

Press Release Hamburg 5–12 April 2003

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.

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Jonathan Cohen (Conciliation Resources) 12 April 2003
