

## European Union and the Nagorny Karabakh conflict: An opportunity for Eastern Partnership engagement

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### **A. Eastern Partnership as a new opportunity for institutionalizing the conflict transformation paradigm**

After the Russia-Georgia war, anti-democratic developments in Armenia and Azerbaijan, and given the need for the EU to finally determine its strategy vis-à-vis Turkey, the time has come to reevaluate EU engagement in all of the South Caucasus conflicts. This is particularly true of the Nagorny Karabakh (NK) conflict. We should develop new ways of engaging Armenians, Azerbaijanis and the inhabitants of NK in building a mutually beneficial joint solution to their issues. This is needed to avoid more conflict and human suffering in this volatile region, and the accompanying decrease in the standards of living and industrial development. This new strategy should be based on the experience of assistance to the South Caucasus over the last ten years. Eastern Partnership has not developed new instruments for engagement as of yet, but it seems to have the potential, because it is more focused on the region and on the conflicts than the more general ENP.

In the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Armenia, signed in 1996, there is only one line which refers to the NK conflict. It says that the conflict is being dealt with by the OSCE Minsk group. This means that the EU does not want to engage in a conflict where another international organization is legitimately involved, in order not to have an adverse effect on the efforts of the OSCE. Armenia also has an interest in keeping its relations with Europe separate from conflict issues. Perhaps also, it would be more difficult to conclude a PCA with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, if the NK conflict was addressed directly there.

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<sup>1</sup> Views expressed in this article belong to the author and do not necessarily represent the views of Eurasia Partnership Foundation

Over the years, several EU states have engaged unilaterally, bilaterally, and in a variety of partnerships in efforts to address the Caucasus conflicts at all levels. However, the assistance of the EC for the NK conflict transformation has been all but absent.

It is the position of the author of this paper that any engagement by the EU as a united institution (rather than as its individual states or their particular groups), if it falls short of a holistic engagement represented by the conflict transformation paradigm, is not likely to bring about a positive breakthrough.

The conflict transformation paradigm requires engagement with the conflict on all levels: high-level negotiations, civil society dialogue, and grassroots work. It also requires engagement on a variety of aspects: humanitarian aid, development aid, assistance in democracy-building, reconciliation and justice<sup>2</sup>.

Until now the EU as an institution has stayed as far away from the NK conflict as possible. Not so the Moldova-Transnistria, Georgia-Abkhazia and Georgia-South Ossetia conflicts. The EU has found ways to develop programming to address the Georgia conflicts since the early 1990s. This programming was boosted in 2004 when two consecutive EU Presidencies, the Netherlands and UK, worked out a strategy to support civil society's conflict transformation processes there. Among the first papers on that strategy were the proceedings of an informal EC conference in preparation for the Netherlands Presidency. The following is an excerpt from the suggestions of that conference (provided by the co-facilitator of the conference, Jonathan Cohen from Conciliation Resources, London):

### **Engaging more effectively with the unrecognized entities**

#### **Rationale**

Mindful of the unresolved conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorny Karabakh and the difficulties of state building in the South Caucasus over the past ten years the EU is called upon to **commence a more active engagement with the unrecognized entities** of the region, building upon the activities that it has supported in recent years.

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<sup>2</sup> For a concise brief description of this paradigm see, for instance, Raffaele Marchetti, Nathalie Tocci. Conflict society: understanding the role of civil society in conflict. In *Global Change, Peace and Security*, volume 17 number 2. June 2009, Routledge.

It is recognized that the dynamics in each of these conflict situations evolve in different ways, which has implications for the way that the EU should engage.

Such engagement is important in order to overcome the existence of chronically weak states and **prevent the emergence of failing states or regions** which could become a challenge to security and stability.

The main premise is that **engagement is a more productive policy than isolation** in terms of drawing the unrecognized entities into more constructive relationships and contributing to long term processes of conflict transformation. This engagement will also provide communities with better understanding of and connection to European norms and practices.

The EU is well placed to encourage such a process: the EU has already played a piecemeal role in supporting such initiatives; it is seen to represent values that encourage openness and breaking down borders and EU states have an history of overcoming animosity through engagement with one another.

**Engagement does not however equate with recognition** in explicit or implicit terms. It is important that as a prerequisite for embarking on an approach of more substantial and sustained engagement the EU does so in a transparent way in consultation with the government of the state from which a given unrecognized entity has sought to secede.

Enhanced engagement is **not a pretext for forum shopping** on the part of the parties to the conflicts. The fact that the EU should seek to become more engaged will not supplant the activities of other international organizations or states already involved in facilitating conflict resolution processes, rather this will require coordination, effective division of responsibilities and the avoidance of duplication.

Greater engagement on the part of the EU should be accomplished on a **case by case basis**, not according to a region wide programme that assumes similar modalities of engagement in the different unrecognized entities. Work in each entity should be based on **sound analysis** of the situation and should be structured according to the specific needs and dynamics of the given situation.

The EU approaches its engagement in the unrecognized entities from a perspective of **upholding the territorial integrity of states**. This is not however designed to promote specific political outcomes. It is instead intended to contribute to a process of conflict transformation whereby the aspirations of the conflict parties are respected and in which they are provided with opportunities to move towards a mutually acceptable and sustainable political resolution.

The EU should be mindful of the possibility for situations of tension to degenerate into armed conflict and should be unequivocal in its dialogue with state and non-state actors concerning the **non use of force in conflict resolution**.

### **Issues for attention within the unrecognized entities**

**1. Opening up closed regions and addressing blockades/restrictions and sanctions regimes:** the essence of engagement is to break down barriers that serve to bolster stereotypes and antagonism. Restricted access in the region is a function of political processes and their resolution needs to be sought within the context of negotiated settlements; however as interim facilitative steps horizons can be broadened through:

- **educational initiatives** (both through the joint participation of students in programmes outside the region and through the provision of resources within the region)
- **addressing the information vacuums** that exist in the region (supporting the exchange of information and at the same time holding the media, and in particular electronic state media, to account for aggressive and false reporting that sits very uncomfortably with Council of Europe commitments)
- **economic and trade initiatives** that address the material well being of communities marginalized by the conflicts in and around unrecognized entities
- **facilitating the work of civil society organizations** within their communities and in establishing cross border relationships (partly through funding but also by politically emphasizing the legitimacy of such activities).

**2. Good governance and the rule of law:** notwithstanding problems with legitimacy there are populations and social and political movements within the unrecognized entities that aspire to the **enhancement of democratic practices**,

**procedures and culture.** The EU can contribute to the promotion of respect for and awareness of international standards. By not engaging with these constituencies the international community is detaching them from the values to which they aspire and effectively giving supremacy to undemocratic practices. A specific issue that will arise during the course of the Dutch Presidency is the Abkhazian presidential election in October 2004, for which Georgian government officials have signaled that they would encourage some form of international non-governmental observation.

3. In addition to seeking to enhance engagement in unrecognized entities the EU should be mindful of other **marginalized regions in the South Caucasus**. These regions are often, but not exclusively, those inhabited by ethnic minorities on the peripheries of states (in Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli in Georgia, and the Lezgin and Talysh regions of Azerbaijan). While some international programmes are operating in these regions (notably the OSCE in Javakheti) there are equally pressing needs in areas that have yet to come under the scrutiny of the international community.

While ENP provides the general framework for relations between the EU and its neighbors, EaP has been designed particularly to address relations with the neighbors that lie immediately to its East. EaP was conceptualized in light of the Russia-Georgia war and its consequences. It demonstrates a re-conceptualization of the EU engagement with EaP states, which should take into account lessons learned and address some of the shortcomings of previous experience.

Four out of six EaP states are party to unresolved conflicts. This makes it paramount for EaP to develop a sound and comprehensive strategy to address them. In light of this, it will be essential to evaluate Abkhazia as a case of partial EU engagement prior to EaP, to confirm or refute the views presented in this article, and to build on that experience.

## **B. The case of Abkhazia: a “non-recognized” success story of EU engagement?**

Even before the 2004 conference, the EC developed a flexible programming strategy for civil society work in and with Abkhazia and South

Ossetia. This then resulted in a variety of projects with and for Georgian, Abkhaz and South Ossetian professional and civic groups.

There is a controversy today surrounding the Russian-Georgian war, particularly the issue of the EU's role and attempts to address it. Bernard Kouchner recently published an article framing the EU's role, and the fact that it is the only organization today which has a mandate for international monitoring in the conflict zone, as a success story<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, many people may say that neither the EU nor any other international actor played a significant role during the hot stage of the conflict, because the conflict did happen and it brought about devastation. However, the fact that the EU was able to instantly deploy such an important mission as the monitors, which is still working despite difficult conditions, could be considered a success.

Arguably, there is another "success" which has been ignored by the experts. There is one striking fact about the events in August 2008 which has not yet been accounted for by scholars and the international community. That is that while Russians and Georgians, Georgians and South Ossetians were engaging in direct combat, the Georgians and the Abkhaz did not engage in direct combat. Meanwhile, immediately before the war erupted many observers would note the escalation of tensions particularly on the Georgian-Abkhaz separation line - not less, perhaps even more, than on the Georgian-South Ossetian one. While the Russian troops happened to move deep into Georgian territory along the Georgian-Abkhaz separation line, no hot conflict took place, either between the Georgians and the Abkhaz, or on the territory of Abkhazia "proper" under the control of the Abkhaz forces (apart from the controversial case of the Kodori highlands, where Georgian troops were stationed<sup>4</sup>).

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<sup>3</sup> Novaya gazeta, #87, 2009

<sup>4</sup> Footnote on October 10, 2009: This essay was written before the publication of the Report of Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (the 'Tagliavini Report'), September 2009. The Report's findings clearly demonstrate that the Abkhaz side did engage in combat with Georgian side in the Kodori highlands (Vol. 1, point 24, page 25). However, many observers agree that while this indeed affects the strength of my argument, but this case of direct combat had a very specific prehistory and was limited in scope, thus it does not nullify the argument advanced in this paper.

This may be an accident. However, I believe that this was due to the significance and the amount of work that the EC, alongside the rest of the international community, had done in Abkhazia over the last ten years in cooperation with the public and civil society there. This work helped to build and support Abkhaz civil society in a non-intrusive way. They kept the ideology they adhered to, be that the ideology of independence or the ideology of peace-building. The international community did everything to prevent the Abkhaz civil society from being seen as a “fifth column” by its authorities or by Russia. While some local propaganda insisted that the local civil society is working with international support to lose the Abkhaz gains during the 1993 war and submitting to Georgia, the public did not accept this message.

Major projects included support to joint exploitation of Inguri power station; however, similar scale development projects were a rarity. Halo Trust operated mine cleaning activities for several years. Typical projects supported by European and US donors and NGOs, as well as UN Mission, included trainings for youth, particularly via a system of Youth Houses in a few major towns; support to women’s initiatives; support to free press; and small scale developmental or business projects (such as rehabilitation of a park; setting up a small business; etc). Projects also included the engagement of Abkhaz experts and NGO leaders in regional and international initiatives on quite a significant scale. A major part of support went into the dialogue projects between the Abkhaz and Georgians. It was thanks to this type of assistance that some of the independent media outlets were constituted, became sustainable and kept their independence. For instance, 3 radio transmitters were brought from abroad thanks to Conciliation Resources support. Establishing the internet connection for Abkhazia, a lucrative business project, at its start up was also supported by European NGOs. It was also thanks to this type of assistance that major NGOs as Center for Humanitarian Programs became one of the leading civil society entities in Abkhazia.

This work of the international community with the Abkhaz and Georgian civil societies evolved in difficult circumstances. The international community

had to overcome the difficulties associated with issues of territorial integrity: how can a decision about financing a community development or humanitarian project be negotiated with non-recognized structures? Will such a decision be legally binding, and if yes, for whom?

Adding to this was the on-and-off engagement of the Georgian government, which from time to time was either allowing direct work in Abkhazia and with the Abkhaz, or prohibiting it, picking and choosing which kind of work could be done and which could not based on political considerations.

Because Abkhazia is heavily influenced by Russia, local civil society groups had to deploy extraordinary talents of maneuvering to be able to engage, with the support of international donors, in humanitarian and development work. Even bolder was their engagement in long-term dialogue with the civil society from Georgia. But that wasn't all they did: they also engaged in projects which were essentially about democracy-building in the territory controlled by the Abkhaz.

Cooperation in Abkhazia culminated in late 2004 during the election for the non-recognized position of the President of Abkhazia. Local civil society groups then were partly supported, particularly via EC, EIDHR, British, and other funding mechanisms, to train in election observation. NGOs had such a high standing in Abkhazia that they were capable of exerting pressure to have the election process designed at least in a resemblance to the international standards (with electoral lists prepared in advance and made public, with ballot boxes from transparent plastic etc). During the election, they paid particular attention (though with mixed success) to the participation of Georgians from the Gali region in the election (although other Georgians displaced from Abkhazia never got the chance to vote).

When, after the election, nationalist forces supported by Russia attempted to forge the results, the community in Abkhazia became deeply divided and was on the verge of a fratricidal conflict. Local civil society groups played a pivotal role in soothing that conflict and helping the polity to achieve



the victory of fairness: Sergey Bagapsh, the candidate who received the majority of votes, did win the seat of the non-recognized presidency.

Since that election, and thanks to it, the multiethnic society of Abkhazia successfully built more “proto-state” or “as if state” institutions. I submit that these institutions helped them to refrain from irrational actions during the August 2008 conflict, and helped keep peace inside Abkhazia at a time when the rest of the region was engulfed in war.

Moreover, today, the OSCE Mission in Georgia has closed and the UN is experiencing difficulties playing the role of intermediary in the Georgia-Abkhazia setting. But EC assistance continues<sup>5</sup>.

The lessons learned from EU assistance to Abkhazia demonstrate the following:

- Engagement, however sporadic, with all sides helps to avoid direct military conflict, though it may be insufficient to bring a sustainable resolution of the conflict.
- The experience gained during that engagement and lessons learned should prompt EC to engage in other conflicts along the similar vein
- Much credit for this partial success is due to the holistic nature of the engagement: alongside the (often blocked) high-level negotiations, the EC and a few other major donors helped to do some development work, rebuilding schools, supporting libraries and youth centers, etc. These donors maintained ongoing civil society dialogue between a variety of actors from Georgia and Abkhazia. They engaged in the riskiest work: supporting the seeds of democratic development in Abkhazia despite the politically unresolved conflict.

Thus one can say, with some simplification, that the EU employed a holistic conflict transformation paradigm in this case, and that this limited assistance was not fully wasted, as different from a number of other cases. If the

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<sup>5</sup> In ‘European Commission and post-conflict rehabilitation in Georgia—Lessons learned’ of Maria van Ruiten one can find detailed information on the European assistance in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, including the EBRD financing via UNDP of the Inguri Power Station, one of the major assistance projects.

aim was to build a more predictable, self-reliable, and rational party to conflict, then it was to a certain extent achieved, as demonstrated by the capacity of Abkhazia to resist the danger of being absorbed in to Russia after the August war. This achievement is far from sustainable. It will also be tested soon, during another election of President of Abkhazia (an election and Presidency officially recognized today only by Russia<sup>6</sup>).

### **C. The NK conflict: diagnosis of a chronic illness**

The NK conflict has not experienced the same type of intervention as Abkhazia, either by the EU or by any other intergovernmental actor. One obvious weakness of the OSCE Minsk group approach has been the fact that for years it has evolved completely cut off from civil society work. If in its early years there was room and opportunity for civil society in the group's work, over the years it has fallen victim to those political forces in Armenia and Azerbaijan which regard civil society and grassroots engagement as hindering, rather than facilitating, the conflict resolution process. Their views were based on the false premise that a compromise solution negotiated at the highest levels of the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments should be kept secret until it is concluded, in order not to be torpedoed by the less "advanced" and more "nationalist" civil society. A milestone in this development was the withdrawal/exclusion, in any capacity, of the inhabitants of NK from the negotiations. The US State Department recently published a document which includes the so-called "Madrid Principles,"<sup>7</sup> a sign of positive change in this regard. So are advances in Armenian-Turkish negotiations and the publication by both countries of the Protocols<sup>8</sup> on their intention to establish diplomatic relations.

A false premise inevitably brings about corollaries which make all but impossible if not the conclusion, then the implementation, of an agreement

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<sup>6</sup> For further reading on international community engagement in Georgia's conflicts, what has been done and where are the strategies leading towards, please see Magdalena Frichova, "Georgia after the August War: Implications for the EU Engagement", Brussels: European Parliament, Foreign Affairs Committee, October 2008; and Magdalena Frichova, "Transitional Justice and Georgia's Conflicts: Breaking the Silence", Brussels: ICTJ, May 2009.

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Joint-Statement-on-the-Nagorno-Karabakh-Conflict/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Joint-Statement-on-the-Nagorno-Karabakh-Conflict/)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-153-turkiye-cumhuriyeti-ve-ermenistan-cumhuriyeti-disisleri-bakanliklari-ile.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-153-turkiye-cumhuriyeti-ve-ermenistan-cumhuriyeti-disisleri-bakanliklari-ile.en.mfa)

reached only between the two presidents. One of these corollaries is the fact that the desire to exclude societies from discussion results in condoning, if not promoting, authoritarian rather than democratic rule. The more democratic a society becomes, the more it wants to and feels entitled to engage in discussion about conflict resolution schemes.

The second corollary is that even if an agreement is concluded on paper, with a lack of public discussion and institutional idiocy (a necessary component of authoritarian societies), the two polities will not be able to implement the agreement even if there is goodwill at the highest level.

Any temporary “hardware” support from the international community, such as peacekeeping troops or monitoring missions, will not substitute for peace-building mechanisms within the two states which are ready to move forward to the conflict-settlement and post-conflict stages.

Thus there are no preconditions for achieving lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan within the mainstream framework of conflict resolution, which has been almost exclusively restricted to the OSCE Minsk group format. Recently the Minsk group did undertake efforts to change the practices of silence and secrecy, but these efforts are far from sufficient. What is needed is a paradigm change, rather than a few press-conferences and meetings with selected civil society representatives.

To be fair, over the years there have been numerous civil society-level projects which engaged Armenians and Azerbaijanis. However, these have either avoided discussing the conflict, or they have neglected the inhabitants of NK, thereby missing a crucial protagonist. Projects which have included people from NK proper have been amazingly infrequent.

In addition, the two polities have developed a paradigm of “conflict negligence”, coupled with enemy-image building. The entire development industry (and, in the case of Azerbaijan, the extractive industry) have evolved in deliberate silence about the fact that the conflict is not resolved. Simultaneously, both states have put significant efforts into building the enemy image of the other internally. A recent minor development in this dynamic is

telling: Azerbaijan's security services started interrogating those who allegedly voted for the Armenian singers during the Eurovision contest. Apparently, contrary to the aims of the authorities, this demonstrates that there are some groups in Azerbaijan, in addition to the "usual suspects" (NGO leaders who have been engaged in dialogue projects for years) who would, at least anonymously, dare to vote for Armenians.

Years ago there was one intervention of an EU member state which tried to address the conflict in a holistic way: the Consortium Initiative. This was an undertaking supported by the UK Government, which involved the work of several leading international NGOs in promoting civil society dialogue (including Armenia, Azerbaijan and inhabitants and displaced people from NK), media work, and informal high-level political work (engaging parliamentarians), as well as work on conflict sensitization of the international community in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Unfortunately this last was interrupted too soon, before it bore any fruit. Today, at least in Armenia, the international development community is almost as indifferent to the need to take the NK conflict into account when planning strategy as if it were working in, say, Estonia, which thankfully is not engaged in any type of large-scale violent conflict.

This lack of conflict-sensitive development strategies has resulted in, first, a lack of sustainability of the development assistance projects' impact, and secondly, in a strategy schism between those rare organizations which try to address the conflict issues and the majority of central actors which provide billions of dollars in assistance.

There is a lack of communication, understanding, and even of common language between the major development organizations related to the conflict dynamic and needs. While development organizations have built a framework for coordination (the Donor Implementation Circle, which comes together at least four times a year to discuss strategies), until very recently they did not discuss the "external political stuff", i.e. the conflict situation.

In light of this, the international community makes a methodological mistake, trying to fit the theoretical concepts of democracy and civil society to a state like Armenia. Given the fact that this state is in conflict, the application of these concepts fails because it does not grasp the essence of the issues the state and society are dealing with, even if their importance is not reflected

sufficiently in public discourse. Marchetti and Tocci suggest renaming the civil society organizations of such a polity to conflict society organizations, which helps to remove the value-laden concept in favor of a neutral and more suitable one<sup>9</sup>.

From time to time, circumstances force us to recognize this kind of major omission: the international actors providing democracy assistance were taken by surprise by the violent events of February–March 2008 which unfolded after the presidential election in Armenia. On paper, Armenia looked much more democratic than these events demonstrated. This was a warning to the international community to adjust its assistance strategies. Similarly, in order to avoid the war option, and to contribute to sustainable peace efforts, the EU and the international community should design new and bolder intervention strategies for addressing the NK conflict.

Azerbaijan has explicitly opted for the non-democratic option, making Presidential elections pro forma with its latest constitutional changes referendum. Can this become an impediment to assistance re the NK conflict? Historical analogies tell us that this is not necessarily the case. A few years ago, Russia chose a path to “sovereign democracy”, but the EU’s work in Abkhazia did not yield then, but in fact accelerated. Immediately after Azerbaijan’s bold step towards greater authoritarianism, Armenia, to the contrary, despite issues of concern in its internal democracy, went far forward in its compromise with Turkey, trying to achieve a border opening. At the same time, NK became an even more closed society than before. In the last few months, the Karabakhi authorities have prohibited the entrance of Turkish journalists to NK; have refused for their representatives to take part unofficially in conflict transformation regional events in Istanbul; and the Karabakhi civil society has refused to take part in a civil society forum in Moscow, planned by International Alert within the Consortium Initiative. The democratic newspaper *Demo*, published for several years with support from the

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<sup>9</sup> See Marchetti and Tocci, op. cit.

Consortium Initiative in Karabakh, has closed down, not for lack of funding, but due to the decision of its editor. All this demonstrates that the imminent talks about a compromise resolution to the NK conflict, exemplified in the so-called Madrid Principles, which do not satisfy the Karabakhi Armenian society and polity, are in danger of failing despite the concerted effort of the three Minsk group Co-Chairs.

Just like official Azerbaijan considers many of those who engage in civil society projects and peace talks with Armenia “bad citizens”, if not “traitors”, a similar process is taking place in NK. No comprehensive peace work has happened in Karabakh over the years, in contrast to the engagement with Abkhazia: NK’s civil society has been supported very sporadically, far fewer trainings or workshops have occurred to build civic engagement there, and there is much less free media. The majority of development assistance to NK comes from the Armenian Diaspora, which does not bring with it the necessary prerequisites of European and international values: transparency, accountability, human rights, dignity, and fairness. It is perceived by locals merely as “aid-by-kin.” In some cases it even contributes to the corruption of minds, indoctrinating the ideas that only Armenians can help Armenians, or that only those who have a vested (e.g. geopolitical, like Russia) interest in Karabakh can provide assistance. Very few people in NK (and only slightly more in Armenia) believe that international development assistance there is for non-partisan development of underdeveloped regions in the name of democracy, human rights, security, stability and other post-national global civic values.

#### **D. What should be done**

The EU’s major tool for addressing conflicts has been funding. The EU is building other mechanisms, such as the Monitoring Mission to Georgia, and there are talks about building—in the future—a peace-keeping mission to NK. But the most important EU instrument has been and remains funding, in

particular the funding of non-state actors, i.e. NGOs and other non-governmental organizations of “civil” society or conflict society.

It is important, in deliberating programmatic RFPs, to engage all the actor-stakeholders. The success of Recommendations to the EU from the 2004 conference (see above) was determined, in part, by the participation there of experts from non-recognized entities alongside other experts.

Similarly, civil society engagement in the EaP started with a conference held by AMO from the Czech Republic in fall 2008. Numerous efforts were made to invite people from non-recognized entities, which is usually difficult politically or logistically. Finally, at least one crucial expert from Abkhazia was present at the conference. Unfortunately, the second conference, where the EaP was launched in May 2009, lacked that representation. Thus another major lesson learned is: EaP should not move backwards from a more engaged state of affairs to a less engaged state of affairs. In every large-scale event which engages people from different EaP countries, such as the Civil Society Forum, planned for November 2009, participation of experts from conflict areas without determination of their status or country of belonging, but only based on their factual citizenship, is highly advisable.

Efforts should be made to build peace constituencies in EaP states and also in non-recognized entities. Peace constituencies are those public groups which have sufficient strategic capacity to support peace initiatives. Without ceasing to be patriots of their state, conflict side and/or nation, they are capable of finding constructive ways to advance peace between their respective nations. Peace constituencies can be built by supporting young people’s participation in peace trainings and their joint projects across conflict divides. These constituencies can also be built through targeted work inside a community on, for instance, addressing the interconnectedness of the issues of democracy building, human rights and conflict transformation.

There is a difference between the impact of money channeled through state structures versus money which directly targets non-state actors. State structures are significantly more corrupt than non-state actors. Additionally, in

the current circumstances the state structures are not peace protagonists. At the same time, state structures can often be more “enlightened” and “Westernized” than indigenous community organizations who, while legitimately representing community views, may also prove to be extremely traditionalist and retrograde when it comes to options for peace. This is because they look at the other side through the prism of an artificial image of an enemy, or that of narrow security and survival considerations. A thorough selection of state or non-state actors who are recipients of funding, experts and participants in conferences should take place, making sure that the more advanced state- and non-state peace groups are engaged in building capacities of the less advanced groups. A part of this is easy to achieve through well thought-through definitions in Terms of References and transparent competitive selection. Transparent and competitive selection of projects and/or invitees requires a special effort to make opportunities known inside the countries, including the provinces. It also requires building capacities so that a larger variety of actors are able to apply.

It is also important to take into account what should not be done. “Do no harm” is a major tenet in development assistance in conflict societies. In this case, it can be renamed “waste no money.” Large-scale top-down projects, with predetermined partners from among the “usual suspects” (international conference-hoppers) face a danger of becoming insignificant talk shops with no impact. These types of projects are usually designed based on the limited expertise of international/European lead partners, who often are newcomers to the South Caucasus conflict transformation issues. These projects incorporate the vested interests of their preselected partners, who are often chosen arbitrarily, and have been identified either via a recommendation from a local state structure or via a chance meeting at an international conference. It is no secret that it is much more likely for well established NGOs from the capitals, if not GoNGOs, to take part in such conferences than for genuine grassroots organizations. A litmus test for any kind of conflict transformation or peace dialogue project is if participation is explicitly envisioned for experts or community organizations from outside capital cities, from non-recognized entities and from all sides of a conflict divide.

But the EU’s ambition can go even further: the EU is well-situated to mainstream the conflict transformation agenda throughout all the development assistance which flows to these countries. This strategic agenda may take a



variety of forms: in-country trainings in conflict sensitivity for international organizations' personnel; special trainings for the European Embassies' international and local personnel from both countries, so that embassy employees have tools to support joint projects and peace dialogue and learn to proactively contribute to such strategies; establishing special regional funds for conflict transformation and peace dialogue projects; a requirement in RFPs for seemingly unrelated internal development programs to have a conflict transformation component; the development of a regional rationale for the majority of in-country development projects and linking them with similar projects on "the other side." In short, what we are talking about is the need to go one step further from conflict sensitization of international development assistance; it is about mainstreaming conflict transformation in development assistance, similar to gender mainstreaming, which has become a common requirement in programming.

The EU is also very well situated to build a regional identity in the South Caucasus as a counter-balance to the nationalist-exclusionist ideologies. Even as a large global region, Europe has managed to successfully build a European identity. The South Caucasus countries, to different degrees, regard themselves as European societies or at least societies which are fully compatible with European values. At the same time, they share the identity of the region (Caucasus) where they are situated. There is a deep need to build an inclusive regional identity to balance and, in the future, to outweigh exclusionist ethnic/national identities. In fact, programming which engaged the Georgian and the Abkhaz in dialogue processes in the early 2000s, referred to above, has been significantly facilitated by regional-level dialogue projects, such as Caucasus Forum. It is important to note that the region, while fractured, does indeed share significant common rational interests, and thus regional-level large-scale projects should be regarded as important and target-oriented in themselves rather than merely a facilitative tool for preparing ground for bilateral engagement.

The preventive activities that the EU should engage in must target the areas of work that are neglected either by the development community or by the infrequent conflict transformation actors. Just as engagement with and in the conflict regions has been and is, to a certain extent, “taboo” for political reasons, a similar taboo has evolved around particular issues, which all the parties know about but lack the political will to boldly address.

There is a very concrete and long-standing need to implement large scale programming between Armenian and Georgian civil society groups and community level confidence-building. The issue is not merely the fate of the Armenian inhabitants of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia, but the entirety of relations between the Armenian and Georgian societies. There is lack of trust, a contest over shared history, and a failure to capitalize on opportunities for economic and cultural exchange. This latent lack of interest in cooperation comes from difficult interactions between these two centuries-old brotherly nations, in history as well as in recent times.

Similar preventive areas of engagement should be identified and programming built to address them in a methodologically correct way, in order to prevent a sudden sharp deterioration of relations as a result of external provocations.

In strategizing and implementing all this, it is also important to engage civil society and enlightened experts from Russia. Russia has a proven capacity to ruin peaceful evolution in the South Caucasus. It is not clear, however, if the official Russia is currently willing to engage in genuine trust building processes about the future shape of the South Caucasus, either with the EU or with the South Caucasus nations.

Russia has many different faces. The cautious, however difficult and long-term, work of identifying a variety of partners from among Russian organizations and individuals will help to prepare grounds for more constructive engagement with Russia.

One possible opportunity for a breakthrough in the South Caucasus is Turkish-Armenian relations. After an intense period of negotiations the two states are currently on the verge of establishing diplomatic relations and opening a direct borderland connection. A positive step will require from both

states an unusual political courage and a visionary level of “idealpolitik”. There are reasons to doubt whether Turkey will be ready to undertake such a step in the near future without an additional push. Turkey-EU relations are also still quite unresolved, but there is constructive momentum which is cause for optimism: in fall 2009 a new round of negotiations should start re Turkey’s accession to the EU. The EU should reprogram its requirements of Turkey, mainstreaming the need for establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia. This requirement should not be made conditional upon the length of time needed for Turkey to become a member of the EU.

Engagement in and with NK should be done in full communication with the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan. To be successful in this, the EC should learn from the experience of its member-states, particularly the UK Consortium Initiative and International Alert’s Business and Economy project. It is unrealistic to expect easy access to NK. Access will be made difficult not only by the two governments, but also by the Karabakhi authorities themselves; they have become more cautious and insecure in light of the recent rapid developments, and Karabakhi civil society lacks trust in the European approach to the conflict. They are not at all certain that the EC’s approach is fair and balanced. In order to engage NK constructively, the EC must first build trust with the inhabitants of NK, and should work closely with those civil society organizations in Armenia and Azerbaijan who have a track record of engaging NK. The EC assistance should not be politicized or held hostage by political considerations around the status of NK inhabitants participating in the projects. On this and other similar issues, the recommendations to the EU conference in the Netherlands, quoted above, are good guidance.