

Oliver Wolleh

A Difficult Encounter –

The Informal Georgian-Abkhazian Dialogue Process

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Foreword

The Berghof Research Center, in cooperation with its British partner organisation Conciliation Resources, has been working on the ethnopolitical conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia since 1997. In this context, attention has focussed especially on organizing and facilitating a dialogue process involving representatives of the political elites and civil society on both sides. The programme began with a pilot workshop which was held at the Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR) in Stadtschlaining in January 1997. A key player was Martin Schümer, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) Programme Coordinator in Georgia/Abkhazia at that time. However, it was not until three years later – from February 2000 – that an ongoing process of three workshops a year was achieved. The ASPR’s financial and conceptual support in the early stages and the frequent return of the dialogue workshops to the Center have resulted in the project being dubbed the “Schlaining process”.

A total of 18 dialogue workshops have now taken place. This report by Dr. Oliver Wolleh deals with the period from February 2000 to May 2004 and covers the first 13 workshops. The author was a member of the project team from November 2000, with particular responsibility for practical and academic reflection on the process. He has led the project from the Berghof Research Center’s side since November 2002 (and within the framework of the Berghof Foundation for Peace Support since 2005). Due to his dual role as a scholar/practitioner, he is ideally placed to facilitate the process in line with the tradition of *interactive conflict resolution*. In terms of the project’s design, its initiators opted from the outset for a combination of traditional *problem solving workshops* with elements of group dynamics, theme-centered interaction and participation.

The study offers an excellent overview of the political context of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, the key features of the project, its structure and processes, the major learning and change processes which took place during the project, and the obstacles encountered. The study also describes various related projects which were initiated as part of the dialogue process or which have fed back into it. A key objective is to identify indicators and factors which determine the effectiveness of the project, defined as the participants’ increased, sustained and self-reinforcing

commitment to interactive dialogue and problem-solving processes. As the report shows, the “Schlaining process” can be viewed as an ongoing political discourse of elites on the scope for, and constraints of, their shared conflict history, but it also identifies entry points for a fundamental transformation of their relations. It is this potential for change which has motivated the project’s initiators and sponsors to constantly review the dialogue’s themes and instruments and the composition of participants in order to adopt new approaches.

During its lifetime, the project has benefited from the financial support of the following organizations: the United Nations Volunteers (UNV), the Protestant Central Office for Development Aid (EZE) / Church Development Service (EED), the German Federal Foreign Office, Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations – Zivik Project, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Swiss Federal Department for Foreign Affairs (DFA), the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), the Berghof Foundation, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the United Kingdom Global Conflict Prevention Pool, the European Commission's Rapid Reaction Mechanism and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

We would like to express our great appreciation to all these organizations for their generous support. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank our local partners Paata Zakareishvili in Tbilisi and Manana Gurgulia in Sukhum(i). Special thanks are due to our partner organization *Conciliation Resources* – which is actively involved in various other local projects as well – together with Jonathan Cohen, Dr. Clem McCartney and Dr. Rachel Clogg. At the Berghof Center, Dr. Antje Bühler and Renate Christaller made important contributions to the project alongside Dr. Oliver Wolleh. Above all, I would like to pay tribute to Martin Schümer, the former UNV Programme Coordinator in Georgia/Abkhazia. Without his inspired and selfless commitment to peace in Georgia/Abkhazia and his personal commitment to the dialogue process, this project would never have taken place. This report is therefore dedicated to his memory.

Dr. Norbert Ropers

Director of the Berghof Research Center 1993 - 2004

and Co-Director of the Berghof Foundation for Peace Support since 2004

10 March 2006

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I would like to thank all the participants in our dialogue project. I am especially grateful to all those persons whose views were solicited during this study and whose names are purposely not mentioned here.

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I am grateful, too, to the members of the Board of the Berghof Foundation for their commitment and financial support, which were vital to facilitate the production and publication of this study while the project was still ongoing.

Last but not least, I would like to thank all the funding agencies whose support was essential to make this dialogue process possible. They all patiently supported this project, conscious that development is a process involving small steps.

This study reflects the opinions and analysis of the author, who does not speak on behalf of the facilitation team or the organising institutions.

1 Introduction

This report aims to provide an overview of the form, content and dynamics of the Georgian-Abkhazian Dialogue Process organized by the Berghof Research Center and Conciliation Resources (CR) and also considers its impact on the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict framework.

The report explains the aims and structures of the informal dialogue project and presents both the opportunities and limitations of the facilitation approach. It analyses the conditions under which the dialogue process was initiated and the way in which the conflict parties evaluate its political dimension. In particular, it discusses the strategies that succeeded in establishing the process in political terms and making it an accepted form of dialogue for the parties.

Care has been taken to give the reader an overview of the process as a whole and to illustrate the development of the project structure and facilitation methods throughout the project. To give an example, obstacles within the process are analysed together with the successful methods used to overcome them.

In order to give the reader an impression of both the content of the process and the dynamics of the participants resulting from their very different perspectives, examples of key topics within the dialogue are presented and analysed. These topics include the processes of mutual deadlock between the conflict parties, the significance of trust-destroying rhetoric, the security problem relating to the issue of returning *internally displaced persons* (IDPs) / refugees, and the inadvertent effects of the politics of isolation.¹ The analysis highlights the parties' different perceptions and their underlying assumptions, both expressed and implied, and illustrates the ways in which the problem areas under discussion are reframed. In view of the confidentiality rules within the process and the huge volume of data arising from ten workshops in which the author participated and which are under review in this study

¹ The Georgian refugees from Abkhazia are referred to using different terminology, not only by Georgians and Abkhazians but also by international organizations. The concept introduced most recently, i.e. "internally displaced persons" (IDPs), indicates that those affected have taken refuge within the internationally recognized borders of Georgia. In contrast, the Abkhazian term is "refugees", implying that the former inhabitants of Abkhazia fled to a region beyond the Abkhazian border. The Georgian and the international abbreviation in the Russian alphabet is the same, i.e. VPL. Whilst this stands for "Vynuzhdenye peremeshennye litsa" (forced displaced persons) for the Georgians and puts the blame on the Abkhazian side, the international abbreviation stands for "Vnutrennyye peremeshennye litsa" (internally displaced persons) and adopts a position regarding political status.

(documented by hand and encompassing a total discussion time of around 50 days), this analysis can only deal with representative cases and examples that attempt to convey the nature of the dialogue. The report concludes with an evaluation of the dialogue process using *impact assessment* concepts developed in other literature.

When placing this process in context, account must be taken of the fact that the dialogue process, with its 13 workshops dealt with in this report, is part of a comprehensive project that aims to promote a civil society infrastructure to manage the conflict peacefully, both within and between Georgia and Abkhazia.

The fundamental idea of this wider project framework was initially to implement a continuous dialogue process with a carefully selected group of leading figures; soon, it became a parallel aim to link this dialogue process with a number of other projects aimed at strengthening the parties internally and encouraging reflection on the capabilities of conflict transformation and the direction it should take. In order to link these two levels successfully, it is important to include participants who are in a position to initiate and realize related and follow-up projects in their respective groups.

A partnership was formed between the Berghof Research Center in Berlin and the London-based organization, Conciliation Resources (CR), based around the original two-facilitator team. CR was already involved from 1998 in activities designed to build civil society capacities, initially with UNV and local partners, /but increasingly thereafter CR took the lead and worked with a wide range of local partners. In addition CR's work had and maintains a range of political components that stretch far beyond the CR-Berghof relationship. Since the partnership was established, Conciliation Resources (CR) has developed the capacity-building component of the broader project framework into a multi-layered programme in both Georgia and Abkhazia.²

The dialogue process represents a significant link, both between the two organizations and also in relation to the project level that complements the process. Whilst this report focuses on the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process, it also tries to take account of the broader perspectives by highlighting certain selected "related processes" that are clearly connected to the dialogue process. These are the production of a Training Handbook for the Constructive Management of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict (Discussion Pack), published by CR and the Berghof Research

² See the Conciliation Resources website at www.c-r.org. It should be noted that the present report does not constitute an evaluation of the work of Conciliation Resources and its programme in the region.

Center in cooperation with local authors, a Round Table organised by the Berghof Research Center and CR, and the formation of a Georgian group of experts, supported by CR, whose far-reaching proposals to settle the conflict with Abkhazia have brought it into the public arena.

Map of the conflict region



Sources

The Georgian-Abkhazian Dialogue is a confidential process and thus contains no institutionalized form of documentation. The visual results of the participants' work are photographed by the organizers and form part of the workshop documentation. With the agreement of the participants, the organizers have published a press release since the fourth workshop (March 2001).

This report constitutes a subjective view and contains retrospective reflections on the dialogue process. It is based on the following sources:

- the author's personal notes taken during the workshops and team meetings.
- interviews with the local project partners, former participants and team colleagues.

The reporting period covers Workshops 1-13 (February 2000 – May 2004).

The author played different roles in ten of the 13 workshops held up to May 2004. His hand-written notes on the plenary meetings and small groups attended within the workshop, along with the notes on the team meetings held before, during and after the workshops, amount to approximately 1000 A4 pages. Workshops 14 (Oxford, April 2005), 15 (Vienna, July/August 2005), 16 (Berlin, November 2005), 17 (London, March 2006) and 18 (Schlaining, June 2006) are not dealt with in this report.

During the reporting period, the author made four trips to Georgia and Abkhazia. During these visits, meetings were held with the local project partners, former and potential new participants and political observers. All these meetings were held in confidence and documented in note form rather than taped. The meetings held during the first three trips dealt mainly with the general political direction and positioning of the dialogue process and were not intended to be the subject of a report. Nevertheless, opinions and assessments from these meetings have been included in this report as they relate to the real-time political context of the project phase presented here.

In contrast, the fourth trip (July 2004) was made in preparation for this report. In total, 18 interviews were held with former participants (and political observers) in both Sukhum(i) and Tbilisi. A confidentiality agreement was also signed for these meetings, although they were taped to allow a more detailed evaluation. In line with this agreement, this report largely refrains from giving direct quotes from those involved in the meetings.

In many respects, the fourth trip was the most difficult of all. The radical political changes in Georgia from November 2003 onwards (Rose Revolution), the election of Mikheil Saakashvili as the new President of Georgia and the upheaval in the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria (May 2004) had led to extensive restructuring of personnel within the executive apparatus. This naturally affected several high-ranking individuals who had been important to the dialogue process up to this time.

Some of the contact persons thus found themselves in a period of great personal change and uncertainty. One was managing the remnants of an office that was effectively empty, and another had just started a new position and was trying to build up a new career under these new conditions. Other contact persons had already left Georgia. In contrast, there were some former participants who had benefited from the political changes and showed off their new offices with pride. The general tension experienced during the stay in Tbilisi was intensified by the threatened escalation of

the situation in the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict and much of the political attention was directed to these events.

In certain respects, the political atmosphere in Sukhum(i) mirrored the tension in Tbilisi. The developments in South Ossetia were followed with great interest and concern, and several Abkhazian observers expressed the view that Abkhazian military intervention was likely in the event of a military escalation in the situation between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali, although this was not official Abkhaz policy. The political formation process had also commenced in preparation for the Abkhazian presidential election scheduled to take place in October 2004, involving several important people from the dialogue process.

All these factors meant that some of the contact partners approached, both from former or current ministries or at international level, were not available for meetings to the extent that had been expected. At the same time, the situation of radical change allowed some key representatives of the previous “state view” to make retrospective observations that were less personally or politically calculated.

2 The Georgian-Abkhazian conflict

This chapter aims to inform the reader about the historical context in which the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue takes place. I am making the assumption that the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict is in essence a dispute about national self-determination and the desired status of the nations involved. The conflict is perceived as a modern conflict in this sense and I will therefore concentrate my analysis on political and social developments since the beginning of the 20th century. The two sides have different interpretations of modern history that are specific to their situations. I have therefore identified and compared the main events for each side in order to illustrate the dynamic of the conflict’s development.

The Abkhazians had already demanded independence in negotiations in Tbilisi at the time of the fall of the Tsarist Empire. However, these negotiations were unsuccessful and Abkhazia formally became part of Georgia in June 1918 (Gerber,

1997, 122).³ The 1921 invasion of Tbilisi by the Red Army ended this short-lived phase of Georgian independence and offered the Abkhazians the chance of recognition as the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia (SSR Abkhazia). This was formed in March 1921 and had equal status with the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR Georgia). A few months later, in December 1921, a confederation agreement was concluded by these two union republics establishing a military, political and financial union between the two Soviet republics and subordinating the Abkhazian SSR to the Georgian SSR in these areas (Lakoba, 1999; Gerber, 1997, 123).

The Georgian view of the situation is that Abkhazia never stopped being a part of Georgia during this period of upheaval. In contrast, the Abkhazians hold that the Abkhazian SSR existing between March and December 1921 had equal status to the Georgian SSR. The “Union Agreement”, which in the Abkhazian interpretation was imposed by force, is regarded as an example of the increasing domination of Abkhazia by Georgia. In 1931 Abkhazia, still a *de jure* union republic, lost this status and, in accordance with the Soviet hierarchy of nationalities, was downgraded to the status of an “autonomous republic” within the Georgian SSR.⁴

The terror of the Stalin years had devastating consequences for the Abkhazians and almost led to their destruction as a culturally distinct group.⁵ 1937 saw the start of the assassination of almost their entire political and intellectual elite, from 1938 onwards Abkhazian texts were only allowed to be published using the Georgian alphabet, and from 1945 the use of the Abkhazian language was forbidden in schools and replaced by Georgian.⁶ Georgians were seen as being systematically settled in Abkhazia. According to Abkhazian historiography, these factors are all evidence of an enforced assimilation into the Georgian union republic. The generalized term used to describe this process is “Georgianization” due to the fact that two Georgians, Stalin and Beria, were at the helm of power, their brutal orders being carried out by a submissive Georgian communist party.

³ In the Abkhazian interpretation, Abkhazia was occupied by the Georgian army in June 1918. The “Abkhazian fight for independence” ended only when the Bolsheviks took control of Southern Caucasus and the Georgian SSR recognised the Abkhazian SSR (see Shamba, 2002).

Today’s Republic of Georgia derives its legitimacy from the then Georgian Democratic Republic (see Nodia, 1999, 20).

⁴ Distinction is made between three levels within the Soviet hierarchy of nationalities. *Union republics* had the highest status, followed by *autonomous republics* and *autonomous regions* at the lowest level. Each national group receiving the right to form one of these political units was called a “titular nation”.

⁵ This opinion corresponds to the Abkhazian understanding but is also shared by external historians (see Lakoba, 1999, 95; Gerber, 1997, 124).

⁶ In 1928, a uniform Abkhazian alphabet was introduced on the basis of Latin characters.

From an Abkhazian standpoint, the terror of the Stalin era was primarily an expression of Georgian nationalism in a Soviet guise. The Abkhazian interpretation of the Stalin era, with its explosive impact in ethnopolitical terms, was not recognised by Georgian historians and intellectuals in the subsequent decades. Instead, the dominant Georgian interpretation was that both Georgians and Abkhazians had suffered equally under the Soviet terror.⁷ A specific analysis of the Abkhazians' grievances did not appear necessary to Georgians in this context.

In the years up to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Abkhazia's desire for equal status with Georgia and for withdrawal from the Georgian union republic was expressed many times and in many different forms (Lakoba, 1999, 97). The decline of centralized Soviet power caused the legitimacy of the federal hierarchy in Georgia to be questioned, not only in Abkhazia but also in South Ossetia.

The “Abkhazian Letter” (June 1988) constituted an important stage in the dynamics developing between Georgians and Abkhazians that finally led to the 1992/93 war. In this letter, representatives of the Abkhazian population again articulated the central aim of the Abkhazian national movement, namely reinstatement of the status as a Soviet republic that had been lost in 1931 and therefore secession from the Georgian SSR.⁸ A few months later, a reputedly 30,000-strong gathering took place in the village of Lykhny, where the “Lykhny Appeal” renewed the demands put forward in the “Abkhazian Letter” (Zverev, 1996). The Georgians then realized that the separatist tendencies in Abkhazia were not only limited to the group of authors of the “Abkhazian Letter”, but actually constituted a mass movement (Gerber, 1997, 137).

In contrast, the Georgian national movement demanded that the autonomous status of Abkhazia be revoked and the interests of the majority Georgian population in Abkhazia be protected. This increased Abkhazian fears that the independence of Georgia would spell the end of Abkhazian autonomy. Whilst Georgia's national movement strove for independence, the Abkhazian side, in contrast, endeavoured to preserve “Soviet legislation and thereby the autonomous status of its republic” (Gerber, 1997, 143).

⁷ Nodia (1997-1998, 23ff) compares the Abkhazian and Georgian patterns of interpretation of the Stalin era and identifies shortcomings in the Abkhazian interpretation. In the Abkhazians' subjective perception, this pattern of interpretation plays a large part in the conflict formation.

⁸ The “Abkhazian Letter” is reprinted in the annex of Gerber, 1997.

As a response to the “Lykhny Appeal”, demonstrations against the Abkhazian secession attempts took place in Tbilisi in April 1989, which subsequently turned into demonstrations for the independence of Georgia. On 9 April Soviet troops brought the demonstrations to a violent and brutal end, killing 21 people (Zverev, 1996). This signified a quantum leap in the escalation that also put pressure on Georgian-Abkhazian relations, and a few months later violent clashes erupted in Abkhazia between Georgians and Abkhazians.

In March 1990 a declaration was passed by the Georgian parliament that denounced the annexation of Georgia in 1921. A new electoral law was passed shortly afterwards, effectively excluding ethnic political groups from elections on the basis that only those parties whose activities encompassed the whole of Georgia were permitted to participate. The Abkhazian reaction to this law was not long in coming, with the Abkhazian parliament issuing a declaration of independence stipulating its de facto withdrawal from the Georgian SSR (Gerber, 1997, 143).

In October 1990 the nationalist “Round table – free Georgia” coalition won the Georgian parliamentary elections and the first government was formed by Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Gamsakhurdia’s election campaign and politics contained a strong nationalist rhetoric that claimed emancipation from its powerful neighbour, Russia, and showed little sensitivity to the national minorities’ fears of domination.⁹ One of the key election pledges took up the radical nationalist demand to abolish the autonomy regulations within Georgia. A few days after the Georgian elections, elections took place in the – until then – autonomous region of South Ossetia where independence was also declared. In response, the Georgian parliament revoked the autonomous status of South Ossetia at its first session and shortly afterwards the clashes between Ossetian and Georgian militia began (Cvetkovski, 1998).

Despite his aggressive and nationalist rhetoric, agreements were made under Gamsakhurdia that temporarily helped to ease the situation between Georgians and Abkhazians. One example of this is the ethnic quota of parliamentary seats in the electoral law for the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet. Of the sixty-five seats in the Abkhazian parliament, 28 were reserved for Abkhazian members of parliament, 26 for Georgians and the remaining eleven for the other ethnic groups (Nodia, 1997-1998, 32).

⁹ The slogan often used in this time, i.e. “Georgia for the Georgians”, symbolized the ambiguity of a general mindset that could appear to national minorities that they were being assigned the “status of guests in their own country”.

	Number of reserved seats in Abkhazian parliament	Percentage share in Abkhazian parliament	Demographic distribution of ethnic groups in Abkhazia in 1989
Abkhazians	28 seats	43.0 %	17 %
Georgians	26 seats	40.0 %	45 %
Other ethnic groups	11 seats	17.0 %	38 %

The electoral law was therefore based on the concept of an over-representation of the Abkhazians and an under-representation of the Georgian population and other ethnic groups. As the Abkhazians generally had the support of the non-Georgian groups, this quota enabled the Abkhazians to secure a clear majority. At the same time, a two-thirds majority was required to pass important laws, meaning that both Abkhazians and Georgians had a minority veto in parliament.

The Abkhazian Supreme Soviet began to meet under this quota system in January 1992 after Gamsakhurdia had already been removed from office by a military coup. Although the under-representation of the Georgian population appeared to be relatively modest in comparison with that of the other ethnic groups (see table), in the post-Gamsakhurdia period, the Georgian public attacked the ethnic quota system, seeing it as an “apartheid law”. The newly elected Abkhazian parliament was thus not viable in practice, as the Georgian deputies stayed away from the meetings, viewing them as pointless.

This situation also prompted Abkhazian nationalists to question earlier agreements establishing the balance of power between the Georgian and Abkhazian populations, for example the distribution of positions in the Abkhazian executive. This brought about the highly symbolic removal from office of the ethnic Georgian Minister of Internal Affairs (Nodia, 1997-1998, 34-35). The war that followed soon after can also be interpreted as a result of the failure of the previous institutional agreements to legitimately divide political power between Georgians and Abkhazians (Coppieters, 1999, 19).

2.1 The road to war

The military coup against Gamsakhurdia took place in December 1991 and the rebels emerged victorious in January 1992, taking power in the form of a military council.¹⁰ At the request of the rebels, Eduard Shevardnadze returned to Tbilisi in March 1992 and was appointed chairman of the rebels' military council, which now met as the "State Council". Shevardnadze, who was the Soviet Union's Minister of Foreign Affairs until the end of 1990, was highly regarded, especially in the West, and was recognised by the Western governments despite the lack of democratic legitimation. They hoped that Shevardnadze, as a conciliatory figure, could put a stop to the escalating ethnopolitical conflicts within Georgia and bring about its democratization and economic liberalization (Coppieters, 1999b, 6). Indeed, Shevardnadze succeeded in containing the conflict in and with South Ossetia and securing it by means of a Georgian-Russian peacekeeping force.

In July 1992, in the absence of the Georgian deputies, the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet reinstated the draft Abkhazian constitution of 1925, declaring that Abkhazia was no longer a part of Georgia.¹¹ This was interpreted by the Georgians as a declaration of secession.¹²

In August 1992, Eduard Shevardnadze gave the order for Georgian troops to advance on Abkhazia. The official aim of this military action was ostensibly to protect the rail links through Abkhazia from terrorism (Kokeev, 1993, 14) and free Georgian government officials who had been taken hostage (Coppieters, 1999b, 8). Troops, primarily comprising paramilitary groups, advanced on the Abkhazian capital Suhkum(i) with the aim of occupying Abkhazia. Even during this initial phase, the Georgian military and paramilitary forces committed serious atrocities against the civilian population. It is difficult to assess whether the occupation of Abkhazia was the Georgian leadership's goal at the outset, or whether a lack of control of the

¹⁰ Tengiz Kitovani and Jaba Ioseliani, leaders of Gamsakhurdia's former/disloyal presidential guard ("National Guard") and the paramilitary group "Mkhedrionis" respectively, took part in the coup. It marked the start of an internal armed battle for power between Gamsakhurdia and his supporters on the one side and the rebels and later Shevardnadze on the other. Gamsakhurdia's armed followers moved back to Mingrelia (Western Georgia) whilst Gamsakhurdia fled via Abkhazia to Armenia and later Chechnya.

¹¹ The Abkhazians failed to push this draft through in 1925.

¹² Moeskes, 2000, 39; Nodia (1997-1998, 34 – 35) sees the Abkhazian reinstatement of the 1925 draft constitution as a counter-reaction to the fact that the Georgians had previously brought their 1921 constitution back into force.

heterogeneous Georgian military units led to independent action on their part (Nodia, 1997-1998, 10).

The Georgian attack came as a complete surprise to the Abkhazians and within four days Georgian troops controlled the territory of Sukhumi. The Abkhazian military resistance was supported by both the Russian army stationed within Abkhazia and fighters from North Caucasus.¹³ After initial Georgian successes, the Georgian advance therefore soon came to a halt. As early as September there were signs that the Georgians were unlikely to secure a lightning victory in Abkhazia, and Abkhazian units were able to win back the town of Gagra before the front became frozen in a state of positional warfare.

A cease-fire negotiated and signed in Moscow in July 1993 led to the withdrawal of heavy Georgian weaponry. The Abkhazian counter-attack breached the cease-fire and ejected all Georgian troops from Abkhazia. Besides the troops, large parts of the Georgian population also fled Abkhazia. This situation prompted the Abkhazian side to secure its military victory by radically changing the demographic situation, and it thus advanced on those Georgians who had not fled. "Many of the remaining Georgians were murdered by Abkhazian troops" (Coppieters, 1999b, 8). This alteration of the demographic make-up is seen by many Georgians as an act of "ethnic cleansing" by the Abkhazians.¹⁴ The notion of "ethnic cleansing" is being rejected by Abkhazians who generally note that much of the brutality against the Georgian population was committed by North Caucasian fighters.

2.2 Developments, negotiations and positions

The negotiations between the parties, facilitated by Russia, initially produced results. The 1994 "Moscow Agreement" saw the deployment of a CIS peacekeeping force (*CISPKA*) consisting solely of Russian soldiers and monitored by the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). Although the Peacekeeping Force's mandate also included the maintenance of law and order and care of the returnees, its activities were in practice limited to monitoring strategic points along the conflict line between

¹³ These battalions of volunteers (one was led by the Chechen fighter Shamil Bassayev) were formed following an appeal by the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, founded in Sukhumi in November 1991 by various representatives of North Caucasian groups (see Lakoba, 2005).

¹⁴ See footnote 1 for a discussion of the various terminology relating to IDPs/refugees.

Abkhazia and Georgia (Vaux, 2003, 23). In addition, with the formation of the Coordinating Commission, an initial framework for negotiations was established.

In 1997 Liviu Bota, the UN Special Representative¹⁵ at the time, initiated the “Geneva Process” involving the parties, other European nations and the US. These meetings led to the founding of the Coordination Council, which has since become the key negotiating framework for the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian issue and in which the Russian Federation acts as facilitator. The UN Special Representative chairs the Council, and the OSCE and the “Friends of the Secretary-General” group are also represented.¹⁶ The Coordination Council has three thematic working groups covering the issues of 1) the lasting non-resumption of hostilities and security problems, 2) refugees and internally displaced persons, and 3) social and economic problems (UN Document S/1998/51 (19.1.1989)). The founding of the “Group of Friends” was intended to limit Russia’s influence on the future negotiation process.

The war changed the demographic structure of Abkhazia dramatically. Before the war, the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia had a population of around 525,000, comprising 45 % Georgians and around 17 % Abkhazians. The remaining 36 % of the population comprised of a variety of ethnic groups.¹⁷ Around 250,000 Georgians left the country during the course of the war. In the years following the war significant numbers of the population in Abkhazia emigrated. According to a UN study, the Abkhazian population stood at between 180,000 and 220,000 in 1998.¹⁸

From 1995 onwards, internally displaced persons began to return unofficially to the Gali region (Kharashivili, 2001, 229). By the middle of 1996, 25,000 to 30,000 Georgians had already returned to the Gali region and relations appeared to be improving, according to the UN (UN Report of the Secretary-General S/1996/284). Yet

¹⁵ Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG).

¹⁶ The members of the “Friends of the Secretary-General” group are France, Germany, United Kingdom, USA and Russia.

¹⁷ These figures are based on the 1989 census and show that the pre-war population of Abkhazia practically halved in the direct aftermath of the war. Besides the fleeing and displaced Georgians, other ethnic groups left the country during the war. Large parts of the Jewish population left for Israel and Pontian Greeks emigrated to Greece. Parts of the Russian and Armenian populations left Abkhazia as well. Last but not least also Abkhazians left the country. According to a 1998 UN Needs Assessment Mission, the Abkhazian population stood at between 180,000 and 220,000 at this time. However, Abkhazian sources claim that the number of Abkhazians in Abkhazia is higher presenting a figure of around 300,000 inhabitants (see Coppieters, 1999, 19).

¹⁸ Both the number of refugees and displaced persons cited above and the level of the pre-war Abkhazian population are disputed by the Abkhazian side, which presents a much higher Abkhazian population figure of 300,000 (see Coppieters, 1999, 19).

there were regular “sweeps” through the Gali region that intimidated Georgians and led to frequent deaths. Both the return process to the Gali region, albeit unofficial, and the creation of the “Geneva Process” with its working groups all endeavouring to build trust between the parties, could be interpreted as relatively positive dynamics in the conflict management process. However, there were also confrontational tendencies that aimed to resolve the conflict quickly from a position of strength, for example, the imposition of the CIS trading restrictions on Abkhazia in January 1996 at the instigation of the Georgians.¹⁹

The emerging positive progress came to an abrupt end as early as 1998 when heavy fighting once again erupted in the Gali region. Provoked by the operations of the Georgian paramilitary group, the “White League”, and other Georgian “partisan groups”, the Abkhazian troops responded with force. Around 35,000 to 40,000 Georgians were again displaced during these clashes, despite their unofficial return to the Gali region having been tolerated by the Abkhazians.²⁰ In 1999 the Abkhazian side unilaterally declared that the internally displaced could return to the Gali region. Neither UNHCR nor the Georgians monitored this return process as they were unable to agree on the arrangements for this return. The Abkhazians estimate that between 40,000 to 60,000 people returned to the Gali region at this time.²¹

The violent events in the Gali region in 1998 caused considerable damage to the peace process. On the Georgian side, these armed irregulars such as the “White League” and the “Forest Brothers” were described as disillusioned Georgians and IDPs who wished to increase military pressure on the Abkhazian side due to the deadlocked negotiations. The Georgians tended to show more private understanding than public support for the groups, whose activities, according to Shevardnadze, could not be stopped. The Abkhazian government, on the other hand, accused the Georgians of directly supporting guerrilla groups.²² For the Georgian side, the Abkhazians’ conduct towards the civilian population constituted more evidence of the brutality of its regime (Coppieters, 1999, 18).

¹⁹ The CIS trading restrictions on Abkhazia have not been formally amended since they were imposed. In practice, they are circumvented by Russian, Turkish and Georgian actors.

²⁰ Neither the Russian peacekeepers nor the Observer Mission intervened; Vaux, 2003, 23; MacFarlane, 1999, 39.

²¹ This figure is difficult to verify, especially as there is a seasonal movement of people between the sides.

²² Under Georgia’s new government, the armed “Forest Brothers Group” was disarmed during a police operation in the border town of Zugdidi on 11 February 2004. See *Civil Georgia*, 11 February 2004.

Since the referendum on the independence of Abkhazia (1999), the Abkhazian side has refused to conduct negotiations on any terms that represent Abkhazia as part of Georgia (yet they have taken part in other negotiations). In order to revive the negotiations, the UN worked on a declaration of principles to allow them to continue. In 2001 Dieter Boden, the UN Special Representative at the time, prepared an eight-point declaration of principles for the negotiation process (“Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi”), which is generally referred to as the “Boden document”. Boden’s strategy aimed to secure the support of the “Group of Friends” for the concept before presenting it to the conflict parties. After a long period of indecision, Russia also endorsed the paper in a letter of transmission that accompanied the document when it was presented to the Abkhaz.

The Boden document views Abkhazia as a sovereign entity that is part of the state of Georgia. The division of competences should be regulated by a “Federal Agreement” that has the status of a constitution and may only be amended with the agreement of both parties. The “Federal Agreement” would therefore confer equal status and legitimacy on both parties. The Boden document thus attempts to balance out the opposing principles of territorial integrity and national self-determination, and establish the basis for a negotiation process. Its style and reference to a “Federal Agreement” indicate that the Boden document aims at a federal solution, although this point is not made explicitly. It thus rules out certain political options including the independence of the state of Abkhazia or a confederal arrangement. The Boden document was therefore rejected as a basis for negotiations by the Abkhazian side.

As part of the UN initiative based on the Boden document, the Geneva Process together with the Coordination Council as its central body continued to deal with the conflict. But since January 2001, the Council has met only sporadically, if at all.²³ The Abkhazian side has refused to take part, citing emerging tensions.

In October 2001, the military situation between the parties was again aggravated by what were called the “Kodori events”.²⁴ On the Georgian side, these

²³ However, the working groups have continued to meet since 2002.

²⁴ The processes and motives behind the “Kodori events” are contentious and less than transparent. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the conflicting reports in detail. The strategic significance of the Kodori is based on the fact that it is part of Abkhazia but not under Abkhaz control. In mid October 2001, fighting broke out in the Kodori valley between various armed groups which had previously penetrated into the valley and Abkhazian troops/reservists. The armed groups included Chechens whose military objectives were unclear. Georgians were also involved in the fighting, some of whom came from the IDP/refugee communities. It is thought that some of these individuals believed that they were participating in military action to free Abkhazia. Others appear to have viewed the “enterprise” as an opportunity for armed looting. There has been involvement of the Georgian government in the events

events led to the dismissal of the powerful Minister of Internal Affairs, and President Shevardnadze also appointed Aslan Abashidze as special envoy for the conflict with Abkhazia. A new actor therefore entered the negotiation process of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict.²⁵ One Abkhazian response to the Kodori events was to apply for “associated status” with the Russian Federation.²⁶ The proposal aroused some controversy within Abkhazia as it entailed a move away from the model of Abkhazian independence. At the same time, association with Russia entails closer links with that country in times of serious military threat.

After his appointment as special envoy for the conflict with Abkhazia, Abashidze carried out actions that were less than transparent. In September 2002, he criticized President Shevardnadze in an open letter and appealed for an end to the economic sanctions against Abkhazia. However, some of the proposals from the Abashidze letter informed the meeting at Sochi between Presidents Putin and Shevardnadze in the presence of the Abkhazian side. The “Sochi Agreement” (March 2003) proposed that the rail route (from Russia to Armenia) running through Abkhazia should be reopened and that more IDPs should be returned to the Gali region. The reestablishment of transport links was thus linked with the return process as a confidence-building measure. In this sense, the Sochi Agreement also marks a departure from the CIS trade restrictions, which would have made the planned rail link impossible, although there was no discussion of what would happen to the trade restrictions were the railway to reopen. The Sochi meeting, which was held without any UN involvement, highlighted the rivalry between the UN and Russia over the issue of who controlled the dynamics of the process. (Interestingly it took place at a point when the UN was seeking to reinvigorate the Geneva process and include high-level UN officials as well as senior Friends and Ambassadors.

but it is not clear to what extent president Shevardnadze was informed. The Georgian media described the events, yet again, in aggressively anti-Abkhazian terms, creating the impression that this was a well-planned military action by partisans aimed at the liberation of Abkhazia. For a detailed report which brings some measure of clarity to these chaotic events, see: (<http://mdb.cast.ru/mdb/2-2002/ac/ekg/>)

²⁵ Aslan Abashidze was at this point the political leader of the Ajarian Autonomous Republic. He had good contacts to Russia.

²⁶ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 29-10-2001.

2.3 The conflict constellation

As a secessionist conflict, the Georgian-Abkhazian dispute stands between the opposing poles of “territorial integrity of the state” on the one hand and “right of self-determination of the people” on the other.²⁷

One of the central Georgian tenets is the preservation of its territorial integrity. Georgia’s endeavours therefore aim to reintegrate Abkhazia into the Georgian state, albeit in such a way as to conform to the model of “widest possible autonomy”. The second key position is the complete, unconditional and timely return of the IDPs / refugees to Abkhazia. A range of variations is possible in this context, including phasing the return over time and by region, one option being to start with returns to the Gali region. The common feature of all the return models is that all the displaced persons should ultimately have the right to return to all regions of Abkhazia.

The secession of Abkhazia is seen by many Georgians as a major threat to Georgian statehood. In addition, they are concerned that if a general solution is adopted, a high degree of Abkhazian autonomy could split the multi-ethnic state of Georgia in the long term. In parallel, the “stagnant nature” of the conflict situation feeds the concern that, in the event of Abkhazia’s *de facto* independence, it will become increasingly unlikely that the IDPs / refugees will ever return.

Since the referendum on independence in 1999, the Abkhazians’ primary position is the recognition of the Republic of Abkhazia by Georgia and the international community. A comprehensive and unconditional return of the IDPs / refugees is rejected, especially to areas outside the Gali region. If at all, this would only be possible to a limited degree after the status issue has been clarified. The Abkhazians usually fear that a comprehensive return of all the Georgians would lead to political domination by the Georgian majority and ultimately pose a threat to the Abkhazian community.

The Abkhazian political vision appears to be aimed at safeguarding the Abkhazian people as a community with its own identity whilst achieving maximum independence from Georgia. These aims can be realized in a wide range of different scenarios, including the attainment of full independence as a state under international law, a formal confederal/federal relationship with Georgia in which both

²⁷ For further analyses of the conflict constellation, see: Coppieters, 2004; Coppieters, et al., 2003; Coppieters, et al., 1999; Cornell, 2002, 245-276; Cornell, 2003; Lynch, 2001; Matveeva, 2002.

have equal status, and an association with the Russian Federation (Nodia, 1997/98, 24). The Georgian offer of widest possible autonomy is seen by many Abkhazian as subordination to Tbilisi, which is seen as being keen to avoid the emergence of a sovereign Abkhazian state. Moreover, the Georgian political elite under Shevardnadze gave no indication to Abkhazian observers that it supported the federalization of the country or would initiate this in the areas under its control. This is perceived by the Abkhazians as further proof that the Georgian offer of autonomy was not to be taken seriously.

Table: The Georgian-Abkhazian conflict constellation²⁸

	Abkhazia	Georgia
Conflict positions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition as an independent state in a confederation • Only limited return of “refugees” after settlement of status issue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of Abkhazia into Georgia with autonomous status • Return of “IDPs” with no preconditions
Instruments of power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rejection of return of “refugees” • Certain amount of support from Russia • Self-sufficiency: preferring to sacrifice development opportunities than to sell out politically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International recognition of Georgia • Blockade and sanctions policy against Abkhazia • Potential use of force
Fears	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No permanent guarantee of autonomy • Overpowered demographically • No survival / decline as a group with its own identity • Permanent isolation in event of no solution • Victor's justice in event of reinstatement of pre-war order • “Cypriotization” (from a Turkish-Cypriot standpoint): permanently condemned to second class status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No return of “IDPs” • Too much autonomy has a domino effect in relation to other ethnic minorities • Danger of de facto recognition of Abkhazia causing continuous fragmentation • Risk of increasing instrumentalization of Abkhazian issue by Russia • “Lebanonization”: too many concessions causing fragmentation of country

²⁸ Based on Norbert Ropers, internal paper, 2001

There is widespread evidence in many contexts that both sides think in terms of maximum demands and believe in the victory of their own cause. Both sides feel that they are morally in the right, give little thought to their own responsibility in creating destructive escalation dynamics and fall back on instruments of power. In general, the central security concerns of the other side are either rejected, not seen, not taken seriously or are denied. The Georgian side is aware of its international recognition and hopes to make the Abkhazians yield by means of blockading tactics. In contrast, the Abkhazians withstand this pressure with support from Russia and by playing a waiting game. It is accepted that development opportunities are limited due to the conflict but this is seen as less serious than political domination by Georgia. As a result, the politically motivated safeguarding of a majority goes hand in hand with the exclusion of the Georgian IDPs / refugees. The Abkhazian fears are therefore linked closely to the issue of the return of the displaced Georgian population of Abkhazia and the fact that they have no confidence in the permanence of a formal statute of autonomy for Abkhazia. On the other hand, the possible dangers perceived by the Georgians are the *de facto* recognition of Abkhazia, the loss of the region to Russia and the resulting open question of the return of the IDPs / refugees. The Georgian side is also faced with the question of how it should deal with the country's ethnopolitical diversity. In general, the solution to the conflict with Abkhazia – even more than the conflict over South Ossetia – is regarded as a precedent-setting case.

A peaceful and permanent settlement of the conflict would have to take just as much account of the right of self-determination of the Abkhazian population and its need to safeguard its identity, as of the human rights of the Georgian IDPs and refugees. The compromise model in the form of a federal or confederal political system was not discussed seriously or in sufficient detail in public debate up to the middle of 2004. However, discussions did commence on this issue, at least on the Georgian side, in the latter half of 2004.²⁹

²⁹ On this issue, see Chapter 5.2, 'The Informal Group of Experts'. For early studies which deal with issues of federalism in the Georgian-Abkhazian context, see: Akaba, et al., 1999.

3 The Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue project

The Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue project presented in this report comprises a series of one-week dialogue workshops attended by six to seven Georgians and an equal number of Abkhazians. In its broadest sense, it deals with the current conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia. From February 2000 to May 2004, three workshops took place regularly each year, so that in all, 13 workshops are dealt with in this report.³⁰ During the period from the completion of the report to its publication, a further five workshops took place (nos. 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18). Up to workshop 13, all the meetings took place outside the conflict region in Austria or Germany; subsequently some took place in the UK.

Georgian-Abkhazian Dialogue Workshops Overview		
Workshop 0	January 1997	Stadtschlaining, Austria
Workshop 1	February 2000	Stadtschlaining, Austria
Workshop 2	June 2000	Stadtschlaining, Austria
Workshop 3	November 2000	Bad Schwalbach, Germany
Workshop 4	March 2001	Potsdam, Germany
Workshop 5	July 2001	Berlin, Germany
Workshop 6	December 2001	Berlin, Germany
Workshop 7	April 2002	Stadtschlaining, Austria
Workshop 8	July 2002	Herrsching, Germany
Workshop 9	November 2002	Berlin, Germany
Workshop 10	April 2003	Hamburg, Germany
Workshop 11	July 2003	Berlin, Germany
Workshop 12	December 2003	Stadtschlaining, Austria
Workshop 13	May 2004	Berlin, Germany

³⁰ A Georgian-Abkhazian workshop had already taken place in January-February 1997, convened and organised by Martin Schümer (UNV) and facilitated by Norbert Ropers (Berghof Research Center) and Jonathan Cohen, who was working for the Foundation on Inter-Ethnic Relations at that time. This workshop displayed some of the key characteristics of the workshop series launched in 2000 under different political parameters. In the past, this first workshop has also been described as part of the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue. However, the team recently instigated a numbering system dating from the start of the continuous dialogue workshops and the 1997 event is therefore referred to as Workshop 0 in this report.

The workshops are organized and managed by the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, Berlin, and Conciliation Resources, London.

These institutions work with a local project partner in each region. The representative responsible for the project in Georgia is Paata Zakareishvili in Tbilisi. On the Abkhazian side, it is Manana Gurgulia. Both have a variety of institutional affiliations.

The dialogue meetings are led by a German-British-Irish team: Dr. Norbert Ropers, Dr. Antje Bühler and Dr. Oliver Wolleh, from the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, with Jonathan Cohen, Dr. Rachel Clogg and Dr. Clem McCartney from Conciliation Resources.³¹ The working language within the team is English, while the participants communicate with each other in the *lingua franca* of the region, namely Russian. The plenary meetings are conducted and simultaneously interpreted in Russian and English.

The participants comprise political office-holders, members of the executive apparatus, members of parliament and civil society actors. The composition of the group of participants is flexible rather than static. Whilst some people take part regularly, the organizers also introduce new participants into the process at each meeting. People who have taken part many times may also sit out on certain meetings and then rejoin the process at a later date.

The dialogue is based on four simple ground rules that are presented to the participants at the start of each workshop. These are:

- Dialogue: The meeting is a dialogue workshop. For this reason, respect for others and the willingness to listen are of paramount importance.
- Informal participation: All participants take part in the meeting in their individual rather than their official/professional capacities.
- Language: The working languages are English and Russian and the plenary meetings are simultaneously interpreted. Participants are encouraged to ask whenever they do not understand something or require clarification.
- Confidentiality: The participants have the right, and are invited, to report on what they hear and experience in the process, both within their organizations and in the public domain. No names should be assigned to any statements made during the process, and participants themselves had to take

³¹ For the composition of the international team for the various workshops, see list of team members in the annex.

responsibility for not compromising other participants and the process if they wanted to see it continue.

3.1 Project goals in general and specific terms

In *general terms*, the dialogue process is part of a comprehensive project that aims to promote a civil society infrastructure to manage the conflict peacefully, both within and between Georgia and Abkhazia.³² In this sense, and with the benefit of hindsight the goals may be defined as follows:

1. to support civic actors from both sides in developing internal capacities and competences, enabling them to assume more active roles in identifying their own long-term enlightened self-interest in relation to the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict;
2. to develop suitable communication forums enabling key figures to formulate constructive approaches and joint initiatives to overcome the major difficulties in relations on both sides;
3. to develop joint perspectives allowing progress in the dialogue to be translated into practical projects, actions and political decisions.

The second goal is the most crucial when focusing on the actual dialogue meetings. In the framework of the workshop, all the activities of the facilitation team are focused on giving the Georgian and Abkhazian political decision-makers and influential individuals the opportunity to analyse and discuss all aspects of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict within a confidential and structured atmosphere.

Integrating social actors into the dialogue process helps to strengthen them and thus contributes to the first goal. The dynamics within the workshops may also lead to new perspectives that identify innovative actions. Nevertheless, some processes relating to the first and third goals have to be developed mainly outside the one-week dialogue meetings.

³² In the early days of the project's development and in the initial discussions between Martin Schümer, Norbert Ropers and Jonathan Cohen, great importance was attached to creating an "infrastructure for peace" as a basic concept. The concept of infrastructure and the ensuing diffusion of projects across a broad social and political spectrum were implemented in subsequent years by CR. For further information on CR's work, see: www.c-r.org

Besides these three general aims, more detailed *objectives* are used by the facilitation team to structure and assess the actual workshop. These function both as set targets and points of reference *within* the process. They comprise personal contact between the participants, the creation of mutual understanding, the intensive analysis of selected topics, speculative problem-solving scenarios and agreement on joint action. The individual forms of interaction affect each other and may be structured in such a way that they can be represented as a pyramid within the framework of the workshop. (See Diagram 1.)

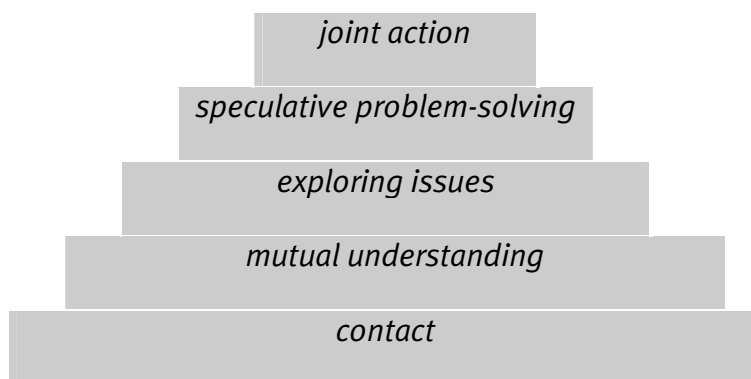


Diagram 1: Levels of interaction and cooperation³³

In a political environment largely characterized by the absence of communication between the two sides, contact is itself a goal, representing respect and willingness to communicate in equal measure and containing an element of relationship development between the participants. The dialogue workshop could not take place without this willingness to meet. Placing contact at the base of the pyramid recognises that the participants have already laid an important foundation for the process as a whole.

“Understanding and exploring issues” denotes levels of quality within the dialogue. The aim is to compare the parties’ different perspectives and broaden their knowledge of each other’s visions, needs, fears and opinions. Ideally, they will then go through a step sequence that may be described as “listening – understanding – acknowledgement”, in which acknowledgement should not be confused with agreement. Exploring issues refers to a more detailed analysis of topics. This not only

³³ This diagram has been used within the process and is based on McCartney, 1986; see also Ropers, 2004, 258.

includes the different perspectives of the parties on a given aspect of the conflict, but also the development of various scenarios based on different basic assumptions / conditions. The subject of these explorations could include, for example, the refugee issue, the current isolation of Abkhazia, the role of foreign powers, and the function of military force. Within the framework of a scenario-oriented analysis, issues discussed might include, for example, the way in which the assumed continuation of Abkhazia's isolation could impact on its various political levels in the short, medium and long term, with a focus on the possible sequence of these predicted developments in the broader peace and negotiation processes.

In some respects, speculative problem-solving can be regarded as a specific strand of detailed scenario development. It allows the participants to discuss and work on political issues outside the well-known official positions and, purely speculatively, to break through the fundamental beliefs of their respective sides.³⁴ This can give rise to scenarios and arguments that can be very stimulating intellectually. Speculative problem-solving is often a source of resistance as the participants are generally not prepared to develop scenarios, albeit only speculatively, based on assumptions or results that do not correspond with their political goals.³⁵

The desired goal is that constructive communication can bring about agreement between the parties on specific or more far-reaching points. Whatever the specific content of the agreement may be, it may find expression in the form of cooperative action, whether in the form of a joint development of options within the workshop or through cooperative action outside of it. Achieving these levels brings about a cognitive and emotional connection between the parties and allows the situation, conflict or aspect discussed to be reframed as a "joint problem".

To date, the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process has not experienced the entire spectrum of the pyramid layers. The initial workshops encompassed the first three stages up to the "exploring issues" level; however, at a later date, scenarios for

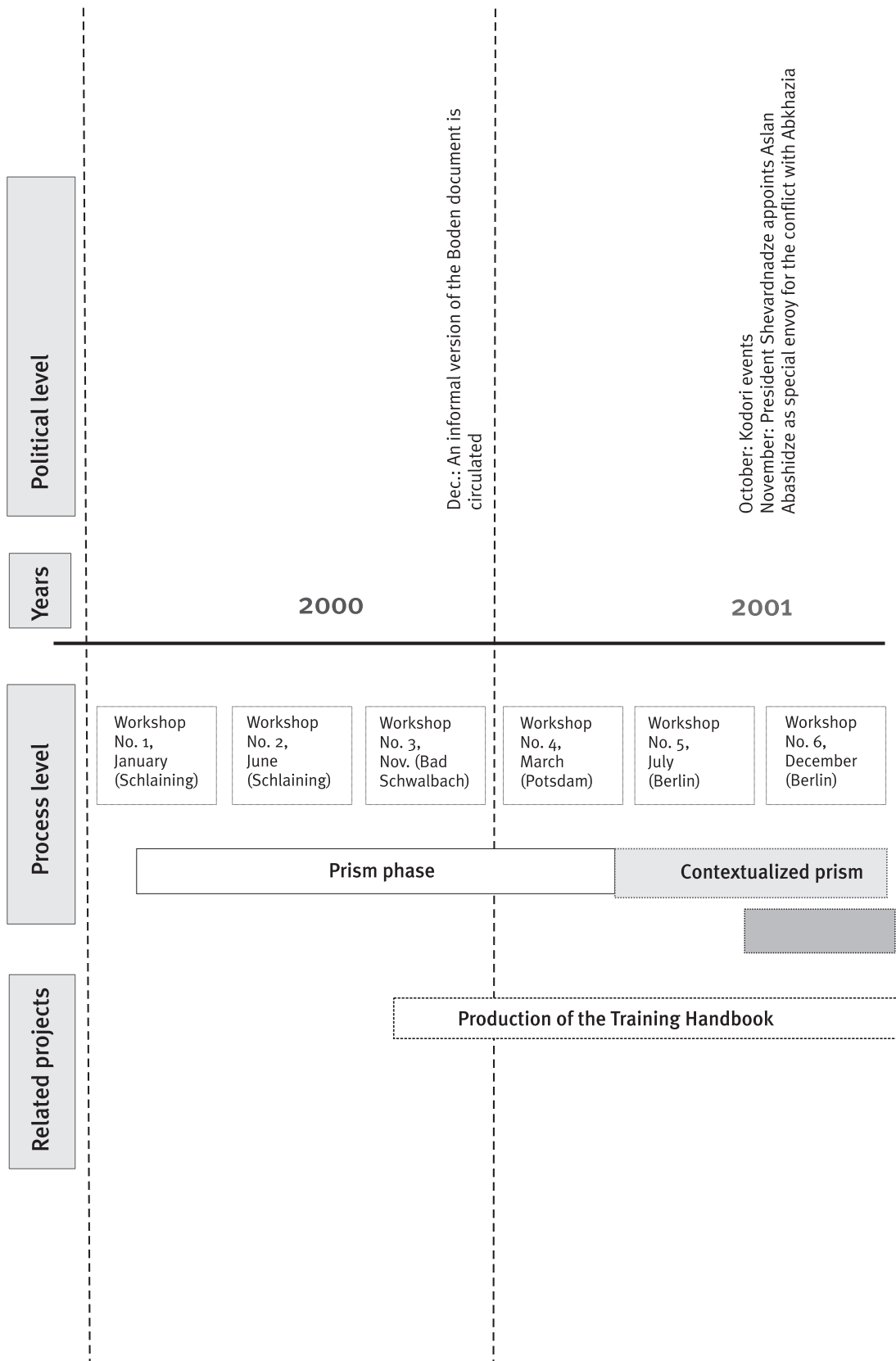
³⁴ In the previous paragraph, a scenario development is mentioned which is based on the assumption that "Abkhazia's isolation" continues to exist. This is a very realistic assumption in light of the current political conditions. By contrast, a scenario which proceeds on the assumption that Georgia is willing to abandon this isolation is highly speculative. How would such a speculative new dynamic impact on Abkhazian politics and the peace process? Which other changes would be conceivable, and under which future conditions might they become probable?

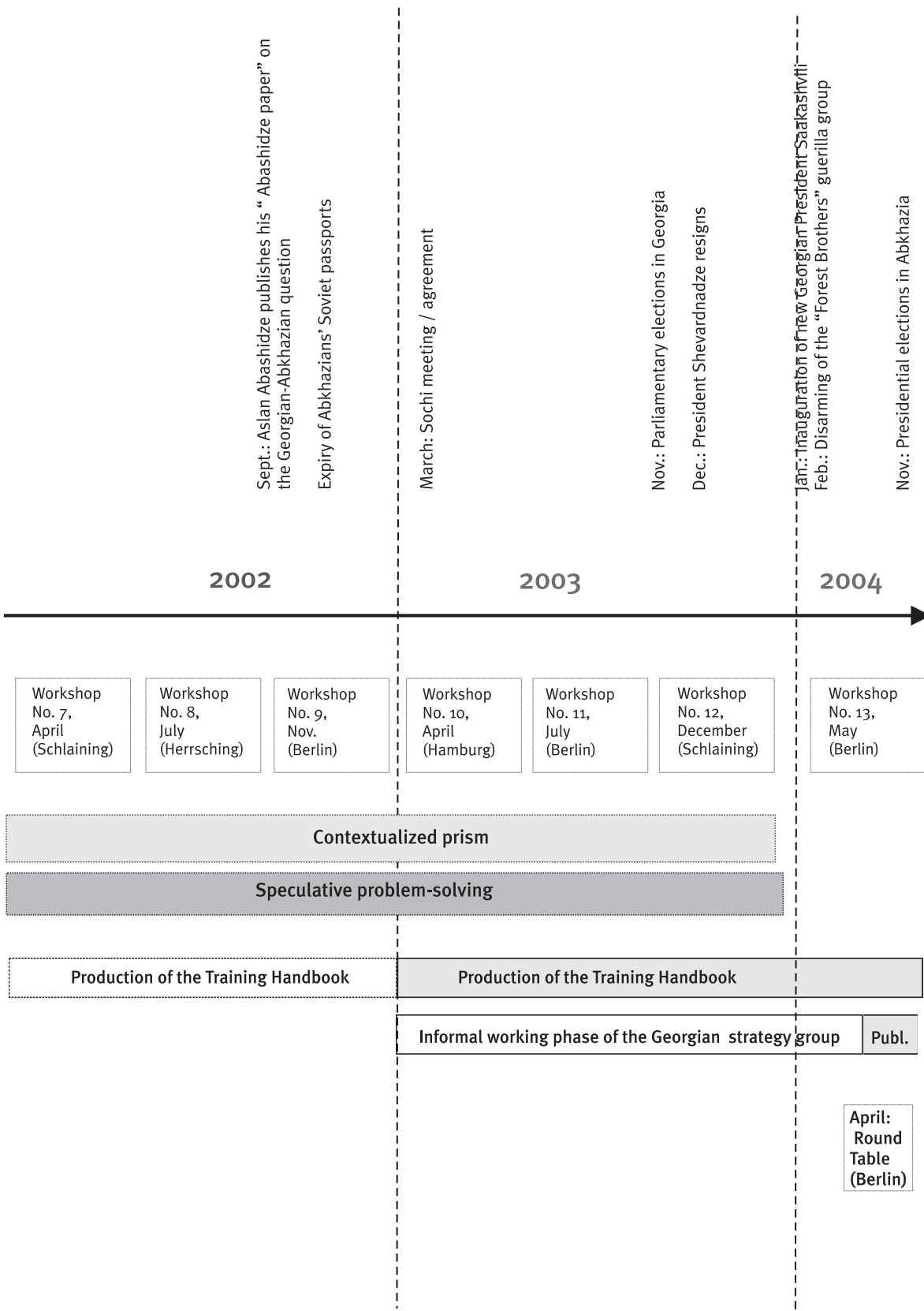
³⁵ For a detailed analysis of the problems of speculative problem-solving and possible ways of dealing with them, see Chapter 4.4.2, 'Obstacles to "speculative problem-solving"'.

speculative analysis were also created and cooperative processes took place to some extent.

The following diagram provides an overview of the 13 workshops during the reporting period. The “process level” visualizes methodological developments which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. “Related projects” comprise activities which are connected with the process but are not part of it. They are discussed in Chapter 5. The “political level” identifies political events and developments which were relevant for the workshop content and the overall development of the process.

Project development and political context





3.2 Facilitation

The dialogue workshops are in keeping with the tradition of interactive conflict resolution / interactive problem resolution that has been in use since the 1960s, primarily for ethnopolitical conflicts.³⁶ The interactive conflict resolution approach aims to create an ambience in which “influential representatives” of the conflict parties can analyse all aspects of the conflict, its underlying *causes* and its *dynamics* within a communicative atmosphere as part of an *interactive* process (Kelman, 1996). The group is overseen by a team of facilitators whose primary task is to facilitate the communication process.

In the context of interactive conflict resolution, *facilitation* simply comprises the task of bringing the conflict parties together and creating the conditions in which the parties can engage in discussion and listen to each other (Barsky, 2000). Facilitation differs from *mediation* in many respects. Mediation processes focus more on the “objective level” of the conflict. The parties’ positions and underlying interests are analysed and discussed with the ultimate aim of achieving a win-win solution integrating the interests of all involved. Mediation is thus generally aimed at achieving a result, namely an agreement between the negotiating parties.

Facilitation on the other hand, with its emphasis on the subjective levels of the conflict, highlights other aspects. The main focuses of interest here are the views and perceptions of the parties, the emotional foundations of their opinions, as well as their existing communication patterns and the effects of these. Facilitation processes therefore have an *understanding* of a *good result* and the focal point of this is the comparison of perceptions³⁷ between the parties that aims at a step sequence of “listening – understanding – recognition”. The facilitation process should form a communicative space for the parties in which they can first develop an informed and later, if possible, a shared understanding of the problem. The usually mutually exclusive interpretation frameworks of the parties should move closer through this comparison and ideally be reframed to form a joint reference framework. Interactive

³⁶ See: Burton, 1969; Burton, 1979; Kelman, 1972; Kelman, 1991; Fisher, 1997. For an overview, see also: Ropers, 1995. Besides these classics on “Interactive Conflict Resolution”, the Berghof Research Center’s dialogue and training workshop concept on the Romanian-Hungarian conflict has promoted important conceptual and practical insights that provided the basis for the workshop concept presented here (Haumersen, et al., 2002).

³⁷ In this context, Burton (1968, 73) talks of the methods of “reperception”. The goal of “controlled communication” is to make the conflict parties experience how their perceptions, biases and misinterpretations can change.

conflict resolution is based on the fundamental assumption that the parties need to have a common conception of the conflict in order to settle it in a comprehensive and sustainable way. It also assumes that this transformation occurs when the basic needs underlying the conflict on both sides can be identified (Kelman, 1992). This approach thus aims to make an indirect contribution to the official negotiations.

The conceptual differences between mediation on the one hand and facilitation on the other are extremely important for the political acceptance of a dialogue process. With its focus on practical agreements, mediation implies binding decision-making processes and therefore does not qualify as a term for informal processes. In relation to the methodological tools *used in practice*, the conceptual differences are not as marked, as a wide variety of methods are used in both formats. In general it may be said that the methodological tools of facilitation within the framework of interactive conflict resolution are wider-ranging than in mediation, as a facilitating team also imparts knowledge about conflict management processes and promotes learning.

Another frequent differentiation is that between directive and non-directive styles of facilitation. A directive strategy is distinguished by the fact that the facilitating party has a recognizable interest in achieving a substantive settlement to the conflict and therefore does not limit itself to a solely process-forming role. In fact, by creating inducements or applying pressure, the facilitating party in a directive process directly influences both the parties and the content of the desired settlement (Ropers, 1995, 50 ff). In a non-directive process, the facilitating party makes no stipulations regarding the type of solution to be adopted, but confines itself to a process-forming role.

The facilitation style in the process

Within a spectrum of non-directive and directive facilitation, the *facilitation style* of the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process may be placed relatively far along the *non-directive* segment. The team essentially controls the group and guides the dynamics of the discussion by proposing *topics* and setting *tasks*, as well as by arranging the *forums* and directing the *way* in which these are handled. The definition of tasks in this instance is primarily the preparation of analyses or scenarios, and the team uses an eclectic mix of conflict analysis approaches here. The analyses therefore relate to conflict dynamics between actors (Galtung, 1996; Osgood, 1962; Glasl, 1994), the *basic needs* of the parties (Azar / Farah, 1981; Azar / Burton, 1986;

Burton, 1987) and so-called rational calculation (Fisher et al., 1991; Zartman, 1989; Zartman, 1995). Analyses are also carried out according to the GRIT principles (Gradual Reduction in International Tension) (Osgood, 1962; Osgood, 1966).

As the process is guided by a team of facilitators, all the tasks set for the group are discussed and must be unanimously approved by the team beforehand. The decision as to who should chair the individual sessions is taken once all the issues relating to the content of the process have been clarified. The rotation of the chair could be regarded as injecting a slightly disruptive element into the process, but this has not been evident in practice. As all the topics have to be agreed in advance, it is rare for a team member suddenly to initiate a different dynamic in the process. The facilitators act as the custodians of the dynamic, trying to ensure that the tempo and flow of debate is maintained in a constructive way. The change of chair creates tension for participants. Very often, a facilitator might chair several sessions until a topic has been dealt with conclusively. The change of facilitator then usually signals the change of theme.

In essence, facilitation aims to optimize communication, prevent problematic developments such as polemics, aggressive accusations or violations of the rules of communication, and demonstrate communication patterns via feedback to the group.

Example: Adhering to principles

In the middle of a plenary discussion, one participant, whose turn it was to speak, sacrificed his turn, saying that a woman in the group had also indicated her desire to speak and would otherwise have to wait. He would therefore let her speak first.

This meant that he not only failed to make his own contribution, but also indirectly made it impossible for the next male speaker to make his contribution, as the woman was only placed third in the order of speakers. Had the discussion become so volatile that he had preferred to say nothing at all or had he suddenly discovered the “gentleman” in himself that lets women go first in any situation in life? Whatever it was, a reaction was required from the facilitator responsible for this session. The speaker had, through his offer, introduced an element that linked the *right to speak* to a criterion other than presence, a willingness to speak and a place on the list of speakers.

The ensuing discussion revealed that precisely because a man should have respect for a woman, he should treat her as an equal speaker and not as one that deserves preferential *treatment*, an attitude that was also endorsed by the woman in question. This example shows how important it is to monitor compliance with the rules of communication. The facilitators must always ensure that participants adhere to the principle of equality between the speakers and keep to the speaking order. (However, there were times when a facilitator might decide to change the

order to maintain a particular line of discussion before moving on to another, or when there seemed to be a consent in the group to allow someone to speak something). The gentlemanly treatment of the woman would almost certainly be followed by preferential treatment towards Professor X or Minister Y at a later stage. Furthermore, the principle of equality and respect for this principle are a force that goes far beyond the relations between the individual participants, as the relationship between the two communities is also concerned with the issue of equality and equal treatment. It is therefore both remarkable and significant when Georgian men support not giving priority to an Abkhazian woman and justify this on the basis of her equality and their respect for it. The example also shows that in response to the discussion triggered by the facilitator, the group was able to identify the principle of equality between the speakers and re-establish it as a valid principle. It is also possible that this discussion about principles would not have happened if the facilitator had not encouraged it. There may only be a very fine line between adhering to and violating key principles.

Different discussion forums

Besides discussion in *plenary sessions*, it is possible to split the overall group into either *mono-* or *bi-communal working groups*, depending on which dynamic is targeted. The process thus moves within the spectrum of *open discussion* (primarily in a plenary context), *analytical discussion* (primarily in small groups) and the *discussion of results* from the small working groups in a plenary context.

Plenary sessions are generally moderated by only one facilitator. The other team members follow the discussion and note the content of the contributions and their observations of the process. They may, like other group members, make their own contributions but it is understood that this should only be done on a limited basis if the participants need to be encouraged to take an active part in the discussions. The facilitator responsible thus introduces the topic of the relevant session and proposes the focus of the discussion.

In the spirit of non-directive facilitation, the dynamics in open plenary sessions are not controlled to any great degree. Participants are free to decide which questions are asked, for example, to clarify a contribution. It is also largely up to the participants whether or not they follow the proposal of the speaker or pursue a question directed to the other group. The facilitator therefore refrains from intervening to pick up on any issues not explored in the discussion and proposing them as discussion topics. Should the need arise, any issues that have been paid little attention by the group may be identified as open issues at the final summary.

Open discussion is therefore largely determined by the participants themselves, although not entirely without direction from the facilitators, and reflects their willingness and capacity to engage in serious debate.

The following description is fairly typical of the start of a workshop and is certainly not characteristic of the event as a whole. The example is simply designed to give the reader an impression of how an open discussion may progress if no effective discussion dynamic has yet developed within the group. Ultimately, it is the facilitators' task to assist the participants by creating, as quickly as possible, a dynamic atmosphere that encourages well-structured discussion. For example, it can be observed, in the open discussion, that participants rarely refer to each other directly by name and that contributions relate to the topic but often contain no direct reference to previous statements. Contributions can be lengthy, embracing a wide range of opinions, judgements and ideas, and frequently deal with additional subjects as well. All this can result in a plenary discussion appearing more like a string of "declarations". The desire to avoid both loss of face and direct confrontation can result in very subtle and coded statements. The participants are aware of their and the others' status in terms of background, age, position, connections, abilities, power, wealth and gender. Those taking part may therefore feel obliged, out of politeness, not to explicitly contradict a person, especially someone from a higher level in the hierarchy.

Within open discussion, non-directive facilitation largely entails controlling the list of speakers and ensuring compliance with the agreed communication rules. The facilitator summarizes the range of opinions and gives an overview of the discussion, either in the form of an interim comment or at the end of the discussion. This allows the different opinions to be grouped under more abstract *topics*, and illustrates the relationship and impact patterns between the schools of thought. The facilitator refrains from contributing any personal evaluation here and the opinions are given equal standing. Due to the breadth of contributions and the tendency of the participants to make implicit references, it can occasionally become necessary for the facilitator to redirect the discussion to the central theme.

The atmosphere of the discussions in open plenary sessions can, and should, differ from one working unit to the next. The more the participants begin to relate to one another and identify explicit points of agreement and dissent, the more *serious* the discussion becomes. Participants also voice their agreement and dissent in relation to members of their own group or their own political leadership. The more

the participants are willing to “bombard” the other side with questions of clarification or understanding, the more dynamic the discussion becomes, signalling genuine interest, both in the subject and in the viewpoint of the other side.

In addition, the *degree of intensity* of facilitation may be varied slightly in the three types of working forum (plenary session, bi-communal working group and mono-communal working group). In general, the working groups in the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process are overseen in three ways:

- 1) The groups work completely unsupervised.
- 2) The working groups are observed or very informally moderated by a facilitator. The moderation tends to consist solely of ensuring that the time requirements are adhered to by the group or that the discussion does not neglect any of the tasks set.
- 3) A slightly more directive form of facilitation occurs when the discussion is more structured than in the non-directive facilitation. Moreover, facilitators may “encourage” working groups to a greater extent, particularly mono-communal groups. In this format, critical analysis of content or communication patterns is extremely feasible as it does not involve any loss of face in front of the other group. The size of the team also allows two facilitators to oversee this format, and they work in accordance with pre-defined roles to build up the tension of this “encouragement”.

This illustrates that the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process only works with methods of a directive nature on a selective basis. The questions for the plenary sessions and working groups for the following day are largely planned at the end of the previous working day in accordance with the *principle of rolling planning*. This allows the team to respond specifically to the dynamic within the group. The composition of the working groups can also be agreed at the planning meetings to achieve the highest level of effectiveness, in terms of group dynamics, for the exercise or discussion in hand.

The presentation and discussion of the results of the small working groups in plenary sessions, which practically always occur with the aid of a flip chart, open up various possibilities for the facilitator to initiate or steer discussions. As group results are the issue here, the interventions of the facilitator are more related to the group, rather than to specific people as in the open plenary discussions that do not contain presentations of results.

Example: Semi-directive facilitation elements in the working group

An interesting reaction occurred to an intervention by a facilitator in one purely Georgian working group. This illustrates how the participants hide behind general formulations, whether consciously or sub-consciously, and test the seriousness of the other side at the same time.

Some of the proposals that the group had previously developed and discussed with the Abkhazian participants in the first round of discussions were being explored in more detail within this task. The author's task was to facilitate the group in a more directive way in order to achieve the best possible outcome. At one point in the discussion, the author asked the group to clarify the meaning of certain points, such as Point 4 about the return of the IDPs / refugees, which was very general and not clear. Did the proposal mean Model A) or did it include elements of Model B) or C) and how did these aspects stand in relation to Point 5? The group nodded. "Those are exactly the right questions, Oliver, but the problem is that you are asking them and not the Abkhazians."

The vagueness of some of the contributions is often deliberate. Vagueness not only protects their own positions, it can also be an amorphous offer to the other side, the significance of which can only be deduced by engagement and determined questioning. It offers the opportunity to test the seriousness of the other side, which must first fathom out the vaguely formulated offer by asking questions. Both these aspects (protection of one's own position and test of seriousness) must be considered in the facilitation. For the Georgian working group in this example, this means that they should continue to be encouraged to make their proposals more detailed whilst the Abkhazian group must be encouraged to ask questions in a systematic way. This example illustrates the importance of semi-directive facilitation elements in a largely non-directive facilitation process, and also shows how various directive strategies should be combined.

With a few exceptions within small working groups, the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process has a pronounced non-directive style. This form of facilitation includes not leading the group into explicit agreement or decision-making processes. Agreement may take place about the form that any further action should take, but should not involve more detailed substantive issues. To generalize, it may be said that, in a room with 12-14 Georgians and Abkhazians representing various political spectrums, it is very unlikely that consensus will be achieved on content. The perceptions of the parties in many areas of life and dimensions of the conflict system are so disparate that few clearly recognizable points of group-wide agreement emerge at overall group level. The facilitation team respects this dynamic and deliberately uses no methods that lead to decision-making. There is scarcely any political scope for this, either at group level in the relevant workshop or at macro-political level.

Such an extensive lack of clear points of agreement between the participants and parties should not lead one to assume that the process contains no positive dynamics. In fact, the opposite is true. However, the positive dynamics do not express themselves in the form of explicit agreement or consensus. Rather, one can speak of *points of convergence*, in which a certain level of understanding is reached between *some* participants. Even if all the participants are not explicitly asked for their exact stance on a particular issue, the group is nevertheless prepared to continue working on another basic assumption. As the process is informal, this cannot be classed as agreement but at the same time, none of the parties obstructs the facilitators' proposed development of the issue. A positive dynamic may also arise when intensive questioning takes place amongst the participants, indicating that they regard the discussion as particularly serious. This general description is an attempt to give an impression of a dynamic that both facilitators and participants often perceive to be positive and stimulating. However, no clearly outlined or written catalogue of results exists at present, even on partial aspects of the conflict.

Example: Ambivalence in the written presentation of results

The problematic nature of producing a written collection of results within the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process, as perceived by the team, is illustrated by the way documentation is handled in the workshop. During the initial phase, comprising the first three workshops, no information on the process or its content was published by the organizers. It was only at the end of the fourth workshop that, at the request of participants, a press release was published that briefly described the nature of the workshop and provided an overview of the topics discussed. The names of the participants and organizers were also given. Once agreed with the participants, the statement – roughly one page in length – in English and Russian was sent to those concerned with the Georgian-Abkhazian situation.³⁸

The team captures the results of the workshop discussions by digitally photographing the written flip charts and stapling them together in chronological order. An advantage of this photographed documentation is that the facilitators do not have to process its content. It is not annotated and thus forms a supplement to some of the participants' notes. The legitimacy of the texts is based solely on the collective working process of the informal groups of participants, and the texts do not possess the status of a results document in any way. It also means that the team of facilitators cannot be held responsible for the content.

At one workshop, the team of facilitators had a discussion that illustrated the different views within the team regarding the level of intensity of facilitation. Four

³⁸ See sample press releases in the annex.

small mixed Georgian-Abkhazian groups had each been given one aspect of the conflict to work on and each had come up with a flip chart containing some innovative ideas. The team subsequently discussed a proposal to type up the four flip charts, summarize them in a document and use these texts in order to elaborate upon these ideas. This suggestion was criticized in many respects. If the facilitators typed and summarized the text, it would lend the text an upgraded status compared with the flip chart. What were previously “notes” of a collective discussion process would implicitly become a “document” which would lend the documented ideas a greater significance. Working further on this document would simply emphasize this increased significance even more and allow it to be interpreted as something similar to an “agreed result”. The perception of the format as a “document-producing process” was interpreted as politically risky and threatening to the process. The flip charts were ultimately summarized in a text within the workshop but any further development of the text in writing was avoided. It therefore retained its documentary status.

The example illustrates how sensitive the political environment is perceived to be by some facilitators in terms of generating written results within the process.

Many participants have repeatedly emphasized that they regard the non-directive style of the process very highly and that it has made a very significant contribution to the political acceptance of the project. Many participants on both sides have experienced other situations in which the third parties involved had imposed compulsory stipulations and standards on them. It is therefore generally perceived as a relief that the facilitation team of the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process is guided by the style and willingness of the participants. In the prevailing political circumstances, achieving more tangible outcomes, particularly in a written format, was not possible within this process. This is not necessarily the case for other projects that are related to this dialogue process.

3.3 Setting

In a wider sense, the setting can be seen as the sum of all elements of the arrangements for the meeting. Under this broad definition, “setting” stands for the overall concept of the interactive part of the project. In a narrower sense, it represents the physical sphere of the meeting and comprises the dimensions of space, location and country. Space, physical movement and physical contact are

important categories of any conflict analysis. Political sensitivity is also essential when developing the setting as a physical concept.

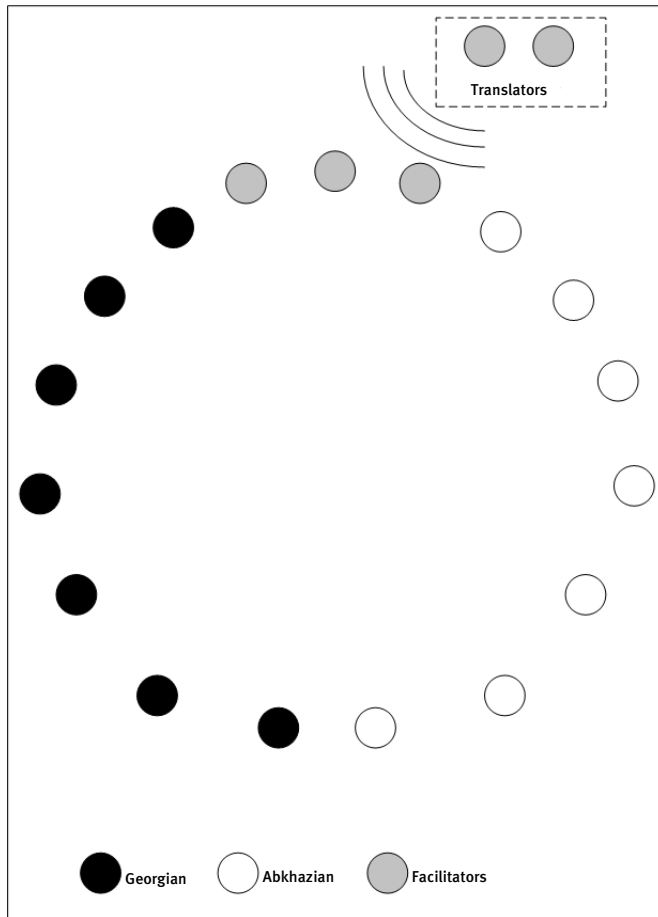


Diagram 2: Schematic representation of the plenary room

Rooms

In specific terms, the meeting takes place in a plenary room in which all the participants and team members sit together in a circle.³⁹ If there are any tables, they are placed at the edges and are only used as a place to keep materials. Visualizations and presentations are displayed on flip charts and pin boards. Two interpreters in a booth translate from Russian to English and vice versa. There are separate break-out rooms next to the plenary room in which small groups can work, either as mixed groups (both Georgians and Abkhazians) or mono-communal groups.

³⁹ The choice of seating is free, which means that the seated group is generally intermixed to a certain extent. The facilitators are also dispersed within the group but tend to sit close to one another. In the interests of clarity, the schematic representation of the plenary does not reflect the group's intermixing – and to be precise the facilitators rarely sit with their back to the interpreters as depicted in the diagram.

The working day is generally from 0900 to 1800 hours and is split into four sessions of 100 hours each. There are two 30-minute coffee breaks during the morning and afternoon sessions and a lunch break of two hours. The length of the workshop may vary, but in general, a total of six working days are available, with either a half-day or a full day generally taken up by a group excursion. This means that often, five to five-and-a-half working and discussion days are available within the setting, making a total of 20-22 sessions.

Locations

When choosing *event locations*, it is preferable to choose a venue that is neither too luxurious nor too plain. Each participant has a single room with a private bathroom and telephone. The rooms should be similarly furnished and should not create any symbolic differences in status between the participants. Besides having well-equipped seminar rooms and bedrooms, the venue should have a fairly peaceful ambience, but there should be something to do in the evenings. Walking in nearby woods or by a lake is just as welcome as a sauna or swimming pool. In a German context, all this corresponds to the facilities available at one of the more comfortable Christian academies.

The event locations of the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process range between relatively secluded rural locations (Schlaining, Bad Schwalbach, Herrsching) and large cities (Berlin, Hamburg). As might be expected, each of these location types creates its own leisure time dynamics within the group of participants. It is therefore no coincidence that the first workshops were held in rural areas. These localities are easier for the team to control and there is less chance of the participants “disappearing” into the nightlife of a metropolis.

In contrast to the rural atmosphere, the urban ambience gives all the participants the opportunity to find interesting things to do during their leisure time or on the excursion day. An urban location, particularly if it is a political centre, also means that the organizers can invite political visitors on an ad hoc basis without major logistical problems. This was illustrated in Workshop 6 (Berlin), which featured a visit by the then Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), Dieter Boden, who happened to be in the city at the time, and also visits from the ministries. External experts may also be more easily and affordably accommodated in urban

locations. The greater diversity of the urban arena thus provides an especially favourable environment for processes requiring flexibility.

However, the city environment can also have a disruptive effect on the process, particularly when participants stay out late in the evening and arrive tired at the morning sessions. The participants' behaviour can be used as an indicator of the value attached to the event and there were no such problems during the Georgian-Abkhazian project. However, the city location was only chosen by the organizers when the process started to become established in terms of its political significance.

Countries

The Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue takes place abroad as it cannot be held in either Georgia or Abkhazia. The reasons for this are complex and are discussed in detail in the chapter entitled 'Obstacles to "meeting"'. Besides personal reasons, the main reasons why a local meeting is not possible are both political and symbolic.

3.4 The group of participants – formation and modification

The facilitators are guided by certain *criteria* when composing or expanding a group of participants. Where possible, representatives from groups involved in the official negotiations are integrated into the process by the team, along with actors who are crucial to the transformation of the conflict. The team also tries to include a broad political spectrum from both sides as political plurality enriches the dialogue both within and between the groups. Experiencing different political views and emphases is particularly significant as the parties often assume that plurality does not exist on the other side.

Horizontal and vertical networking

Participants in the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process include officials, government representatives, members of parliament and representatives of civil society, who all take part in a private capacity. The group's composition therefore aims to achieve a *horizontal* relationship structure between the parties and a *vertical* one – i.e. cutting across the internal hierarchies – within them (Lederach, 1997). In line with the concepts of "Track I diplomacy" for official negotiation processes and "Track II diplomacy" (Montville, 1987) for informal meetings at societal level, the

combination of participants from both state *and* civil society has produced the term “Track one-and-a-half”.⁴⁰

Another important guiding feature when putting a group of participants together is to achieve a relative symmetry in status between the groups. This means that the proportion of civil society and “official” representatives from both sides should be relatively similar and that the “official representatives” of both sides should have approximately the same status.

To date, advisers of both presidents have regularly taken part in the meetings along with others from their spheres. Various ministers from both sides have also participated together with their deputies or advisors, the ministries involved being those relevant to the conflict, such as the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the Georgian Ministry of Special Affairs,⁴¹ the Ministry of Justice and the State Minister for Conflict Resolution. In addition, representatives of the Georgian National Security Council have attended, as have high-ranking members of Georgian and Abkhazian intelligence services. Representatives of the Coordination Council, Georgian IDPs / refugees and members of the “government-in-exile”, although this is a very sensitive issue that is returned to subsequently⁴² have also been present. The inclusion of 18 members of parliament from both sides meant that a spectrum of both pro-government and opposition personalities were involved in the process. Other civil society representatives belong to socio-political institutions, a women’s group, universities and newspaper publishers, to cite just a few examples.

It should be noted that many people have several roles that can increase both their influence in the relevant political framework as well as their impact in the public domain. For example, members of parliament can also be members of committees or NGOs, just as a newspaper publisher can also support a certain political line.

⁴⁰ See the approaches of John Burton, Leonard Doob, Herbert Kelman (Fisher, 1997).

⁴¹ Under President Shevardnadze, the Minister of Special Affairs was responsible for the settlement of the conflicts within Georgia.

⁴² The “Abkhazian government-in-exile” styles itself as the only legitimate Abkhazian government. It consists of former Georgian members of Abkhazia’s pre-war parliament and executive. Based in Tbilisi, it acts as the representative of the interests of Georgian IDPs and refugees from Abkhazia. Throughout the period covered by this report, Tamaz Nadareishvili chaired the “Supreme Council of the Abkhazian government-in-exile”, though he died in August 2004.

Flexible group formation

Another characteristic of the composition of the participant group is that it should be flexible rather than fixed. In practice, this means that some people regularly take part in the meetings whilst others are only integrated on an intermittent or selective basis by the organizers. In total, 76 different participants from both sides took part in the first 14 meetings of the process, covered by this report.

Rotating the participants has both advantages and disadvantages, the significance of which can only be considered in terms of the overall context. It is obvious that continually intermixing the groups cannot produce the distinctive group formation process possible with a group meeting over a long period of time. An important goal of a fixed workshop group is generally to build up personal trust between the participants who get to know and respect each other personally and therefore, it is hoped, may more easily enter into cooperation. With a fixed group of participants, it is easier to refer back to and follow up on the results of previous workshops. In this context, accumulating results throughout the overall process would also appear easier and more feasible.

The disadvantage of a fixed group of participants is that the relatively small number of participants means that only a limited political spectrum can be integrated into the process.

With a fixed group of participants, it is generally also not possible to respond to political developments and include those political representatives who instigated them. Moreover, the organizers' scope in selecting participants can increase during the life of the overall process. People and groups whose involvement in the start-up phase of the process was ruled out for whatever reason can be included by the organizers at a later date. The principle of flexible group formation allows such expanding latitudes to be explored and exploited.

Fixed and flexible group formations set different emphases. On the one hand, there is the personal trust-building and likelihood of a deeper exploration of content, and on the other there is the flexible integration of various political spectrums along with the associated relative "widespread impact". In the Georgian-Abkhazian context, the team has chosen the flexible method and has retained this throughout.⁴³

⁴³ See list of participants in the annex.

Expanding the spectrum of participants

The participants are generally selected by the organizers in close liaison with the local partners in the countries: Paata Zakareishvili on the Georgian side and Manana Gurgulia on the Abkhazian side. The selection process requires the organizers to choose the participants in principle, who then inform their respective governments about the up-to-date participants' list in order to ensure the necessary transparency. The respective governments are always involved in the process of agreeing the group of participants, not least due to the fact that government members or advisers of political decision-makers are also included in the process. In practice, this means that putting together the group of participants is based on a complex and multilateral discussion process in which the wishes of the official representatives of both sides are both respected and anticipated by the organizers.

Due to the parties' different political sensitivities, this consultation process with the respective governments does not develop in a symmetrical way. In general, it can be said that the *Georgian side* is sensitive to the composition of the Georgian group whilst the Abkhazian side attaches great importance to the composition of its own *and* the Georgian group. Sensitivities did, however, change over time.

During the *initiation phase* of the process, it seemed likely that the Georgian side would insist on the participation of IDPs in the process, an idea that was rejected by the Abkhazian side. When analysing the issue of which groups trigger particular political sensitivity in both parties, it became apparent that the "IDP" category was just one of many. Besides the "IDPs", the Abkhazian side was particularly sensitive to the participation of "government-in-exile" representatives, "politicians who served in the Abkhazian government before and during the war", and "well-known supporters of violence, both past and present".

The supposed insistence on or rejection of certain groups of people is characteristic of escalated conflict situations. On both sides, there are categories of people whose participation is called for by the one side and rejected by the other, for both political and symbolic reasons. The facilitators must accept that the parties will set such boundaries if they want to build a working relationship with the parties based on trust. At the same time, it is the task of the facilitators to create a dialogue forum, for the parties, which is as comprehensive and restriction-free as possible, and to broaden and deepen this dialogue. The overall project is therefore constantly faced with the dichotomy of *accepting the boundaries and crossing them*. It is thus an indicator of success if the team manages to expand the process and integrate, into

the dialogue, groups which – for whatever reason – had been previously excluded and whose relevance to the discussion can be substantiated.

In order to understand the parties' motives and the criteria that determine how they act, the organizers have to carry out a very empathetic and detailed information-gathering process that allows them to exploit small, but recognizable latitudes. These latitudes generally arise in cases where people may be members of one of the excluded categories but have a *personal profile* that allows them to appear credible and trustworthy in the eyes of the other side. The important features include, to name but a few: a person's political status and scope for influence, their political proximity and orientation towards a leading political personality, their own political ambitions, stance and role during the war, stance on the issue of force, family connections, general reputation before and after the war. It is essentially these characteristics of an individual's *personal profile* that determine whether or not he/she can be integrated into the dialogue process.

It became increasingly possible during the dialogue process to allow Georgian IDPs to take part in the meetings. One individual who belonged to the “government-in-exile” also took part several times.

Example: Personal profile

The participant who can be assigned to the “government-in-exile” on the Georgian side had a personal profile that allowed the Abkhazian side to permit his participation. He is also a member of the Coordination Council and is seen as a representative of the political group within the “government-in-exile” that believes in a political settlement to the conflict. His stance had always been to reject the war, something that the Abkhazians were aware of. Moreover, from the Abkhazian perspective, he is regarded as predictable. These characteristics made him an acceptable personality in many respects and his participation has been secure since the second workshop.

Nonetheless, the precarious nature of his participation in the process was illustrated by the fact that he always introduced himself as a member of the Coordination Council and did not identify his roles within the “government-in-exile” even though the Abkhazian authorities were aware of them. Only after more than two years of regular participation in the process did the time come for him to speak freely in the introduction round, although all his political offices were known to everyone present. His participation enhanced the process in many respects as he signified a communication link to both the Coordination Council and the “government-in-exile”.

The spectrum of participants has expanded not only on the Georgian but also on the Abkhazian side. During the first few workshops the Abkhazian group was relatively homogeneous in political terms. As their experience of the process increased, individuals from the opposing political spectrum within Abkhazia also became increasingly integrated into the dialogue process. When asked about this, one participant related this development to the confidentiality rule.

“At the first meetings, 1 to 4, the [Abkhazian] group was more monolithic and had prepared itself to a greater degree. The participants then realized that the process was confidential and that nothing would be leaked out about the participants and get back to the Abkhazian people. So they began to be less afraid and started to trust the process more.”⁴⁴

Since 2001 the political spectrum within Abkhazia has become more diverse, which meant that representatives of these political trends should and could be included in the group of participants.

From the fifth workshop in Berlin (July 2001) onwards, clear qualitative shifts in the composition of the group occurred. The spectrum of political opinion represented in the process expanded and the political status of the participants increased. At the fifth workshop, four out of a total of twelve participants were members of parliament. These are all indicators of the increasing acceptance of the dialogue process and its establishment in the consciousness of the political elites on both sides – just one-and-a-half years into the process.

As the following chapter will show, the fifth workshop also marked a watershed in terms of other conceptual features. This illustrates how long it can take for the organizers to expand their range of options and increase the quality of the project structure.

3.5 Other conceptual elements

Besides the characteristics of the dialogue project already presented, various other conceptual elements are applied; these will be introduced briefly at this point before their further development in the project is discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

⁴⁴ Interview with a regular Georgian participant.

One important conceptual element that shaped the initial phase of the dialogue process was the *conflict prism*. Within the framework of a conflict prism, the participants are presented with a conflict that, in terms of its form and structure, displays parallels to the Georgian-Abkhazian situation. The image of a “prism” is used to display the basic structures and dynamics of the conflict, just as a prism splits light into the colour spectrum. The conflict prism was used regularly in the initial stages but was then dropped as a thematic element of the process. The discussion of other conflict situations then took the form of short talks by the facilitators (*contextualized prism*)⁴⁵. At first sight, this might simply appear to be a change in the methodical and didactical style of facilitation, but it also reflects the establishment of the process as a confidential and informal political dialogue format.

Non-structured encounter and its significance

Within the overall project, the process in which people become acquainted with each other evolves in two spheres, both important in different ways. These are the *structured* and *non-structured* phases of the workshop.

This report deals almost exclusively with the structured phase of the one-week meeting. This is the part that is shaped by the facilitators and in which the participants engage in discussion within both plenary sessions and small groups. The structured sphere is therefore characterized by mechanisms of mutual observation and control, together with an element of international observation and control through the presence of the facilitators.

The breaks between the sessions and the evening leisure time are very important to the cultivation of relationships. Information and opinions may be exchanged in this context that could not occur in this form in the plenary sessions. Participants often say that this unstructured phase of the overall process is as important as the organized part.

Switching between these two levels enables the participants to experience the “difference in openness” of a person between a plenary context and an informal setting. It represents an important level when positioning and categorizing people politically, and allows conclusions to be drawn about the political conditions in which they work and how they may behave within their own group. It is an important experience for participants if they observe people criticizing their own government on

⁴⁵ See Chapter 4.2, “The contextualized conflict prism”.

one issue, even in the plenary session, but only showing their critical stance on another subject in a very private conversation. The overlaps *and* differences between these levels undoubtedly contribute substantially to the complexity of opinions.

An outside observer would find it difficult to understand, in quantitative and qualitative terms, the significance of both the development of the relationship level and the non-structured phase of the dialogue workshop. Participants regard them as very important elements. In accordance with their principle of optimizing communication between the parties, the facilitators therefore ensure that space is made for these processes.

Contact on the basis of equality

Contact and encounter alone do not create the conditions required to strengthen relations between the participants. It is also important that the contact takes place on an equal basis and is perceived as positive, and these qualities were ensured within the framework of the process. The informal nature of the meeting in which all participants were present in a personal capacity, the rules of communication and the compliance with them, the large volume of information and opinions exchanged with the encouragement and guidance of the facilitators: all these factors led to the dialogue workshops being perceived as a very interesting, enriching and positive experience by the participants. The author does not wish to package this process as “trust-building”. The beginnings of trust may or may not occur between the participants. However, the participants are certainly given the opportunity to form a multi-layered image of both the other participants and the other side.

So what we can say is that within a positive framework of interaction, participants establish a more informed and realistic impression of people who are often their functional counterparts. The author is thus convinced that the process creates a positive ambience in which participants may develop a realistic opinion of people, thereby creating a favourable environment that makes contact more likely in the event of critical situations.

3.6 The conflict parties' perceptions of the process

Both sides regard the meetings and, above all, the dialogue as a special circumstance, the political significance of which primarily evolves from the political status of the participants and the political nature of the subject matter. The dialogue is a forum for information-gathering and an opportunity for government representatives and civil society to exchange their views on an informal basis.

Recognizable differences are apparent in the way the respective governing parties view the *political dimension* of the process, and these are mirrored in the differences in the parties' *need to control and influence*. In general, it may be said that there are indications that the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process has a far greater political significance for the Abkhazian side than for the Georgians. The reasons for this may be found in the very different political *framework conditions* in which the two governments operate, the different ways in which the negotiating parties *interpret the nature of the conflict*, and the different degrees of importance that the parties attach to the *role of civil society*.

Different framework conditions

The fact that the Abkhazian state is not recognised internationally means that the Abkhazian government operates under the difficult conditions associated with political and economic isolation. The Abkhazian side has no access to the usual channels of international communication or interaction, such as embassies and consulates. For a long time, politicians, government representatives and officials had only very limited freedom to travel, for political and economic reasons. For many years after the war the telephone network was under-developed and over-burdened, and Internet use has also developed very slowly. Opportunities to contact and meet the international community are therefore limited and take place almost entirely within the existing multilateral bodies set up to resolve the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict or during visits of foreign delegations to Abkhazia.⁴⁶ Due to its limited communication opportunities, the Abkhazian side sees the dialogue process as more than just a forum for the exchange of information with the Georgians. It is also an indirect communication channel to the international community.

⁴⁶ Hewitt (1998, 214) reports vividly on the US example, when US diplomats were subjected to self-imposed restrictions on entry. The first US diplomatic delegation therefore only travelled to Abkhazia in April 1996.

The members of the facilitation team and the organizing institutions (Berghof Research Center and Conciliation Resources) are perceived as *links* to national foreign ministries, international organizations and the international community as a whole.

This aspect of the dialogue process as a communication channel to the international community is relevant to both parties. However, this dimension is less important for the Georgian side as it has access to the entire spectrum of established, international communication channels, both at multilateral and bi-lateral levels. The network for international communication indirectly afforded by the dialogue process is practically meaningless to the Georgians as they have adequate scope of their own to influence international opinion. Moreover, the positions represented by Georgia conform to those of the international community.

By contrast, the Abkhazian government has no widespread communication links to the international arena and its position also conflicts with that of the Georgians and the international community. This explains the high level of political attention generated by this informal dialogue on the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, even though these meetings merely constitute an informal exchange of opinions. Above all, therefore, it is the *opinions that deviate* from the official position that represent a potential risk for the Abkhazian government, as it assumes that every form of deviation will be communicated to the international arena, either by the Georgian or the international participants.

Different perceptions of the conflict

It is not just the creation of a potentially unpredictable communication channel to the international community that makes the project so politically significant for the Abkhazian leadership. The way in which the Abkhazian side conceptualizes the conflict causes problems for its government which further increase the political sensitivity of the informal dialogue. For the Abkhazians, the conflict is an ethnopolitical conflict that revolves around the realization of the *right of self-determination* for the Abkhazian people. In contrast, the predominant interpretation patterns on the Georgian side deny the ethnopolitical dimension or at least downplay it to a substantial degree. The view often put forward by the Georgian side is that the Abkhazian leadership acts as an instrument of Russian policy and that Russia's primary goal is obtaining control itself. According to this perception, the ambitions for sovereignty are controlled by Moscow and are only partially supported by Abkhazian

public opinion; public support for independence from Georgia is thus the outcome of prolonged propaganda. In the Georgian view, the conflict is therefore largely controlled from outside, that is, by Russia, and has the primary aim of splitting and weakening Georgia as a state.

The Republic of Abkhazia's demand for independence from Georgia emerges as the key Abkhazian position in the argument on self-determination. The Abkhazian leadership therefore intends to further develop and strengthen the currently unrecognised state of Abkhazia and, through negotiations, secure its recognition by the international community and Georgia.

In the absence of any formal international recognition, the internal support for this issue has become the key element of any outward claim for legitimacy by the Abkhazian government. This aspect is reinforced by the argument, often appearing in the Georgian discourse, that the Abkhazian leadership gains more legitimacy from Russian power than from its own population. The Abkhazian leadership feels that its legitimacy is challenged in two respects, firstly, on the issue of its formal status, and secondly, on the genuineness of its demand.

A key element in the Abkhazian leadership's presentation to the outside world is therefore to demonstrate maximum, if not total, unity in respect of the *demand for independence*. The internal political processes in Abkhazia are characterized by the dynamic of total unity on the issue of Abkhazia's status. In mid 2004, there were no political parties or social groups within Abkhazia that were advocating anything other than independence as a long-term goal. In general, it may be assumed that the Abkhazian leadership regards unity in all areas of politics as strengthening its position in the dispute with Georgia, and therefore aims to preserve it.

Generating this unity at the level of the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue is therefore a *political process* as only unity gives credibility to the Abkhazian interpretation of the conflict as a dispute about self-determination. (More recently, though, there has been a shift and the Abkhazians increasingly see themselves as a functioning democracy). Moreover, it is this unity that allows the Abkhazian leadership to be seen as an independent and sovereign party rather than as a heteronomy. It is therefore politically risky for the Abkhazian leadership not to demonstrate unity, which is not the case for the Georgian leadership.⁴⁷ Divergent

⁴⁷ Internal Georgian criticism of the government would not result in its legitimacy being called into question nor would the government's central concerns in relation to the conflict be challenged by outsiders. This is different from the situating arising in the Abkhazian context.

opinions on the issue of Abkhazia's status would be very damaging politically. The fear exists, perceived or real, that Abkhazian political actors who are more willing to compromise could be identified and supported by the international community, thereby weakening Abkhazia's negotiating position in the medium to long term.

In an official negotiation process, or an unofficial process attended solely by government representatives, it is very unlikely that the dialogue would contain any stances or opinions that deviated from the government position. However, this is not the case with the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process 2000-2004, as it also involved civil society actors and political players from outside the government. From the perspective of the Abkhazian government, the dialogue process therefore involves risk, which explains part of its political dimension and some of the sensitivity with which the Abkhazian leadership reacts to the process. This raises the question why the Abkhazian government is, in principle, prepared to take this risk. This leads us to the importance attached to civil society within Abkhazia. Civil society actors play a much more influential role in Abkhazian discussions of the dispute than they do for the Georgian government.

Differing importance of civil society

During the period under examination there was a firm belief within the Abkhazian civil society, that democracy-building in the Abkhazian state and civil society is crucial to Abkhazia's political survival and its recognition by the international community and, ultimately, Georgia. This belief was also shared by political leaders within the Abkhazian opposition and to a lesser extent by representatives of the executive at the time. The Abkhazian presidential elections that took place at the end of 2004 / beginning of 2005 resulted in a change of government. The central political wisdom that democracy-building in the Abkhazian state and civil society is crucial to Abkhazia's political survival and its recognition at large is clearly dominating post 2004 thinking both within the Abkhazian executive and civil society.

This involves working towards a separation of powers between a functioning presidency, a parliament that is able to perform its control functions, and an independent judiciary. Moreover, the significance of civil society in the construction of a democratic polity is recognised in principle and supported. From the Abkhazian perspective, democratization may therefore be regarded both as a *value in itself* as well as a *strategy* in the political dispute with Georgia. In line with this view, a

democratic entity can expect to be recognised by the international community sooner or later. In addition, it would be difficult, even for a stronger Georgia, to impose a military solution on a democratic Abkhazia without coming up against resistance or problems of acceptance within the international community. So from an Abkhazian perspective, the declared desire for democracy also performs a protective function within the conflict formation.⁴⁸

The Abkhazian efforts to create a democratic polity are in sharp contrast to the dominant pattern of interpretation within Georgia, namely that Abkhazian society is “frozen” and has no recognizable dynamics. Most Georgians dispute / deny that an independent Abkhazian society exists and is undergoing a development process, with institutions being created and alternative political concepts to those of the government evolving. The Georgians’ frequent denial of the existence of an Abkhazian civil society does not necessarily denote a denial of all forms of independence for the other side. In reality, it is often difficult from a Georgian perspective to follow internal Abkhazian political developments due to the poor communications between the parties and the limited opportunities to exchange views and information (even though this has changed over time). This is exacerbated by the fact that the Abkhazian side is certainly able to present itself as a homogeneous group, particularly towards the Georgians. This is particularly true as regards the issue of Abkhazia’s status – the key issue for Georgian observers.

The participation of various social actors in the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue therefore offers an opportunity to demonstrate the level of civil society development and its degree of autonomy in Abkhazia. At the same time, it is this social plurality that poses a risk for the official Abkhazian negotiators in terms of the diversity of opinions and their deviation from official negotiating positions. The Abkhazian perception of the political dimension of the informal dialogue is therefore caught within this field of tension.

In contrast, on the Georgian side, the government does not attach major strategic significance to civil society actors in the dispute with the Abkhazians. The idea that “Georgia must become more attractive”, with a knock-on effect on Abkhazia, is only now being emphasized under the Saakashvili government. Besides economic growth, democratization is being seen as an element of the future attractiveness of Georgia and civil society actors are therefore acquiring some greater

⁴⁸ The “protective function” is based on the existing tension between the principles of “territorial integrity”, emphasized on the Georgian side, and “democracy and sovereignty of the people”.

significance in the dispute about Abkhazia. In the Shevardnadze years, however, this argument was given little prominence and, during the period under review, the significance of civil society was emphasized to a far greater extent on the Abkhazian than on the Georgian side.

Summary and conclusions

The Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process under examination here, with its mixture of state and civil society actors, represents as much of an *opportunity* as a *risk* for the Abkhazian government. The heterogeneity of the participants and their different political foci can (in many respects) be seen as an opportunity. The dialogue process is therefore a forum in which Abkhazian civil society can present itself as a dynamic and independent actor. The existence of this civil society increases and enhances the legitimacy of the Abkhazian side, particularly as its existence is not recognised on the Georgian side, and is often denied by Georgia and often by the international community.

The unity between government and civil society representatives has a legitimizing effect on the Abkhazian government's position. Unity creates credibility and establishes the dispute as essentially a political problem about self-determination and sovereignty for the Abkhazian people. At the same time, the pluralistic nature of the participant group constitutes a risk for the Abkhazian government. It can credibly demonstrate the government's legitimacy as a representative of the Abkhazian people, but in the same way, it could also erode this legitimacy. The lack of clarity with regard to its status at international level and its limited scope for communication and the exertion of influence make it very sensitive to processes in which its position may be undermined, both in the eyes of the Georgians and in the presence of international actors.

On the Abkhazian side, its participation in and agreement to every meeting have constituted a political act. In contrast, the political significance of the process on the Georgian side is less clear. The way in which the workshop process is perceived and evaluated by the parties is also not static and has been subject to change since the process's inception at the beginning of 2000.

Human interaction and prevention

One of the goals of the dialogue process is to create and strengthen human relationships. This is based on the assumption that "knowing each other", "assessing

each other” and “valuing each other” are important conditions for an exchange of views and potential cooperation outside the dialogue workshop (although this last point was not a priority for the organisers). This also raises the hope of helping to *prevent an escalation* if a potentially hostile or critical situation arises between the parties. The assumption is that people who know each other are more willing to pick up the telephone and establish a direct channel of communication than people who do not know each other. As a large percentage of the participants in the process are decision-makers themselves or work closely with them, the preventive dimension of the dialogue process is indeed relevant.

4 Experience gained from the process

This chapter presents the various phases and stages of the process to give the reader an insight into the content, methodology, challenges and developmental steps of the process as a whole.

A model of the phases has already been introduced in the section on process goals, which portrayed the pyramid with its five levels: personal contact, creating mutual understanding, exploring selected issues in depth, speculative problem-solving scenarios and agreement on joint action. Although these stages are not always completely distinct from one another, they have their own individual facilitation methods, dynamics and obstacles.

4.1 The conflict prism

The conflict prism was used during the first five workshops (February 2000 to March 2001) and included case studies on the conflicts in Northern Ireland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus and Sri Lanka. Each conflict prism generally consisted of a combination of talks by international experts and experts from the conflict region. The conflict analysis was introduced by an international expert along with speakers from the relevant conflict parties, and was supplemented by contributions from the

facilitation team. The focus on the prism took around 1.5 days and the discussion was then steered towards the situation in Georgia / Abkhazia. At the end of the prism phase, the external experts left and the team of facilitators dealt with any further references and “revisits” to the case study during the rest of the workshop.

The fifth workshop (July 2001) can be regarded as still belonging to the prism phase. However, the prism used here was not a broad analysis of conflict but consisted of a thematic focus on the “transitional processes” in South Africa. The sixth workshop (December 2001) dispensed with prepared case studies and introduced the dialogue-only phase. This concept has been retained ever since. The conflict prism concept links various goals and functions, both didactic and political, at micro and macro level. These will be explored in more detail below.

Didactic functions

At micro level, the prism was primarily a *didactic concept* which enabled the participants to learn from other conflict situations. Within the prisms, participants learned about different analytical approaches to conflicts, such as the analysis of the actors and escalation dynamics, forms of external intervention, asymmetries between conflict parties and their environments, isolation structures such as embargoes, the role of international organizations, peace and negotiation processes and both successful and unsuccessful solution models. In the context of these prisms, the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue has examined particular issues such as negotiation agreements (Workshops 1, 2 and 4), the role of international organizations (Workshop 2), constitutional issues (Workshop 4), refugee/IDP issues (Workshop 2) and economic sanctions (Workshop 3).

As a didactic concept, the prism aimed to impart knowledge about international instruments and conflict management regimes while encouraging the participants to stand aside from their own conflict situations and think in more general and abstract terms.

The prism concept, particularly when used at the beginning of an event, was intended to make it *easier* for the participants to enter into the dialogue. Focussing on another conflict defused the situation between participants as they did not feel confronted with the situation of having to discuss their conflict with the opposing party right from the outset. The focus was directed more towards the international and local experts from the crisis region under review. The dynamics which developed as a result of the various contributions and ensuing rounds of questions were more

like those of a conference or seminar. The participants generally possessed similar levels of knowledge of the relevant subject matter, thereby avoiding the development of significant asymmetries between them and enabling everyone to take on the roles of interested listeners and questioners.

Beside these advantages, the prism concept also posed certain didactic *challenges*. One line of argument that was regularly put forward in case study presentations was that the participants' own conflict formation is more complex than the one being presented and that the prism is therefore only applicable to their own situation to a (very) limited degree (Ropers, 2004, 267). It was striking, in this context, that developments in other conflicts that may be regarded as positive, de-escalating or promoting a solution were only acknowledged to a limited extent. Participants' response to the prospect of applying the positive dynamics of the case studies to their own situations tended to be restrained. It was precisely the dynamics presented in the case studies which have the potential to take conflict parties further than the participants have achieved in their own conflict formation that were often dismissed as unsuitable or trivial.

The scepticism towards and dismissal of these positive examples should not be interpreted as a lack of will on the part of the participants. However, they were faced with numerous difficulties and found it hard to discuss the political processes contained in the case studies on an emotional level or adequately assess events or processes in terms of their human *and* political significance. They were not familiar, for example, with the emotional aura surrounding a controversial politician such as Gerry Adams in the Northern Ireland context. They therefore could not evaluate the psychological *and* political obstacles that the actors in Northern Ireland had to overcome in order to accept Adams and Sinn Fein as a negotiating party and integrate them into the negotiation and peace process. They underestimated the obstacles that the parties had to surmount in order to develop new dynamics within stable conflict patterns, and tend to assume straight away that "successes" and new developments merely indicate a lack of complexity or even the absence of a problem.

Participants' criticism that the conflict presented in the case study could not be transferred wholly or in part to their own situation was used by facilitators as the basis for an interesting discussion about the comparability of political processes and the nature of conflict dynamics. It should be noted in this context that the "criticism" and "scepticism" mentioned are not usually shared by all participants equally. Some participants took the notion of "mutually reinforcing escalation dynamics" presented

in the lecture as a starting point for consideration of similar mechanisms in their own conflict history, for example. The debate enabled participants and facilitators to focus on abstract elements and dynamics in conflict systems. In this way, the debate progressed from the detailed factual level towards more abstract concepts of general conflict analysis.

Furthermore, whenever the complexity of the case study was unclear to participants, the facilitators and experts provided further information during the discussion. The presence of experts from the conflict region was very valuable: given the relevance of the conflict to their own lives, they were often able to identify the emotions associated with specific positive or negative developments.

The discussion about the relevance of conflicts foreign to the participants' own conflict situation takes place on many levels. The critical comments put forward by participants should be analysed constructively under the facilitators' guidance. The discussion can also facilitate an exchange about systematic or abstract conflict-relevant categories and terms. However, there is also a risk that participants will jump to conclusions, based on the argument that "if it didn't work in Cyprus, it won't work in Georgia", or "they were only able to reach a solution because it wasn't a very difficult problem".

Depoliticizing functions

Besides offering a *didactic concept*, the prism also had the function of *relativizing the political dimension* of the event. Even for an unofficial process such as the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue project which does not formulate any political demands in the external arena, it is nevertheless perceived and interpreted as a political process by the participants and their governments.

Depending on the degree of emphasis, the academic dynamics developed via the prism may overshadow the political dimension of the event. This applies to the individual participants on both sides and to the organizers, whose task is to invite the participants to the event and secure the political acceptance of the overall process with the appropriate governments.

The academic aspect of the process helped potential and actual participants to justify, within their social and political environments, their participation in a workshop which involved persons from the other / opposing side. This was particularly useful if the person came from a social context that tends to be sceptical towards, or rejects dialogue with, the other side. The academic dimension also

offered greater scope to the organizers as the nature of the overall event fluctuated between being a *seminar* and performing a *dialogue function*. This was not only an important element when approaching the participants and the relevant political authorities, but also in facilitating the seminar at a micro level.

Example: Depoliticization

A good example of the importance of the academic dimension, in terms of managing the overall process, was the first workshop (February 2000). The meeting was planned as a Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue workshop with the use of the Northern Ireland prism. For that reason, two elected politicians from Northern Ireland and one expert were invited to attend as speakers alongside the two facilitators.

When the Georgian delegation arrived in the morning, it brought the news that the Georgian State Minister who, after lengthy discussions, had given his consent for the meeting to take place, had been put under pressure by representatives of the “government-in-exile” to have one of their members participate in the workshop. They informed the organizers that the State Minister would, at his own expense, be sending one of his advisors to the workshop who was also a member of the “government-in-exile”.

The Abkhazian side, whose participants arrived in the afternoon, had made their participation in the event conditional on the absence of members of the “government-in-exile” at the workshop. The anticipated arrival of the latecomer presented a *fait accompli* to the participants and the organizers alike. All the participants were aware that the organizers bore no responsibility for this development; nonetheless, an extremely provocative situation loomed, particularly for the Abkhazian participants, threatening to derail the event before it had even begun.

The situation was defused after an agreement was reached with the participants and the ministries in Sukhumi and Tbilisi. A decision was taken to drop the dialogue element and, instead, to extend the prism, supplemented by presentations from the facilitators, e.g. on escalation dynamics in conflicts. In this way the dialogue workshop, in keeping with the situation, underwent an ad hoc transformation into an academic seminar and was defused politically. During the course of the “seminar”, two participants from Georgia also made “academic contributions” on Georgian foreign policy, while the Abkhazian participants declined to make a presentation. The workshop concluded with the participants recommending the retention of the prism as an interesting element and requesting the opportunity for dialogue at the next meeting.

Example: Personal profile

The *depoliticization via academization* strategy was only one of the components that prevented the derailment of the event before it had even started. The personal profile of the expected “government-in-exile” representative was also important. He was known to be a critic of the political group within the “government-in-exile” that stood for a return of IDPs / refugees by force. Moreover, he was a well-known and respected doctor before the war: in fact, he was actually better known within the Abkhazian group than among the Georgian group of participants. If the anticipated latecomer had been an aggressive representative of the “government-in-exile”, it would have been much more complicated for the Abkhazian participants to have accepted the conversion of the dialogue workshop into a seminar. This example shows how closely *categorization* and *personal profile* are linked and how the organizers are able to increase the scope by combining the correct strategy and including people with favourable personal profiles. In this example, taken from the first workshop, it was purely a matter of luck⁴⁹ that the person who turned up was not unanimously rejected by the Abkhazian group on account of his personal profile, and that the strategy of depoliticization could be implemented.

The prism concept with its didactic dimension and relativizing features has proved to be an essential component in the *creation and management of the process*. By giving advance notice of the case studies, the political character of the workshop was given a kind of shifting ambiguity in the run-up to the event which was very useful, particularly in the Abkhazian context. Announcing the components of the case studies and the experts to be invited enabled the team to defuse a politically very sensitive situation without causing any loss of face for themselves or the participants. The prism concept was therefore a very fitting tool to depoliticize the project as a whole in its initial phase. Provided that the team possesses sufficient expertise, the prism can be used on an ad hoc basis to defuse politically critical situations. Moreover, its didactic function of encouraging the participants to engage in self-reflection can be increased by means of targeted contextualization.

In terms of the overall project, the prism concept has also proved to be an important element in the recruitment of the facilitator team. For example, Clem McCartney’s expertise in Northern Ireland and Oliver Wolleh’s expertise on the Cyprus case were conducive to their role as facilitators. With Norbert Ropers’ expertise in Sri

⁴⁹ Although it seemed to be a matter of “luck”, it may also have been the outcome of a political strategy by the Georgian State Minister, who sent someone whose presence was a provocation for the Abkhazian participants but whose personal profile was acceptable to them.

Lanka, this meant that the team of facilitators possessed considerable ad hoc expertise across a range of conflicts.

In the sixth workshop (December 2001), the prism concept was no longer used as a case study presented by external experts and announced in advance. This can be seen as an indicator of the increasing political acceptance and establishment of the process as a whole. The relativization of the political nature of the dialogue meetings is no longer as necessary as in the start-up phase of the process.

4.2 The contextualized conflict prism

The key prerequisites for discontinuing the use of the prism concept were the *improved political acceptance* of the process, the *broad range of expertise* among the extended team on the three conflict regions (Northern Ireland, Cyprus and Sri Lanka) and the routine resulting from the facilitation team's experiences of the workshops. Now that the prism was no longer being used to promote dialogue, the entire workshop was given over to direct discussion of Georgian-Abkhazian relations.

Case studies continued to be a formative element of the dialogue despite the withdrawal of the pre-announced conflict prisms that lasted a couple of days. The dialogue process was occasionally supplemented by ad hoc presentations on the conflicts used as examples, but the input generally focused on the *current theme* of the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue. Presentations were consequently much shorter and more specific in terms of subject matter than those in the original prism concept. In this case, an important element of the input, unlike that in the prisms, was its contextualization for the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict and the group.

Contextualizing a case study for the audience was a way of lending it a didactic focus, affording the participants an increased awareness of developments in other conflict systems that go beyond their own experiences. One possible method of contextualization was to create analogies to the Georgian-Abkhazian context and make explicit references to developments and persons in the conflict that caused a similar emotional and political stimulus/response pattern. Staying with the Northern Irish example, the Georgian or Abkhazian "Gerry Adams" could be identified to enable the participants to experience the emotional and political conditions that existed in Northern Ireland.

Contextualization should ensure that the participants have an emotional understanding of the difficult conditions faced by the parties when attempting to develop a new dynamic. If this forming of an emotional bridge to the group is successful, it is possible that scepticism and trivialization may give way to a moment of revelation. The group will start to become interested in the question why people were prepared to overcome these difficulties and in their motives for trying to create new dynamics in their conflict system. It then becomes the task of the facilitators to induce the group to reflect on their own conditions, analyse stagnating dynamics and discuss ways to overcome them.

Example: Contextualization

A wonderful and particularly exciting example of contextualization occurred in Workshop 9 (November 2002). Besides the Georgian-Abkhazian negotiation process – a process that was regarded as having lost its way, if not actually at an impasse – the group had been studying the various dynamics that had developed in real political terms and through a cooperative political approach. For the following day, the team decided to give three short presentations on the development of negotiation dynamics in politically deadlocked situations, using the examples of Cyprus, Sri Lanka and Northern Ireland.

The talk on Northern Ireland showed the development of the dynamics from the first contacts between John Hume and Gerry Adams via the informal and secret Adams-Hume statement through to the Downing Street Declaration and finally the Good Friday Agreement. The presentation used mapping, in the form of actor mapping and a sociogram, to visually portray the different governments and actors. A dynamic and complicated process was summarized compactly and illustrated visually in this presentation.

This was an impressive presentation but the author was sceptical, wondering: “And how are we supposed to show what this has to do with our problem?” for up to that point, there had been no attempt at contextualization and it had become clear that the talk was at an end. The speaker, Clem McCartney, then turned to various participants on both sides and assigned them positions within the visual presentation, since they occupied similar positions, in their political contexts, to people in the Northern Ireland dynamics contained in the presentation. Almost as soon as he finished, Jonathan Cohen supplemented the diagram by highlighting further applications to the Georgian-Abkhazian context, thus showing how politically controversial parties were involved in the negotiation system. Literally at the last minute, two contextualization methods were used simultaneously, thereby clarifying the emotional conditions of this political process for the whole group and showing some of those present, implicitly but also very clearly, which processes they could initiate responsibly in the transformation of their conflict.

Concentrating on several ethnopolitical conflicts and retaining these case studies in the dialogue phase of the overall process has created a positive and exciting concept. It is evident that some of the participants' knowledge of the relevant conflicts has increased markedly over the course of the project. Of course, this is not only due to the discussion of the conflicts throughout the process. Not only have the participants acquired knowledge via personal initiatives; the facilitators have also recommended literature to the participants, or supplied them with documents and background information. The facilitators have also given several presentations on Northern Ireland and Cyprus in Georgia and Abkhazia. In the case of Northern Ireland, a Georgian-Abkhazian visiting programme has been organized by Conciliation Resources since 2002, enabling more than 50 politicians and civic leaders, including a number of participants, to learn about the peace process and the political and social conditions in Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom through site visits.

Retaining the case studies as a permanent component of the dialogue process has encouraged the participants to take an interest in the changes taking place within these conflict formations. When the Cyprus conflict was introduced into the process in November 2000, it represented a rigid and static conflict system that in many ways mirrored the conditions in the Georgian-Abkhazian situation. The publication of the first version of the Annan Plan on Cyprus triggered a fundamental change in the entire conflict constellation. The agreement of the Northern Cypriots to a federal system was and still is an example that stimulates analysis and reflection for both Georgians and Abkhazians and, in particular, gives the team the opportunity to discuss changes in dynamics and potential solution models.

The breadth of expertise of the facilitation team has proved invaluable and enables the team to introduce topical inputs into the process on an ad hoc basis. When the dialogue phase started, even those team members who initially had no experience of the Georgian-Abkhazian situation acquired additional expertise that enabled them to implement appropriate and effective contextualizations for the participants. The extended expertise of the team also has budgetary consequences as the fee and accommodation costs for external experts no longer have to be paid. This form of expert input is linked to the element of *rolling planning* as it allows the interests, trends and resistances within the overall group to be accommodated.

4.3 Processes of learning and change

Informal dialogue projects such as the Georgian-Abkhazian project are founded on the basic assumption that the micro-level of the project, i.e. the meeting and interaction of the participants and the process they experience, may contribute to the reframing of the conflict at macro-level and complement the official negotiation process. Given that 13 workshops have taken place, comprising around 77 days of discussion and dialogue, the challenge is how to give the reader a clear insight into the dynamics of the micro-process. Using four selected *examples*, this chapter is intended to show what happens during the process and illustrate the learning and change processes that the participants undergo.

Herbert Kelman identifies four components that are affected within an *interactive problem-solving* process and also form part of the official negotiation system. These are: identifying the problem, joint shaping of ideas for a solution, influencing the other side and creating a supportive political environment (Kelman, 1996, 107). This means that the parties must have a shared understanding of the nature of the conflict in order to arrive at an integrative (official) negotiation process. The official negotiation level aims to achieve a formal solution to the problem in which the idea of a mutually satisfactory solution is embedded, despite all possible moves towards the use of power-based instruments. In this context, the *noncommittal* interaction to identify potential solutions is a part of every negotiation process, even if this takes place in unofficial sub-processes. For Kelman, influencing the other side means influencing both the *outcome* of the negotiations and the negotiation *process*. Here, informal dialogue offers a forum in which the methods used by the parties to influence the other side are reflected on and the chain of effects generated (action – reaction – counter-reaction) is discussed. Last but not least, all negotiations should be based on the assumption by all parties that positive results can be achieved and that the process is therefore largely supported by their own communities.

The examples presented here will give the reader an idea of the way in which the effect of the informal dialogue project develops in all four components. The fact that these components are part of the official negotiation system and thus part of the macro-political process does not mean that the dynamics described here have already become evident on the macro-political level.

4.3.1 Example 1: Aggression and mutual deadlock

Experiences and perceptions of violence and the functionality of aggression play an important role in the way in which the parties conceptualize the conflict and blockade each other. On the Abkhazian side, the memories of the 1992/93 war are still very vivid. Almost every family has suffered in some way as a result of the war. All the battles were fought within Abkhazia itself and their destructive effects are felt by many Abkhazians in their everyday lives. According to Georgian views, it is, above all, the forced expulsion of people from Abkhazia that stands out as the main act of violence. The banishment of the IDPs is seen by many Georgians as a permanent aggressive human rights violation perpetrated by the Abkhazian side.

Besides these *experiences of violence* related to the past, various opinions exist about potential future *expectations of violence*. For example, no-one assumes that Abkhazia poses a serious military threat in the form of a potential Abkhazian attack on Georgia. By contrast, it is less clear whether a serious military threat to Abkhazia by Georgia can be ruled out completely. Although, during the project phase, Georgia was classified (by Georgians and Abkhazians alike) as a state which lacked the capability to resort to a military option, it became clear that it could well evolve into a powerful military opponent if its army were modernized. The fear of this threat and the associated insecurities of many Abkhazians therefore have more to do with future possibilities than to the current situation.

From an Abkhazian perspective, the general security situation is regarded as unstable and problematic, and therefore poses a major and immediate problem. Since the end of the war in 1993, the Abkhazians have been confronted time and again with sporadic outbreaks of violence. Reference is often made in this context to the events of 1998 in the Gali region or the Kodori crisis in October 2001. Moreover, violent clashes often occur in the border region, supposedly involving Georgian armed groups such as the “Forest Brothers” or the “White Legion” (Mindorashvili, 2001; Shonia, 2003). For the Abkhazians, these clashes are often tantamount to “low intensity warfare” with Georgia. The Georgian government is said to tolerate the partisans or even to support them clandestinely.

Within the dialogue workshops, therefore, a key demand frequently put to the Georgian participants is to adopt a declaration renouncing the threat or use of force, if possible supplemented by security guarantees, and thus put an end to the activities of the Georgian violent actors. If Georgia adopts this declaration, the Abkhazian reasoning runs, its implementation should be underpinned by

international guarantees from the UN Security Council which, if necessary, would allow a peace enforcement intervention in order to curb aggression. A frequent argument is that without a declaration of non-violence from Georgia, there will be no opportunity to find political common ground at negotiation level.

In contrast, the Georgian participants generally deny any direct or indirect participation by the Georgian state in these violent clashes. Instead, the problem is regarded as the outcome of the deadlocked negotiation situation, which is perceived as especially frustrating by the IDP community from which the "partisans" are recruited. Under the current circumstances, with no prospect of serious negotiations on the issue of IDP return, the Georgian government lacks the military capability to curb the partisans' activities.⁵⁰ So the counter-demand generally advanced by the Georgian participants is that the Abkhazians should resume serious negotiations or propose a plan to allow IDP return to take place. An unconditional renunciation of violence by the Georgians, they argue, would take no account of the political dynamics and, with no movement on key issues, would inevitably be doomed to failure.

These are two very different basic perceptions of the way in which this situation, often described by members of both sides as a deadlock, can be dynamized. On the Georgian side there is the belief that the Abkhazians must be put under pressure in order to agree to a negotiation process that at least recognises key matters of concern to the Georgians. Behind this is the major concern that a militarily stable situation would be unilaterally advantageous to the Abkhazian side and would simply reinforce the country's division. What chance would the Georgians then have of moving the Abkhazian side towards serious negotiations on the return of the IDPs? Trade restrictions alone are not enough in this context.

On the Abkhazian side, the start of a political process and the development of a trust-building relationship depend on the political will of the Georgian government to give *unconditional* support to a political resolution of the conflict. Participants on both sides often point out that their ideas and opinions are deeply embedded in the political convictions of their respective peoples.

The contrast described above forms a key theme in practically every dialogue workshop and has prompted numerous discussions. Moreover, the supposedly

⁵⁰ Under the new Georgian president, M. Saakashvili, the strategy for dealing with the armed Georgian groups has changed fundamentally. These groups were disarmed soon after he was sworn in as president. See *Civil Georgia*, 11 February 2004; *Civil Georgia*, 2 February 2004.

typical Georgian argument outlined above has never been an entirely uncontentious issue within the Georgian group of participants. Throughout the dialogue, an alternative point of view has become increasingly prevalent among Georgian participants, coming close to the Abkhazian approach in many crucial aspects. According to this view, the conflict situation ultimately reinforces the division of Georgia. Violent clashes have stirred up resentment, particularly in the Abkhazian population, and strengthened the stereotypical view of Georgia as the enemy. The initiation of a negotiation process, especially one which involves discussion of serious models for IDP return, seems unlikely in these circumstances. According to this theory, the conflict situation, regardless of whether it was brought about deliberately or is tolerated, will ultimately lead to the loss of Abkhazia and must therefore be ended. Only the credible renunciation of violence by Georgia can open up a political process in which the Georgians can attempt to assert their interests. According to the view of some Georgian participants, the “we will give something when we get something in return” scenario should give way to “we will give and then we will generate a political process”.

This development has meant that the discussions about the functionality of violence have become noticeably more nuanced. Moreover, the views expressed can no longer be attributed unequivocally to Abkhazian or Georgian speakers. Nonetheless, it is difficult to assess what it means for participants on the two sides to discover that they are starting to hold similar viewpoints on key issues.

Furthermore, as the Georgians’ reflections on the functionality of armed conflict become more pluralistic, it has become more feasible for the Abkhazian participants to review their positions. Faced with external threat and isolation, the Abkhazians tend to adopt a defensive stance. They try to withstand the pressure while taking the view that “the ball is in the Georgian court”. A common reaction is that the Abkhazians only need to become engaged when Georgia has fully renounced violence. The changing breadth of discussion on the Georgian side has enabled facilitators to encourage the Abkhazian participants to think of measures that could be taken on their side to support and strengthen the alternative discourse within Georgia and for them to explore whether or not this is in their interest.

For the participants, this at least suggests that there is such a thing as a mutually and positively reinforcing pattern of interaction. The discussion thus stimulates an interdependent understanding of relations and politics that is no longer solely based on the action models of the school of realism but also takes account of

more idealistic approaches. Such dynamics open up opportunities for introducing unilateral and reciprocal trust-building models and offer a basis for reflecting on strategy.

4.3.2 Example 2: Trust-destroying rhetoric

Comments from politicians that are perceived as aggressive and threatening are regularly discussed within the dialogue. These discussions form part of the overall question of how trust-building processes can be developed between the parties, and which processes and events have the effect of destroying trust. Analysing current political statements that have become contentious can offer the participants an insight into the other side's patterns of perception and creates opportunities for self-reflection. In order to improve the quality of communication, the facilitators can even go as far as to introduce, into small group discussions, specific recommendations for action for politicians, e.g. the president.

The asymmetry between the parties' fears of potential threats is reflected in the discussions on trust-destroying rhetoric. Within the *process as a whole*, it is predominantly the Abkhazian participants who repeatedly give examples of statements that they perceive to be aggressive.

The following situation, selected as an example, was discussed and analysed during Workshop 13 and relates to a statement made by Georgian President Saakashvili, who was visiting a group of IDPs and enquired about their living conditions. When taking his leave, he turned to one of them, took off his watch and gave it to him with the words: "This watch runs on a battery that lasts for a maximum of two years. I promise you that you will be back home in Abkhazia before it stops."⁵¹

This statement was interpreted as hostile and aggressive by the Abkhazian side and considered to be an indicator that the new Georgian president either intends to pursue a solution involving force or is in principle inclined to use force to resolve the issue of IDP / refugee return. The message received by the Abkhazian side is that the president is not prepared to enter into an indefinite and – in terms of content – open negotiation process. Instead, a promise of a total and imminent mass return to Abkhazia was made over the heads of the Abkhazians. This time period of two years appears to be breathtakingly short and completely unrealistic in view of the

⁵¹ Whether this anecdote took place exactly as described here is not significant. The main issue is to consider the patterns of interpretations of the Abkhazian and Georgian participants and the ways in which they relate to one another.

Abkhazians' security concerns about a mass return of IDPs / refugees and the enormous gap in trust between the parties, closing which would require a substantial change in relations. To the Abkhazian observer, all these aspects indicate that President Saakashvili is not moving towards a political process aimed at achieving a mutual agreement.

In the Georgian interpretation, the meeting between the president and the IDPs is an internal political process that is primarily aimed at signalling the president's willingness to give his personal support to the interests of the IDPs. The primary recipient of the message was the IDP / refugee community and the second was the wider Georgian population. No mention was made of the negotiation process and no indication was made that the government was prepared to use force. The supposedly aggressive content of the message, indeed, the apparent introduction of a military operation into the equation, is generally not recognised.

Many Georgian participants consider that they are highly sensitive to the way in which Abkhazians think and feel. However, experience has shown that in general, very many of the interpretations offered by the Georgians are not shared by the Abkhazians. When confronted with Abkhazian interpretations, Georgian participants often react with irritation and a lack of understanding. The ability to view matters from an Abkhazian perspective and therefore to anticipate Abkhazian patterns of interpretation causes difficulties for many Georgian participants.

Analysing events and statements perceived as offensive by the Abkhazians opens up diverse learning opportunities for both parties. The Georgians are made aware, from the Abkhazian responses, that their statements – regardless of whether the message is directly related to the Abkhazian question – have been registered by the Abkhazian side and interpreted in terms of the relationship between the two parties. Given the weak relationship between the two sides and the limited exchange of information, it is very difficult for Georgian politicians to recognize the Abkhazian population as a recipient of their communications at all.⁵²

Analogous to the phrase coined by Paul Watzlawick “one cannot not communicate” (Watzlawick, et al., 2000), this means, in effect, that Georgian politicians cannot say anything without Abkhazian political observers relating it to themselves or to the Abkhazian question. The knowledge that they are constantly being monitored by the Abkhazians should make Georgian politicians, who generally

only feel a responsibility towards their own voters, more aware of the scope of their impact and responsibilities.

By jointly analysing political rhetoric and symbolic gestures, the participants gain an insight into the internal logic of Abkhazian patterns of interpretation. It is difficult for Georgians to recognise this under the current political conditions as the Abkhazian public reaction to Georgian politics is overwhelmingly negative. A Georgian participant once described this as follows: “There is mistrust between us, and the Abkhazians see us as their enemies. It does not matter, therefore, what we Georgian politicians say, as it will always be perceived as a hostile statement by the Abkhazians.” The informal dialogue enables the Abkhazians to interpret their perceptions in different ways and even critical reactions and rejections can be evaluated. This includes identifying public figures in Georgia who, in Abkhazian eyes, have not made any threatening statements and therefore possess some degree of credibility in Abkhazia. Such aspects can therefore be used to show that the statements of Georgian politicians need not be categorically dismissed as negative and that there may be different ways for the Abkhazians to assess the seriousness and credibility of Georgian politicians. The observation process to which Georgian politicians are subjected must include recognising when a person distances him/herself from obviously aggressive statements made by colleagues, criticizes them or demands an apology for an unreasonable statement. During the process, it has become apparent that some participating Georgian politicians are now more conscious of the Abkhazian population when making public statements.⁵³ The Abkhazians also learn that the messages interpreted by them as trust-destroying were not intended as such by the Georgian side. The discussions and analyses of the rhetoric used by both sides could thus contribute directly to creating the improved political environment that is needed to make negotiations possible.

⁵² For further examples of the limitations and conflict-related obstacles that influence the information-processing system of the conflict parties, see Kelman, 1992, 87 ff.

⁵³ Interview with a Georgian participant.

4.3.3 Example 3: Freedom of movement and dependence

During 2002, it emerged that the process by which Abkhazians would be issued with Russian passports was intensifying. This development was discussed several times within the framework of the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue, both before and after the passports began to be issued.⁵⁴

The documents available to the Abkhazians were Russian passports, which were issued upon expiry of their existing Soviet passports. The Russian passports identified the Abkhazian holder as a Russian citizen. Abkhazians also possess Abkhazian passports issued by the Republic of Abkhazia that identify the holder as an Abkhazian citizen. This type of passport is not recognised at international level and cannot be used for international travel.⁵⁵ In mid-May 2004, it was assumed that around 80% of Abkhazian citizens were in possession of a Russian passport.⁵⁶

From the Georgian perspective, the issuance of Russian passports is an extremely worrying development that indicates the increasing *de facto* integration of Abkhazia into the Russian Federation and is consequently perceived as a further threat to the territorial integrity of Georgia. In the Georgians' view, the Abkhazians are citizens of the Republic of Georgia who have now been granted the status of Russian citizens; they argue that despite the official declarations of respect for the territorial integrity of Georgia, Russia is again demonstrating whose side it is on. This is a setback to the strategy of isolating Abkhazia internationally, and the reintroduction of the freedom to travel has reduced the general pressure on the Abkhazian side.

In contrast, the Abkhazians generally view the acquisition of Russian passports as a pragmatic step that gives them the freedom to travel in this current period of non-recognition of their state. (Indeed, for many as important as the freedom to travel is the right to receive a Russian pension.) They believe that if the goal of international recognition for the Republic of Abkhazia is achieved, the Russian passports will be withdrawn and replaced by Abkhazian ones. With Russian support, the Abkhazians are able to break through a key element of the general isolation

⁵⁴ On the issuing of passports, see Khashig, 27 June 2002; Khashig, 14 August 2002.

⁵⁵ This arrangement raises many legal questions that will not be considered here. The formal basis of the agreement between Russia and the Abkhazians is unclear.

⁵⁶ This assessment was made by an Abkhazian participant during Workshop 13. A similar figure was quoted in the NZZ article „Chaotische Präsidentenwahl in Abchasien: Pannen bei der Auszählung – Ruf nach Wiederholung“, *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 5/6 October 2004.

structure and expand the personal freedom of every citizen. This is therefore a visible success in the government's efforts to increase the self-determination of the Abkhazians. In this sense, the fact that the Abkhazians have regained the freedom to travel has strengthened the legitimacy of the Abkhazian government and state and reasserted Abkhazia's independence vis-à-vis Georgia.

Comparing both these typical patterns of interpretation clarifies the thinking in terms of "win-lose" scenarios. The Georgian side perceives this development as being a Russian and Abkhazian "success", strengthening their positions and consequently weakening the Georgian position. This assessment is shared by some Abkhazian representatives.

In the informal dialogue, however, opinions are voiced on the Abkhazian side that put a different slant on the issue, with a less clear-cut effect on the "Abkhazian scorecard". Abkhazian participants also mention their concern that the regained freedom to travel may go hand in hand with increased dependence on Russia and can therefore only be perceived as an example of growing Abkhazian self-determination to a limited extent. In general, the increasing dominance of Russia is apparent within Abkhazia and the highly symbolic issue of passports and citizenship is only one example among many. The Russian commitment, regardless of the positive effects of freedom of travel, is also perceived as a problematical process that may, in the end, undermine Abkhazian independence and identity. Georgians can appreciate this interpretation with all its nuances as it indicates a stance that is critical of Russia; it is therefore a connecting factor. During the joint analysis of the processes leading to the issuing of Russian passports, a whole range of Georgian assumptions on the structure and dynamics of the overall conflict were (implicitly) called into question and set against alternative concepts.

One widely-held assumption amongst the Georgian political elite is that Abkhazia was predominantly ruled by Russia and had been controlled from afar as an instrument of Russian politics since the start of the conflict. According to this interpretation, the true nature of the Abkhazian problem is that it is a Russian-Georgian dispute and results from an attempt by Russia to undermine the independence of the Georgian nation.

In line with this interpretation of the conflict, Georgians generally have only a limited awareness that the Abkhazians, as a nation, regard their struggle for independence as a serious political matter. The "Abkhazian vision of independence" is largely interpreted by the Georgians as a pretext aimed at concealing the desire of

the Abkhazian elite to make a pact with Russia. From a Georgian point of view, the postulated heteronomy of the Abkhazians and the absence of a serious political motive indicate that identifying a comprehensive solution through negotiation is of secondary importance to the Abkhazians. Rather, the “key” or “keys” to the solution of the Abkhazian question are said to lie in Moscow. It is assumed that Russia possesses the power and competence to bring about a comprehensive solution and, as a result, a large part of Georgia’s political attention is directed towards Moscow rather than Sukhumi(i).

By contrast, the Abkhazians present themselves as independent actors within the framework of the dialogue, who possess an independent political vision that is embedded within their population, and who are concerned about their independence, not only vis-à-vis Georgia but also Russia. A growing dependence on Russia is perceived as problematic as this would, in the long term, constitute a threat to Abkhazian identity. Moreover, Russia’s greater scope to exert influence within Abkhazia is interpreted as a consequence of Georgia’s politics of isolation. To whom, if not Russia, should Abkhazians turn in their current isolation which, to a large degree, was brought about by Georgia? How should the Abkhazians travel, if not with Russian passports? Seen in this light, closer relations with Russia are not so much a natural alliance as a “marriage of convenience” in the absence of any other alternative. Who else, they ask, will support Abkhazian interests in the long term?

The Abkhazians’ desire to maintain their independence vis-à-vis Russia accentuates their long-term political aim of independence and allows them to be seen as actors with their own political ideas. The concerns voiced about the growing trend towards “Russification” lend credibility to the assumption that forms of “Georgianization” are and have been perceived as just as problematic. The goal of self-determination does not appear to be a meaningless pseudo-issue. Even if the Abkhazians do not deny some measure of closeness and dependence on Russia, it is clear that they do not want this to increase just yet. This indicates that the Abkhazians see themselves as having a certain power vis-à-vis Russia as well. The Abkhazians respond to the Georgian hypothesis that “the key lies in Moscow” with the counter-theory that any solution would have to be endorsed by a majority of the Abkhazian population. As the Abkhazians understand it, the nature of the conflict lies in the feared dominance by the Georgian side and the associated threat to their identity as an ethnic group. In their isolated position, the problem of the Abkhazian loss of identity arises also in relation to Russia as a “protective power”.

This opens up the prospect of emancipation from Russia becoming a *joint element* that *connects both parties*. Moreover, the disclosure of the Abkhazian desire for separation from Russia contains an (indirect) appeal to the Georgian side to refrain from carrying out those actions that could increase Abkhazian dependence on Russia and, in turn, Russian influence on Abkhazia. In this pattern of interpretation, the strategy of isolating Abkhazia appears to be effective, albeit not in the way it was originally intended by the Georgian side. Isolation does not increase the pressure on Abkhazia to submit to a solution scenario that fulfils the key Georgian demands; instead, it causes the Abkhazians to turn increasingly towards Russia.

What emerges is a re-evaluation of the entire situation. A situation which originally appeared to be a clear Abkhazian victory and Georgian defeat now shows at least some recognizable elements of a “lose-lose” situation. The Georgians are becoming aware that their strategy of isolating Abkhazia has some undesired side-effects. Moreover, the Georgian approach is putting pressure on the relationship with the Abkhazians, who perceive isolation as a form of warfare by other means. The Abkhazians also realize that the status quo is increasing processes of dependence.

The reframing of the conflict described here and the analysis of new systems of interrelated effects in current politics encourages cooperative thinking.

Example: Dialogue sequence on the identification of problems and the initial search for solutions

In one small mixed group facilitated by the author, the issue of the Abkhazians' freedom of movement and the Russian passports was discussed. The Abkhazian participants made it very clear how their freedom of movement was being curtailed, the worrying outcome being closer relations with Russia. One Georgian participant, visibly moved and reacting to the appeal implied in the presentation, tried to find a solution to the Abkhazians' problem. “You could simply use Georgian passports” was his spontaneous and apparently sincere suggestion. “That is not possible”, replied one of the Abkhazians. “Why not?” asked the speaker, surprised. “It would reduce your dependence on Russia”. “Of course it would”, answered the Abkhazian, “but you are forgetting that you are the enemy.”

This example provides an insight into the intensive forms that the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue can take. The Georgian participant stated at the end of the working group that for the first time, he began to “understand” the Abkhazian constraints. This shows how moments of understanding and the emerging “joint recognition of the problem” evolve into attempts to find a solution.

The apparently serious suggestion made by the Georgian participant – namely to use Georgian passports in order to reduce the dependence on Russia – could indeed be a possible model for a solution to the problem of the Abkhazians' growing dependence on Russia. However, as this would mean that the Abkhazians would then be acting as “citizens of Georgia”, this option is rejected, and the Abkhazian participant politely reminds the Georgians that they are the enemies.

The examples given in this chapter are intended to give the reader an insight into how the loss of trust could be made apparent to the participants in the informal dialogue. This created a basis on which to discuss the significance of trust as a factor in transforming the overall situation. To put it another way: is trust-building relevant to the parties in transforming the status quo?

4.3.4 Example 4: the status quo and evaluations of its transformation

The conflict between the parties not only concerns their goals; it also includes the process of conflict transformation. For many people, “lack of trust” and “loss of trust” are generally not positive concepts. Consequently, trust-building is posited as a useful, indeed a necessary process in order to transform a deadlocked conflict situation. The informal dialogue makes it clear how differently the parties view the deadlocked status quo. At the same time, they have very different ideas of when trust-building measures are justified and which precise form they should take. Despite these divergent evaluations and views, potential options for action can emerge which can be explored in the informal dialogue.

The Georgians usually perceive the general macropolitical situation as “stagnant”, “frozen” or “deadlocked”, which they attribute to the Abkhazian rejection of the Boden document and the resultant stalemate in the official negotiation process. The situation is seen as *frustrating* as no recognizable process has been put in place to safeguard the territorial integrity of Georgia or the return of the IDPs.

In the prevailing Georgian stance, trust-building initiatives are not essentially a strategy intended to revive the negotiation process, but rather a *reaction* to a positive and necessary move by the Abkhazian side. The Georgians had generally hoped that this positive step would be the start of serious negotiations on the basis of the Boden document. Only when negotiations have commenced and a recognizable political process has emerged to settle the conflict, can conciliatory trust-building measures be initiated. This includes a binding renunciation of the use of force as a means of

conflict settlement. The abandonment of the politics of isolation, e.g. the embargo, would also be linked to the return of the IDPs, including to places outside the Gali region. In this sense, the trust-building measures are part of a *quid-pro-quo* logic. There is no real awareness that trust-building can be a *proactive* process that need not be linked to any conditions and that can aid the general development of relations.

On the Abkhazian side, the description of the situation as “deadlocked” is not disputed. The content of the Boden document excludes the Abkhazians’ central position from the start, namely the attainment of *de jure* recognition. It is therefore seen as a unilateral UN measure in favour of Georgia and is rejected as a basis for the negotiation process. For the Abkhazians, the revival of negotiations is linked to a negotiation process that is open in terms of outcome. The deadlocked situation is perceived as quite positive on the Abkhazian side. The status quo with its *de facto* independence is presented as a move towards the realization of the political goal of *de jure* independence.

The Georgians’ frequent understanding of trust-building measures as part of a *quid-pro-quo* logic, i.e. a reaction to a negotiating process that is progressing positively, contrasts with the Abkhazian counter-demand that a revival of the negotiation process is only possible if recognizable reconciliation gestures are made by the Georgian side *in advance*.

This includes demands for Georgia to distance itself explicitly from the 1992/93 war, renounce the use of force on a credible basis and / or ease or end Abkhazia's political and economic isolation.

The *status quo* and the further consequences of its long-term preservation were the subject of analysis and discussion on several occasions. This in-depth analysis gives the participants the opportunity to reflect on the future development phases of their societies and place the predicted scenarios in the context of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict situation. Participants reflect on the long-term costs of perpetuating the status quo. An awareness of the anticipated costs raises the question, for each party, whether – and if so, how – changes could benefit their own side and which appeals for change could be made to the other side. Again, it is the differences within the parties which may be of particular interest and stimulate fresh discussions. During the dialogue process, two divergent evaluation patterns emerged on the Abkhazian side as regards the long-term consequences of maintaining the status quo.

Within the Abkhazian group of participants, definite differences are apparent in the assessments of how the conflict and the associated embargo may affect the development of a democratic Abkhazia. It is predominantly the representatives of the political and social opposition movements who are sensitive to the question of the (political) price of preserving the status quo. Whilst the Abkhazian government and its followers primarily use the embargo situation to explain Abkhazia's poor economic development, certain people in the opposition camp identify other causes for this. They criticize the tendency of the government to use the embargo situation as an excuse for economic mistakes. In their view, the conflict situation with Georgia is obstructing the internal political debate on the formation of a democratic Abkhazian state. The dispute with Georgia is therefore creating a public environment that facilitates measures that obstruct democracy.

One can therefore speak of two basic trends within Abkhazia during 2000-2004. Those close to the government assume that the preservation of the status quo is *slowing down* Abkhazia's political and economic development but not *obstructing* it. Both the "siege" situation, as perceived by the public, and the clear image of Georgia as the enemy increase the internal cohesion of Abkhazian society and leaves the government rather less open to attack from any form of internal opposition in times of permanent threat. The assumption is that the longer the negotiation process is drawn out, the more likely it will be that the problem of IDP return will ease as a result of migration, resettlement and death. The status quo is therefore not seen as (negative) stagnation at all but as a dynamic process that is strengthening the *de facto* independence of Abkhazia. The non-existence of trust-building measures on the Georgian side is therefore not regarded as a problem that threatens the key political goal, namely independence for Abkhazia. In this sense, "time is working" for the Abkhazian cause.

In contrast, government critics maintain that the right of self-determination of the Abkhazian people must be primarily realized in a democratic state. One important difference, however, is the sensitivity of the government critics to the consequences of the conflict for Abkhazia's long-term democratization. In this case, the perpetuation of the status quo is viewed as a possible threat to the key political goal, i.e. a democratic and independent Abkhazian polity. From this perspective, it is not clear whether time really is working for the Abkhazian cause. An easing of relations could bring about more options for action in the internal political debate in Abkhazia on the formation of an independent state and polity.

For the Georgian participants, this opens up interesting distinctions regarding the long-term political goals, as well as different assessments of the framework conditions in which the desired goals can be achieved. However, the differences should not obscure the fact that there is substantial common ground across the entire political spectrum within the Abkhazian camp.

In the face of the current trust gap and trust-destroying processes, to show flexibility in dealings with Georgia in these circumstances appears completely absurd to all Abkhazian politicians. The view on the Abkhazian side, clearly evident across all political spectrums, is that the dynamics to revive Georgian-Abkhazian relations should, to a large degree, come from the Georgians. “The ball is in the Georgian court” is a widely-used phrase.

The Abkhazians’ frequent demand to the Georgians is therefore that they should end Abkhazia’s international isolation. Only then, it is argued, could the Abkhazians respond positively. At the same time, differing views are emerging within the Abkhazian camp on how these possible measures by Georgian could tie in with democracy-building within Abkhazia itself.

For the Georgian participants, the dialogue process affords an insight into the plurality of opinion existing within the Abkhazian political elite and society. This offers clues about the interdependence of political processes on both sides of the conflict. Which activities and strategies could encourage a positive reaction from Abkhazia and thus bring movement to a situation that is regarded as deadlocked?

At the same time, analysing hypothetical trust-building initiatives by the Georgians shows the Abkhazians that this is an extremely sensitive issue. There is no willingness on the part of the Georgian population and public opinion to agree to generous trust-building measures that could be interpreted as “giving in” to the Abkhazian side. Various measures could be explored, in terms of their domestic impact, in more detailed analyses and discussions.

4.3.5 Conclusions

The effect of dialogue on the directly-involved participants – in terms of changes in their attitudes or behaviour – is complex and is difficult to observe and verify. Using four problems discussed within the framework of the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue, this chapter has shown the fundamental differences in the basic assumptions, attitudes and patterns of interpretation of the members of both parties.

Without exaggerating, it can be said that there is a clash of two very different worlds of thought here.

The informal dialogue affords an insight into the perceptions of the other side and creates space for a mutual comparison of viewpoints together with an interactive and analytical approach to the inter-dependent dynamics. The direct meetings and discussions can make the Georgian participants aware of the Abkhazians' deep and fundamental loss of trust in them. The dialogue process leaves little room for the assumption that there is an element of trust in the relationship. The war, a key event in the Abkhazian perception, has led to a largely negative assessment of the overall relationship.

Besides the very extensive loss of trust, the dialogue shows that current relations between the Georgians and Abkhazians are characterized by a whole range of trust-destroying processes. Examples of this are the latent readiness to use force, the aggressively perceived rhetoric (Example 2) and all the processes and omissions that are interpreted by the Abkhazians as part of the Georgian politics of isolation (Example 3). With the increasing awareness of the depth and extent of the loss of trust between the communities, the Georgians begin to wonder whether there may be need for trust-building in the general strategy towards Abkhazia and when this would appear appropriate, and consider the relationship between trust-building and the creation of dynamics which facilitate negotiation.

The informal Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process is developing a micro-dynamic in which the key elements of such a negotiation may be explored. It operates in a political context in which the official negotiation process shows little dynamism and has virtually come to a standstill during the life of the project. In this context, the process works on the fundamental components of such a negotiation system but it also creates certain obstacles which are dealt with in the next section.

4.4 Obstacles in the process

The pyramid diagram comprising the different levels of interaction and cooperation acts as a conceptual system for the facilitators to structure and direct the process.⁵⁷ Each layer of the pyramid (contact, mutual understanding, deepening of

⁵⁷ See diagram 1 on page 27.

topics, speculative problem-solving, joint action) generates its own dynamic and needs its own specific techniques, activities and frameworks in order for it to be realized. The requirements to safeguard the quality of the individual levels vary and, consequently, the functions to be fulfilled by the organizers and the team are also different.

Two levels present particular obstacles, namely “contact/meeting” and “speculative problem-solving”. This section therefore analyses the nature of these obstacles and the ways in which they can be overcome.

4.4.1 Obstacles to “meeting”

The Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue is held neither in Abkhazia nor Georgia, but in Europe. This is not only true of this process: another Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue project, initiated by Paula Garb of the University of California, Irvine, and bringing together civil society actors from both sides, also takes place abroad. Although implementing the process abroad is a very energy- and cost-intensive exercise, the dialogue would not otherwise take place.⁵⁸

The obstacles to an “on site” dialogue are complex. On the one hand, there may be individual reasons why a participant would refuse or be very unwilling to travel to the other side’s region. On the other hand, there are political and symbolic reasons why a local meeting does not take place in either Abkhazia or Georgia.

To generalize, it can be said that Georgian participants are in principle more prepared to travel to Abkhazia than vice versa. The participants themselves and the wider population would perceive this as simply moving within Georgia. “Returning” to Abkhazia is desired, even longed for by the Georgians and is therefore seen as positive. A Georgian politician, supporting Georgian issues, would be able to justify a trip to Abkhazia internally as, symbolically, he is “returning”, and therefore a possible strategy to promote this would be that he was supporting the “reintegration of Abkhazia into the state of Georgia”. Such political symbolism is not desired by the Abkhazians, who would not want to give any Georgian politicians the opportunity to portray themselves in this way. It is therefore not possible at present to hold a

⁵⁸ The process of implementing the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue meetings abroad is constantly under review by the organizers in cooperation with their local partners. In order to adapt flexibly to the changing political framework conditions, the team is always prepared to move the process into the region. However, up until the 13th workshop, this was not possible, in our view.

bilateral dialogue process in Abkhazia as this would generally be vetoed by the Abkhazian side.

Abkhazians who see themselves as citizens of the Republic of Abkhazia do not, in practice, have freedom of movement. As in other ethnopolitical conflict situations, the loss of freedom to travel takes the form of a combination of self-imposed and external isolation. As citizens of the Republic of Abkhazia, the Abkhazians do not possess internationally recognised passports. From the international community's perspective, they are Georgian citizens. Therefore, freedom of travel would, in principle, only be granted to Abkhazians who registered as Georgian citizens and applied for Georgian passports. However, Abkhazians do not do so, as it is viewed as a symbolic acceptance of the Georgian state. Hence, the Abkhazians do not possess internationally valid passports and therefore lose their freedom to travel. At the same time, Georgia is also not a suitable venue for the event from the Abkhazian point of view as the Abkhazian public perceives it as a hostile neighbour with which contact is neither desired nor deemed necessary in the present circumstances. Moreover, the journey would, from an Abkhazian perspective, be a foreign trip, which would appear particularly unwarranted in the face of Abkhazia's international isolation.

Along with the risk to personal safety that many Abkhazians associate with a trip to Georgia, the presence of an Abkhazian group in Georgia for dialogue could be quickly interpreted as a "delegation" by the Georgian media and as a sign that Abkhazia was moving closer towards Georgia. The Georgian media would certainly not present the Abkhazians' visit as a "journey abroad". The Abkhazian participants do not want to offer any scope for any such interpretation.

This illustrates the complex issues, as perceived by the Abkhazian participants, surrounding a meeting in Georgia. Along with personal motives, the way in which their presence in Georgia would be very likely to be interpreted by the Georgian public is a key issue. Furthermore, the way in which the Abkhazian population would view the trip or react to its potential depiction in Georgia is also a deterrent. All these aspects mean that Abkhazian participants could come under pressure to justify the visit in their homeland and all Abkhazians – representatives of the state apparatus and civil society alike – are at pains to avoid this situation.

Even though, in principle, the Abkhazian government at the time was in favour of the unofficial Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue, its standpoint was to avoid all actions that may be misrepresented by the Georgian media in particular, or by Georgian politicians, as an (apparent) step towards the integration of Abkhazia into Georgia.

This made a meeting in Abkhazia or Georgia impossible at the present time.⁵⁹ In general, meeting abroad is also not a cure-all method of avoiding a misrepresentation of the event, no matter by whom. Yet different emphases are placed on a *meeting abroad* than on a *local meeting*, which made it (more) possible, particularly for the Abkhazian side, to participate in the process.

When the possibility of a Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process was first mooted and the political opportunities analysed, only one of the Abkhazians was as yet able to travel with the new Russian passports. It was therefore necessary to construct very specific travel arrangements for the Abkhazian participants. Organizing a Georgian-Abkhazian meeting abroad in Europe is a logistical challenge. In reality, it is a case of third-party intervention in which the conflict-related obstructions are “by-passed” and as the obstruction takes an asymmetric form, one can speak of an asymmetric *by-pass* in favour of the Abkhazian side.

Meeting abroad creates parity between the parties and participants as all those taking part can exercise their freedom to travel without limitation. In this way the process, and indirectly all the actors involved in it, signal their sensitivity and respect towards the Abkhazian side and its structural disadvantage. The *host country* must be politically prepared to implement a visa-issuing process that takes account of the special situation of the Abkhazian participants. The project *donors* recognise the necessity for a meeting abroad and provide the means to do this, and the *third party facilitators* demonstrate their ability and willingness to put all the necessary support measures in place to organize a meeting based on parity.

From the Abkhazian perspective, a meeting abroad also represented and represents a kind of indirect recognition and increase in status. Their participation in the dialogue is apparently so important to international civil society and state actors that the restrictions that have existed for years finally disappear. Meeting abroad thus intensifies the political symbolism of the dialogue and lends it an additional dimension whose deeper emotional meaning can perhaps only be understood by those whose freedom of movement has been seriously curtailed. The implicit equality *and* enhanced status are particularly attractive to participants from the government camp, state officials or active politicians, as the type of meeting increases the status of their participation rather than discrediting it. Furthermore, meeting in Europe

⁵⁹ The strength of resistance is also demonstrated in the fact that the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process of the University of California, Irvine, takes place in Russia and Turkey (and there was one meeting in the UK) rather than in Georgia or Abkhazia.

demonstrates an element of Abkhazian independence vis-à-vis Russia and also illustrates the ability to forge contacts with Europe.

Last but not least, there is also an element of attraction in foreign travel that could apply to participants on both sides. The element of attraction was and is real and is certainly a positive inducement significant for group dynamics. However, it is certainly not enough to create anything akin to process stability for an informal political dialogue. In this context, process stability is the result of a planning process that takes account of the politically motivated obstacles and the sensitivities of the parties and creates the framework conditions in which the parties, despite their existing differences, can act on a basis of parity.

4.4.2 Obstacles to “speculative problem-solving”

Ideally in the course of constructive problem-solving, after defining the problem and analysing the background to the problems more deeply, the parties embark on a phase in which they devise a range of possible solution models. These are then systematically analysed in terms of their suitability in order for a comprehensive understanding to be reached. Only when both sides demonstrate their intent and willingness to understand the problem as being a shared one can the two parties embark on this brainstorming phase and model solutions be proposed that do not solely safeguard their own individual interests, but also include those of the other side. In other words, there must be some measure of emotional and cognitive solidarity between the parties that manifests itself in the idea of the “shared problem” and “shared problem-solving”. If this solidarity occurs, the parties are, in principle, ready to jointly embark on a forward-looking process to shape solutions.

The stage of emotional and intellectual solidarity described above constitutes the key obstacle in a conflict that has undergone highly escalated phases. Profound processes of change are necessary on both sides before the parties can be ready for inclusive problem-solving. Consequently, the parties and participants in the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process are not prepared to develop solution models beyond their own standpoints. The Georgians place the emphasis on the territorial integrity of their country whilst sovereignty forms the key position of the Abkhazian political planning process.

During the speculative problem-solving phase, participants discuss and work on political topics that push against the boundaries of the established official positions and, in a purely speculative way, try to break through the fundamental beliefs of their respective sides. This gives rise to intellectually very stimulating arguments in which the previously “unthinkable” is pondered and discussed. Speculative problem-solving therefore attempts to anticipate something which is actually not possible, namely to move the parties towards creating solution models that are no longer solely based on their preferred positions, even though the parties have not yet gone through the stage of recognising the problem jointly and internalizing their common interests.

The speculative problem-solving level was reached a good two years into the process in December 2001, representing a step up from the informal dialogue to informal speculation. Now that the level of speculative discussion has been reached in all the meetings since December 2001, it has become evident that certain participants are expecting to enter the speculative phase at every workshop. Despite this recognizable expansion of the discussion spectrum, this level is still difficult to achieve and is not entirely free of obstacles.

As a rule, it is difficult for the participants to become involved in a speculative scenario as this is based on assumptions or conditions that run counter to their political beliefs and have therefore not been previously included in their reflections (“We don’t need to think about things that are not possible”). The speculative scenario therefore means entering new intellectual territory, and this involves a degree of uncertainty. In the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process it was definitely an advantage that the relevant speculative scenarios were equally unfamiliar to all participants. None of the participants revealed that they had ever seriously considered the particular scenario or would have invested time in analysing its specific conditions.

Even when the speculative group work is introduced by the team of facilitators as a symmetrical exercise, meaning that both groups of participants should engage in the speculation to the same degree, and even when all the participants accept the exercise within the plenary session, this does not mean that the groups, who work separately, actually immerse themselves in the speculative scenario to the same extent. There is thus a risk that an imbalance will become apparent between the groups when they present their findings in the plenary session.

In a situation where the participants think in reciprocal terms to a relatively large degree (“I will give you something when you give something to me”), disillusion can quickly arise in the group that has developed the speculative scenario fully. These participants may feel “deceived” or “tricked” by the other group, as they were “stupid enough” to move away from some of their key positions, albeit hypothetically, in the scenario. They did this partly in the expectation that the other side would, in parallel, “make reciprocal concessions”. At the same time, some of the participants in the group that did not carry out the exercise may interpret their group’s “steadfastness” in not speculatively challenging their own position as a strength; in this view, the other’s side’s willingness to “give way” thus denotes a lack of resolve.

An asymmetrical development in the groups in the speculative phase always brings tension. When participants begin to assess the exercise in terms of “steadfastness” and “non-steadfastness” and relate the hypothetical scenario to the actual positions, the situation can quickly become very heated. In this event, it is the task of the facilitators to clarify the separation of the levels and place the correct perspective on the significance of a speculative scenario.

Even when one or both groups fully implement the speculative exercise and find it stimulating and productive, the presentation of results to the other side is a tense moment. Ultimately, however enriching the exercise, the participants do not identify with their particular speculative scenario. As a consequence, attempts to distance themselves from their own speculative scenarios can quickly arise during the presentation and ensuing discussions. These attempts to distance themselves clearly go far beyond the easily understandable need of the presenting group to emphasize the hypothetical nature of the scenario. Comments describing the scenario as “totally unrealistic” or “never feasible” can rapidly arise and such total negations can cause irritation and annoyance in the participants on the other side. “Why was the scenario prepared and presented when it is devoid of all realism?”⁶⁰ If total negation ensues, it is difficult to direct the discussion back to the details of the scenario. As the other side is totally and, in the truest sense of the word, “unconditionally” rejecting the scenario, participants can even gain the impression that the detailed conditions associated with the scenario are actually completely meaningless.

⁶⁰ Such moments of tension can be used by the facilitators to widen the discussion to include the conditions attached to the scenario.

Participants in one group once distanced themselves totally following a presentation of their own speculative scenario. In order to avoid the irritations caused by the presentation, the proposal was presented again the following day by one of the facilitators in the plenary session. The use of this “mouthpiece” function enabled the defensive nature of the participants’ presentation to be filtered out and the entire scenario was presented and discussed in accordance with its inner logic.

The presentation of a speculative scenario presents an exciting challenge, not only for the person and group presenting, but also for the listening group. The presentation can be quite overwhelming as the listeners hear the other side – albeit speculatively – discussing their greatest political desires. Some participants can become quite confused, which can manifest in many different ways. For example, some do not understand the overall scenario although it was presented clearly and vividly. Others begin to mix up the speculative and the real worlds. Another tendency is for the presentation’s key message to be interpreted as “the other side has done a U-turn”. (The “*de jure* recognition” of Abkhazia is promised (speculatively) or the Abkhazians are giving up (speculatively) their sovereignty.)

With so much good news, the conditions given by the other side as part of the speculative scenario are often overlooked. The moment is therefore not always accompanied by an intensive questioning of the exact form the conditions will take. They have (speculatively) got what they have always wanted and there is practically nothing left to say.

On the basis of the dynamics resulting from the presentations, it is clear that the speculative scenario demands a lot from the participants and triggers mixed feelings and messages. The moment of confusion is, however, only one phase in the process, which can be shaped further by the facilitators.

Speculative scenarios encourage the parties to think about and articulate their own *interests*. As they (speculatively) leave their own official and favoured positions behind, they formulate *conditions* to safeguard their key interests. As these conditions are realized, the speculative renunciation of the official position appears tolerable and, in a certain way, justifiable. The conditions stated within the framework of the scenario perform a damage limitation function for their own side. This way of thinking is often easier for many participants than articulating their own interests in response to a direct question.

Speculative scenarios vividly show the parties the interests of the other side. One side might hypothetically “accept” a scenario which it would generally not

endorse. In the discussion, standards and conditions are cited which makes this unappealing scenario bearable. In other words, the participants want to see that their key demands are being fulfilled, and they name these demands in order to achieve this outcome in the unfavourable scenario. The participants therefore come to realise that even the favoured scenarios have advantages and disadvantages. Everything – even the speculative attainment of their most desired goal – has a political price. The scenario identifies the other party’s central interests that have to be satisfied in order to achieve the (speculative) agreement of the other side. However banal these views may appear to be from an external perspective, under conditions of non-communication and in light of their closed and deadlocked positions, the parties can only develop a limited understanding of the actual advantages and disadvantages of their preferred option. The assumption that the positive arguments are only found on their own side can easily become entrenched. Creating the conditions necessary to achieve the other side’s agreement is rarely discussed in these communities.

This scenario can therefore be used as an exercise on (speculative) *inclusive thinking*, as each scenario combines the interests of the other party (in the form of the position taken) and their own interests (in the form of the diverse conditions). Partly due to the above conflicting circumstances, the participants are not used to thinking in inclusive terms.

This section has provided an insight into the obstacles existing before and during the speculative phase of the dialogue and the associated opportunities and risks associated with this method. Whilst the features of the dialogue, with the levels of contact, understanding and exploring issues, are very much oriented towards political reality, the speculative phase introduces a future-oriented element in scenarios that present the “best case” and “worst case” equally for both sides. At the end of one workshop that also involved a great deal of speculative thinking, one participant said: “Here we feel like astronauts, having no gravity, that is good.”⁶¹ It is the facilitators’ task to shape this absence of reality in such a way that building a scenario, despite its speculative nature, is anchored in realistic analytical frameworks so that the participants communicate their experiences of the workshop in a realistic way upon returning to their respective communities.

⁶¹ Notes: Workshop No. 8.

5 Related projects

Examining the informal Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue in isolation and solely in relation to the project does not take full account of the interrelated effects within the process. A range of other projects and processes are connected with the dialogue, both directly and indirectly, and it is evident that these other processes feed back into the informal dialogue format.

This chapter presents three project initiatives providing an insight into the forms of related processes arising from the dialogue process. These initiatives are the “Training Handbook for the Constructive Management of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict” (*Discussion Pack*), the Informal Group of Experts and the organization of a Round Table. These additional projects vary greatly in terms of their indirect objectives, time frames, organization and levels of funding.

5.1 The Discussion Pack – process and publication

The idea to produce a “Training Handbook for the Constructive Management of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict” (*Discussion Pack*) arose during the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process.⁶² Some participants at the third workshop identified a considerable gap between their own thinking and the discussions in their respective communities. They therefore proposed the creation of training materials that could achieve a wider effect.

As a result, the discussion pack was produced in Russian by both Georgian and Abkhazian authors. It contains materials and proposals for educational training and is intended to offer practical aids to those living within the unresolved and violent conflict in the Caucasus region.⁶³ The discussion pack aims to analyse the complex questions and issues underlying this conflict and develop new approaches for its

⁶² This chapter is largely based on the document written by one of the project leaders, Dr. Antje Bühler (2003).

⁶³ The discussion pack in Russian may be downloaded from the Berghof Research Center website (www.berghof-center.org) or the Conciliation Resources website at www.c-r.org.

transformation. However, it provides no definitive answers. Instead, the intention is to question the customary assumptions and encourage reflection.

Objective, contents and target group

The discussion pack aims to promote discussion within the Georgian and Abkhazian communities about what may be learned from the past and how these experiences may be used constructively to deal with present and future challenges. The authors intend the book to create a counterbalance to the existing educational materials in the region that give a largely one-sided view of Georgian-Abkhazian history. The discussion pack contains eleven topics:

- Causes of the conflict
- Dealing with the past
- Positions, interests, fears and needs
- The framework of negotiation processes
- The role of third parties
- The role of civil society
- Security issues
- Forms of mutual relations
- IDPs / Refugees
- Economic aspects
- Cooperation across the whole Caucasus region

A detailed and methodical introduction explains how this book can be used. Each topic is contained in its own chapter with a standard format, starting with an introduction to the topic followed by a collection of quotations and a range of interactive exercises. The exercises support and guide both the teaching of and critical reflection on the relevant topic. The discussion pack thus aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict.

The discussion pack is mainly intended for multipliers and trainers who work with adults or older teenagers/young adults in the fields of education, culture and media. It is directed towards those who are already familiar with current conflict management methods and who possess training experience. The history of the conflict and conflict issues are written on the basis of consensus between the parties, which is a new approach, and this pedagogic form of conflict analysis is also unusual. A certain level of experience with intercultural educational work is therefore required

in order to work with the materials offered in this book, along with familiarity with the use of conflict management methods.

The discussion pack as a shared working and learning process

The production of the discussion pack on the basis of the consensus principle signifies that the project not only contained a recognizable product-oriented level but also a consciously targeted process level. Some of the authors involved had already worked on other publications with members of the other side; however, each individual author was only responsible for his or her own article. The novel aspect of this handbook project is that the articles were written by the Georgian and Abkhazian contributors on the basis of consensus and the authors therefore take joint responsibility for the texts. The discussion pack is thus the result of a discussion process which was guided primarily by Antje Bühler (Berghof Research Center) in cooperation with Conciliation Resources.

The discussion pack was produced in both mixed working groups and those containing just one conflict side. In order to secure political acceptance for the consensus reached in the working groups, the texts written in the joint working groups were assessed and reviewed by political and education experts from both Georgia and Abkhazia. A mixed core working group discussed the ideas generated and integrated the ensuing proposals into the final version of the discussion pack.

From the initial idea in June 2000 (ie before the third workshop) until the first publication in December 2002, the following phases took place: conceptual development, production of draft versions by various authors, consensus on a draft version within the working group, and a phased evaluation of the package.

The authors were confronted with a twofold challenge. Firstly, they had to create an unusual kind of “teaching manual” and, secondly, they had to carry out the work with reference to a mixed team (much of the work was drafted separately and then brought together for discussion and review at joint meetings). Their greatest difficulty was coming to terms with the fact that they were no longer the sole authors of their text, but had to agree it with representatives of the other conflict side. This process, along with the obstacles and difficulties encountered, will be described in more detail below.

Production of rough drafts by various authors

In line with the concept, quotations were collected on individual topics. These quotations were also to form sub-items of the planned chapters.

Contributors were assigned one chapter each, drafts were created and joint working meetings were subsequently held to agree the content of these chapters. However, within the editorial group, the Georgian members called the competence of the Abkhazian members into question and vice versa. There was also no concept of what form a chapter might ideally take. Therefore, both sides subsequently worked separately on their chapters in order to define an appropriate quality standard. Only when the different sides had formally accepted the individual chapters as satisfactory could the joint meetings take place to create an agreed version of the discussion material.

Difficulties in achieving consensus

The authors were united in their perceptions of the goals and principles. Everyone intended to create a multi-perspective teaching manual reflecting the views of the different conflict parties and encouraging contemplation on constructive solutions to the conflict. Furthermore, all the authors referred to a shared system of values as a guiding principle for writing the book.

Whilst there was consensus on these abstract goals, it was a far greater challenge to translate these goals and principles into tangible (operational) standards, and various difficulties arose as a result.

According to the joint definition of the goal, the discussion pack was supposed to consider the different viewpoints that had come to light during the political negotiations between Georgia and Abkhazia. The different perceptions of the political status of Abkhazia are mirrored, among other things, in the different names for places (e.g. Sukhum in Abkhazian, Sukhumi in Georgian), as well as for IDPs / refugees and the political leadership. The solution agreed upon by the members of the editorial team was to define the terms and then, to simplify matters, use the term “refugees/IDPs”. The editing group also tried to find generic terms, encompassing the viewpoints of both sides, for ethnic and national groups, the state and the government.

As already mentioned, the authors aimed to encourage constructive thinking about possible solutions to the conflict, both among themselves and the future users of the discussion pack. One difficulty that emerged was the tendency of the authors

to use categorical and normative statements. These primarily manifested themselves in key words such as “unfounded/ groundless”, “absolutely necessary”, “appropriate”, “naturally” or: “the best or only way out of the conflict”. These assessments prompted more detailed analyses and discussions between the members of the working group. Moreover, the authors gained a higher level of sensitivity to questions with potential constructive effects. An example of this was the increasing shift of the focus of the discussion from incompatibilities to the compatibility of needs.

Securing acceptance

It is typical for post-war societies which still face protracted unresolved conflicts to view educational materials on their own conflict situations with a large degree of scepticism. The events in the Kodori valley in the summer and autumn of 2001 caused particular mistrust towards the Georgians on the Abkhazian side. It is primarily due to this fact that the Georgian and Abkhazian trainers viewed the continuation of their work on the discussion pack as essential.

To increase the likelihood of the discussion pack being accepted within the aggravated political framework conditions, an evaluation process of both the political content *and* the pedagogic level was introduced to guarantee the quality of the material and secure the support of politically influential persons for the project. For this reason, at various stages, selected political decision-makers, recognised academic experts, heads of educational institutions and, of course, the future multipliers were asked to submit an assessment of the working group’s agreed discussion material. This evaluation process took place in two stages, with the political content being assessed between October 2001 and February 2002 and the pedagogic aspects from February to June 2002.

During the *evaluation of political content*, ten Georgian and ten Abkhazian political experts were asked to review the material and make specific proposals to improve it. They were asked to pay particular attention to whether the presentations of both sides appeared balanced. Following the results of the first assessment phase, it did not appear advisable to publish the discussion pack in its existing form. The experts on both sides feared that publication at that time and in that form would have a negative impact on the acceptance of the material and possibly also the peace process itself. This was attributed partly to the rising tension in Georgian-Abkhazian relations following the armed clashes in the Kodori valley in 2001, but the content of

the texts was also criticized. The strong resistance from the experts showed that revising the book in accordance with the criticisms would not be sufficient. The Georgian-Abkhazian working group therefore decided following revisions to subject the book to another evaluation of political content before publication.

This second evaluation phase involved a Russian native speaker to ensure the clear formulation of the ambiguous texts and those coming under (political) criticism. In addition, Georgian IDPs / refugees were increasingly involved in the assessment of the book during this phase, as the escalation of the conflict in 2001 was partly attributed to the exclusion of this group from the peace process. Further proposals for improvement from experts from the fields of politics, academia and education were formulated and subsequently integrated by the editing group. The positive consequences of this evaluation phase included the support offered by heads of educational institutions and future multipliers, and also the recommendation of a political decision-maker to include this discussion pack in the general curriculum.

The evaluation of the political content was complemented by a pedagogic assessment which aimed to assess the applicability of the discussion material in practical training. The following questions were investigated: is the more Western-oriented methodology appropriate to local requirements and needs? Is the manual easy for the trainers to work with? How do the participants in the training courses react? Do they find the training interesting? Are lively discussions taking place? Is the material helping to encourage and deepen understanding? Is it suitable to increase one side's understanding of the other? In order to evaluate the materials in terms of these criteria, a total of 28 test training sessions took place, 14 with Abkhazian groups and 14 with Georgian groups. The participants included students, schoolchildren, journalists and staff of non-governmental organizations. The participants, assistants who were observing and the trainers then submitted a written evaluation of the handbook material, which formed the basis for a workshop for experts in June 2002. Trainers, coordinators and authors discussed their experiences and proposals to resolve difficulties, with the aim of finding acceptable solutions for both sides. This workshop was very much focused on the main issue and facilitated the production of a publishable manuscript. After two years' work, the process of agreeing the discussion pack was therefore complete.

Even before the discussion pack was published, the discussion materials were used as aids in regional training sessions in both Georgian and Abkhazian educational institutions. These training sessions aimed to recruit future trainers and

multipliers from these regions to take part in a *train-the-trainers* seminar. Once the discussion pack had been published, the first *train-the-trainers* seminars took place in Georgia and Abkhazia in December 2002 with 18 participants from both sides from the education sector. They included university lecturers, teachers, trainers from non-governmental organizations and staff from the Ministries of Education. The discussion pack was assessed very positively by the participants on both sides, including the Georgian IDPs / refugees, and was described as “balanced, constructive and absolutely essential”. They said that they would like to see the book included in the official curriculum for universities and schools. Furthermore, both sides expressed the desire to take part in a joint training session with those of the other conflict party who had completed the training seminar.

During 2003 the discussion pack was published in Russian, Georgian and Abkhazian. Free copies have been given to interested institutions, people and libraries. The fact that the discussion pack is published in three languages is unusual. The symbolic equality of the Georgian and Abkhazian languages sends out an important message to the region’s social and political community and reflects the spirit of balance contained in the discussion pack.

Since its publication, the discussion pack has been used in both communities, and Conciliation Resources has developed a programme in which the material has been used in a structured way. This involves groups of young people and students in Suhkum(i), Tbilisi, Batumi, Gali, Zugdidi and Kutaisi.

The discussion pack project is a direct result of the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process. The political networks formed by the organizers and local partners within the dialogue project were essential to strengthen the framework conditions required to ensure the acceptance of the discussion pack. This has undoubtedly succeeded. The discussion pack was never solely intended as a publication to give new insights into the perceptions of the people in both conflict groups. The production process itself took place within a mixed, inter-ethnic process largely moderated and supervised by Antje Bühler. The different substantive positions that come together within the process are essentially the same as those in the context of the dialogue workshop.

5.2 The Informal Group of Experts

In May 2004, a series of proposals on a possible settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict were submitted to the National Security Council (NSC). The proposals were developed by five Georgian experts and consisted of five parts and two annexes. The first part presents an analysis of the relationship between Georgia and Abkhazia in legal and political terms whilst the second part deals with the negotiation processes since the end of the war. The third part analyses the different political alignments in Georgia and Abkhazia along with the interests of external actors and international organizations. Part four presents an analysis of the political, social, military and religious conditions in Abkhazia and the fifth part presents a concept for Abkhazia's special status within the Georgian state. This document therefore offers an extensive overview of the Georgian-Abkhazian situation at the end of 2003. It is the fifth part of the document in particular, with its focus on the status of Abkhazia, which has aroused public interest. (This was the only part put in the public domain.)

The section of the document covering the status of Abkhazia provides for the creation of a federation with two member states, in which Abkhazia is recognised as a sovereign entity within the Georgian national borders. As a first step, the concept calls for the signing of a declaration on mutual non-resumption of violence between the parties and the mutual declaration of willingness to settle the conflict exclusively through negotiation. According to the authors, this should be followed by the signing of an agreement governing the division of competences between the two constituent parts of the new state. The agreement would have constitutional status and could not be amended without the agreement of the other side. This concept to resolve the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict was first published in instalments in the Georgian daily newspaper "24 hours" (*24 Saati*) and presented to the Georgian public in a range of interviews with the authors.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ OSCE News Digest, 19 May 2004, "Georgia offers Conflict Settlement Model"; OCHA Georgia Information Bulletin, "New Plan Elaborated for the Resolution of Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict", May 2004; Sepashvili/ Gularidze, 2004; Gularidze, 2004.

In summer 2004, some of the authors published part of the proposals which had previously been sent by the group to the NSC. In the meantime, some of the other members of the group of authors had won seats in the newly elected parliament and began to distance themselves from some aspects of the document's content.

For the authors, the concept combines both federal and confederal elements with the competences resting primarily with the federal states. The “federal level” would merely be responsible for foreign policy, defence, customs systems and measures against organized crime. Abkhazia would have its own central bank and Abkhazian recruits would not have to undertake military service outside Abkhazia. The draft also establishes a secession mechanism for Abkhazia. The details of this comprehensive draft cannot be reproduced in full here, however. Besides the high level of autonomy for the Abkhazian state, the document introduces the concept of positive discrimination, provides for an ethnic quota of Abkhazian representatives in the federal parliament and a right of veto for these representatives on certain Abkhaz-related issues. A gradual and voluntary process of IDP/refugee return is proposed, and movement to the region by other social groups which did not live in Abkhazia before the war would be restricted. The official reaction from Sukhum(i) was dismissive, on the basis that no model in which Abkhazia was a part of Georgia was acceptable.⁶⁵

The creation of both the group and the document is clearly connected to the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process, albeit not exclusively. In November 2002, one of the advisors to the Georgian National Security Council (NSC) took part in the dialogue workshop in Berlin. In January 2003, the same person then took part in one of the joint Georgian-Abkhazian Northern Ireland study visits which were organized by CR.⁶⁶ During this sequence of meetings, the idea of an informal working group arose which would generate ideas for the Secretary of the NSC. The group's key objective would be to challenge Georgia's strategy and policy towards Abkhazia and provide fresh ideas. At the time, the plan was for the group to prepare a draft which the Secretary of the NSC would present directly to the then President Shevardnadze.⁶⁷ CR was asked to provide material support and access to some international experts for the group although it had no responsibility for the content of the concept that was drafted.

The dialogue workshops have doubtless played an important role in the formation of the group and the development of informed opinion among its

⁶⁵ OSCE News Digest, 10 June 2004, 5

⁶⁶ McCartney, et al., 2003

⁶⁷ Due to the Rose Revolution, this did not take place and so the proposals were presented to the new NSC established by President Saakashvili as well as to Saakashvili himself and the new State Minister for Conflict Resolution Issues. The Saakashvili government has not adopted a formal position on the proposals to date.

participants, enabling them to meet as an informal group of experts to consider and discuss key aspects of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict as a working group. Four of the five authors of the draft (Paata Zakareishvili, Konstantin Kublashvili, Archil Gegeschidze, David Bakradze and Ivliane Khaindrava) have taken part in the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process, with Paata Zakareishvili also acting as our Georgian project partner. The group met regularly for over a year before it started to present parts of its draft to the public in mid-2004.

Besides Paata Zakareishvili as the local Georgian coordinator of the dialogue process, other members of the informal working group also took part in the dialogue workshops during the one-year informal working phase of the group. At the Berlin workshops in December 2003 and May 2004 in particular, a few working group members used the opportunity to present some of their ideas on a future federal/confederal state structure and explore the Abkhazians' receptivity to their ideas. Some results of the informal expert group's work therefore found their way into the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue and were discussed in a context that embraced the different Georgian and Abkhazian political spectrums. Furthermore, the working group also received support from other international legal experts who were asked to analyze earlier drafts.

The workshop format was a significant source of inspiration for the development of the draft. Although the author regards it as consistent with the principles of the Boden document, which has, however, been rejected several times by the Abkhazian leadership, the working group's ideas display many elements perceived as innovative in the Georgian context. For the first time, Georgian intellectuals have elaborated a very extensive set of ideas which is both rich in detail and formulates a sophisticated approach to achieving the substance and essence of "maximal Abkhazian autonomy". The group of authors has succeeded in making a contribution to discussions at macro-political level and in initiating a debate which struck a chord with the Georgian mass media as well. And it did so at a time when President Saakashvili's government had not yet made known its official stance on the Abkhazian issue and was still in the process of formulating its strategy.

5.3 The Round Table

The Round Table, organized by the Berghof Research Center and Conciliation Resources, aimed to provide representatives of various European ministries with an informal setting in which to discuss topical Georgian-Abkhazian issues with politically informed persons from both sides. The one-day meeting in April 2004 took place in Berlin at a very dynamic time in politics. The new Saakashvili government had only been in office for three months and the processes of political formation were starting in Abkhazia in preparation for the presidential elections in October 2004.

To enhance the discussions with topical and multi-layered analyses from the region, two Georgian and two Abkhazian speakers, regarded as well-informed political observers and active members of democratization initiatives in their own communities, were invited to Berlin. The topics discussed were:

- The formation of political camps in Abkhazia in the run-up to the presidential elections.
- The possible consequences of the outcome of the election on the future development of the peace process.
- The change of power in Georgia and the emerging trends in relation to the possible change in Georgian strategy in dealing with the Abkhazian issue.
- Resistances and latitudes in Georgian-Abkhazian relations.

To a large degree, the participants from Germany, the United Kingdom and Switzerland belonged to the established group of European contact partners of Conciliation Resources and the Berghof Research Center. This communication had previously only taken place on a bilateral level and so this format provided an opportunity for different actors to interact within a network.

Not all the Georgian and Abkhazian speakers invited had been participants in the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue project presented here. The Round Table was therefore not primarily concerned with transferring knowledge from the dialogue process to the international stage. It was more a case of using the network developed within the dialogue project for the organization of the Round Table, both at local and international level. The Round Table format can therefore be seen as a related process to the actual Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue project.

5.4 Links with the dialogue project

The three project examples outlined here are connected in many ways to the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process of the Berghof Research Center and Conciliation Resources' wider peace building programme.

All three projects have been developed from the process described here and have demonstrated its wider goal of developing joint perspectives enabling the implementation of practical projects and cooperative measures. As the dialogue process presented and analysed here does not take the form of a project planning format, it acts as a birthplace of ideas for projects that can then be implemented by the participants within many different forms of cooperation. Whilst the discussion pack places a very strong emphasis on Georgian-Abkhazian cooperation, the group of experts were all Georgians. The dialogue process thus established a basis for new types of cooperation, be they inter- or intra-party. Moreover, it shows the ways in which the network structure of the dialogue projects is used to implement the related projects. The track 1.5 structure of the dialogue project, which encompasses a broad socio-political spectrum in both societies, is very beneficial to the implementation of related projects. Examples of this are the political acceptance and ownership of the discussion pack, and the expert groups' communication channels to political decision-makers and policy-making bodies. The projects themselves enrich the dialogue process and create new aspects that can be integrated into it. This has been particularly apparent in the example of the group of experts and their model of a federal/confederal system for Georgia. During the second half of 2004 it became clear that the model developed by this group was triggering much discussion about the future constitutional structure of Georgia. The outcomes of this discourse flowed into the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue workshops during 2005.

Chapter 3 explained that the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process was deliberately facilitated in a non-directive manner. This facilitation approach is not predominantly an expression of the facilitators' personal preferences, but a reaction to the perceived political framework of the informal dialogue. In the context of the Georgian-Abkhazian situation from 2000 to 2003, a directive facilitation style with a clear goal of encouraging the participants to come to (informal) agreements, would have risked being perceived as biased and consequently come under political attack. Initiating, creating and supporting further projects and processes has offered an opportunity to shape and deepen content and forms of cooperation that cannot be

achieved in this form within the existing dialogue format. It is therefore important that the organizers of an informal dialogue process do not overload this specific format with contents and “results”. Last but not least, it is crucial that the participants and organizers have the organizational flexibility and scope to shape and guide related projects. This includes the funding of these processes. Raising awareness among potential donors is also essential.

6 Evaluation of the project and conclusions on the management of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict

In a narrower sense, the dialogue process was and is intended to provide a forum for communication, enabling key figures from the Georgian and Abkhazian sides to meet, engage in analysis and explore constructive options to overcome the main difficulties in Georgian-Abkhazian relations.

This general aim was subdivided by the organizers into five levels of interaction at the start of the process. These comprise personal contact between the participants, the creation of mutual understanding, the intensive analysis of selected topics, speculative problem-solving scenarios and agreement on joint action.

As the study shows, the overall process comprised the first three categories in its initial phase and, from mid 2002, also included speculative problem-solving scenarios. The dialogue thus achieved an interesting and identifiable level of quality as the conflict parties suspended some of their key positions, albeit hypothetically, in speculative scenarios. For many participants, this means entering new intellectual territory and adopting positions to which they are unaccustomed. Nonetheless, it is important to reiterate at this point that a willingness to engage in speculative scenarios does not necessarily imply any willingness to implement them in practice.

The final level of interaction and cooperation, i.e. “joint action” has not been achieved – or was only achieved to a limited extent – during the project to date. The notion of “joint action” was not defined as a goal by the organizers during the project. So it remains an open question whether the term denotes a joint approach between representatives of the two conflict parties, or denotes new forms of

cooperation within one conflict party that have been initiated by the project. In any event, “joint action” requires some form of detailed agreement between the participants, which was not achieved in the overall group during the dialogue process. The study has presented various examples which show how a rapprochement has come about and how intra-party pluralism has emerged and what form this takes.

The dialogue project displays various conceptual features. The organizers' goal of horizontal and vertical networking among participants led to the formation of a “track-one-and-a-half” participants' group. The “expansion of the spectrum of participants” should also be mentioned in this context. The “expansion” involved the progressive inclusion of groups and persons who, during the initial project phase, appeared to be unacceptable to at least one of the conflict parties. These expansions did much to achieve the substantive pluralization of the dialogue.

Using the principle of flexible group formation, 76 different participants from both sides were included in the first thirteen meetings of dialogue. Besides this increase in quantity, there has also been a qualitative improvement as, from both sides, representatives from civil society and also alternative political actors from outside the respective governments have been integrated into the dialogue. This relatively broad political basis has enabled the insights and realizations gained from the dialogue to be communicated to the different sectors of the respective elites. It was also an important factor in the sustainability of the project against the background of the power changes in both Georgia (November 2003 / January 2004) and Abkhazia (November 2004 / February 2005).

According to Mary B. Anderson, all civil intervention strategies can be represented in a matrix that distinguishes between the interrelated effects at individual/personal level and those at socio-political level. Moreover, the effectiveness of a project may vary according to whether many or few people were affected by the project (Anderson, 2004).

By its very nature, an informal dialogue project such as the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue analysed here is only aimed directly at a relatively small number of people. Nevertheless, throughout the reporting period, there have been recognizable increases in the numbers of people directly and indirectly affected.

Besides the “from-few-to-many” dynamic of a project, another indicator of effectiveness is the increasing influence on the socio-economic sphere. A direct and clearly identifiable influence on political and social institutions that is visible in the

public arena has not taken place. Instead, influence on this level has occurred through one of the related projects, namely the Georgian group of experts.

The significance of the related projects may be assessed by considering the individual project measures in isolation. When deliberating the relationship structure between informal dialogue and further projects, it becomes clear that the dialogue creates the conditions in which the projects first become possible and these, in turn, enhance the dialogue and bring ideas and realizations into the public domain that cannot be achieved by the dialogue project alone. At the same time it can be argued that the related projects constitute new, independent interactions in which some persons involved have no connection with the dialogue project.

Chris Mitchell puts forward a similar evaluation system to Anderson; however, unlike Anderson, he does not emphasize the aspect of institutionalization. He distinguishes between three levels on which the effects of informal dialogue processes may be determined (Mitchell 1993, 82).

- The effect on the directly involved participants in the form of changed ideas or behaviour.
- The effects on the development of informed political ideas of the conflict parties.
- The influence on the macro-political level in the form of long-term effects.

Ultimately, Mitchell's system reflects the basic assumption on which all dialogue projects are based, namely that the interaction at micro-level of social relations leads to a conflict transformation at the political macro-level. How does this transmission from micro to macro occur within the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue? The most identifiable effect resulted from the activities of the informal group of experts. Their concept of a federalization of Georgia, and a settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, gave rise to serious debate within Georgia on the constitutional models of a possible future Georgia. The content of this internal Georgian discourse, which noticeably gained momentum in the second half of 2004, is multi-layered and many-faceted. At the beginning of 2005, other social groups brought alternative models into the public domain and the Saakashvili government is also working on its own concept. The substantive outcome of this debate is completely open at the start of 2005, but it can be argued that this debate will contribute to the development of informed political ideas and have a long-term impact. A multi-cultural society like Georgia cannot close its mind to the issue of how it proposes to deal with its cultural

and political diversity. Regardless of the content of this discourse, the fact remains that discussion has started, and this is an important stage of the development.

Another concept for positioning and evaluating dialogue processes is the idea of “sustained dialogue” developed by Harold Saunders. Sustained dialogue has “.. purpose and destination and the possibility of generating power to accomplish goals” (Saunders, 2001, 81). The purpose is understood as creating the space in which the participants can experience a change in their relationship. The destination describes the way in which this experience may be integrated into a jointly formulated concept, which aims to put the conflict relationship on a completely new footing. The last step is the creation of power by the participants, in which they begin to introduce their concept to change relations into public discourse in the form of a scenario. Like Mitchell's analysis grid before, *sustained dialogue* therefore embraces both psychological and political processes, as the change at relationship level within groups of participants leads to political activities in the political sphere. The combination of the psychological micro-level with the political macro-level also forms the basis here.

Saunders makes it clear that he sees the dialogue process as the birthplace of politically active groups who, matured by common experience, develop joint political concepts outside the bounds of the conflict and introduce these into the public discourse of the relevant conflict sides. For him, dialogue is more “... a process of genuine interaction”. This means that an interaction qualifies as *dialogue* only when the participants begin to consider seriously the problems and misgivings of the other side. He places high demands on interaction at group level: “In dialogue, one puts forward ideas while suspending judgment on them in the expectation that others’ thoughts will deepen them.” (Saunders, 2001, 82).

The genuine openness to the concerns of the other side has not been universally present within the framework of the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue project. It is more akin to a spectrum comprising the exchange of opinions, discussion, debate, clarification, convincing, speculative problem-solving and dialogue in the Saunders sense. In the circumstances of escalated conflict, as in the Georgian-Abkhazian case, Saunders’ definition of dialogue as a genuine interaction is only conceivable within a constant group of participants who have the time and space to undergo the psychological development process, caused by group dynamics, that is required to achieve dialogue as “genuine interaction”. Moreover, Saunders sees the facilitating third party as completely free of political considerations and limitations in

the selection of participants. His understanding of dialogue and the anticipated political processes is therefore more characteristic of projects established at the level of civil society.

In the context of a track-1.5 dialogue process, the participants are not only chosen for their personal characteristics or their multiplier effects, but also on the basis of their political functions and roles. Under these circumstances it is very unlikely that the “genuine openness” in the assembled dialogue group may be created as a universal communication feature.

The Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue has produced all the defined characteristics of *sustained dialogue*, albeit not in the ideal form targeted by Saunders. Within the speculative problem-solving phase, participants have developed hypothetical plans and models that have an inclusive character and clearly attempt to consider the interests of all sides. Moreover, the process has made a significant contribution to the founding of a group like the group of informal experts, which developed a concept to completely re-shape the relationship between the conflict parties. In addition, this group also managed to achieve great resonance within Georgia, with the result that the issue of federalization and Georgia’s constitutional structure now feature more significantly on the political agenda. At the same time, the yardstick of the Saunders concept demonstrates how far there is still to go before the conflict-ridden relationship can be comprehensively re-shaped. However innovative the Georgian discourse may be, no conceptual development involving both Georgians and Abkhazians exists at present.

Herbert Kelman also sees the introduction of aspects of *interactive problem-solving* as one of the most crucial dynamics, the effects of which range from the micro-level of the project through to the political macro-level of public discourse (Kelman, 1996). It is, however, important to understand that this level of impact does not relate to the specific details of a concept. In the context of the dialogue project analysed here and the example of the group of experts, this means that the concept is innovative as it contains the basic idea that the Georgian side has to create positive inducements and endeavour to create political ideas that send positive signals to the Abkhazian community. It is this element that makes the concept innovative and enriches public discourse. According to this way of thinking, it is a mistake to measure the impact framework of informal dialogue processes solely by how the specific political concepts are received by the political elite. This way of understanding impact is associated, particularly for a facilitating third party, with a

whole range of serious dilemmas (Hizkias Assefa, 2004, 45 – 56). The chapter on learning and change processes has demonstrated various dynamics that affect and enhance important components of a negotiation system, even when these only slowly become visible within public discourse.

The use of Kelman's criteria also illustrates the areas of impact that *cannot* be opened up by the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process. Within the project to date, no process has been developed that would have led both conflict parties to a dynamic of increasing mutual trust-building and ever more valuable levels of communication. We may have shown how the levels of communication in the process have expanded and how speculative scenarios have become a regular component of the process. However Kelman clearly has higher quality levels of communication in mind when he describes the role of the informal dialogue process as ultimately leading the parties directly into official negotiation formats. This suggests another evaluation criterion, namely the creation of informal, interactive micro-processes as an integral element of official negotiation processes. This actually shifts the informal process from the *pre-negotiation* level to the sphere of *negotiation* by way of informal methods. Kelman's criteria did not specifically form the basis of the project design of the Georgian-Abkhazian process, but its flexible, rolling planning design does not exclude them. They are mentioned here in order to show how extensive the evaluation criteria of an informal dialogue workshop concept can theoretically be. Measured in accordance with these, the impact dynamics of this dialogue project move between the start and middle phases.

This report has provided an insight into the opportunities and constraints existing in the political sphere in which the dialogue takes place. The Georgian-Abkhazian encounter was, is and will continue to be challenging for the foreseeable future. The informal dialogue project has succeeded in filling a part of this space and extending its sphere of action. It enjoys the political support of many local and international actors and, not least, the trust of political players on both sides of the conflict line.

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8 Annex

8.1 List of Abkhazian participants

Abkhazian participants	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Emma Avidzba	X												
Giorgiy Otyrba	X									X			
Zaur Shalashaa	X	X											
Aleksander Gulia	X	X	X										
Sveta Konjaria	X												
Batal Tarkil	X												
Daur Arshba		X	X	X			X	X					
Astamur Tania		X	X	X				X	X		X		
Vakhtang Khagba		X								X			
Abesalom Lepsaia		X	X										
Manana Gurgulia			X	X	X	X			X			X	
Ruslan Kharabua			X										
Batal Tabagua				X		X			X				
Ruslan Kishmaria				X	X	X							
Aleksander Stranichkin				X	X		X				X		
Viacheslav Tsugba					X		X	X		X			
Tamaz Ketsba					X								
Aslan Tsvinaria					X								
Leonid Lakerbaia						X		X				X	X
Aleksander Studenikin						X							
Astamur Appba						X							
Arda Inal-Ipa						X							
Stanislav Lakoba							X	X	X	X		X	
Sokrat Djinjolia							X						
Konstantin Tuzhba							X		X				
Ruslan Khashig								X					

Abkhazian participants	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Anna Keropian								X					
Vitaliy Tarnava									X				
Valeriy Zantaria									X				
Beslan Butba										X		X	
Vitaliy Sharia										X			
Nadia Venediktova										X			
Marina Bartsits											X		
Milor Chalmaz											X		
Beslan Kubrava											X		X
Tengiz Lakerbai											X		
Alkhaz Tkhagushev											X		X
Oleg Arshba												X	
Iliya Gamisonia												X	
Laura Avidzba													X
Garik Samanba													X
Maxim Gvindzhiya													X

8.2 List of Georgian participants

Georgian participants	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Paata Zakareishvili	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Shalva Pichkadze	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
Archil Gegeshidze	X	X				X							
Levan Berdzinshvili	X												
Misha Chachkhunashvili	X		X										
Napo Meskhia	X	X		X									
Nato Makadze	X												
Tamaz Khubua		X	X		X	X	X	X	X				
Levan Geradze			X	X							X		
Zurab Adeishvili			X										
Konstantin Kublashvili				X								X	X
Koba Davitashvili				X	X							X	

Georgian participants	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Vakhtang Khmaladze					X								
David Sanikidze					X								
Armaz Akhvlediani						X							
Pikhria Chikradze						X							
Giorgi Kacharava						X		X				X	
Akaki Asatiani							X	X	X				
Hamlet Chipashvili							X	X	X	X	X		
David Paichadze							X	X					
David Bakradze									X	X			
Jemal Gamakharlia									X				
Kote Kemularia									X				
Archil Chitava										X			X
Roza Kukhalashvili										X			
Lali Moroshkina										X			
Mikheil Djibouti											X		
Zurab Erkwani											X	X	
Giorgi Volski											X		
David Darchiashvili												X	
David Berdzenishvili													X
Giga Bokeria													X
Giorgii Khaindrava													X
Zurab Jguburia													X

8.3 List of team members

The team	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Dr. Norbert Ropers (Berghof)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				
Jonathan Cohen (CR)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dr. Clem McCartney	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Dr. Antje Bühler (Berghof)			X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
Dr. Oliver Wolleh (Berghof)			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dr. Rachel Clogg (CR)						X						X	X
Renate Christaller (Berghof)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				

8.4 Press releases

Example 1: Workshop No. 4

Press Release

From 25-30 March the fourth in an ongoing series of dialogue workshops on the Georgia/Abkhazia conflict and peace process took place in Potsdam, Germany. The series of meetings is organized by the Berghof Center for Constructive Conflict Management (Berlin) and Conciliation Resources (London), two international non-governmental organizations with experience in facilitating similar processes in other regions of the world and working to support civic peace initiatives in both Georgia and Abkhazia.

The dialogue process provides a forum for informal reflection and joint analysis for officials, politicians and representatives of civil society organizations. Everyone takes part in their individual capacity, not representing any organization or institution. The process aims to facilitate a mutual exploration of options for a long-term settlement of the Georgia/Abkhazia conflict. In organizing this process the Berghof Center and Conciliation Resources are committed to complementing the official United Nations sponsored peace process.

One premise of the series is that inspiration can be gained by learning how similar problems have been addressed and sometimes solved in other conflict and peace processes. In previous seminars experiences from Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Cyprus have been explored. In Potsdam the Sri Lankan conflict was the prism through which to reflect on the experience of the Georgia/Abkhazia conflict and peace process. Experts from Sri Lanka and the participants reflected on the fact that while the experiences are different in each case there are some structural similarities. In both cases the conflicts are between an internationally recognised state and a non-recognised political unit striving for recognition; the conflicts cannot be understood without regard for the long histories of co-existence as well as of grievances; the conflicts have reached a level of protraction that demands long-term and multi-track responses; constructive conflict transformation must be based on just and sustainable opportunities for development for all the communities involved; and neighbouring big powers play an important role with respect to any settlement.

Such protracted ethno-political conflicts are unlikely to be resolved quickly, even if political settlements are reached. Many issues have been revisited from one seminar to the next. These include the positions of the parties and their underlying interests; their needs and fears; the sanctions regime and how this impacts upon the

respective societies as well as the peace process itself; the relationship between status and security; and the return of IDPs. In Potsdam these issues were discussed in the context of the long-term development of Georgia and Abkhazia and the different strategies the parties pursue in order to achieve their objectives. This also included discussion of the ways in which the parties can assist each other in reaching their long-term goals in a non-violent way.

The participants in the seminar were Koba Davitashvili, Levan Geradze, Konstantin Kublashvili, Napo Meskhia, Shalva Pichkhadze and Paata Zakareishvili from Georgia and Daur Arshba, Manana Gurgulia, Ruslan Kishmaria, Alexander Stranishkin, Batal Tabagua and Astamur Tania from Abkhazia.

The facilitators were Jonathan Cohen, Clem McCartney and Norbert Ropers. The resource people were Tyrol Ferdinands, Director of the National Peace Council, Sri Lanka, and Mano Rajasingham, Chairman of Institute for Alternative Development and Regional Co-operation, Sri Lanka. The seminar was funded by the Evangelische Zentrale für Entwicklungshilfe (EZE - Development Branch of the Protestant Church of Germany, Bonn) and the German Foreign Office (Berlin).

Press release issued by Norbert Ropers (Berghof Center) and Jonathan Cohen (Conciliation Resources)

Example 2: Workshop No. 10

Press Release

The tenth dialogue workshop in an ongoing series on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict and peace process took place in Hamburg, Germany from 5-12 April 2003. The meetings bring together government officials, politicians and civil society representatives from both sides of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. The objective of the series has been to provide a forum where participants discuss and analyse opportunities and obstacles in the peace process in an environment that encourages creative thinking, realism and mutual respect. As an informal and non-official process no decisions are taken and no common positions sought.

The Hamburg workshop followed soon after the Sochi meeting in March and the meeting of the Group of Friends of the Secretary General of the UN on Georgia in Geneva in February. The participants were mindful of the new impetus given to the negotiation process by these meetings. Nevertheless they were cautious about prospects for significant change.

Drawing upon the aforementioned meetings, discussions in Hamburg focussed on factors that inhibit progress in the negotiations and areas where the parties might

find common ground both in regard to issues of substance and process. In particular participants addressed the concern that the strategies of the parties often play on the gravest fears of the other side. As a result negotiations are not always considered the most effective way to make progress. This reinforces a vicious cycle of mistrust. To overcome this reticence the meeting explored how each party could make negotiations more attractive for the other party and in particular how risks could be minimized so that the parties could negotiate without the fear that this would jeopardize their goals and interests. Participants discussed whether the parties could pursue negotiations and dialogue in ways that could help each other to have an expectation that a mutually acceptable outcome could be achieved.

The participants examined whether or not it would be helpful in the short term to focus mainly on social and economic issues and return to the question of the status of Abkhazia at a future date. It was recognized that this would not mean that either side would have to abandon their current positions. While the risks of such an approach were noted it was also felt that such a strategy might allow a more constructive approach to negotiations.

The dialogue was characterized by an open and frank exchange in which participants were able to air contested and often painful issues in a constructive manner. It is hoped that this will contribute to a culture of dialogue between their communities.

The participants in the seminar were David Bakradze, Hamlet Chipashvili, Archil Chitava, Roza Kukhalashvili, Lali Moroshkina, Shalva Pichkhadze and Paata Zakareishvili from Georgia and Beslan Butba, Vakhtang Khagba, Stanislav Lakoba, Gyorgy Otyrba, Vitalii Sharia, Viacheslav Tsugba and Nadia Venediktova from Abkhazia. Everyone took part in their individual capacity, not representing any organization or institution.

The workshop was organized by the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management (Berlin) and Conciliation Resources (London), two international non-governmental organizations that have worked in the Caucasus for a number of years and with experience facilitating similar processes in other regions of the world. Facilitation was by Jonathan Cohen, Clem McCartney and Oliver Wolleh.

The workshop was funded by the Development Service of the Protestant Church (Bonn) and the United Kingdom Global Conflict Prevention Pool.

Jonathan Cohen (Conciliation Resources) 12 April 2003

Example 3: Workshop No. 13

Press Release

The 13th dialogue workshop in an ongoing series on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict and peace process took place in Berlin from 7-11 May 2004, bringing together government officials, politicians and public figures from both sides of the conflict. These workshops provide a forum for participants to discuss and analyse opportunities and obstacles in the peace process in an environment that encourages creative thinking, realism and mutual respect. As an informal and non-official process no decisions are taken.

Political events in Georgia over the past six months, from the “Rose Revolution”, through the election of President Mikheil Saakashvili to the departure from office of Aslan Abashidze formed an important part of discussions. Likewise the Georgian participants were eager to hear from the Abkhazian participants about recent developments in Abkhazia and in particular about the process for conducting the presidential election in Abkhazia that is expected to take place in October 2004, and its possible outcome. The participants recognised that the integrity of the democratic process in Abkhazia is of considerable importance, notwithstanding the fact that the election is not recognised by the international community or the Government of Georgia. All acknowledged that the new leaderships on both sides will have the opportunity to impact more on the negotiations process but that any new approach will need to be sensitive to what is publicly acceptable.

In discussing the current and prospective political situation it was evident that there are often misunderstandings between the parties. The participants were challenged to think about whether or not statements and actions by politicians and public figures are always perceived as intended by the other side.

Participants explored the commitment of the two sides to their stated positions – that of territorial integrity on the part of Georgia and that of recognition of independence on the part of the Abkhazians – and whether they can articulate their positions in a way that better incorporates the aspirations of the other party. Those taking part in the seminar examined options for the future and the importance of a framework for negotiations that satisfies the needs of the parties to the conflict.

In exploring these issues the participants were mindful of important recent international developments such as the conduct of the war in Iraq and the referendum on the territorial arrangement of Cyprus.

The workshop was characterized by a constructive exchange. It is hoped that this will contribute to a culture of dialogue and understanding between the respective communities.

The Abkhaz participants in the workshop were Arzadin Agrba, Laura Avidzba, Beslan Kubrava, Leonid Lakerbaia, Garik Samanba and Alkhas Tkhashev. The Georgian participants were David Berdzenishvili, Giga Bokeria, Archil Chitava, Zurab Jguburia, Giorgii Khaindrava, Konstantin Kublashvili, and Paata Zakareishvili. Everyone took part in their individual capacity, not representing any organization or institution.

The workshop was organized by the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management (Berlin) and Conciliation Resources (London), two international non-governmental organizations that have worked in the Caucasus for a number of years and with experience facilitating similar processes in other regions of the world. Facilitation was by Clem McCartney, Jonathan Cohen, Oliver Wolleh and Rachel Clogg.

The workshop was funded by the Swiss Federal Department for Foreign Affairs and the United Kingdom Global Conflict Prevention Pool.

Jonathan Cohen (Conciliation Resources) 13 May 2004

8.5 Organizations and authors involved in the discussion pack

The project to create the “Training Handbook for the Constructive Management of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict” (discussion pack) was led by Dr. Antje Bühler (Berghof Center) and sponsored by the Federal Foreign Office (Berlin) and the *Evangelische Entwicklungsdienst* (Church Development Service) (Bonn). The following people were involved in various functions and project phases:

- as project coordinators: Abesalom Lepsaya (Sukhum(i)) and Paata Zakareishvili (Tbilisi),
- as authors of the texts: Nino Durglishvili (Tbilisi) and Abesalom Lepsaya (Sukhum(i)) with contributions from Emzar Jgerenaia (Tbilisi), Paata Zakareishvili (Tbilisi), Arda Inal-Ipa (Sukhum(i)), Ivlian Khaindrava (Tbilisi) and Asida Shakryl (Sukhum(i)),
- as authors of the content-related introduction to the discussion pack: Jonathan Cohen (London) and Norbert Ropers (Colombo, Sri Lanka),
- as authors of the methodological introduction on the use of the discussion pack: Clem McCartney (Belfast) and Elena Ivanova (St. Petersburg),
- as experts on political content: Irina Agrba (Sukhum(i)), Manuchar Akhalaia (Tbilisi), Vakhtang Khagba (Sukhum(i)), Yulia Kharashvili (Tbilisi), Giorgiy Khutsishvili (Tbilisi), Maxim Gvindjia (Sukhum(i)), Manana Gurgulia (Sukhum(i)), Otari Jordania (Tbilisi), Liana Kvarchelia (Sukhum(i)), Guram Odisharia (Tbilisi), Salome Odisharia (Tbilisi), Giorgiy Otyrba (Gagra), Ghia Nodia (Tbilisi), Nodar Sardjveladse (Tbilisi), Sergey Shamba (Sukhum(i)), Tinatin Chekelashvili (Tbilisi),
- as pedagogics experts: Marina Akirtava (Sukhum(i)), Liana Beria (Tbilisi), Mariam Beria (Tbilisi), Yulia Kharashvili (Tbilisi), Marina Elbakidze (Tbilisi), Arda Inal-Ipa (Sukhum(i)), Elena Nikitichna Ivanova (St. Petersburg), Elena Kobakhia (Sukhum(i)), Galya Kalimovaja (Sukhum(i)), Aida Ladaria (Sukhum(i)), Marina Pochua (Tbilisi), Tinatin Chekelashvili (Tbilisi),
- as readers: Emil Adelkhanov, Elena Cook, Elena Zavodskaya,
- as participants in the test training sessions: students and doctorate students of the universities in Sukhum/i und Tiflis, participants in the «Молодые лидеры на Кавказе» programmes (young executive management in Caucasus), staff of the press agency “Apsnypress”, students at the Sukhum(i) Youth House Сухумский Дом Юношества, staff of the «Центр Гуманитарных Программ» non-governmental organization (Center for Humanitarian Programmes),
- as translators: Henryk Alff (Berlin), Rachel Clogg (London), Elena Cook (London), Nata Gzobava (Tbilisi) and Elena Ivanova (St. Petersburg).