principle of “do no harm” in another, unexpected way: by relying too heavily on the local, scandal-avert partners’ advice, international implementers may end up randomly supporting this or that



side's prejudices regarding the conflict; and instead of working for peace, they may become hostages to one side's interests, as a result of which the sense of a peace project evaporates.

Scandals become easy to generate because of a **lack of information**; conversely, if people know about a peace project, it is difficult to make them believe suddenly that it betrays the national interest. However, the peace communities have yet to learn how to be transparent in a smart way, letting the general public know about their activities to prepare the ground in such a way that a sudden, big scandal would be impossible. Over the years of their work, peace actors have learnt some strategies for reducing the negative effects of scandals. One strategy, often interpreted by outsiders as counter-intuitive, is to go public vis-à-vis the scandal, rather than to hide and disappear from the public domain. If a peace activist is accused of "selling out one's national cause", it is often more prudent to come forward and engage in an open debate with the accusers, rather than to avoid the controversy and hide. A peace activist can argue, for instance, that they are no less patriotic than their accusers and that this is why they want sustainable peace; it is difficult to argue against such a contention if it is made by those who reside in their societies and who are usually well educated and respectable members of that society.

In the Caucasus, people recognise **authority** therefore if a peace actor has acquired influence over time through constant expression of integrity, continual transparency and unbending readiness to help the right cause; in such cases, it becomes difficult to argue against such authority. Such figures naturally acquire supporters and are no longer alone.

The other strategy, of course, is to **unite ranks** across the peace field. For this, however, prior established consensus is needed among major peace actors in the society. This consensus, unfortunately, only seems to be possible among some actors but not among the majority of them. This is because they also compete among themselves for resources (grants) and also, sometimes, because of genuinely differing strategies that they legitimately adopt, since peace work is an experiment and no blueprints exist. However, seeing how useful the strategy of uniting the ranks is, more and more peace actors are using this approach. I myself benefited from it, when a scandal arose around me and my work: a very significant group of civil society actors united in my defence and the issue evaporated. This uniting of ranks also has a flipside though: if peace actors from the opposing side declare support for their colleague, the colleague may turn out to be in an even worse situation than they were before. This raises a difficult dilemma for some peace actors: whether to be silent while their partner becomes the centre of a scandal or even persecution, or to speak out and risk making the partner's situation even more difficult. The right choice may seem obvious, with restraint being the best solution. However, there are ways of expressing support even for those who are under pressure on "the other side". One such approach was used by the Caucasus Forum, which would publish its press releases and opinions in the name of a group of civil society actors from all over the Caucasus; thus the opinion of an actor from the opposite side was strengthened by a larger opinion. Building an alliance across the conflict divide – and, if possible, across several conflict divides – is a powerful tool.

Another observation is that the field of peace work has evolved in a kind of opposition to or aloofness from democracy building and human rights work, and vice versa. Many peacebuilding strategies have been built on the assumption that democracy can wait, that conflicts can be resolved even by



shaking dirty hands and/or without large-scale societal participation, through the top elites. The experience of peacebuilding in the Caucasus after the collapse of the USSR demonstrates the opposite: that conflicts cannot be resolved without a holistic concept of democracy evolving, and that the kind of democracy which is evolving in the Caucasus, a nationalist democracy, is fuelling conflict further. This is further complicated by the fact that the international community, on the one hand, often shies away from this complex issue, supporting democracy building without due regard for the conflict dynamic; or even worse, it overlooks huge gaps in democracy because of geopolitical considerations, as a result contributing to further militarisation and building of “enemy images”. In order to make peace work and to make it more effective and successful, democratisers and human rights defenders should unite ranks with civil society peacebuilders. Otherwise, neither type of project will move societies out of stagnation, becoming instead a case of ineffective use of resources.

Shifting the paradigm: it is war that is scandalous, not “peacebuilding”

Today, on the one hand, much has been learnt about successful methods of peace work in the Caucasus; on the other hand, the lack of a united front and unified information have demonstrated the limitations of peace work, a condition which continues. The re-thinking of peace strategies taking into account the potential for big and small scandals brings us to the conclusion that more united strategic efforts are needed to make peace work more effective and, with or without scandals, to move it towards achieving at least some successes.

The Caucasus societies (and most of the rest of the world when thinking about them or discussing them) have learnt to take war for granted. The fact that wars are the biggest and most inappropriate scandal is being overlooked. Wars have become stereotypically treated as something almost natural, as a *fait accompli*, which should be taken into account with all its consequences. The result of this, coupled with the abovementioned caution of peace actors, is that the best and more daring civil society led peace processes can often be characterised as a series of small-scale scandals whose aim is to avoid a big scandal. If the war is set in stone, initiatives such as meetings between youth from the opposite sides, their joint work and similar undertakings will be deemed as scandalous, if they become known within societies. However, these are small and contained scandals, if their participants are not publicising them (but then their impact may be low) and/or are presenting them through well thought-out communication strategies. Peace work is usually a provocation, an attempt to move people out of their temporary, unsustainable and insecure comfort zone; provocation is an inherent trigger for scandal.

The situation has to be turned upside down, the paradigm has to change: it is the wars that are the most unacceptable scandals. It is natural for societies to interact, discuss, be in permanent dialogue, look for ways for mutually beneficial co-existence. In order to acquire sufficient minority support for this position, peace actors should initiate smart public relations campaigns, explaining to the larger society why the war is a scandal and why their opponents are as human as themselves. They should establish ties with each other and build alliances. They should look for transparency rather than shy away from publicity. Peace actors should discuss and critique each other’s projects more openly, in order to enhance their effectiveness and build better strategies. They should engage in debates with democracy and human rights proponents who are, nevertheless, nationalist, to expand the ranks of



their minority group for peace. They should provide sources of information for newcomers to the field, local and international, about projects that have been carried out, their strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures. If peace actors work like this during times when there is no significant scandal, when and if such scandals arise, they will be well prepared to counter them effectively.



Impartiality and neutrality in peacebuilding: helping to strike a balance?

Phil Champain, International Alert

In this short paper, I quickly discount the idea of neutrality in peacebuilding before setting about to unpack the notion of impartiality. This includes some exploration of the context in which peacebuilders are striving to be impartial; recognition that peacebuilders have world views and values which they bring to the context; and exploration of the role of the peacebuilder in the process of dialogue between different parties. A key idea is the notion that impartiality can be legitimately applied to the process but not to the outputs we are striving to achieve.

If you look up definitions of neutrality in Wikipedia, you are referred to statements such as ‘not entering into wars between parties’ and essentially ‘staying out of it’. But as peacebuilders we do not ‘stay out of it’. On the contrary, we engage. More often than not, we need to navigate contexts in which “victim and perpetrator”, “justice and injustice”, “right and wrong” are all contested ideas. So what helps the peacebuilder to navigate and engage in ways that help? According to International Alert’s Code of Conduct,⁹ ‘our adherence to the principle of impartiality precludes us from engaging in any activity which furthers the personal or collective ambitions of any individual or group in so far as those ambitions conflict with the primary goal of transforming the conflict’. On paper, therefore, the idea of impartiality is useful in adopting a desired stance: that is, to be unbiased in one’s personal preferences or interests; when we engage, to be even handed and fair minded.

However, the dynamics of the contexts we work in mean that in practice judging and understanding ambition – and the connection between these ambitions and peace – is not a straightforward exercise. So how do we know if we are being even handed? We are not neutral, but impartiality is desired. However, the quality and feel of this impartiality is something we craft within the dynamics of the changing contexts we work in. To maintain our credibility and effectiveness as peacebuilders, we need to understand the contexts we are working in; what we are doing in these contexts; what it is that we are bringing; how we are deploying it; and what impact it is having. Rather than be guided by stated principles, it may be more useful to ask ourselves some hard questions – to have these questions close to hand and to ask them often. This puts emphasis on understanding impartiality as a **process** rather than an **output**.¹⁰ I will elaborate.

⁹ International Alert, ‘Code of Conduct – Guiding Principles’: 1. Primacy of People in Transforming Conflicts; 2. Humanitarian Concern; 3. Human Rights and Humanitarian Law and Principles; 4. Respect for Gender and Cultural Diversity; 5. Impartiality; 6. Independence; 7. Accountability; 8. Confidentiality; 9. Partnerships; 10. Institutional Learning. Available at <http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/library/Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf>.

¹⁰ See Francis Fukuyama’s essay, ‘What is Governance’, p. 7. Available at <http://fukuyama.stanford.edu/files/What%20is%20Governance.pdf>.



Let us start with the context that peacebuilders work in. Some commentators characterise these contexts as “**hybrid political orders**”.¹¹ They are contexts arguably in transition: where people are struggling to find ways of managing conflicts without violence; where existing institutions are either being dismantled or transformed; and where new institutions are being built. In such contexts, informal networks develop and thrive – often monopolised by “shadow authorities” that are mostly invisible to the outsider but powerful governors of what are sometimes, and perhaps misguidedly, labelled “ungoverned spaces”. Why misguided? Because these spaces *are* governed – but by authorities that some may not regard as legitimate.

Some apply the terms “**insider partial**” and “**outsider neutral**” to mediators. The intention is to distinguish between those individuals or organisations that are from the violent conflict affected region in question and those working in the region but not from it. The insiders are labelled “partial” because their identity is linked with the context and the actors involved in the violence. They are vulnerable to being associated with a particular actor and to deploying partial approaches. The outsiders are labelled neutral because they are not from the context. The implication is that they are therefore more likely to be perceived as being neutral. On one level this distinction is useful in that it emphasises the important role of insiders and supports the idea that solutions to violent conflict come from the inside rather than the outside. On another level however these distinctions between partial and neutral make little sense. The practice (and impartiality) of those from outside is influenced by a world view and a set of values as much as that of those from the inside. In addition in an increasingly globalised world the implication that the identity of outsiders has little or nothing to do with the context is quite a stretch.¹²

It is in these contexts that peacebuilders operate. Such contexts are difficult places to work in. They are difficult places to establish and maintain credibility and integrity, difficult places to ensure impartiality is adhered to. International human rights (HR) standards and norms provide some kind of compass. Killing, sexual violence, kidnapping, imprisonment without trial, recruiting children to fight – all of these contravene global HR standards. Peacebuilders would likely say that they are not impartial when it comes to these acts. They do not condone such abuses. But these abuses are most often occurring in “hybrid states” where the rule of law is weak, where institutions need to get stronger at a time when their legitimacy is under question, where unseen “shadow authorities” are often perpetrating human rights abuses, and where there is a need to redress power imbalances.

The peacebuilder in this context may think they are being impartial when in fact the **output** of their engagement is the opposite. Consider a scenario in which you are approached, as a peacebuilding organisation, to work with a particular department of a government that has a long history of abusing its power at the expense of its country’s citizens. The government has stated its aim to change its model of governance in a bid to develop the country, address poverty and manage its

11 Not a new term – see for example: V. Boege, A. Brown, K. Clements and A. Nolan. ‘On Hybrid Political Orders and Emerging States: What is Failing – States in the Global South or Research and Politics in the West?’, Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management. Available at http://www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/dialogue8_boegeetal_lead.pdf .

12 For the origins of this concept in conflict resolution literature see Paul Wehr and John Paul Lederach, “Mediating Conflict in Central America”, in *Resolving International Conflicts: The Theory and Practice of Mediation*, ed. Jacob Bercovitch. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), 56.



conflicts without violence. The government says it wants to do this by changing from authoritarian military rule to a civilian democracy. It is a hybrid state – neither completely authoritarian nor completely democratic. One department is reaching out to peacebuilding organisations for assistance.

One feature of the hybridity is that politics is not consistent. There are progressive economic reforms and the release of political prisoners, for example, but restrictions remain in relation to freedom of speech and the close surveillance of movement of civilians and organisations. Many traits of the old political order remain, including high levels of clientelism and patronage. But there are also progressive departments such as the one approaching your organisation. Do you take up the invitation? Do you negotiate conditions? How do you take up the invitation from a particular person/department without appearing to be partial towards the government in a context in which it continues to hold and exercise power without accountability?

If we consider our impartiality in this context as an output, then we are skating on thin ice. We need to know what we are getting into, what we think of that context and what we are trying to change. We need direction and purpose. We are not impartial when it comes to this “output”. According to Alert, peace is ‘communities managing and anticipating conflicts without violence’. These communities are characterised as having equitable access to income and assets, safety for citizens, a deployment of power that is just and accepted by its people, recourse to justice, and a sense of well-being. Alert, as a peacebuilding organisation, is not impartial when it comes to its purpose, values and ultimate output.

We cannot get away from the fact that, at the output level, we are not impartial. We need a vision of peace. This represents our world view – what we work to. In the words of the philosopher and physicist David Bohm, we all need ‘to have enough faith in our world-view to work from it’.¹³ Without it we are aimless. Interestingly though, Bohm adds ‘but not that much faith that we think it’s the final answer’. Therefore, even at the output level, we need to be vigilant of dogmatism and remain open to other ideas and ways of looking at things. We should hold our ideas lightly you might say.

To assess the impartiality of our approach, we therefore need to focus on **process** rather than output – that is, to understand the nature of the process our engagement with the aforementioned government department is part of. If we take this approach, we can envisage a relatively long-term timeframe (building peace needs time and patience) in which we identify different entry points to engage with different actors involved in the complex task of building a new kind of relationship between the governed and the governors. We can envisage a process driven by those affected by the violence. In other words, although we have a vision of what peace looks like, we realise we cannot force this on anyone. What we can do is design processes which are inclusive and therefore reflective of an impartial approach. What do such processes look like?

At the heart of process is the notion of **inclusivity**. Impartiality is, after all, about an even-handed approach. However, it is a particular type of inclusivity we need. The World Bank often frames inclusiveness in terms of good governance, or the need for transparency and accountability.

¹³ D. Bohm (1985) in *Unfolding Meaning*, ARK Paperbacks, p.4



Meanwhile, various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) often employ “inclusive approaches” to mean the representation of all citizens and groups. I would suggest that inclusiveness means the inclusion of **key** actors in political settlements, rather than “all”. This inclusive approach harnesses the capabilities of political-economic entrepreneurs, including local strongmen and shadow authorities, in crafting political settlements that support peace.¹⁴

In addition, we need to recognise the importance of including the excluded in peacebuilding processes. In adopting an inclusive approach, we need to recognise that some actors hold more power than others. You could say that some are inevitably more included in the transition processes of hybrid states than others due to the power they hold. The government department mentioned earlier is one of the “included”. What is important for the peacebuilder is to support and leverage the influence of this “included” actor to draw in the excluded. Other actors included in the political transition process may be private sector actors with control of significant resources and political influence; they may also include civil society leaders who have gained credibility and standing in society due to their resistance to the former regime and their subsequent support from the international community. Indeed, these civil society leaders are in some ways elites within their societies, with growing political access in hybrid states. The excluded are those not defined as elites, often as vulnerable to the actions of their own leaders as they are to the oppression of the regime their leaders have opposed. Women are invariably excluded from peacebuilding and political transition processes, as are young people and indigenous peoples.

To draw in the excluded and to influence political settlements towards peace, some kind of dialogue involving the included and the excluded needs to be established. Exploring the nature of this dialogue allows us to delve a bit deeper into the notion of impartiality.

The peacebuilder can play a role in shuttling between different actors and talking with them individually, in the first instance. This consultation process can help to identify the needs and interests of different groups and to establish an agenda for the dialogue that follows. These actors represent those who have held power and who have expressed an interest in changing the balance of this power – those who are more in control of and included in the change process. Also represented are those who have to date been excluded from power and who now have the opportunity to be drawn into the change process.

However, the opportunity for dialogue is not necessarily a foregone conclusion – even if up to now the process has been impartial. Indeed, an impartial process can in itself block dialogue, since it challenges actors to engage in ways they may not be comfortable with. Some may want to control the process. They will no doubt view others in terms of stereotypes. There will likely be low levels of trust at the beginning. This is why working with the different actors separately is needed in the early stages of a process.

¹⁴ F. Lara and P. Champain, Vertical and horizontal conflict in political transitions: Political settlements and an inclusive peace in Myanmar, forthcoming.



There are a couple of **observations** worth considering at this point, because they throw light on the difficulties involved in sustaining impartiality. The first observation touches on the **dialogue agenda**. Getting different actors into the same room is often a first major achievement; establishing a space conducive to discussing the most controversial, taboo issues takes longer. In fact, getting to taboo issues sometimes requires travelling a circuitous route. Along the way, certain participants in the process may exclude themselves.

This brings me to the second observation. As the process unfolds, the **balance of participants** will inevitably change in some way. Some may drop out, since they do not feel able to engage with the agenda and other participants. As some retreat, others may join. This will change the balance of the dialogue. But will it necessarily remain (sufficiently) inclusive (in the sense of the word described above)?

Here, we need to be careful of being drawn towards the outcome rather than focusing on the process – the third observation. **Trust the process**. As peacebuilders, we need to design processes that are inclusive and to trust these processes once they are underway. We can influence them as they evolve, but this influence should be determined by the need for inclusivity rather than the need to keep the design as we imagined it to be. Those participating need to own the process, determine the agenda and calibrate the level of participation.

Revisiting the example of engaging with the government department in the hybrid state, we can now imagine a process evolving over time which draws those excluded from power and the levers of change together with those more included. During the early stages, the peacebuilder working to build the space and the agenda may feel a greater degree of control than in the latter stages when the participants will have developed more ownership. Particularly at the early stages then, the peacebuilder will be aware of their partiality with regard to vision and outcome. However, at every step they will work to ensure the process is inclusive and impartial as a whole – even though they may need to focus on certain actors at certain times in order to reach others and on more peripheral issues in the first instance in order to reach more central ones.

As the process evolves, a group will form. Some will leave as others join. But if the process works, the group will generate an identity. Its identity may be described as a mechanism, a platform, or even an institution. Whatever the identity, it will be something new, inclusive and a consequence of the hybrid political space it is evolving within. You could say that hybrid political orders need hybrid institutions and mechanisms to move towards peace. Peacebuilders applying impartiality to process can play an important role in helping to create such mechanisms.

At the heart of these mechanisms will be dialogue. An inclusive, even-handed and impartial approach to process is essential to establishing what Bohm regards as ‘the spirit of dialogue, which is in short, the ability to hold many points of view in suspension, along with a primary interest in the creation of common meaning’.¹⁵

¹⁵ D. Bohm and F.D. Peat (1987). *Science, Order, and Creativity*. New York: Bantam. P.247



PANEL 2:

**POLITICISATION VS NEUTRALITY IN
PEACEBUILDING – CAN YOU BUILD PEACE
WITHOUT POLITICS?**



The politics of “non-recognition” – neutrality or politicisation?

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The Georgian-Abkhaz situation demonstrates how international assistance can become hostage to the geopolitical conjuncture: firstly, when unresolved conflict involves the right to self-determination (i.e. an independent state); and, secondly, when third parties do not take a neutral stance on the formula for resolution (i.e. supporting the political ambitions of one side).

The idea that in complex conflict situations, one can move beyond political issues – and identify humanitarian or even development issues that can be dealt with in isolation from political issues – does not always work in practice. External actors often have their own political agendas related to the conflict. The further their position is from neutrality on political matters (e.g. on the status issue), the more difficult it is for them to strike a balance and exercise an unbiased approach in non-political matters. Moreover, it is difficult to even identify issues that are “non-political”.

If we take the example of human rights programmes in unrecognised states – for instance, projects which require the strengthening of an independent judiciary for more sustainable human rights protection, or the training of law enforcement bodies for the same purpose – these may be regarded as strengthening state institutions. This is often the reason why international organisations do not support such projects.

Because Georgia keeps a close eye on international organisations to ensure that they do not, through their actions, in any way strengthen the “separatist state”, international structures have exercised great caution in choosing areas for engagement with Abkhazia. Such a selective approach has meant that the assistance offered has not always taken into account the priorities and needs of the population at whom the assistance is targeted. It appears that external (official) stakeholders prefer to work in areas which do not raise “suspicion” of supporting state building in an entity not recognised by them, but which at the same time ensure sufficient international presence and conditions for monitoring the situation on the ground. Increased support – especially development assistance, as opposed to humanitarian – becomes conditional on progress in the political sphere within the framework of “territorial integrity”.

The European Union, through its Special Representative for the South Caucasus, Peter Semneby, formulated its position regarding Abkhazia as far back as 2009. This was expressed in the formula of “engagement without recognition”. In other words, a format was proposed for engagement with Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the complex political situation after the 2008 war.

To begin with, the idea of “engagement without recognition” was perceived by Sukhum as a step towards a more balanced EU position regarding Abkhazia. It was viewed as an attempt to demonstrate an unbiased approach to development assistance primarily, the era of humanitarian assistance to Abkhazia having ended. A more unbiased approach could be achieved by considering the Abkhaz population’s needs as a value in its own right. The new approach was also perceived as reflecting a shift towards a more balanced consideration of the parties’ political interests. Abkhaz



society initially interpreted the idea of “engagement without recognition” as “everything except recognition”.

In fact, this initiative was politicised by different actors and to this day remains largely frozen. Let us attempt to figure out why this European idea remains devoid of any real content.

From the very beginning, the EU was not ready to engage with Abkhazia without taking into account Georgia’s attitude to such engagement. As Georgia was only able to accept ideas linked to the “reintegration” of Abkhazia, Europe’s “engagement without recognition” was seen by the Europeans not only as an initiative to de-isolate Abkhazia, but also as a way to bring Abkhazia and Georgia closer together. In this context, the needs of the population were only considered through the prism of how they could contribute to the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. In other words, it was not the needs of the people themselves that were important, but how they could contribute to the reconciliation of the two societies. As one senior EU official in Brussels pointed out at a meeting with a representative of Abkhaz civil society: ‘In your case, the EU is not interested in the development aid per se. We are looking for confidence-building measures.’ Linking international aid for Abkhazia to conflict resolution strips the European strategy of the neutrality expected of it by the Abkhaz side. Such an approach is restrictive in relation to Abkhazia.

Even if the Europeans’ particular understanding of a desirable political outcome cannot satisfy Abkhazia, the idea of “engagement without recognition” could have been more or less viable under certain conditions. Firstly, the EU should have clearly differentiated its own approach from the Georgian official policy towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Secondly, such a differentiation should not have been a mere assertion – the EU should have shown a real interest in the needs and requirements of the population in such areas as health, education or business, for example. Meeting these needs should not have been linked to the prospects of resolving the conflict. This could have been a way of separating political issues from the rest. Neither was done in a timely manner.

Furthermore, given that the EU decision-making processes are complex, bureaucratic and slow, important time was wasted. The Saakashvili government took full advantage of this. The adoption of the Georgian Law on “occupied territories”, followed by the Strategy on “occupied territories”, along with the so-called “neutral” passports and modalities for international organisations working in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, all significantly limited the scope for implementing an independent European initiative. Saakashvili’s government was serious about preventing a far-reaching de-isolation of Abkhazia through various European projects. It made every effort to restrict the right of Abkhaz citizens to free movement, for example to travel to European countries.

The Georgian authorities must have perceived European “engagement” as a step towards the legitimisation of Abkhazia as a subject of international relations. Thus, the policy objectives of “reintegration” and “de-occupation” outlined in the Georgian Strategy on Abkhazia and South Ossetia, along with other specific Georgian initiatives, made “de-isolation” directly dependent on the willingness of the Abkhaz and the Ossetians to comply with Georgian laws, to cooperate with the Georgian authorities and to interact with the outside world exclusively through and with the approval of Georgia. The Georgian leadership understood that this was totally unacceptable to the Abkhaz. In



reality, the point of the Georgian strategy was “to steal Europe’s thunder” and to offer the Abkhaz the kind of terms which they knew they would not accept.

As Georgia was stepping up its efforts to prevent Europe from engaging directly with Abkhazia, European officials found it increasingly difficult to infuse their strategy with real meaning. They found it particularly difficult to formulate their objectives in such a way as to address the concerns of the Abkhaz, who were increasingly inclined to see the European initiative as an instrument to bring Abkhazia into the Georgian fold.

Moreover, the idea of “engagement” did not progress due to differences in the positions of different EU member states. Within the EU, while there is general support for Georgia’s claims on Abkhazia and South Ossetia, there are different attitudes towards Georgia’s policy towards Russia, as a result of different interests and visions regarding European-Russian relations. Against this background, the lack of unity between New Europe and Old Europe on the need to recognise the “occupation” of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is offset by regular public affirmations of respect for Georgia’s “territorial integrity” and a high regard for the views of the Georgian leadership in shaping the European strategy. Perhaps this is the reason why most international projects in Abkhazia have so far been quite modest in scale (some merely symbolic). Moreover, even those projects that were quite expensive (for example, repairs of maternity hospitals) have received little media coverage so as not to irritate the Georgian side.

For fairness sake, it should be noted that despite the official position of most Western institutions (donors), some international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and donors have tried to overcome Georgia’s resistance and respond to the needs of Abkhaz society, with the support of local NGOs and experts. Over the years, they have not only funded (albeit on a small scale) humanitarian, social and educational initiatives, but also civil initiatives in governance and judicial reform, etc. Such initiatives have sometimes required a fair amount of ingenuity in their dealings with donors.

Recently, there have also been some positive tendencies arising from the EU. For instance, EU executive official documents have encouraged Georgia to review the “Law on occupied territories”. At the same time, it has been proposed that “neutral” passports should not be considered the only acceptable travel documents for Abkhaz citizens. However, such European recommendations – in particular, those regarding freedom of movement of the Abkhaz population – are not always taken into account, not so much by Georgia, but by the European countries themselves. For example, Abkhaz citizens still find it difficult (often impossible) to get a visa to a number of EU countries, including Belgium.

Among the positive developments is, for example, the EU expansion of direct funding for local NGO projects through the Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism (COBERM) programme. In addition, EU representatives have taken the initiative to discuss with the Abkhaz leadership a programme of assistance in areas considered a priority by Abkhaz society – including, for instance, Abkhaz students studying in European universities.

The change of leadership in Georgia and the new Georgian approach to Abkhazia voiced by Bidzina Ivanishvili – that is, “everything but recognition” – in a sense lets the EU off the leash and gives them



reason to expect more moderate reactions from Georgia to potential Abkhaz-European cooperation. In any case, the EU position should not be more stringent and restrictive than that of the Georgian authorities. If the Georgian leadership really does not want to interfere in the process of Abkhazia's de-isolation, a more independent and active EU policy in respect to direct cooperation with Abkhazia would help the Georgian leadership to avoid accusations by their opposition of indulging the "separatists", because the "responsibility" for it would rest with their European partners.

To the surprise of many, however, the European initiatives are now being hindered by the Abkhaz side. The new Abkhaz approach is expressed through imposing more formalised procedures for cooperation with international organisations. It is now suggested that organisations based in Sukhum should focus only on the Gal district. Previously, Abkhaz NGOs had spent a lot of time and effort convincing international organisations to work across the whole of Abkhazia, not only in the Gal district. This approach was based on the belief that it would be unfair to meet only the needs of the ethnic Georgian population, rather than all Abkhaz citizens.

Currently, the Abkhaz leadership does not always give European officials permission to enter Abkhazia, when previously they had only denied entry to the representatives of European embassies accredited to Georgia, which had its own logic. Only recently, an education programme at the Abkhaz State University (ASU) involving a Belgian professor giving lectures to Abkhaz students was suspended. The ASU and the Brussels Free University were expected to sign a cooperation agreement to formalise the initiative, but now the programme is once again under discussion on the initiative of the Abkhaz side.

Difficulties in engagement between the Abkhaz leadership and European institutions can be explained by a number of factors. Firstly, discussions about the European engagement policy have been going on for some time now, with the Abkhaz repeatedly stating their preferences; however, no real steps have been taken. By the time the EU finally expressed its willingness to implement certain programmes, the frustration on the Abkhaz side with the slowness and vacillations of the EU was running rather high. Other reasons are possibly related to the fact that the EU projects are quite small and do not include (except for the IngurGES) any plans for infrastructure rehabilitation. The latter remains a priority for the current leadership of Abkhazia, which considers infrastructure as the basis of all development, although this is a debatable issue. There is also a general mistrust of the West, as a result not only of the West's double standards on the independence of Abkhazia, but also due to Soviet-style beliefs left over from the Cold War era. Furthermore, since the conflict is widely used in domestic politics to manipulate public opinion (in both Abkhazia and Georgia), the authorities exercise caution in regard to the EU, fearing their political opponents' charges of excessive openness to the EU as a Georgian ally.

Finally, it is quite likely that the authorities do not want to irritate Abkhazia's main partner – Russia – whose financial support far outstretches the EU contribution. The atmosphere of intolerance towards international organisations and the local NGOs that work with them is widely cultivated in Russia today, a trend which is likely to be taken into account by the Abkhaz leadership. It may be necessary to discuss investment in the development and modernisation of Abkhazia within the framework of the Geneva discussions as well as other inter-governmental and non-governmental fora which could involve both European and Russian representatives.



The Abkhaz side should understand that large-scale investment by Europe will not happen overnight and that a gradual increase in cooperation would help to create the necessary framework. Closing Abkhazia [to the West] would only lead to its marginalisation and the Abkhaz side will miss out on an important opportunity. Given that Abkhazia has a much higher interest in cooperation with Europe, than Europe has to gain from cooperation with Abkhazia, it is important for Abkhazia to put forward its own ideas of engagement, without setting itself unrealistic goals which cannot be met at present.

The opening up of Abkhazia to non-politicised economic and cultural cooperation with Europe is justified from the point of view of the contribution it would make to transforming the current context – a context which Abkhaz society has felt unfairly punished by for far too long.



Playing with “enemy” and “hero” images – or why crocodiles sometimes do fly

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Two people are talking:

- So do crocodiles fly?
- Are you crazy? Don't be ridiculous!
- But the minister says they do.
- Well, you know... They do fly, just very low...

Every day, we all consciously or unconsciously manufacture our own real and imagined heroes and anti-heroes. Overwhelmed by the plethora of events swirling around us, we very often give in to the human tendency to generalise and exaggerate in order to simplify our world and form a multipolar – even bipolar – view of reality, events and people, etc. This is entirely normal. It is even, to some extent, necessary if human beings are to retain their sanity and accept and live in the world around us. In normal conditions, most of these images, heroes and anti-heroes are short lived, expiring once they have fulfilled their purpose or no longer nurtured from outside.

In the case of government policy, however (and here we are considering a potential instrument of propaganda, the state education system), these images are cultivated. Financial, human and administrative resources are used to bolster their influence and root them in the public consciousness. A whole set of tools is engaged: the halo effect, glamour, intra-group favouritism, etc. Working with the as yet unformed minds of children and young people; using their position to present one “official” view of the world, declaring it to be the most (sometimes the only) correct and indisputable version of a single objective reality – the authorities all too often succumb to the temptation to exploit this for their own ends.

There are three ways of teaching history in schools: history as a science; history as conveying a consensus-based view of the past; and history as a propaganda tool, promoting a specific world view and fomenting a specified set of values and attitudes to world events among its audience. Here, we draw a parallel with one of the chief guiding principles of democracy – the separation of powers. We suggest that these three ways of teaching history in schools need to be separated, although they do interact with each other. Even though the analogy of separation of powers does not suggest how ideally to divide power between each of the three purposes, a balance of influence needs to be maintained. Unfortunately, the trend in most post-Soviet countries is towards the third approach – that is, propaganda – outstripping history as a science and history as a consensus-based view of the past. And this propaganda is not aimed at future generations or objective considerations, but at present-day, specific and conjectural interests of particular individuals and groupings.



This view of history and how it is taught is powerful and dangerous, as it enables a small or larger coterie of people to exploit and manipulate natural human reactions and perceptions. Unlike our ephemeral mini-heroes and anti-heroes, their heroes and anti-heroes along with their values are claimed to be universal and absolute. This view of history dismisses and “conceals” any objective scientific criteria that contradict it: that is, common sense or universal human values which have led the global community to the consensus that there are in fact no vicious, criminal nations, or nations that are genetically predisposed to be hostile, or peoples or groupings of people that are intrinsically incompatible with each other – but instead that people must always, indeed preferably, have a choice, an alternative.

Do we really have to remind ourselves that any idea or value, however good it may appear in itself, fails the test of common sense and becomes counter-productive once it is claimed to be absolute and universal? For example, if multi-culturalism is taken to such an extreme that the fairytale ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs’ is condemned for offending people of small stature, or Burroughs’ ‘Tarzan’ series for promoting apartheid, it becomes a phobia and a tool for creating new anti-heroes. So let us consider the following in the context of the fledgling post-Soviet countries, where unfortunately there are still many remnants of past phobias colouring the public consciousness, mentality and their approach to problem solving. Whilst preparing this article, I started to reflect on a Russian synonym for enemy – the word “nedrug” (literally non-friend). I began to see it as a symbol of most post-Soviet ways of thinking – if you are not my friend, you must be an enemy. This places an even greater burden of responsibility on the shoulders of those who claim to be a country’s political and cultural elite. So far, unfortunately, few have risen to the challenge.

Finally, I would like to recall the words of the American writer, the publicist Sam Keen: ‘In the beginning, we create the enemy. Before the weapon comes the image. [...] Propaganda precedes technology.’ So, if we – or the conflicting parties – are interested in something more than simply issuing declarations and want to work towards real conflict resolution, we and they must start with public consciousness, the images of heroes and enemies, propaganda tools as well as history textbooks. Of course, I make no claim that this is a universal or absolute approach.



Politicisation of neutral mediators

Ivlian Haindrava, Republican Institute, Tbilisi

In 20 years of international efforts aimed at conflict resolution in Georgia, various inter-governmental organisations have tried a number of different formats and mandates including:

- The UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), in tandem with the Group of Friends of the UN Secretary General (in Abkhazia);
- The mission of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Georgia and its observers in South Ossetia;
- Since 2003, the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus;
- Since 2008, the Geneva consultations in which all three of the above organisations act as “co-hosts” along with the partially deployed EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM).

None of these formats has led to the overall objective being achieved. Even on local issues, the results have been variable and for the most part negligible. Overall, the presence of UNOMIG in Abkhazia had a beneficial effect on the situation, and the regular reports of the Secretary General based on UNOMIG’s activities were objective. However, UNOMIG failed to prevent the excesses of 1998, 2001 and 2006, not to mention the Russian-Abkhaz military operation in the Kodori Gorge in August 2008. In fact, the OSCE observers in South Ossetia failed to secure a prompt and adequate response from the international community to the escalation in tension and the explosion of large-scale inter-state armed conflict in August 2008.

In 2009, the Russian Federation not only blocked resolutions at the UN Security Council and the OSCE to extend the mandate of their respective missions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia; it even achieved the complete removal of the OSCE mission in Georgia. Russia continues to refuse to implement the fifth clause of the Sarkozy-Medvedev Agreement of 12th August 2008. At the same time, together with the administrations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it has prevented an EUMM from being set up in those territories. Russia plays a defining role in all international efforts aimed at conflict resolution in Georgia, and has managed to achieve a de facto monopoly in Abkhazia and to an even larger extent in South Ossetia. However, this was a status it had in fact enjoyed for years, backed up by its peacekeeping contingent – formally under the aegis of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This has now been expanded to its former status as a Russian military base, which has now been firmly established for a long time to come in Abkhazia together with (Russian) border guards and other less symbolic features of Russian domination.

At the same time, it was with Russia’s direct involvement (although presumably to maximise its own interests) that the parties in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict came closer than ever to signing an agreement on the principles for future co-existence in 1995 (“unified federal state”) and 1997 (“shared statehood”). International mediators were then and still are very short on ideas. The only ones that come to mind are the Boden Plan of 2001 (supported by UN Security Council Resolution 1393 of 31st January 2002) and the Steinmeier Plan (July 2008). Thus, if there has indeed been any politicisation of “neutral” mediators, this can be related primarily to the Russian Federation, which has openly transformed itself from a peacekeeper into a party to the conflict. This transformation



though is purely in formal terms, as there was never at any stage any doubt that the Russian policy was predicated on domestic interests rather than its international obligations. The charge to be levelled at the other mediators is that they lacked creativity, a sense of purpose and consolidation.

UNOMIG and the OSCE were as neutral as it is possible to be in global politics. However, the very same UN (and all the countries of the world apart from Turkey) adheres to the principle of respecting the unity and integrity of Cyprus, almost 40 years after the de facto division of the island and even after the Greek Cypriots failed to win the “Annan Plan” referendum. It is noteworthy that even colleagues from Abkhazia gave a positive assessment of the activities of UNOMIG. I quote: ‘In general, the UN’s role in the political settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict has been positive, since its mediation and its very presence in the conflict zone contributed to maintaining the peace and created more or less favourable conditions for the negotiation process.’ In his article in the same collection, the now Deputy Foreign Minister in the Sukhumi government, Irakli Khintba, listed eight potential negative consequences of dropping UNOMIG and just four positive ones. So why was the UN mission literally ejected from Abkhazia (and the OSCE from South Ossetia)? And why are they now complaining that the EU has no neutrality over the formula for resolution?

The EU cannot by definition be neutral in relation to Georgia’s integrity. The EU is a union of 27 member states, each of which has diplomatic relations with Georgia and recognises Georgia’s territorial integrity. They develop relations on both an individual and a collective basis, working together on the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), associate membership, simplification of the visa regime, etc.

So how can the EU be required not to “politicise the process” when the parties themselves are doing all they can to politicise it? Indeed, it is thanks to the position adopted by Saakashvili in the four years since the 2008 war that the second component of the European policy of “non-recognition and engagement” has been undermined. This trend has now changed though on the Georgian side: since the change in power in October 2012, the new administration has proposed a series of initiatives aimed at Sukhumi and has already begun implementing them unilaterally. The current position of the Tbilisi authorities is formulated as “everything short of recognition”. However, it is being blocked by the tough “one dimensional” position adopted by Sukhumi, which pursues a “nothing but recognition” approach. So, who precisely is politicising Georgian-Abkhaz relations – a multi-faceted issue where, between the two poles of non-recognition and recognition, there is a vast space in which concrete results can be achieved and where Tbilisi has demonstrated that it is entirely prepared to engage?

We have witnessed over the last few months how the new Georgian leadership is increasingly approximating and harmonising its position with that of Brussels (albeit not vice versa), while the EU has failed to reciprocate – at least openly. Given this situation, if anyone is entitled to complain about “politicisation” by the EU, it is the new leadership in Tbilisi. It has received much criticism from Brussels (and other European capitals), but not a single word of approval for the aforementioned actions aimed at de-isolating Abkhazia and enabling “engagement” as the Europeans understand this term. Indeed, the Georgian side at Geneva is being blackmailed with the threat that the process could be abandoned altogether, which of course is not at all in Georgia’s interest. This completely disregards the personality and political character of the country’s new leader or the new minister



(and our old friend), who have to deal with the conflicts – although they certainly will not give in to blackmail and threats.

I will say a few words about the EU's first Special Representative for the South Caucasus (EUSR). Recently, I carried out a test on an audience of seven to eight political scientists. I asked them to recall the full name of the first EUSR. A prolonged and deep silence ensued, finally broken by one of the "test subjects" asking whether it was someone with a name like Heidi Tagliavini. In fact, it was Heikki Talvitie who occupied this post from 2003 to 2006, but it is hard to remember any results of his work. Incidentally, he is the former Finnish ambassador to Moscow (1988–1992) and has been the permanent secretary of the Finland-Russia Association since 2002; perhaps this job has taken up too much of his time.

Regarding the aforementioned Heidi Tagliavini, we should perhaps also recall that in December 2008 the EU summit set up a special committee with the official title, 'The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia'. As head of this mission, Heidi Tagliavini worked hard and conscientiously (although perhaps without covering all the details). The main conclusions of the "Tagliavini Committee" stated that 'there is no way to assign overall responsibility for the conflict to one side alone. They have all failed, and it should be their responsibility to make good for it' (Vol. 1, p. 32). The conclusions also stated the following:

- 'Abkhaz forces supported by Russian forces took the upper Kodori valley, meeting with little Georgian resistance' (Vol. 1, p. 11). 'The use of force by Abkhazia was not justified under international law. The same applies for the Russian support of these actions' (Vol. 1, p. 25).
- 'South Ossetia did not have a right to secede from Georgia, and the same holds true for Abkhazia' (Vol. 1, p. 17).
- 'Recognition of [breakaway entities such as] Abkhazia and South Ossetia by a third country is [consequently] contrary to international law' (Ibid).

This raises the question of whether the EU or any individual EU member state can ignore the committee's conclusions, which were so exhaustively argued in the thousand-page report. Incidentally, these conclusions also include the following: 'Established principles of international law such as respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of states were ignored... Falling back from civilised standards of political interaction in Europe is a consequence' (Vol. 1, p. 32). This conclusion directly relates to Russia and so the "non-recognition" component of Europe's policy of "non-recognition and engagement" also clearly means that Europe cannot recognise any such action by the Russian Federation as legitimate: if the EU were to do so, it would cease to be the European Union.

Personally, I am very sympathetic to the philosophy of European "soft power", which goes more or less as follows: these are our values, these are our approaches; do you share them? If so, we can deepen our collaboration. If not, it is up to you; we can still have limited relations based on specific shared interests. But soft power should not give the impression that you are powerless or simply juggling your own positions and approaches.



PANEL 3:
**PEACEBUILDERS – WESTERN IMPERIALISTS
OR DONOR CLIENTS?**



Public perceptions of peacebuilding

Arda Inal-Ipa, Centre for Humanitarian Programmes, Abkhazia

After 20 years of peacebuilding, unfortunately we have not seen the evolution of broad based support for peacebuilding initiatives within our societies. A large proportion of the population think of peacebuilding processes at best with indifference, and at worst negatively. Often accusations are made of political bias, that peacebuilding is in the interests of the “other” side, and that engagement in peacebuilding projects is motivated by financial interests and a lack of strong patriotic commitment on behalf of the participants. For example, much of the Abkhaz public, only having a vague idea of what is discussed during bilateral dialogues, are sceptical about the benefits of any communication with the enemy and of people-to-people diplomacy in particular. On the other hand, what may have appeared to be a positive attitude towards dialogue at first glance, in reality turned out to be born of the hope to use peacebuilding processes for political aims. An example of this would be when Georgian public opinion tended to view peacebuilding projects with the Abkhaz side as a means to achieve the unification of Abkhazia with Georgia.

Neither one nor the other attitude contributed to peacebuilding and serve as evidence of how far the public from the conflicting sides are from mutual understanding. Confirmation of the negative attitude towards peacebuilding can be evidenced by the fact that there is still no peace movement in the Caucasus, a region that has endured so many military conflicts.

So what could explain this attitude to peacebuilding in countries that have experienced the horrors of war? Bitterness and refusal to interact with the enemy cannot be the only factors creating negative feelings towards peacebuilding, as the existence of cross-border contacts to facilitate private business interests has never caused such emotional and personal disturbance as peacebuilding projects have.

One reason for the negative attitudes is the political positions and assumptions of those involved in mediating the processes. Most peacebuilding initiatives are supported by those countries – or organisations from those countries – that do not recognise Abkhazia and officially support the Georgian position of territorial integrity. For example, a call for proposals issued by USAID in 2007 wrote: “The U.S. Government (USG) is actively engaged in supporting the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the Georgian separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in a manner that maintains Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders”. Therefore, from the Abkhaz perspective, there is a perception that the mediators are biased, and that their motivation is to achieve their political goals rather than peacebuilding per se.

Furthermore, the processes themselves are often influenced by false assumptions on the part of both participants and mediators – i.e. the assumption that through more contacts and interaction the sides will eventually agree on the return of Georgian refugees; or mediators see how well Georgians and Abkhaz interact with each other after a few meetings and conclude falsely that the problems between them do not go so deep. There have also been some one-off peacebuilding initiatives which are frankly poor quality and even opportunistic – of more benefit to the organisers than the



participants who it seems are using someone else's misfortune for their own benefit. It would be better if peacebuilding actors understood dialogue as a process through which participants reach a deeper understanding of each other's perspectives and therefore leading to alternative paths for resolution.

Having said that there have been some serious initiatives facilitated by organisations such as University of California (Irvine), Conciliation Resources and International Alert, who do not have pre-conceived ideas about the solution to the conflict and have tried to create space for dialogue. So why do they not enjoy more widespread support from within the population ?

One has to understand that we are still living in a culture imbued by war. Our society is still full of war-time values and memories in which concepts of victory and loss, heroes and victims are still strong. In the Georgian-Abkhaz context, there has been no objective assessment of the war of 1992-1993; up to now the parties have not signed an agreement on non-use of force, not to mention a peace treaty, and many people are inclined to believe that the preservation of an enemy image is beneficial for national security. Peacebuilding initiatives are seen as an attempt to cure an unfinished business – to reconcile and build confidence between people in the absence of deep analysis of the roots of the conflict. There is a sense of injustice - the past has not been dealt with – and these initiatives are not seen as addressing that, and suspected of having a hidden agenda, of trying to persuade us to give up our convictions and weaken our resolve.

Is it therefore only down to objective reasons that a negative attitude to peacebuilding is often found in Caucasus?

The important question is whether the negative feelings are based on real knowledge on the part of society of the nature of civil peace processes. We believe that the widespread views in society about peacebuilding far from reflect reality. To what extent did the creation of this distorted vision occur naturally? Society does not know about what goes on during these meetings. On their return home, many participants do not share what was discussed. There is also a strong possibility that there is deliberate misinformation about these events. The following parties may have had an interest in this:

- a) The authorities who are concerned about the independence of the participants engaged in these issues and their own lack of control over these process – this is the case over the whole Caucasus, I am not just talking about Abkhazia;
- b) External actors who are not interested in resolving the conflict;
- c) People within societies that want to prevent direct contact between the conflict parties even at the level of civil society, because of their values, as a result unhealed psychological war trauma (adherents of eternal enmity); and
- d) Those who fear that such processes may lead to objective investigation of war crimes.

In this context, it is important to disseminate accurate information about the aims and potential of civil peacebuilding. Despite the guns being silent today in the South Caucasus, the fact that the value of peacebuilding is not recognised testifies that our society is stuck in war-mode. This mind-set is a serious factor preventing objective and far sighted political vision. As long as peacebuilding



continues to be initiated only from the outside and perceived by the participants and wider society as an external initiative, significant results are unlikely to be achieved. The idea of building peace must be born from within, and then international organisations can support them. In this respect, the younger generation could play an important role. It is not such an impossible task for the younger generation to reorientate themselves from being stuck in the past to focusing on the future, unlike the older generation. Looking forward and imagining a vision for the future in a South Caucasus without conflict could inspire the younger generation to seek more actively new effective forms of peacebuilding. As long as peacebuilding has only abstract aims it won't attract many people to its cause. Peacebuilding needs to become not the aim in itself, but the means through which we can achieve a better future: a future more just, developed and prosperous.



Motivational drivers of civic peacebuilding

Jana Javakhishvili, Global Initiative on Psychiatry, Tbilisi

The often voiced idea that ‘civil society peacebuilding has failed’ has become almost a cliché. Although international donors continue to finance civil society initiatives aimed at facilitating cooperation between conflicting sides in the South Caucasus, the support is becoming increasingly modest. One can sense a steady growth in scepticism and lack of faith in the effectiveness of civil processes. The fatigue of 20 years of “no war, no peace”, with periodic escalations that on occasion develop into real war as occurred in August 2008, is also taking its toll. However, the real cause of this scepticism lies, I believe, elsewhere.

At the beginning of the 1990s, representatives of the budding civil societies in the South Caucasus pinned a lot of hope on civic peacebuilding. This was clearly evident, on the one hand, in the enthusiasm and excitement of representatives from both sides of the conflict divides when they talked and argued, trying to convince each other of their “own truth”. A number of publications – such as the series which grew out of the process facilitated by the University of California, Irvine – serve as documentary evidence of that enthusiasm. On the other hand, a pointedly cautious and wary attitude in the respective societies also testified to the high (one can even say excessive from today’s perspective) expectations of citizen diplomacy. However, as usually happens when expectations are inflated, the time of disillusionment came and those “great expectations” collapsed.

What was the cause of this disillusionment? Was it the expectation of immediate, easy and fast results? Was there inappropriate anticipation that the conflicts could be resolved through citizen diplomacy? Or was it due to the emergence of a cohort of “professional civil peacebuilders” who became the “face” of peace projects and the “filter” through which new people had to pass? I imagine that the reason is a combination of all these factors, along with a mythologised perception of civil peacebuilding by all stakeholders, without exception. In particular, a diverse variety of civil peacebuilding initiatives became overgeneralised and tended to be treated as a homogenous group under one banner.

In order to de-mythologise these processes, therefore, and to encourage a differentiated approach to and understanding of different civil peacebuilding processes, it is important to understand the motivations behind peace processes at various levels.

In my analysis, I shall use the pyramid diagram, which has become a classic in conflict resolution studies. The foundations of this pyramid symbolise the people (micro level), the middle represents civil society (meso level) and the top represents the authorities (macro level).

The pyramid diagram does not assume a hierarchical approach to resolving conflict. It describes the structure of society, and in terms of conflict resolution assumes a systemic involvement of all three levels in parallel to achieve synergy and complementarity.



The base of the pyramid (micro level) involves **day-to-day interaction between people**, i.e. representatives of the sides to the conflict, which often takes place close to the conflict divide in order to meet “**basic human needs**”. For example, prior to its closure, the Ergneti market was an example of such interaction, with Georgians and Ossetians engaging in trade with each other (or exchanging smuggled goods). A present day example would be that of the AIDS patients from Abkhazia who come to Tbilisi for treatment. This type of interaction is important, because it reduces alienation between the divided communities. It is an example of basic human interaction driven by the need to satisfy basic human needs (food, medical treatment and so on). Of course, there are other values at play here, but the dominant driver is “survival”. However, if the geopolitical situation changes and the potential “satisfiers” of basic needs shift, with people turning to another provider, the pragmatism of interaction between conflict parties disappears and in turn contributes towards their alienation. For example, the current process of integration of Abkhazia and South Ossetia into Russia’s sphere of influence risks rupturing the remaining weak threads of communication between Abkhaz and Georgian societies, as well as between Ossetian and Georgian societies.

The primary goal of **citizen diplomacy** (meso level) is to transform the relations which have both contributed to and been damaged by the escalation of conflict. Therefore, it is built not on “basic human needs”, but rather its main drivers are **civic values** such as human rights, citizen participation, transparency, minority rights, freedom of speech, etc. Satisfying basic human needs (for example, the need for participation, identity, creativity, etc.) undoubtedly plays a role in civil diplomacy, but is not the primary motivator. Being value-based, citizen diplomacy is not directly influenced by geopolitical games. In periods of high political tension (as was the case, for example, during the Kodori Gorge events in the early 2000s), the participants of civil diplomacy processes, in fact, intensified their cooperation to prevent armed conflict. A political escalation of conflict is a challenge which citizen diplomacy is ready to tackle.

Despite the efforts of civil societies to act in the name of peace, and against geopolitics, war can put that aspiration at risk. Take, for example, the events of the summer of 2008. Avoiding a war was the supreme objective pursued by representatives of the Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian civil societies, who worked together for many years within the framework of various peacebuilding projects. Apart from the total confusion between truth and misinformation, and between emotional reactions and unrealised expectations on all sides, the summer of 2008 engendered a feeling that all efforts to build peace had been in vain and futile, that civil society was helpless in the face of real war. There was a sense of guilt, because civil diplomacy had been unable to prevent military action. The following qualities are all characteristic of a psychological trauma: to a certain extent, the refusal to accept reality, resorting to protest and looking for a culprit (the “sole culprit for all troubles”, as a simplified perception of the situation); a sense that you are to blame for events beyond your control; unrealistic expectations of yourself and of others; re-evaluation of everything and everyone; the loss of meaning in what you have devoted a large part of your life to, and so on. After the initial shock over the trauma of war, people still managed to turn to the “principle of realism”. After the hostilities ended, people started to overcome the drastic consequences of war – a long process and one which cannot be hurried. But if the war served to push back further the horizon of reconciliation for the Ossetian and Georgian communities, possibly even for several generations, representatives of civil society were able to keep the horizon close in sight because of their long-term cooperation and personal relations through citizen diplomacy – as a result of which dialogue resumed.



Diplomacy at the “top” of the pyramid (macro level) is often at the level of **official talks**, the drivers of which are **geopolitical and national interests** as well as the respective positions of the parties. Needs and values are also present at this level, but geopolitical interests play the dominant role. This is the level at which geopolitics has a direct impact, determining the intensity, special nature and effectiveness of the relations between the parties.

Without involving the “base” of the pyramid and those spontaneous links between divided communities, which are initiated by pragmatic considerations in meeting basic needs (micro level), citizen diplomacy (meso level) is left without a backbone. Similarly, without the micro and meso levels, official diplomacy actually has no basis, remaining suspended in thin air. Conversely, if the micro and meso levels are engaged and functional, then official processes have something to rest on other than realpolitik interests and positions, in turn increasing their effectiveness. If the first two levels are engaged, but the third one is “silent”, a lack of “political will” to resolve the conflict may become apparent, resulting in low effectiveness of conflict transformation processes. The engagement of all three levels opens up the possibility to involve basic human needs, together with civic and general human values, as well as the geopolitical interests of the parties. This can contribute to consistency of approach and increase the chances of success. If the geopolitical situation does not allow all three levels to be engaged, transformation processes may face considerable difficulties.

However, awareness of the interdependence between all three levels should not induce the pessimistic notion that ‘if geopolitics is not conducive to conflict resolution, then there is no hope, and therefore it makes no sense to act’. This demonisation of the geopolitical can only work against peacebuilding, fuelling alienation of the accommodating approach of civil society. By way of counter argument, we could cite the optimistic path, proposed by John Paul Lederach at a Georgian-Abkhaz meeting. According to this approach, civil society has the potential to exercise a “vertical impact, both up and down” – in order to engage both the foundations (ordinary people) and the pinnacle (the authorities) of such pyramids.

However, in order not to be carried away by unrealistic expectations, we should clarify what we understand by “impact” and consequently “change”. Civil diplomacy projects show that “quick visible changes in reconciliation” can only be achieved at the level of civil society – mainly, among project participants. Unrealistic expectations and inflated claims – for example, of having a significant impact in a short timeframe on the wider public or on the political level – may discredit even the most effective efforts of civil society.

Civil initiatives are, indeed, capable to some extent of transforming a situation in the long term. However, changes do not occur in a linear fashion (according to the principle of cause and effect), but in a systemic way. According to systems theory, which describes all three levels of the pyramid as components of one system, whatever level changes take place at, they transform the overall system, which in turn contributes to finding new solutions.

Based on the above analysis, at each of the three levels described one can identify three motivational clusters. The scale of their representation depends on the level of peacebuilding.



The first motivational cluster can be called “basic human needs” – such as existence, security, information, identity, etc. Despite the fact that the general public is the main “translator” of the “basic human needs” motivation, these needs can be manifest at all three levels of peacebuilding. For example, at the level of the authorities, “basic needs” can be interpreted as the “need for votes”; at the level of civil society organisations, they can be interpreted as the “need for donors”, leading to “donor-led” initiatives; for international facilitators, such needs can manifest themselves as the “need for a job” or any other benefit which leads to the satisfaction of the facilitators’ basic human needs.

The second motivational cluster can be roughly described as “civic values”, which combine democratic values such as human rights, participation, transparency, minority rights, freedom of speech, etc. Although this motivation may be present at all three of the abovementioned levels, it is mainly civil society (meso level) and international facilitators who are assumed to be the conduits of “civic values”.

The third motivational cluster can be roughly described as “national interests”. In the South Caucasus, this cluster corresponds to the interests based on the existing, developing or even imaginary (explicit or implicitly assumed) “national projects” of the various countries/regions/societies in conflict. They are usually ethno-centric and are based on primordial and essentialist basic assumptions. The authorities (the pinnacle of the pyramid), or the “official level”, are the main carrier and a “translator” of the national interests motivational cluster. Where international facilitators are concerned, these “national interests” are derived from the interests of their respective states (for example, “fewer refugees from the East”, “less drug trafficking through the South Caucasus”, etc.).

In the current context, the motivation based on “national interests” is the main obstacle to peace processes in the South Caucasus. This is because they are based on mutually exclusive meta-narratives of the conflicting parties, rooted in modernist thinking prevalent in the region. In contrast, the “civic values” motivation is based on postmodernist perspectives, and can provide a more inclusive framework for conflict resolution, reducing existing differences. The “basic human needs” motivation serves as a powerful engine for engagement and thus reconciliation of societies to the extent possible in the given geopolitical context.

In conclusion, for each level of peacebuilding, one can identify a key motivation which assumes a certain level of civic peacebuilding: for the population as a whole, “basic human needs” constitute the leading motivation; for “civil society”, “civic values” are the key motivation; for the government, “national interests” are paramount. However, if the principal motivation for a particular level is replaced by another principal motivation of a different level, it creates a gridlock. For example, if during a civil society peace dialogue there is a shift in motivation from “civic values” to “basic human needs” – that is, if the satisfaction of one’s personal basic needs becomes the main motivator for involvement of the participants (or the facilitator) in the citizen diplomacy process – this will result in a value deficit in the process and reduce its effectiveness or even make it counterproductive. This motivational shift, regardless of whether it occurs among local civil society activists and/or international facilitators, will create another stalemate in – along with increasing scepticism of – the peacebuilding process.



Annex 1: Programme

0930-1000	Opening session: Phil Vernon, Director of Programmes, International Alert Gunnar Wiegand, Director Russia, Eastern Partnership, Central Asia, Regional Cooperation and OSCE, EEAS
1000-1130	Panel 1: Risk taking versus the principle of “do no harm” Moderator: Simon Tiller, International Alert Maria van Ruiten , Conciliation Resources Comparative dilemmas inherent in official and unofficial peacebuilding Gevorg Ter Gabrielyan , Eurasia Partnership Foundation: Creating a scandal to make a point – in whose favour? Phil Champain , International Alert: Codes of conduct in peacebuilding – helping to strike the balance – Impartiality vs neutrality.
1130-1200	Coffee Break
1200-1330	Panel 2: Politicisation versus neutrality in peacebuilding – can you build peace without politics? Moderator: Phil Champain, International Alert Liana Kvarchelia , Centre for Humanitarian programmes, Abkhazia The politics of “non-recognition” – neutrality or politicisation? Anar Eyubov , Azerbaijan State Economic University Playing with “enemy images” Ivlian Haindrava , Republican Institute, Tbilisi Politicisation of “neutral” mediators
1330-1430	Lunch
1430-1600	Panel 3: Peacebuilders – Western imperialists or donor clients? Moderator: Maria van Ruiten, Conciliation Resources Arda Inal-Ipa , Centre for Humanitarian Programmes, Abkhazia Public Perceptions of “peacebuilding” Jana Javakhishvili , Global Initiative on Psychiatry, Tbilisi Motivations of different actors in professional peacebuilding Douglas Carpenter , EEAS, EU
1600-1630	Close



Annex 2: List of participants

	Name	Institution
1.	Abel Polese	Tallinn University
2.	Alan Gassiev	Caucasus Business and Development Network
3.	Alan Parastaev	Freelance journalist
4.	Ali Aliyev	Embassy of Azerbaijan to Belgium
5.	Amanda Paul	European Policy Centre
6.	Anahit Harutyunyan	Embassy of Armenia to Belgium
7.	Anar Eyyubov	Azerbaijan State Economic University
8.	Andrej Didenko	EEAS - European External Action Service. Delegation of the European Union to Armenia
9.	Antonina Rousseva	Chairman of the EP delegation to the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly
10.	Arda Inal-Ipa	Centre for Humanitarian Programmes
11.	Baiba Aleksejuka	EEAS - European External Action Service
12.	Batal Kobakhia	Centre for Humanitarian Programmes
13.	Bedo Demirdjian – Kurkjian	European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy
14.	Björn Kuehne	EEAS - European External Action Service
15.	Bogusław Gertruda	EEAS - European External Action Service. Eastern Partnership Bilateral Division
16.	Canan Gündüz	European Forum for International Mediation and Dialogue e.V. (mediatEUR)
17.	Charlotte Gendre	Association of Local Democracy Agencies
18.	Charlotte Pruth	Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation
19.	Chris Taylor	Head of Mission's Office; OSCE Mission to Serbia
20.	Christine Detaille	Permanent Representation of Belgium to the EU
21.	Cinta Depondt	IKV Pax Christi
22.	Craig Oliphant	Saferworld
23.	Darejan Javakhishvili	Global Initiative on Psychiatry, Tbilisi
24.	David Jishkariani	Caucasian House
25.	Douglas Carpenter	EEAS - European External Action Service. Team Leader, South Caucasus. Eastern Partnership
26.	Eduard Kabulov	Independent Expert
27.	Ekaterina Dorodnova	EEAS - Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Division;
28.	Esther Marijnen	Institute for European Studies
29.	George Gotua	Centre for the Study of Social Practices
30.	George Niculescu	The European Geopolitical Forum
31.	Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan	Eurasia Partnership Foundation



32.	Giulia Prelz Oltramonti	Université libre de Bruxelles – ULB. Department of Political Science
33.	Gkarine Apikian	European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy
34.	Gulru Nabieva	International Alert
35.	Gunnar Wiegand	EEAS - Russia, Eastern Partnership, Central Asia, Regional Cooperation and OSCE
36.	Heino van Houwelingen	EEAS - Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Division;
37.	Ilgam Abbasov	Center for Independent Sociological Studies Novator
38.	Ilona Bitieva	International Alert Coordinator
39.	Iskra Kirova	International Crisis Group
40.	Ivlian Haindrava	Republican Institute, Tbilisi
41.	Joanna (Asia) Hosa	European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO)
42.	Judith Berger	Association of Local Democracy Agencies /ALDA
43.	Juliet Schofield	International Alert
44.	Ketevan Khapava	Centre for the Study of Social Practices
45.	Kirsten Meersschaert Duchens	Coalition for the International Criminal Court
46.	Larisa Sotieva	International Alert
47.	Leila Wilmers	International Alert
48.	Lena Ag	Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation
49.	Liana Kvarchelia	Centre for Humanitarian Programmes
50.	Luca Laloli	Mission de la Suisse auprès de l'Union européenne
51.	Mana Faroghi	International Alert
52.	Marat Terterov (Dr.)	The European Geopolitical Forum
53.	Maria van Ruiten	Conciliation Resources
54.	Marie-Charlotte Forgeron	Crisis Management Initiative (CMI)
55.	Marina Nagai	International Alert
56.	Martha E Freeman	Office of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus & the crisis in Georgia
57.	Maud Vanwalleghem	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO)
58.	Mikayel Hovhannisyan	Eurasia Partnership Foundation
59.	Mireia Villar Forner	UN/UNDP Office Brussels
60.	Mussa Akhmedov	Université libre de Bruxelles
61.	Nadia Venediktova	Civil Society Journal
62.	Nargiza Saipidinova	International Alert
63.	Natella Akaba	Association of Women of Abkhazia
64.	Nino Japiashvili	Editor, 'Hot chocolate' journal
65.	Nino Sharashidze	Institute of Caucasus Regional Security; Helsinki Civil Assembly Georgian National committee
66.	Pascal Heyman	OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre



67.	Peter Sondergaard	Association of Local Democracy Agencies
68.	Phil Champain	International Alert
69.	Phil Gamaghelyan	Imagine Centre for Conflict Transformation/George Mason University
70.	Phil Vernon	International Alert
71.	Rasa Ostrauskaite	Conflict Prevention Centre, OSCE Secretariat
72.	Rascha Osman	Mission de la Suisse auprès de l'Union européenne
73.	Renata Wróbel	EEAS - Deputy Head of Political, Press and Information Section, EU Delegation to Georgia
74.	Riccardo Lepri	EEAS - Office of the EUSR for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia
75.	Sally Orr	UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Eastern Europe and Central Asia Directorate.
76.	Seymur Kazimov	Freelance Journalist
77.	Sophio Bukia	Journalist, Institute for War and Peace Reporting
78.	Souheir Edelbi	UNPO
79.	Tamara Terashvili	Journalist, Ekhokavkaza
80.	Tika Tsertsvadze	EUCAM
81.	Togrul Malikov	Embassy of Azerbaijan to Belgium
82.	Ulfat Hajiyev	Solvay Business School
83.	Vardan Barseghian	Armenian Mission to the European Union Brussels
84.	Yuri Manvelyan	Co-founder and editor of Epress.am
85.	Zack Taylor	Bureau for Crisis Prevention & Recovery, UNDP Regional Centre in Europe & CIS
86.	Zhanna Krikorova	International Cooperation Centre, Nagorny Karabakh