

Press Release – 30 November 2005

The sixteenth dialogue workshop in an ongoing series on the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict and peace process took place outside Berlin from 25–29 November 2005, bringing together government officials, politicians and public figures from both sides of the conflict. The series provides a forum for participants to 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.

Discussions touched upon recent developments in relations between the Georgian and Abkhaz parties to the conflict, including the resolution of the Georgian parliament concerning the possibility of the withdrawal of CIS peacekeepers from the conflict zone and the security situation in the Gali district. Participants went on to explore the hopes and fears of their respective sides and examined the ways in which these impact upon the strategies pursued in the negotiations process. A number of concerns were raised about the structure of the peace process and the apparent inability of the parties to create a more constructive framework within which to promote progress. It was noted that the difficulties stem from different perspectives as to what progress can mean as well as the differing expectations of the respective parties to the conflict. In addition to debating the underlying needs, interests and positions of the parties, the participants also looked at specific steps that could be taken jointly or separately to improve the context within which the negotiations take place. Such steps were seen as needing to be specific, have a direct relevance to the current situation and forward looking, without jeopardising their differing long–term aspirations. Notwithstanding the fundamental differences that were highlighted the parties could see steps that could be taken in the right context that would not compromise them but which could add to security and stability.

The workshop was characterised by a constructive exchange. It is hoped that this will contribute to a culture of dialogue and understanding between the respective communities.

The Abkhaz participants in the workshop were Natella Akaba, Daur Arshba, Tamaz Ketsba, Leonid Lakerbaia, Anatoly Otyrba, Garik Samanba, Dmitrii Shamba and Batal Tabagua. The Georgian participants were Irakli Alasania, Irakli Gegetchkori, Nikoloz Gvaramia, Vakhtang Kolbaia, Natia Tskepladze, David Usupashvili and Paata Zakareishvili. Everyone took part in their individual capacity, not representing any organisation or institution.

The workshop was organised by the Berghof Foundation for Peace Support (Berlin) and Conciliation Resources (London), two international non–governmental organisations 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 Clem McCartney, Jonathan Cohen, Oliver Wolleh and Rachel Clogg.

The workshop was funded by the German Foreign Office.