

## Press Release

The seventh dialogue workshop in an ongoing series on the Georgia/Abkhazia conflict and peace process took place in Stadtschlaining, Austria from 7-12 April 2002.

Current relations between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides to the conflict are marked by tension. Significant security concerns exacerbated in the second half of 2001 have yet to be resolved; the situation in the Kodori Gorge remains contested and extremely tense; and the negotiations process itself is in difficulties. In this context the participants valued the opportunity for government officials and parliamentarians from across the conflict divide to: share perceptions of recent developments; analyse underlying challenges in the peace process; and explore the parties' respective approaches and requirements to revitalise the negotiations process.

The dialogue enabled the participants to reflect on their approaches to the conflict and to what extent the strategies of the respective parties will enable them to achieve their aims in both the short and long-term.

The participants engaged in a frank dialogue on a number of issues including: the impact that the threat of force has on preparedness to negotiate constructively; the positive and negative influence of external actors; and internal developments within their respective societies which influence their approaches to resolving the conflict. In discussing their respective strategies for negotiations the parties identified areas of common ground and the possibility for confidence building measures, but they also recognised that unless such measures are clear and comprehensible they can have a negative impact on relations.

The organisers observed that a vicious circle exists: internal development and democratisation are regarded as preconditions for an improvement in relations across the conflict divide but the conflictual relations between the parties are a brake on democratisation and development in both communities.

The participants in the seminar were Akaki Asatiani, Hamlet Chipashvili, Tamaz Khubua, David Paichadze, Shalva Pichkhadze and Paata Zakareishvili from Georgia and Daur Arshba, Sokrat Djinjolia, Stanislav Lakoba, Aleksander Stranichkin, Konstantin Tuzhba and Viacheslav Tsugba from Abkhazia. Everyone took part in their individual capacity, not representing any organisation or institution.

The workshop was organised by the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management (Berlin) and Conciliation Resources (London), two international non-governmental organisations with experience in facilitating similar processes in the Caucasus and other regions of the world. The workshop was funded by the German Foreign Office (Berlin) and the Development Service of the Protestant Church (Bonn) with support in kind from the United Kingdom Department for International Development.

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