

Press Release

The eleventh dialogue workshop in an ongoing series on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict and peace process took place in Berlin, Germany from 15-20 July 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 workshop commenced with a detailed discussion of the internal political dynamics that have dominated the Georgian and Abkhaz communities since the previous meeting in Hamburg in April 2003. With regard to Abkhazia attention was paid to the fluid political situation following the change in government and in particular the relationship between the President and Parliament and the role of the public movement Amtsakhara. Georgian participants outlined the political manoeuvrings in relation to the forthcoming parliamentary election in November 2003 and the way in which politicians are using this as a staging post for the presidential election in 2005. With a presidential election in Abkhazia due in autumn 2004 the participants drew parallels between the political processes and the implications of electoral politics for the prospects in the peace process. The danger of Georgian politicians speculating on the Abkhaz question during the election campaign was noted. The rhetorical and often aggressive slogans that characterise much political debate and the trend for personalities to take precedence over policies were seen as particular sources of concern.

Participants analyzed the way in which internal political developments feed into the peace process and create the culture of negotiations. This culture is further conditioned by the relations between the parties, the United Nations and other third parties, especially the Russian Federation and the USA. There was an implicit consensus that the range of options their respective sides can pursue is limited by the complexity of the international context as well as by concerns regarding how public opinion responds to the peace process.

Recognising the difficulty to impact upon the context in which negotiations take place, participants examined the specific issues of security guarantees and opportunities for economic mobilization. These are two areas that might open up potential for political progress. At the same time participants recognised that the question of IDP return impacts upon the way both these issues are discussed, and is an issue with political and humanitarian aspects.

The dialogue was characterized by an open and frank exchange. It is hoped that this will contribute to a culture of dialogue between their communities.

The Georgian participants in the seminar were, Hamlet Chipashvili, Mikheil Djibouti, Zurab Erkwania, Levan Geradze, Shalva Pichkhadze, Giorgi Volski and Paata Zakareishvili and the Abkhaz participants were Marina Bartsits, Milor Chalmaz, Beslan Kubrava, Tengiz Lakerbai, Aleksander Stranichkin, Astamur Tania and Alkhas Tkhagushev. 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), Swiss Federal Department for Foreign Affairs and the United Kingdom Global Conflict Prevention Pool.

Jonathan Cohen (Conciliation Resources) 20 July 2003