

Press Release

The ninth dialogue workshop in an ongoing series on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict and peace process took place in Berlin, Germany from 17-22 November 2002.

Participants discussed the current state of relations between the conflicting parties and recent changes in the regional context. The peace process is seen to be making little progress and tensions and lack of trust persist between the parties. Participants examined the value of a framework of principles for renewed negotiation processes and the steps parties could take separately and jointly to promote this. This led to discussion of relevant considerations including guarantees to prevent the use of force and the role of peacekeeping; the procedures for moving into and managing negotiations; human rights and group rights as part of a peace process; and issues concerning the return of IDPs; relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction – plus economic development and exchanges of information. Issues were examined in terms of the opportunities and risks they present and principles of decision-making in a negotiations process.

The role of the international community in facilitating or hampering peace processes was a theme that ran through much of the discussion. This was analyzed from the perspectives of power politics in contrast to co-operative engagements. One participant characterized the current role of third parties in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict more as a process of crisis management than conflict resolution. Discussion of recent developments in Cyprus, Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka indicated that in each case in its own way the interplay between internal and regional dynamics combined with the roles of third parties has served to shift seemingly intractable conflicts in the direction of political resolution. In this light the participants considered whether their own parties are able to shape the role the international community plays and thereby encourage it to be more constructive or whether they are merely the objects of external involvement.

The participants in the seminar were Akaki Asatiani, David Bakradze, Hamlet Chipashvili, Jemal Gamakharia, Kote Kemularia, Tamaz Khubua, and Paata Zakareishvili from Georgia and Manana Gurgulia, Stanislav Lakoba, Batal TabaguaAstamur Tania, Vitalii Tarnava, Konstantin Tuzhba and Valerii Zantaria 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 other regions of the world. The workshop was funded by the German Foreign Office (Berlin), the Development Service of the Protestant Church (Bonn) and the United Kingdom Department for International Development.

Jonathan Cohen (Conciliation Resources) and Norbert Ropers (Berghof Center) 22 November 2002