

IFP MEDIATION CLUSTER

CASE STUDY: LESSONS FROM SOUTH CAUCASUS

MEDIATION AND DIALOGUE:

Official and Unofficial Strands

Natalia Mirimanova

January 2009

International Alert.



INITIATIVE FOR PEACEBUILDING



THIS INITIATIVE IS FUNDED
BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

ABOUT IFP

The Initiative for Peacebuilding (IfP) is a consortium led by International Alert and funded by the European Commission. IfP draws together the complementary geographic and thematic expertise of 10 civil society organisations (and their networks) with offices across the EU and in conflict-affected countries. Its aim is to develop and harness international knowledge and expertise in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding to ensure that all stakeholders, including EU institutions, can access strong independent analysis in order to facilitate better informed and more evidence-based policy decisions.

This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of IfP/International Alert and under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union. To learn more, visit <http://www.initiativeforpeacebuilding.eu>.

ABOUT INTERNATIONAL ALERT

International Alert is an independent peacebuilding organisation that has worked for over 20 years to lay the foundations for lasting peace and security in communities affected by violent conflict. Our multifaceted approach focuses both in and across various regions; aiming to shape policies and practices that affect peacebuilding; and helping build skills and capacity through training. Our regional work is based in the African Great Lakes, West Africa, the South Caucasus, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Our thematic projects work at local, regional and international levels, focusing on cross-cutting issues critical to building sustainable peace. These include business and economy, gender, governance, aid, security and justice. We are one of the world's leading peacebuilding NGOs, with an estimated income of £11 million in 2009 and more than 120 staff based in London and our 11 field offices. To learn more, visit <http://www.international-alert.org>.

Picture front cover: © International Alert/Oskari Pentikainen.

© Initiative for Peacebuilding 2009

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without full attribution.

MEDIATION AND DIALOGUE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank Lucia Montanaro, Canan Gündüz, Diana Klein and Juliet Schofield from International Alert and Antje Herrberg from Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) for their comments on the paper.

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	6
Introduction	8
The Multi-track Diplomacy Model	9
Official and Unofficial Mediation and Dialogue: Mapping the Field	10
Distinctions Between Official and Unofficial Mediation	12
Outcomes and Timing	12
Participants	12
Legal Enforcement of Agreements	12
Resilience	13
Impartiality and Neutrality	13
Coercion	14
Traditional Security Framework for Official Mediation	14
Human Security Framework for Unofficial Mediation and Dialogue	15
Relationships Between Parties	15
Opportunities for a Complementary Approach	16
Challenges to Unofficial Mediation and Dialogue	18
Mediation and Dialogue Projects are Slow to Adjust to Changes in the Conflict Context	18
Selection of Participants	18
No Clear Link Between Dialogue and Structural Change	20
Dialogue as a Surrogate of Reconciliation - Where is the Justice Part?	21
Dialogue and Mediation Do Not Translate into Change in the Public Opinion Structure	21
Sustainability of Unofficial Dialogue	23
Recommendations for the EU and for NGOs Working in the Region	24

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mediation and dialogue are the most established strategies of conflict resolution. Grounded in the principle that the conflict parties need to resolve the conflict themselves with procedural assistance from a neutral and impartial third party, mediation and dialogue appear to be a fair, humanistic, cost-effective and democratic means of conflict resolution, as opposed to arbitration or military intervention by a third party. However, mediation and dialogue cannot be contained in an ivory tower and need to be placed in a real-life conflict context characterised by violence, mistrust, political opportunism, vengeance and systemic injustice.

The purpose of this paper is to explore approaches to and formats of mediation and dialogue, and the relevance and effectiveness of these strategies in the context of protracted violent conflicts, with particular emphasis on the conflicts in the South Caucasus. Differences and complementarities between official and unofficial mediation and dialogue are highlighted. Advantages and deficiencies inherent in unofficial mediation and dialogue are discussed and new creative strategies to get out of the loop of talks for the sake of talks are proposed. Innovative formats of unofficial dialogue are illustrated with examples from the conflict regions in the South Caucasus.

The EU has an important role to play in peacebuilding in the individual conflicts in the South Caucasus, as well as in the promotion of regional stability and security. Mediation and dialogue ought to be in the palette of EU strategies for conflict transformation. A more nuanced understanding of these processes, as well as of the interplay of mediation and dialogue and the conflict context factors needs to be developed within the EU and its programmes and missions that deal with conflicts in the European Neighbourhood – the South Caucasus included. The present paper serves this purpose. Recommendations for the EU as a donor and a political mediator in the conflicts in the South Caucasus and for European non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that run unofficial dialogue and mediation projects in the region include the following:

- The EU should sponsor dialogue and mediation not only on the core conflict issues, but where dialogue on the most contentious issues is not possible or cannot be effective. It should pay greater attention to the mediation and dialogue on second-order and side issues, or on the issues of supra-national, regional scale, such as environmental degradation, human and drug trafficking, labour migration and others.
- EU donors need to develop flexibility in their funding of *ad hoc* dialogue and mediation initiatives. Proper timing and capacity to accommodate a need for “flexible geometry” in the changing conflict context are important for the amplification of an impact of a dialogue and mediation. Dialogue projects need to be implemented not when funding is available, but when they are most relevant. In addition to funding long-term, ongoing dialogue projects, a pool for the funding of emerging unofficial dialogue needs to be created.
- EU donors and political bodies need to make adjustments to their evaluation of unofficial dialogue and mediation projects. A process-orientated evaluation strategy needs to be applied to elicit an impact of a long-term process aimed at attitudinal change.
- Greater liaison between dialogue and mediation by the formal EU and individual state authorities, and by European NGOs is recommended to compensate for disadvantages of official mediation by advantages of the unofficial track and *vice versa*.
- Tailored programmes need to be designed and implemented at the interface of mediation and dialogue and civil society capacity-building, mass media development and good governance.

- Cross-border dialogue and mediation at the periphery of the societies in conflict at the grass-roots and local authorities' levels need to be supported and institutionalised. Positive experience of solving pressing social and economic issues through a dialogue with neighbours on the opposing side may become a model of conflict resolution strategy and a confidence-building measure for a wider society.
- Novel formats should be further explored that address deficiencies of an unofficial dialogue, for example, mass media-mediated dialogue projects need to receive greater attention because of the outreach opportunities that they provide.
- Whenever possible, unofficial mediation and dialogue need to be linked with practical projects that provide tangible peace dividends (e.g. jobs, better ecology, safe water and energy supply) that capitalise on personal attitudinal change and improved inter-personal relationships between the dialogue participants and involve them as leaders of social change, irrespective of the scale and publicity of the projects.

INTRODUCTION

Mediation and dialogue are specific types of conflict intervention strategies. They are both grounded in conflict resolution through controlled communication by the conflict parties. These strategies serve different purposes and are guided by distinct rules. Mediation is a third party-assisted, or third party-initiated and led, communication between representatives of conflict parties, in order for them to directly talk to each other, discuss issues, reach an agreement and make decisions together. Dialogue is an open-ended communication between conflict parties that is facilitated or moderated by a third party, in order to foster mutual recognition, understanding, empathy and trust. 'Unlike mediation, in which the goal is usually reaching a resolution or settlement of a dispute', the Conflict Research Consortium argues, 'the goal of dialogue is usually simply improving interpersonal understanding and trust'.¹ This does not mean, however, that dialogue is a lightweight process compared to mediation. Practitioners that have worked in the Balkans, South Caucasus and other conflict regions would probably disagree that 'simply improving' relationships and building trust is a simple task. Casual conversation, discussion or debate by members of the rival parties does not qualify as dialogue, because for dialogue to happen, communication of the parties ought to unfold according to certain rules, to be orchestrated in a way that the participants can hear each other, acknowledge the other side's part of the story, develop empathy towards each other and critically re-assess one's position and behaviour – in sum, transcend the exchange of blows when one is trying to defeat or proselytise the other. Dialogue is a communication method when the parties create a new common communicative space. Mediation and dialogue have very similar communication processes. The distinction is that dialogue is generally process-focused, while mediation is a product-focused process. However, the distinction is especially blurred at the unofficial level. Dialogue may be product-focused when the parties have a super-ordinate goal (such as a prisoner-of-war exchange) which requires an agreement on specific issues that cannot be reached without building trust and developing empathy between opponents.

The conflicts dealt with in this paper are protracted social conflicts² or deep-rooted conflicts³ marked by violence of varying intensity and duration. These conflicts cannot be resolved through a bargaining procedure because non-negotiable basic human needs such as identity, security, participation and development are at their core. Containment of the warring factions may result in a short-term cessation of violence, but will not ensure lasting peace unless the institutions and attitudes that caused and aggravated the conflict are addressed and transformed.

Mediation and dialogue are necessary strategies for conflict resolution and conflict transformation, but will not build peace if they are the only strategies used. They have to be part of a larger process, addressing issues such as transforming institutions, governance structures, alleviating poverty and demilitarisation. The interweaving of dialogue and mediation into multi-issue, multi-strategy interventions is an innovative and promising approach to peacebuilding.

1 'Glossary', Conflict Research Consortium (CRH) - University of Colorado, US, available at <http://www.beyondintractability.org/resources/glossary.jsp?nid=5098>.

2 E.E. Azar (1983). 'The theory of protracted social conflict and the challenge of transforming conflict situations', *World Affairs, Monograph Series*, Vol. 20, pp.81-99.

3 J. Burton (1987). *Resolving deep-rooted conflict: A handbook*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America.

THE MULTI-TRACK DIPLOMACY MODEL

Initially the terms Track I and Track II were suggested to distinguish between governmental and non-governmental diplomacy,⁴ and to acknowledge that mediation and dialogue ought to take place at different levels of society and that elites should not have priority for making peace. The McDonald-Diamond model expanded this.⁵ Nine diplomacy tracks ranging from business-to-business to academics-to-academics and clergy-to-clergy and others demonstrated the richness and potential of unofficial diplomacy. Track I remained the top authority avenue, while the other eight tracks are a diversified and expanded former Track II. (See Figure 1.)

FIGURE 1: MULTI-TRACK DIPLOMACY MODEL⁶



Although Track I remains the primary avenue for political negotiations, this does not imply that non-governmental actors are excluded from the processes and activities at the top level. Civil society actors have been participants in official negotiations in several conflict settings,⁷ while government representatives can partake in non-governmental dialogue. Official mediation has both visible and invisible parts. The latter usually involves behind-the-scenes shuttle diplomacy, clandestine talks between top leaders or people from the top decision-making circles. The Oslo Peace process and numerous rounds of clandestine talks in the Northern Ireland conflict are examples of “unofficial official” mediation.

4 J.V. Montville (1987). 'The arrow and the olive branch: The case for track-two diplomacy' in W.S. Thompson and K.M. Jensen (Eds.) (1987). *Conflict resolution: Track two diplomacy*. Washington DC, US: Foreign Service Institute, US Department of State. pp.253-269.

5 J. McDonald and L. Diamond (1996). *Multi-track diplomacy: A systemic approach to peace*. Virginia, US: Kumarian Press.

6 Available at the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy (IMTD) website, at <http://imtd.org/cgi-bin/imtd.cgi>.

7 C. Barnes (Ed.) (2002). 'Owning the process: Public participation in peacemaking', *Accord*, No. 13. Available at <http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/public-participation/contents.php>.

OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL MEDIATION AND DIALOGUE: MAPPING THE FIELD

Official mediation and dialogue are defined here as dialogue and mediation between those who hold formal top-rank decision-making authority, or their delegated representatives. These can be *de jure* leaders of recognised entities, such as states or governments, or *de facto* leaders who represent groups, such as armed “rebels” or self-proclaimed nation-states that either do not recognise the law and authority of the state and/or government they are in conflict with, or are not recognised by them.

Unofficial mediation and dialogue have many names, such as private diplomacy,⁸ public peace processes,⁹ problem-solving workshops¹⁰ and transformative mediation.¹¹ It ‘denotes various informal, unofficial forms of interaction between members of adversary parties that attempt to influence public opinion, develop strategies, or organise resources toward the resolution of the conflict’, observes Ronald Fisher.¹² In reality, unofficial interactive conflict resolution processes have grown to become hybrid relationship-product processes.¹³ This trend is partly due to the weariness of talking for the sake of talking,¹⁴ often resulting in a lack of tangible change in protracted conflict settings. The emergence of strategies at the interface of conflict transformation and the fields of development, human rights and media have opened up new horizons for cross-conflict dialogue and trust-building. Such projects can yield tangible results, such as prisoner-of-war exchange, refugee assistance, economic initiatives, films and publications. These are multi-disciplinary initiatives that combine dialogue with practical conflict transformation outputs. Dialogue in these initiatives unfolds at different levels – between the initiative implementers themselves, between the initiative implementers and their respected target groups, and between larger communities across the conflict – and therefore becomes the means *and* the ends. The increasing popularity of fusing dialogue with other peacebuilding projects can also be explained by pressure from the donor community to provide proof of the productiveness of dialogue as an activity that is worth continuous funding (i.e. as an activity that delivers trust, understanding, empathy and eventually peace).

Dialogue may be creatively modified to substitute face-to-face communication through words with communication through artistic means (e.g. films, photos, songs, plays etc.). The *Dialogue Through Film* project is a vivid example of an unconventional yet genuine dialogue between Armenians and Azerbaijanis (see Box 1). The Caucasus Business and Development Network (CBDN) (see Box 2) is an example of dialogue through business. For instance, cheese-makers from the opposing conflict camps have arrived at an agreement on a new cheese brand and delivered the actual commercial product. In another case, farmers, having developed a joint strategy to fight a hazardous insect on both sides of the Inguri River,¹⁵ are engaged in a dialogue which has produced concrete dialogue dividends.

8 A term used by Crisis Management Initiative (CMI). For more details, see: <http://www.cmi.fi>.

9 H.H. Saunders (1999). *A public peace process: Sustained dialogue to transform racial and ethnic conflicts*. New York, US: St. Martin's Press.

10 H.C. Kelman (1972). 'The problem-solving workshop in conflict resolution' in R.L. Merritt (Ed.). *Communication in international politics*. Urbana, US: University of Illinois Press. pp.168-204.

11 Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, USA. Available at <http://www.beyondintractability.org/resources/glossary.jsp?nid=5098>.

12 R.J. Fisher (1997). *Interactive conflict resolution*. New York, US: Syracuse University Press. p.9.

13 In reality, unofficial interactive conflict resolution processes have grown to become hybrid relationship-product processes that aspire to produce outputs that legitimise the value of a dialogue as an efficient and effective conflict transformation strategy. Hence, dialogue at the unofficial level is being increasingly approached as a project and not as an open-ended process. Trust, understanding, empathy that a classic dialogue is aimed at fostering seem to be too fluid for the parties involved and for the sponsors.

14 Also known among practitioners as “hummus meetings”, named after the countless one-off dialogue meetings between Israelis and Palestinians with little or no result, in which numerous bowls of hummus were consumed.

15 The Inguri River is the physical border separating Abkhazia and Georgia.

Box 1

The *Dialogue Through Film* project started in 2006 as a collaborative project by the London-based Conciliation Resources and Internews-Armenia, Internews-Azerbaijan and Stepanakert Press Club. This project aims at building bridges between young people, mostly journalists from the Armenian community of Nagorny Karabakh to directly communicate with their peers from Azerbaijan, including refugees from Nagorny Karabakh. Participants produce short documentaries as a method of exchanging their ideas and emotions as regards the war and post-war life in their societies. The selected participants receive intense conflict transformation and film production training and go back to their communities in search of human stories that convey a message to share with a counterpart.

Box 2

The Caucasus Business and Development Network (CBDN) is an example of cross-conflict dialogue in the South Caucasus. It uses a regional format and promotes dialogue through economic initiatives. The CBDN was launched by a group of people from all sides of the regional divides who have the vision of an economically integrated South Caucasus. Awareness of the interdependence of people and economies, and the “unnaturalness” of impermeable borders in the South Caucasus, motivated CBDN to implement projects that were aimed at both structural change and awareness-raising. Structural initiatives have included drafting provisional rules for cross-conflict trade and business, creating a new Caucasus cheese brand as an embodiment of an integrated South Caucasus, a cross-conflict bilateral farming machinery lending scheme, and honey and juice production. Awareness-raising activities have included South Caucasus tea festivals and other public events, and political lobbying. It has incorporated regular research into the scope of its activities from the outset. Geographically, CBDN covers Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, encompassing Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorny Karabakh.

Often unofficial dialogue and mediation are combined with conflict resolution capacity-building training. In this training, members of the conflict parties jointly participate in either mock or genuine role play mediation and dialogue scenarios – but not scenarios based on their own conflict settings – or engage in mediation or dialogue-type exercises to tackle real life issues from their own conflict context. This approach is usually taken when the situation is volatile, when participants have not had experience of engaging in mediation or dialogue with members of the opposite side before, or when direct talks and other cross-conflict activities by unofficial actors are frowned upon or hindered by the authorities. Dialogue training may be a useful starting point for conducting larger initiatives aimed at training participants as implementers of cross-conflict projects who will need the skills to reach agreements with their conflict counterparts on difficult issues of various scale.

In the following section, the two clusters of mediation and dialogue are contrasted, and the strengths and weaknesses and complementarity of the two are discussed at length.

Official and unofficial mediation and dialogue processes differ not merely because they take place at different levels of the society. There are other principal differences that set these two processes apart. It is important to understand what these differences are and plan the mediation and dialogue interventions accordingly. The danger is of raising false expectations or getting the sequence and the emphases wrong, which in turn may devalue the mediation and dialogue as peacebuilding strategies in the eyes of the conflict parties and even aggravate the situation.

In the next chapter we will map the field of interactive conflict resolution, of which mediation and dialogue are strategies, and highlight the distinctions and commonalities between official and unofficial processes.

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL MEDIATION

OUTCOMES AND TIMING

Official mediation is expected to yield solutions that concern cessation of armed hostilities and intermediate or final solutions to the conflict. Unofficial mediation and dialogue are rarely ever expected to stop violence or deliver solutions to the core conflict issues. These processes are primarily aimed at a personal change of the participants, which in turn is expected to lead to the “humanisation” of relationships between members of the opposing parties, trust-building, and motivation for peacebuilding initiative design and implementation.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants in official mediation are the official leaders of their people and have the political power to change the course of a conflict. Participants in unofficial mediation and dialogue could be civil society leaders, students, entrepreneurs, journalists, ex-combatants etc. Officials and politicians can also partake in unofficial dialogue and mediation, but only in their capacity as opinion leaders or experts, or when non-core conflict issues like local community problems (e.g. environmental hazards, epidemics, water management, cross-border trade etc.) are being decided upon.

LEGAL ENFORCEMENT OF AGREEMENTS

Intermediate official mediations (including clandestine and shuttle diplomacy talks) and unofficial mediation produce agreements that can be broken. Violations and revisions of intermediate agreements, including unilateral ones, are common. Mediation allows the parties to reach an agreement that is mutually acceptable – or at least not objectionable – to the different parties concerned. It enables exploration of various solutions beyond what is prescribed in international and national law and also creates precedents for innovative political, economic and security arrangements. This is an advantage of mediation and dialogue compared to arbitration or imposition of a solution by force. On the other hand, the non-legally binding nature of unofficial mediation and dialogue, and of behind-the-scenes official mediation, raises expectations that sometimes cannot be fulfilled. Violation of final peace agreements by one or all parties may entail sanctions from the international community. However, the threat of sanctions is not the only factor that makes the parties observe an agreement. The responsibility of conflict party leaders for the enforcement of the mediation decisions could be of a moral and/or pragmatic nature: the top leadership may be dedicated to make peace or may see more privileges than disadvantages should it follow the peace agreement road to the end. Unofficial dialogue that involves civil society and other non-state actors is an important synergist for the official mediation in this case, as it legitimises official peace processes, anchors them and ensures the rootedness of official agreements.¹⁶

Unofficial mediation does not have any enforcement mechanisms except for the participants' commitment to follow the agreements and their resolve to advocate for the mediation and dialogue achievements within their society and authorities.

16 J.P. Lederach (1997). *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington DC: US Institute of Peace Press.

RESILIENCE

Unofficial dialogue processes can survive the different conflict phases in order to keep communication channels open and to continue confidence-building, which is vitally important in protracted conflicts where levels of violence fluctuate. Official mediation processes frequently collapse at the onset of violence and proceed when it subsides, making it possible for those opposing a peace process to undermine it with violence. Throughout the “frozen” conflict phase, characterised by either absent or idling and extremely volatile official talks, an unofficial dialogue and mediation that generates innovative frameworks for addressing the core conflict issues and consequences of the violence may be a stimulus for the resumption of official talks as “face saving” and ensuring mutually needed progress. At the same time, unofficial dialogue may be instrumental in raising public support for peace talks within the rival societies that may influence the leaders’ decision to intensify the peace process.

IMPARTIALITY AND NEUTRALITY

Official and unofficial mediation differ in the adherence of a third party to the principles of impartiality and neutrality. When acting state leaders play a mediator role in official negotiations, mediation driven by the political interest of a third party is often confused with professional mediation. This is not to say that power-based mediation, in which a third party applies pressure on one or several parties, entices them to reach an agreement, and proposes and lobbies a particular agreement, is objectionable: ‘[...] worlds of war and politics tolerate and often demand a spectrum of mediating roles that exceed conventional notions of mediation practice because of the extreme human consequences and political ramifications of continuing armed conflict’.¹⁷

Politically motivated official mediation may indeed be very effective in brokering a cease-fire, keeping the parties apart and preventing them from relapsing into a war, and even signing a final conflict resolution agreement. However, when the main principle of impartiality (not siding with any of the parties) and neutrality (not having interest in a particular outcome) are compromised, which is often the case in this type of mediation effort, it could jeopardise the sustainability and public endorsement of an intermediate or final agreement. The Russian Federation is one such example, claiming a role as mediator in the Georgia-Abkhazia and Georgia-South Ossetia conflicts, while providing political, humanitarian and economic support to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgia did not trust the process and searched for a strong patron to equalise the power dynamics, and re-focused on a military means to resolve the conflict. The US also has a record of biased mediation in the cases of crises in Bosnia and Kosovo.¹⁸ The Dayton Peace Agreement was timely and managed to stop the atrocious war, but was not instrumental in building a functional multi-ethnic state and eventually led to growing bitterness among all the communities in Bosnia. The legitimised cessation of conflict in Kosovo in exchange for the prospect for Serbia of joining the EU has led to a split within Serbian society, while presence of international institutions in the security and governance sector of Kosovo is perceived by Kosovo Albanians as curtailing Kosovo’s sovereignty. In sum, the region has not moved as much as possible.

Multi-party third parties are formed in some cases to eschew partiality. The mediation role of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk group on the Nagorny Karabakh conflict is one example. In other cases, such as George Mitchell in the Northern Ireland peace process and Jimmy Carter acting as a mediator in several conflicts in Africa, the parties may choose a mediator who is not an acting politician. A mediator can be appointed by the UN Security Council, or the UN Secretary General may play this role, as was the case in the crisis in Timor-Leste in September 1999. This is a type of official mediation that is more professional than politically motivated. It has a serious disadvantage in terms of available leverage – either pressure or resources – to ensure the steady progression of mediation towards a peace agreement. The advantage, however, is that a neutral and impartial mediator that is accepted by all parties can work on the improvement of relationships and trust that cement step-by-step progress in talks.

17 H. Slim (2007). *A guide to mediation: Enabling peace processes in violent conflicts*. Geneva, Switzerland: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. Available at <http://www.hdcentre.org/publications/guide-mediation-enabling-peace-processes-violent-conflicts>.

18 P. Wallensteen (2002). *Understanding conflict resolution: War, peace and the global security*. London, UK and New Delhi, India: SAGE Publications.

Unofficial mediation and dialogue are guided by professional principles of neutrality and impartiality. Track II mediators and facilitators that are not bound by their formal role and status have greater maneuverability regarding the inclusion of various conflict parties in a dialogue, which allows them to increase fairness and impartiality of a particular dialogue process. A key predicament for the fully fledged involvement of individual European states in the transformation of state formation conflicts¹⁹ is the principle of the inviolability of borders. This erects a wall between European states as interveners (as mediator and donor) and non-recognised political territories or *de facto* states like Abkhazia, Transnistria and Nagorny Karabakh. European NGOs circumvent the issue of recognition by providing all parties concerned with the avenues for participation in research, confidence-building, human rights and other cross-conflict projects. The perceptions among local communities of an outside third party's impartiality and neutrality is of key importance. In this regard, non-governmental actors usually enjoy greater trust among the communities.

Greater liaison between formal EU and individual state authorities and European NGOs is recommended for more comprehensive and effective dialogue and mediation. Disadvantages of official mediation need to be compensated by advantages of the unofficial track and *vice versa*.

COERCION

Official mediation in many cases is imposed on the warring parties. However, even when the parties are in agreement with a proposed mediation process, a third party still may be inclined to exercise a “mediation with muscle” approach when credible threats or actual use of force by the third party stimulate one or all parties to commit to a peaceful course of events or agreement. Talks that led to the Dayton Agreement were interspersed with NATO bombardment of the Bosnian Serb army positions. Unofficial mediation and dialogue is a voluntary process. Mediators are usually scholars or practitioners from international and foreign NGOs. They neither have the stick nor carrot to put pressure on and entice participants to stay in the process. The advantage is that those who have chosen to engage in dialogue and mediation are likely to be committed to building peace.

TRADITIONAL SECURITY FRAMEWORK FOR OFFICIAL MEDIATION

Official mediation is being undertaken within a strong *realpolitik* framework. Coercion is frequently seen as the only sure way to guarantee peace and order. Those with greater power prevail. The weak ones either surrender or advance their position by siding with bigger powers. Within this logic, “mediation with muscle” is considered as a legitimate and effective way to get the parties to the table and to make them talk. A third party with its own preferred outcome exercising “mediation with muscle” is more willing to commit resources to the implementation of the desired solution. Thus, the US had a clear position throughout the course of the conflict in Kosovo and it has become a major donor throughout the transition period and in forging an independent Kosovo.

Within the *realpolitik* paradigm, the state has the monopoly on the use of military force. Its use is frequently seen as a legitimate means to achieve a goal in addition to participation in the mediation process. The state is also the only legitimate actor within the international community of nation states, hence equal participation of non-state actors in an official mediation process is highly problematic. Official bilateral mediation between a recognised state and non-recognised *de facto* state or any other non-state actor has the added complexity of a lack of symmetry. Intra-state conflicts do not have a clear solution within the realm of international law, due to the clashing principles of territorial integrity and peoples' right to self-determination. States and inter-governmental organisations that act as third-party mediators usually favour the territorial integrity principle. Exceptions from this trend raise questions, stir emotions, challenge impartiality in the application of international law, but the ambiguity remains.

¹⁹ A state formation conflict puts 'an incumbent government against a regionally-based opposition demanding a radically different status for a particular territory. The demands concern autonomy, federalism, independence or joining a neighboring state'. See: P. Wallensteen (2002). Op. cit. p.169.

HUMAN SECURITY FRAMEWORK FOR UNOFFICIAL MEDIATION AND DIALOGUE

A human security framework for unofficial mediation and dialogue opens new horizons in mediation, especially in the case of intra-state conflicts. Using this approach, which is people- rather than state-focused, representatives of identity groups are legitimate parties to official mediation processes. Within this paradigm, 'mediation can and should facilitate the articulation of legitimate needs and interests of all concerned into fair, practical and mutually acceptable solutions'.²⁰ Their participation does not have to be defined as "official", and participants in unofficial mediation and dialogue sessions do not have any formal mandate from their identity group. They may not speak on behalf of their identity group, but their group identity speaks in them. While official mediators struggle with the dilemma of including non-recognised and/or *de facto* parties in negotiations, thus overtly legitimising their claims which challenge the existing world order of nation-states, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and academic institutions circumvent the issue of recognition by providing all parties concerned with the avenues for participation in interactive conflict resolution processes.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARTIES

Relationships between a third party, a mediator or facilitator, and the conflict parties are different in official and unofficial talks and dialogues. In the latter case, the relationships ought to consist of genuine respect and mutual learning. Unofficial dialogue is aimed at the transformation of relationships between the participants, so that opportunities for cooperative efforts present themselves even without the participants having to change or question their cause. A mediator in an unofficial dialogue does not criticise or pass judgment on the individual participants, but encourages reflection and communication between the parties. How genuine is the commitment to assisting the parties to pave the way towards peace is under scrutiny on behalf of the dialogue and mediation participants and their societies. When academic research is being disguised as a dialogue and participants play the role of guinea pigs, the reputation of unofficial dialogue as a valid peacebuilding strategy may be undermined. Official mediators usually manage the peace process more strictly and are far less accommodating to the parties, because they have to deliver an agreement within a limited time frame.

20 J.P. Lederach (1995). *Preparing for peace: Conflict transformation across cultures*. New York, US: Syracuse University Press. p.14.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR A COMPLEMENTARY APPROACH

Unofficial dialogue processes in various spheres of society precede official negotiations, unfold parallel to official negotiations and continue after official negotiations either collapse or are crowned with an agreement. Without unofficial dialogue processes, official mediation may yield an agreement acceptable to the leaders but not to the public at large or to certain powerful factions that have not been involved in the cross-conflict dialogue and who may become spoilers of the official peace process. The legitimacy of governments to “make peace with the enemy” is rooted in people’s understanding that such an agreement will be beneficial to them and in people’s readiness to conclude peace with the opponent. It is not solely the state leadership that can order a political shift from armed conflict to genuine conflict transformation. The preference of the state leadership regarding the conflict certainly matters, but two other factors that define the shift are the relative weight of the war constituency and peace constituency in society, and the sensitivity of the state leadership to public opinion.²¹ The assassination of Yitzchak Rabin²² was an extreme manifestation of a leadership being ready for peace but the “war constituency” in society prevailing over that of the “peace constituency”. Likewise, images of the enemy have been incorporated into the “national thinking” across the South Caucasus. A peace deal signed from one day to the next will do nothing to address those and other societal issues necessary for change.

Were a society largely in favour of peace in a democratic state, a hawkish leadership would have to follow the desires of their people. However, in a democracy where a society rejects talks, concessions and compromise, a dovish leadership would not be able to cut a peace deal. The modes of governance, quality of the civil society, degree of independence of the media and other structural characteristics of a society in conflict have an immediate impact on the effectiveness of official and unofficial mediation and dialogue, and the prospects for the complementarity of the two processes. Civil society is the main actor in unofficial dialogue, but it should be remembered that its capacity-building programmes do not automatically strengthen its dialogue and peacebuilding capacity. Civil society is often falsely perceived as a club of peace-loving moderates, while civil society is a part and parcel of the society at large, albeit organised and politically and socially active. NGOs, media and academics are often in the vanguard of nationalist movements, and can manipulate and manufacture historical evidence, stir hatred, and even call for war as a means of liberation and restoration of historical justice. Civil society may be divided on the issue of the use of violence. The ratio may change, but there are always those who consider war as an acceptable means of conflict resolution and those who opt for exclusively peaceful means. However there is usually a broad consensus on the causes and the solution, and those who challenge public consensus have to struggle not only with the political authorities, but with civil society as well. Civil society organisations (CSOs) that call for and engage in dialogue with the “enemy” have to navigate between the Scylla of conformism and Charybdis of marginalisation: they need to preserve the trust and respect of their societies and retain their influence and authority on the one hand; and yet promote dialogue with the rival conflict side on the other. Tailored programmes need to be implemented at the interface between mediation and dialogue and civil society capacity-building, mass media development and good governance, such as the Consortium Initiative (see Box 3). Coalition-building is combined with peacebuilding in the civil society strand, while development of parliamentarism is paired with the dialogue of parliamentarians on the Nagorny Karabakh conflict, for example.

21 B.D. Mor (1997). ‘Peace initiatives and public opinion: The domestic context of conflict resolution’, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp.197–215.

22 One of the claims used by the opponents of the peace process to incite against Rabin was that the government did not have a ‘mandate for peace’.

Box 3*The Consortium Initiative*

The Consortium Initiative was established in 2003 and is led by International Alert, Conciliation Resources and Resources and the London Information Network on Conflicts and State-building (LINKS). The Consortium Initiative promotes a multifaceted process of engagement with the conflict over Nagorny Karabakh. It engages with Armenians and Azerbaijanis from all strata, including the Armenian population of Nagorny Karabakh and Azeri refugees. As part of this process, each Consortium member is responsible for a separate strand of work. Conciliation Resources addresses media and public awareness issues; International Alert focuses on civil society work, as well as addressing issues of conflict sensitivity; and LINKS works on the level of political dialogue.

The picture of an official mediation between “buttoned up” and cynical top leaders and of unofficial dialogue between open-minded pacifists is a simplistic one. Both processes are crucial for building peace and none of them can succeed in isolation from the other. There is a connection between the two. Civil society leaders may be elected or appointed to a position of political authority and get involved in the official dialogue. It is expected that they will bring their experience of unofficial dialogue into the official talks. Likewise, unofficial dialogue may yield documents and proposals that would be further discussed and endorsed at the level of official talks.

CHALLENGES TO UNOFFICIAL MEDIATION AND DIALOGUE

There are a number of challenges to unofficial mediation and dialogue discussed below.

MEDIATION AND DIALOGUE PROJECTS ARE SLOW TO ADJUST TO CHANGES IN THE CONFLICT CONTEXT

Acknowledgement that issues, stakeholders – including primary, secondary and tertiary parties – the constellation of preferences and the conflict context all change over time, has made a substantial impact on the design and implementation of mediation and dialogue.²³ Internal conflict dynamics and changes in the context define the course of the conflict. Context changes may include shifts in the regional power dynamics; international influences; energy, water and other resource supply-demand fluctuations; and environmental disasters. Both qualitative and quantitative changes in the conflict parties take place over time. New parties get involved, original parties split. New issues emerge in the course of protracted conflicts, causes and symptoms evolve and symptoms become second-generation causes: hatred (attitude) and militarism (behaviour) evolve into issues in their own right.

For example, the Georgia-Abkhazia and Georgia-South Ossetia conflicts have dramatically changed since they first manifested themselves. New context factors include Georgia's aspirations to join NATO; Russia's rising neo-imperialism, backed by a strengthened state capacity to defend its security interests and open clashes with US security interests in the region; and Russia-Europe energy routes and interdependence in other areas, accompanied by complex relationships between Europe and Russia on the one hand, and Europe and Russia's rivals on the other. In addition, a new inter-state conflict between Russia and Georgia has been marked with a war, and Russia has become an explicit conflict party, yet remains a powerful regional actor. The US has also been manifestly one-sided. The EU has taken a balanced approach in this case.

Constant conflict analysis and its incorporation into the design of mediation and dialogue projects, or any other conflict intervention, is needed. The outcome of the analysis must be translated into action. Changes within and outside the conflict system that may shift the balance of power, open new opportunities or increase the likelihood of relapse into violence, ought to lead to adjustments in mediation and dialogue. While there is a healthy supply of conflict analysis by internal and external researchers, there is often a disconnect between the numerous papers and conference presentations, and actual adjustments in the dialogue processes on the ground. Parallel conflict analysis by researchers across the divide is a challenging, yet very much needed form of dialogue in itself at any stage of the conflict. On the other hand, mediation and dialogue processes inevitably affect the conflict system and need to be factored into conflict analysis by researchers.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Selection of participants is a straightforward procedure in the case of official mediation: the prospective participants are known. However, this does not mean that they are readily convinced to engage in mediation. Selection of participants for unofficial mediation and dialogue is an open process. Some practitioners even

23 R. Vayrynen (1991) cited in H. Miall (2004). 'Conflict transformation: A multi-dimensional task', *The Berghof handbook for conflict transformation, concepts and cross-cutting challenges*. Available at http://www.berghof-handbook.net/std_page.php?LANG=e&id=11.

suggest that the right selection of individual participants is the key to success, because it is individuals and not structures that build peace.²⁴

In the post-Soviet regions, the South Caucasus included, the idea to launch a dialogue and mediation in the unofficial realm is conceived either by an outside NGO, academic institution or a government alone, or in consultation and cooperation with an initiative group from one or more parties to the conflict. Further, the proposal is presented to local civil society or other non-state actors and participants are selected. Examples of locally-initiated and driven dialogue projects are rare, but the situation is changing. Driven by the desire to sustain and promote a positive dialogue experience or correct a negative one, several sustainable on-going dialogue initiatives have developed in the region, marked by partnerships or coalitions between local civil society institutions and INGOs or designed and implemented solely by the actors across the conflict divide. They may evolve with or without an outside third party. In some cases, a third party becomes an external partner that provides advice, assists with fundraising and international advocacy, and acts as a facilitator when needed, but local activists are always the driving force. The partnership between International Alert and CBDN (see Box 2) is one such example. In some other cases, there is no external third party, but the role of a mediator or facilitator is played by a committee that consists of the members of all parties concerned; or there is no facilitator at all and the two sides craft the dialogue themselves. *Internews Vis-à-vis* (see Box 4)²⁵ and the *South Caucasus Integration-Alternative Start* citizen initiative and projects (see Box 5)²⁶ are examples of internally-driven and promoted dialogue projects.

Selection of participants for dialogue and unofficial mediation ought to ensure equal status of participants in a symmetric conflict, or minority participants of higher status than majority participants in an asymmetric conflict. Dialogue between people from conflicting parties is usually more effective and efficient if the participants already have a common ground that is unrelated to the conflict, such as a profession, gender, generation, societal role etc. Dialogues among women, youth, academics, journalists, human rights activists, ex-combatants and entrepreneurs, for instance, have been implemented in various conflict settings. The assumption that if people share an identity they can more easily engage in a cross-conflict interaction has never been empirically tested, yet is often a basis for many unofficial dialogue projects. If the project includes participants from the opposing sides who share a social goal, such as poverty reduction, support to independent media, the rehabilitation and social re-integration of ex-combatants, or the elimination of family violence, and who have established themselves as social activists, then this may create a transnational solidarity and even transnational social movements that could be an asset in conflict transformation.²⁷

There are also different views on how the constellation of moderates and extremists should be reflected in the list of participants in dialogue or mediation processes. Moderation and extremism may be reflected in the participants' positions on the cause and the solution, and also the means for reaching the desired solution. Proponents of the inclusion of all parties concerned in dialogue and mediation projects, including extremists, say that adding parties and goals instead of getting rid of them is the best way to achieve conflict transformation.²⁸ Opponents of mixing moderates with extremists argue that it is important to begin with dialogue among moderates to gain momentum. Moderates are those who can think of alternatives both regarding options for resolution and the course of action in the conflict. Moderates can then start working within their own society and consolidate public opinion in favour of dialogue. After that, involvement of extremists may be more effective.

Skilled “entrepreneurs of peacebuilding” who disguise themselves as peace activists, human rights activists, academics and so forth, may hijack entire mediation processes and intervention projects to fulfill their personal ambitions, lobby for a particular political party or simply get money.

24 G. Baechler (2008). “Emerging archetypes”: A comparison of patterns of the peace processes in Sri Lanka and Nepal’, *The Berghof handbook for conflict transformation dialogue series, No. 6: A systemic approach to conflict transformation. Exploring strengths and limitations*. Available at http://www.berghof-handbook.net/std_page.php?LANG=e&id=232&parent=5.

25 For more information, see: <http://www.internews.am/projects/archive/frontline/index-e.htm>.

26 For more information, see: <http://www.southcaucasus.com>.

27 J. Smith, C. Chatfield and R. Pagnucco (1997). *Transnational social movements and global politics: Solidarity beyond the state*. New York, US: Syracuse University Press.

28 J. Galtung (2000). *Conflict transformation by peaceful means (The Transcend method)*. Trainer’s manual. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Disaster Management Training Programme. Available at [www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwt.nsf/db900SID/LHON-66SN46/\\$File/Conflict_transfo_Tnascend.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwt.nsf/db900SID/LHON-66SN46/$File/Conflict_transfo_Tnascend.pdf?OpenElement).

NO CLEAR LINK BETWEEN DIALOGUE AND STRUCTURAL CHANGE

One of the evaluators of the long-term project of Arab-Jewish dialogue in Israel has articulated a valid point about dialogue in asymmetric conflict situations: 'When dialogue becomes a substitute for action, there are two results. First, it assuages the conscience of members of the oppressor group to the point they feel they do not have to do anything else. Their conscience is soothed and satisfied. On the other hand, for the members of the oppressed group it becomes a safety valve for venting their frustrations. In both cases it becomes a means for reinforcing the existing oppression and therefore serves to perpetuate it'.²⁹ Indeed, what is the value of mediation and dialogue processes in relation to the structural change needed for peacebuilding? Any attempts to foster dialogue and to model co-existence in a workshop setting, regardless of the professionalism and commitment by facilitators and the participants alike, would eventually die out as the initial excitement of renewed communication and good individual relationships fade. Critics of dialogue processes in situations of protracted asymmetric conflict denounce dialogue that is not paralleled by change at the macro-level. Inter-communal and intra-communal dialogue 'may generate a false consciousness of peaceful relations when the underlying processes are much more malign'.³⁰ This is not to say that dialogue for the purpose of dialogue is a futile process. But pure dialogue projects need to be balanced with other conflict interventions. Proponents of dialogue as a conflict transformation practice claim that by the time there is a change at the macro-level, confidence and understanding will have been restored at the micro-level and people will be ready to live in peace.

A systemic approach to conflict and to conflict transformation is a promising paradigmatic, methodological and practical innovation in this regard.³¹ First, problem-orientation and vision-orientation need to be balanced in a dialogue or mediation methodology. A needs-based paradigm of conflict and conflict resolution is thus better answered by the vision-oriented approach to mediation (and structural change). However, a vision is not tantamount to a solution. The conflict persists because a solution for one party is a problem for the other. Hence, drawing a shared vision of the future is just a small step that ought to be followed by an intense search for political, territorial, security, economic and other arrangements (structural change) that would bring about the vision. This may sound idealistic, but there are examples when exactly this vision has driven the conflict transformation process.

Second, involvement of those who are active and influential in the economy, politics and media, and motivated and capable of generating micro-scale structural change and conducting advocacy is important. However, all the challenges listed in the selection of participants section need to be overcome. Dialogue is aimed at personal change, but at the societal level this strategy is usually considered therapeutic conflict transformation,³² which in itself does not challenge the distribution of power, institutions and laws in society. In order to contribute to peace and achieve the goal of conflict transformation, dialogue projects need to be complemented by advocacy and active promotion of structural change. Such projects are built on a dialogue foundation and yet evoke critical thinking in broader society, and promote a change in institutions and norms.

Third, dialogue and mediation can model some aspects of the structural change needed. For example, the bilateral archetype of a peace process may be deficient and even harmful when a community, political force or nation that has a stake in the conflict is being systematically excluded from the dialogue and mediation process. Two parties at the table reinforce the zero-sum game pattern of dealing with conflict, while eliciting and acknowledging factions within a conflict party or the introduction of a new party, may open up new areas for finding solutions. Exclusion of refugee communities as a separate conflict party and merging ethnic Azeri refugees from Nagorny Karabakh with the Azerbaijan conflict party have been questioned by some conflict transformation practitioners. Indeed, an Azeri refugee community may have a unique stand on the conflict that is not shared by their kin in Azerbaijan, who have not had the same experiences.

29 J. Kuttub (1988) cited in M. Abu-Nimer (1999). *Dialogue, conflict resolution and change: Arab-Jewish encounters in Israel*. New York, US: State University of New York Press. p.152.

30 K. Clements (2004). 'Towards conflict transformation and just peace', *The Berghoff handbook for conflict transformation, Recovering from war: post-conflict regeneration and reconciliation*. Available at http://www.berghof-handbook.net/std_page.php?LANG=e&id=11.

31 N. Ropers (2008). 'Systemic conflict transformation: Reflections on the conflict and peace process in Sri Lanka', *The Berghoff handbook for conflict transformation dialogue series*, No. 6, pp.11–43. Available at http://www.berghof-handbook.net/std_page.php?LANG=e&id=232&parent=5.

32 K. Clements (2004). Op. cit.

DIALOGUE AS A SURROGATE OF RECONCILIATION – WHERE IS THE JUSTICE PART?

Mediation and dialogue are praxis that stem from the humanistic psychology tradition. Each view is given equal procedural respect and all participants are treated as equal irrespective of their side's record of behaviour in the conflict. This may seem artificial and even immoral, especially in the case of mass atrocities: 'When justice ceases to be the goal, any particular role, activity or strategy must be questioned. Where any approach is used as a ploy to co-opt or manipulate the less powerful and disadvantaged, it should not be pursued'.³³ However, dialogue and mediation are compatible with justice. The question is what kind of justice enforcement approach is being adopted. Restorative justice as opposed to legalistic justice is an approach promoted in peacebuilding in the cases of protracted communal conflicts. A restorative justice system 'assumes that settlements that rest on conflicting parties' subjective perceptions of fairness are longer lasting and more likely to promote reconciliation than imposed (i.e. adjudicated or arbitrated) settlements'.³⁴

Dialogue paves the way for restorative justice, because it disaggregates the opponent into various factions, including those that have been opposing violence all the way. This sends an important message to the opposing side. In addition, having listened to the other side's story, or rather, stories of the conflict in the dialogue format, one may start seeing how one's own side's wrongdoings may have ignited violence. Dialogue is a forum for the conflict parties to reassure each other of their commitment to a peaceful course of events and to ask for forgiveness.

The relationship between justice and reconciliation is complex. Overall, a trend can be noted from the history of states where massive atrocities and human rights abuses have taken place: successor governments have had a better chance to move forward where transitional justice has been pursued to a certain extent.³⁵ The issue of the limits of applicability of legalistic and restorative justice approaches is very important, yet no simple typology can be proposed. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission strategy worked in South Africa, but was rejected in Bosnia. The evaluation of the role of the Hague Tribunal in the reconciliation in Bosnia or Kosovo is problematic. The level of hostility between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians is as high as it used to be. One may suggest that this was partly due to the perceived unfairness of the approach to justice taken, which bestowed Kosovo Albanians with the image of victims and victors, and Kosovo Serbs as perpetrators and losers. In the light of Carla Del Ponte's book revealing crimes committed by Kosovo Albanians against Kosovo Serbs that went unpunished, prospects for a dialogue in Kosovo are darker than ever.

Dialogue and justice are believed to reinforce each other and promote reconciliation when they are synchronised and when a restorative justice approach has been tried prior to or parallel with the application of a conventional legalistic approach. It is crucially important to include in dialogue projects, dissidents from the conflict sides who uncover their own side's crimes and actively seek truth and justice.

Unofficial mediation and dialogue are important strategies for addressing the issue of justice by means of humanising relationships between the conflict parties and the disaggregation of the parties.

DIALOGUE AND MEDIATION DO NOT TRANSLATE INTO CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC OPINION STRUCTURE

Dialogue at the unofficial level is important to counter war rhetoric, as well as the perception of helplessness and self victimisation of the public. However, the issue of conducting dialogue and mediation publicly is difficult for participants. Dialogue through mass media is a creative way to solve the publicity and outreach dilemma. *Dialogue Through Film* (see Box 1) is an example of dialogue by means of documentary films, which form messages targeted at people on

33 J.P. Lederach (1995). *Op. cit.* p.14.

34 M. Estrada-Hollenbeck (2001). 'The attainment of justice through restoration, not litigation: The subjective road to reconciliation' in M. Abu-Nimer (Ed.) (2001). *Reconciliation, justice and co-existence: Theory and practice*. New York and Boulder, CO and Oxford, UK: Lexington Books. pp.65-86.

35 D. Bloomfield, T. Barnes and L. Huyse (Eds.) (2003). *Reconciliation after violent conflict*. Stockholm, Sweden: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). Available at <http://www.idea.int/publications/reconciliation/index.cfm#toc>.

the other side of the conflict. Young Armenians and Azeris have grown up in the absence of direct communication and most of them have never met a person from the other side. Against the background of unleashed nationalist propaganda in their media and virtual wars of words on the Internet, war constituencies are being consolidated. *Dialogue Through Film* provides an alternative media format for the expression of each side's pain, fears, grief, anger and despair, and has the potential of bringing the rival sides closer rather than pushing them further apart.

The *Front Line* series, which broadcasts dialogue via video link between Armenian and Azerbaijani politicians, artists, civil society activists and others, successfully implemented the Vis-à-vis format pioneered by Internews (see Box 4). This format has become a ground-breaking technological solution to a social task. Vis-à-vis is a format where people in different parts of the world separated by distance or insurmountable obstacles cannot meet in real life, but get an opportunity of seeing and talking to each other through a digital video link. The audiences watch a dialogue as it is happening. This Vis-à-vis series was of particular interest for the conflict resolution field as it brought together people divided by violent conflicts.

Box 4

Front Line: Television-mediated dialogue on Nagorny Karabakh conflict

In 2000–2001, Internews-Armenia and Internews-Azerbaijan started producing the *Front Line* programme, 'Yerevan-Baku Spacebridges'. Government officials and oppositional politicians, civil society activists, intellectuals, former soccer star teammates, artists and other interlocutors went on air weekly over a six-month time period. The two crews rejected editing and chose to produce the programmes live to tape. That approach helped both to eschew subsequent problems with programme guests and made the dialogue look more trustworthy to viewers. This programme portrayed difficulties in relations and irreconcilable positions on a number of issues, while providing participants and broad audiences with an opportunity to listen to an array of viewpoints from across and within the conflict sides. Praised as an 'outstanding format for dialogue', the Internews television programme *Front Line* has been named 'Best Journalism Project of the Year' by the Institute of Peace and Democracy in Azerbaijan. It was also awarded the annual Yerevan Press Club Award.

There are media dialogue products that are universally appealing to the audience, while some others can have their effect multiplied at the right time. The timing of the *Front Line* was good because of the intensification of the top-level 1999 peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and several meetings of the two Presidents taking place in 2000 and 2001.³⁶ The fact that all 24 spacebridges were broadcast in Armenia and Azerbaijan may be attributed to the general warming of political relations with the handing over of olive branches demonstrated at the top level. A sociological survey of the *Front Line* programme audiences revealed remarkable results. Over 50 percent of the randomly selected people watched the programme and 60-70 percent of them regarded the televised dialogue as a model and sign of hope for dialogue between the two peoples. An overwhelming majority of respondents in the two countries appreciated the openness of the dialogue and rated it as interesting and necessary. This is a demonstration of the impact of the televised dialogue on public opinion.

These examples of publicly conducted dialogue open new possibilities for media-mediated conflict interventions. However, the tyranny of the market and vulnerability of media to political pressure are major obstacles to the spread of media-mediated dialogue. Financial and political support from the EU and European NGOs are of key importance at the early stages and throughout these initiatives. These initiatives are not commercial and can rarely be self-sustainable, yet their societal and political impact may be worth funding.

However, there are cost-effective media dialogue initiatives, such as an Internet platform for the South Caucasus intellectuals, human rights, and peace activists and dissidents (see Box 5). Moderated by a team formed from various conflict regions of the South Caucasus, this Internet dialogue is a good resource for those that are committed to the search for alternative solutions and are open to critical reassessment of their own position. This initiative also provides a platform for the diaspora from the South Caucasus to engage in a dialogue.

³⁶ For more information, see: <http://www.internews.am> and <http://www.internews.az>.

Box 5

The citizen initiative *South Caucasus Integration-Alternative Start* was started by a group of journalists to creatively use the Internet to link thinkers and activists all over the South Caucasus. This initiative has changed the conventional bilateral format of dialogue by making it multilateral and regional. At the same time, this initiative made the discussion platform accessible for people in different parts of the South Caucasus to participate in, share their ideas, reflections and emotions, and call for solidarity. This initiative combats nationalism and isolation not merely with essays on politics, conflicts, human rights and other pressing issues that every registered partner can submit and comment on, but by means of public awareness, advocacy campaigns and assistance to the victims persecuted on political grounds. This is an example of creating transnational and cross-conflict solidarity among those committed to human rights and the protection of freedom as an overarching goal. Importantly, this initiative has long been run on a voluntary basis with only occasional small funding for specific initiatives.

SUSTAINABILITY OF UNOFFICIAL DIALOGUE

Key to any conflict intervention effectively promoting peace is its “staying power” – the ability to stay engaged in the conflict transformation.³⁷ The Inter-Tajik unofficial dialogue, which eventually led to the peace agreement and continued beyond the peace accord, lasted for over seven years.³⁸ This is a rather unique case of a dialogue that was not aimed at the production of formal agreements. The Dartmouth Conference Regional Conflicts Task Force model was successfully implemented in the Tajik civil war context. A society – especially one coming out of a protracted violent conflict – needs time to start using dialogue as a strategy to resolve differences. Hence, dialogue as conflict intervention at different levels and in different realms ought to be sustained until this habit takes root and the self-reproducing character of peacebuilding is fostered. In an ideal world, dialogue should never stop. Ongoing dialogue on race relations and other issues is a part of university life in the US, for example.³⁹ However, there are restrictions that apply in real life, particularly in protracted conflict settings. Lack of funding, fatigue of participants, increased threat to the participants, escalation of violence and other factors all interfere with the original plans. There are several suggestions that may help eschew situations of interrupted dialogue.

- Parties involved need to be able to define an optimal time frame for the selected composition of a dialogue initiative;
- Parties involved need to be skilled in navigating in a changing conflict environment in order to keep dialogue relevant and timely;
- Parties need guaranteed long-term funding (the first two obstacles concern evaluation and adjustment capacity of the parties on the ground and a third party; the third obstacle concerns not only the parties involved, but international donor policies); and
- Unofficial dialogue and mediation should not be isolated processes, but need to be linked with civil society projects, university programmes, economic initiatives and the media. This way, the spirit of dialogue will be sustained in the society.

Unofficial mediation and dialogue should neither be overestimated nor underestimated as peacebuilding strategies. They operate at the subjective level of people's emotions, fears, illusions and revelations, and are at times regarded as a secondary “soft” type of intervention compared to “hard” aid, peacekeeping or political negotiations. Unofficial mediation and dialogue have their unique place in the spectrum of conflict transformation and conflict resolution strategies. At the same time, unofficial mediation and dialogue are crucial in multi-task and multi-strategy peace initiatives.

37 F.O. Hampson (2001). ‘Parent, midwife or accidental executioner? The role of third parties in ending violent conflict’ in C.A. Crocker, F.O. Hampson and P. Aall (Eds.). *Turbulent peace: The challenges of managing international conflict*. Virginia, US: USIP Press. pp.387-403.

38 H.H. Saunders (1999). *Op. cit.*

39 For example, a dialogue between Israeli and Arab students and inter-racial dialogue at George Mason University Virginia, US.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EU AND FOR NGOs WORKING IN THE REGION

Below are some recommendations for enhancing the social and political effectiveness of unofficial mediation and dialogue, and the complementarities between official and unofficial mediation and dialogue processes, which together can encourage a more comprehensive, cost-effective and sustainable peacebuilding process

- Where dialogue on the most contentious issues is not possible or cannot be effective from the onset, the EU should pay greater attention to the dialogue and mediation on second-order or side issues, or issues of supra-national and regional scale, such as environmental degradation, human and drug trafficking, labour migration etc. This may defuse tensions, empower the dialogue or mediation participants to tackle more challenging issues in the future, and most importantly sow seeds of hope within the societies in conflict for mutually acceptable and beneficial solutions.
- EU donors need to develop flexibility in their funding of *ad hoc* dialogue and mediation initiatives. Changes in the conflict context may open opportunities for a dialogue that needs urgent support or may necessitate change in the composition of the parties at the table and sequencing in already funded mediation and dialogue projects that require additional funding.⁴⁰ Dialogue projects need to be implemented not when funding is available, but when they are most relevant. In addition to funding long-term ongoing dialogue projects, a pool for the funding of emerging unofficial dialogue also needs to be created.
- EU donors and political bodies need to make adjustments to their evaluation of unofficial dialogue and mediation projects. A proper process-orientated evaluation strategy needs to become an integral part of any mediation and dialogue initiative. A long-term process that is aimed at attitudinal change, such as dialogue at the non-state level, begs particular evaluation approaches, such as action research.⁴¹
- Greater liaison between dialogue and mediation by formal EU and individual state authorities and European NGOs is recommended to compensate for the disadvantages of official mediation with the advantages of the unofficial track and *vice versa*.
- Tailored programmes need to be implemented at the interface between mediation and dialogue and civil society capacity-building, mass media development and good governance.
- Dialogue on the issues of energy, cross-border trade, organised crime, drug and human trafficking, epidemics and other basic survival issues at the grass-roots and local authority level on the opposing sides needs to be supported and institutionalised. Cross-border dialogue and mediation at the periphery of the societies in conflict is a window of opportunity for sustained dialogue, since the immediate survival needs of people across the divide are at stake. This dialogue has a good chance to be a model of conflict resolution strategy and a confidence-building measure for a wider society.
- Novel formats of unofficial dialogue that address deficiencies of unofficial dialogue should be further

40 G. Baechler (2008). Op. cit.

41 R.J. Fisher (1997). Op. cit.

explored. Mass media-mediated dialogue projects need to receive greater attention, because of the outreach opportunities that they provide.

- Whenever possible, unofficial mediation and dialogue need to be linked with practical projects that provide tangible peace dividends (e.g. jobs, better ecology, safe water and energy supply etc.) that capitalise on personal attitudinal change and improved inter-personal relationships between the dialogue participants and involve them as leaders of social change, irrespective of the scale and publicity of the projects.

INITIATIVE FOR PEACEBUILDING

c/o International Alert
205 Rue Belliard, B-1040 Brussels Tel: +32 (0) 2 239 2111 Fax: +32 (0) 2 230 3705
lmontanaro@international-alert.org www.initiativeforpeacebuilding.eu



THIS INITIATIVE IS FUNDED
BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

PARTNERS



International Alert.

