



# **DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S OPPORTUNITIES**

**For Elaboration  
of New Approaches  
in Conflict Transformation**

**2017**

# DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S OPPORTUNITIES

## For Elaboration of New Approaches in Conflict Transformation

For a whole year (15.01.2017-15.01.2018) Fund Sukhumi has been involved in the project “Development of women’s opportunities for elaboration of new approaches in conflict transformation”. It aimed to expand rights and opportunities of women on both sides of the conflict in order to increase their social role and their influence on the process of conflict transformation and sustainable peace-building.

Target groups of the project comprised women, including young women, who have acquired skills needed for participation in peace-building activities; representatives of official bodies involved in the process of conflict resolution, civil society, government officials, who are perceived as supporters and contributors to reaching the main aim of the project.

The organization has carried out project activities throughout West Georgia. Trainings with women and youth groups were organized within the project framework. Some of the project participants wrote essays, girls conducted workshops for their peers. A study was carried out and the brochure “Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict, Rethinking Approaches to Conflict Resolution and New Directions for its Transformation” was published in Georgian, Russian and English. This was followed by round-table discussions of the results of the study. At the final stage of the project a meeting was organized in Cyprus and the project presentation took place in Tbilisi. A film on the project was produced and released.

And now a journal reflecting all the project activities is being published.



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# AS PEACE IS A LONG PROCESS...

## New approaches based on shared visions and interests

**KHATUNA GOGUA**  
Project assistant

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Peace-building activities never become outdated as peace is a process, a lengthy process, which requires systematic work, endeavor and involvement. Fund “Sukhumi” has pursued this strategy for 20 years already ... Generations follow one another; governments change ... The only thing that remains constant is the strategic course of the organization with peace identified as its main priority since the very first year of the Fund’s existence.

New approaches, search for new ways for transformation of Georgian-Abkhazian conflict – these were among the main goals of 3-day training, which was organized by Fund “Sukhumi” in hotel “Discovery” in Kutaisi and which became an important part of the project.

The format of the training required that for the first two days women and youth groups representing six different regions (Kutaisi, Tskaltubo, Khoni, Senaki, Poti, Zugdidi) work separately on conflict analysis and women’s peace initiatives. On the third day both groups merged to discuss the format of negotiations conducted in the context of Georgian-Abkhazian conflict.

Youth groups were integrated and included locals together with IDPs. It was clear from the start that the participants had no previ-

ous experience of discussing Georgian-Abkhazian issues in this format. Consequently, they showed great interest to the topic from the very beginning.

**I am not an IDP myself, but I want to know more about Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. Now I have such an opportunity and I am listening to new information with great interest.**  
-Nino Khubulava.

**There is little discussion on this topic at schools, universities. Only those who are directly involved in it are interested.**  
- Tea Medzvelia

**I was not born in Abkhazia but I also want to do something for my IDP friends. For this I need to understand the history of the conflict. This training has become a turning point for me.**  
- Nana Zirakadze

**I am neither a politician, nor an influential person, but I have an obligation to think: what I can do for the transformation of Georgian-Abkhazian conflict.** - Mari Balanchivadze.

Similar opinions were often voiced during the training. According to the young people, with time Georgian-Abkhazian issues are becoming less of a priority for the state and the society. The reason is that the country is now facing new needs and with emerging new hotspots worldwide international interest has also declined.

The women showed peculiar interest in the topic. The participants shared their personal stories to express their attitude:

Abkhazia is my homeland, the conflict has totally altered my life. Although I have witnessed the conflict, it was interesting to get to the roots of the conflict after so many years. I reappraised many things. *Rusiko Murgulia*

Now, when the emotions have subsided, I have different attitudes. I can see mistakes from both sides. From this viewpoint, many things could have been done differently. *Tra Shonia*

One can think of transformation only after analyzing everything. The information I have received is very interesting for me. *Manana Khubua*

Training sessions in both groups had something in common: participants in both groups were interested in getting information about the roots and development of the conflict. All of them realized that this did not concern only IDPs, these were common issues for all to think about and discuss.

The participants stressed that their awareness of Abkhazian conflict is low. The training gave them the possibility to see the dynamics of the conflict in Abkhazia, how it started and developed. They analyzed positions of both sides and clearly saw the dangers, perceived by the Abkhazian side as coming from the Georgian side, which impede conflict resolution.

What is conflict transformation? Is it possible to make changes in Georgian-Abkhazian relations after so many years of stagnation? How can we start the changes? Train-

***First day  
of training  
and  
expectation  
of news***





ing participants tried to identify new creative approaches for Georgian-Abkhazian conflict transformation using simulations, role plays and interactive exercises.

It was especially emotional for training participants to get acquainted with the cases of women peacemakers. These cases were compiled into a brochure a few years ago by Fund "Sukhumi". Everyone especially remembered Visaka Dharmadasa – a peacemaker from Sri-Lanka and her words: "A mother's voice is very influential when she says 'No more bloodshed.'"

The participants, especially the younger ones, were inspired by the example of Malala Yousafzai. Taliban laws ban girls from attending school. Malala advocated for education of girls and fought against closing schools. For this she was once badly shot in the schoolyard. She survived and after recovery continued her struggle for the right of education for women.

In 2014 this 16-year-old Pakistani girl, who was portrayed in our brochure, was awarded Nobel prize for peace and became the youngest Nobel prize laureate.

The real cases of women peacemakers gave an impulse to the participants to think and to set out on the road to peace alongside with these women.

Representatives of both generations expressed their feelings and attitudes in discussions. They expressed belief that peacekeeping is a key to be used in all kinds of conflicts to guide conflicting sides in the right direction. Peacekeeping is the only way of achieving peace, therefore it cannot be hampered by obstacles.

In general assessment of the training, the participants emphasized the need for conflict transformation.

Ana Kutateladze, training participant from Tskaltubo, noted that her knowledge about

## *Training participants express their emotions:*



Georgian-Abkhazian conflict had been superficial: “I have IDP classmates, but unfortunately even they do not have adequate information about Abkhazia. They just know that their parents were born there. Conflict transformation might prove to be useful after so many years since the beginning of the conflict. New people, new generation have appeared. Who knows, maybe a new model can be developed in their relations.”

Mari Cherkezia is an IDP and she knows about Abkhazia only from others. She believes that it can never be too late for conflict transformation. And it really does not matter that she was born here and she does not know much about Abkhazia. The changes can start at any time if both parties are willing.

Keti Kuchava thinks that role play enabled

her to understand the position and requirements of the Abkhazian side. She believes that there are points of contact for Georgian and Abkhazian sides and there are common issues which can be used for expanding the dialogue.

The idea that much needed information about the conflict chronology was received, which facilitated the analysis, prevailed in the women’s group.

“During the role play activities we tried to understand the other side, we grasped the essence of their positions and realized their needs. Information gave us ground for analysis. We clearly saw the mistakes of both sides made at the beginning of the conflict and during its development. We saw how to continue the dialogue taking the new reality into consideration, what could be the topics



*Each part of training was active*





for starting new negotiations” – says Tamuna Jimsheleishvili.

At the final stage youth and women groups were combined and they continued to work together. The aim of the activities on the third day was to get acquainted with the format of negotiations of Georgian-Abkhazian sides: how the dialogue was conducted from 1992, what the new realities have emerged since 2008 and how the process of negotiations has developed. Chronology of successful and failed meetings was analyzed and unexplored possibilities for the conflict transformation were discussed.

The theoretical part was followed by practical exercises. Using SWAT analysis the participants tried to identify perspectives for conflict transformation based on existing realities. Using strengths and weaknesses of the Georgian side they reflected on unused capabilities and new approaches.

By the end of the training the approaches of participants from different regions had become a shared position.

Transformation of Georgian-Abkhazian conflict implies its new deep analysis, reconceptualizing the dynamics of the whole process as the time gap since the beginning of the conflict allows us to rethink the issues which were not solved many years ago and led the sides to an impasse.

The participants believe that transformation should start from our own consciousness. The society should accept that dialogue is the beginning of transformation. Correct information about the conflict and fresh analysis would create an environment where a destructive conflict may be transformed into a constructive process, where there is room for dialogue and negotiations, where new approaches emerge based on common visions and interests.

### ***Memorable photo of all training participants***



# PEACE MISSION OF YOUTH

## 10 Trainings Conducted in West Georgia

NINO CHABUKIANI

Project assistant

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Young people not only got acquainted with issues related to Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, cases of peacemakers, pondered over the ways of conflict transformation, but they also engaged their peers in discussion. After the training, the young participants were given an assignment - to conduct workshops in their regions. This was a kind of peace mission which has been accomplished successfully.

**10 workshops have been conducted in the towns and villages of West Georgia:**

**2 in Khoni;**

**1 in Poti;**

**2 in Koki (Zugdidi Municipality);**

**2 in Tskaltubo;**

**2 in Kutaisi;**

**1 in Terjola;**

**198 young people participated in the workshops.**

**This means that 12 young people transferred their peaceful attitudes and desire of involvement in the process to other 198.**

This was one of the important parts of the project for several reasons: first of all, it is especially important for young people to work independently on similar issues; besides, such events contribute to integration of IDPs and local youngsters.

There were a lot of discussions, different opinions, peace initiatives during the workshop. The hours of work passed quite rapidly leaving many thoughts in the participants' minds, and they noted in the feedback part of the workshop:

"The topic of the group work was women's involvement in the negotiation process, so I clearly saw myself in the process, I liked my role and I got involved with pleasure."

"I want to be more active in order to be able to participate in similar projects."

"It was interesting to know that women are active peacemakers. Their capabilities are really inexhaustible. This gives me a strong impulse; I want to be such a woman myself."

"The workshop has exceeded all my expectations. I am convinced that my generation can play an important role in peaceful resolution of the conflict if such events are carried out at a wider scope."

"Two hours of involvement in the activities, simulations of negotiations, group work – all of this was new and very interesting for me. I was able to overcome my insecurities



## Extracts from essays

**RUSUDAN MURGULIA,**  
training participant (Senaki)

It has been more than a quarter of a century since our country became a hot topic of international dialogues. As long as this process is active and dynamic, the hope for better future is real. Under the better future we imply Georgia united with Abkhazia and Shida Kartli. We should achieve this by peaceful negotiations.

Political force which is willing to disintegrate Georgian and Abkhazian Societies will always try to deepen the conflict between the two societies, but civic activities should impede this. We should understand the present-day attitudes of Abkhazian people, their disillusionment; they failed to gain independence, could not reach the aim for which they sacrificed so much. This has already caused some dissatisfaction in parts of the society. We should pay due attention to this and we should offer them the benefits which cannot be provided by the third side: safety, health care, development of education and tourism. We cannot ignore that there are mixed attitudes towards Georgia in the Abkhazian society: a number of Abkhazians strongly object to Georgians returning to Abkhazia, the other part has a more favourable attitude to us but they cannot express it openly to avoid accusations of treason. We should make provisions for these mixed attitudes of Abkhazians during the negotiations.

and enjoy the free space.”

“The process of negotiations is very important, especially when both sides try to find a compromise... this was exactly the approach during the workshop and at the same time you had an opportunity to evaluate your own abilities.”

“It is hard to explain my feelings when I got acquainted with the cases of women peacemakers. This was so interesting and I was so charged with emotions that I had a desire to share my attitude and the new exciting knowledge with my friends and even strangers.”

“To be very candid, I had thought that Georgian-Abkhazian conflict was not not interesting for me. First of all, so much time had passed and nothing had changed. Besides, I was not from Abkhazia. Nevertheless, I attended the workshop... And I did the right thing. This was two hours of extraordinary feelings. I have never felt such an interest, such zest. Now I am ashamed that I did not consider it as the topic of my interest before. Now my attitude has changed and I will never miss any meeting on this topic”

These remarks reflect well enough the idea of the workshop, its goals and the changes of attitudes among its young participants.

The workshops were conducted by active young people: Nino Khubulava, Mariam Cherkezia (Kutaisi), Mariam Chargaleishvili, Tea Medzvelia (Khoni), Ketikuchava, Ani Kutateladze, Mariam Balanchivadze (Tskaltubo), Ketikheban, Ana Zirakadze (Poti), Nino Morgoshia, Tata Narmania (Koki), Tamar Iakobashvili (Terjola). Some of them had had some experience of working with groups, for others it was a debut. Nevertheless, all workshops were equally productive due to their open-minded ap-

## *Special time at workshops*



proach, interest in the conflict and, most of all, the participants' desire to contribute to the process.

The workshops conducted by the young people independently gave a strong stimulus to pupils, students and young people employed in different sectors. Now they are willing to be involved in youth projects and to be more active.

The most important thing is that during these meetings it was understood that social processes cannot be conducted without young people's involvement, that it is unacceptable to be indifferent and say that nothing will change anyway... On the contrary, everyone should try to express themselves, try to influence the environment, to make at least minimal contribution to common cause.

What happened after the training and workshops?

Analyzing Georgian-Abkhazian conflict and working on its transformation has influenced Mariam Chargaleishvili (Khoni). Mariam is a student at Tbilisi State University. She chose the topic of Georgian-Abkhazian conflict transformation as a topic of her presentation for a competition. In the motivation letter she emphasized the need for informal education and the work conducted by Fund "Sukhumi" in this direction. She became the first among first-year students to win a competition of this format.

Ani Kutateladze (Tskaltubo) changed her specialty after the training and she chose to continue her studies at the department of international relations of Caucasus University as she began to see her future in the negotiation process and she knows that much has to be done in this direction.

And this is only part of the changes...

## Extracts from essays

**NATO KARAIA**

**training participant (Senaki)**

Opportunities for women are really inexhaustible. We coexisted with Abkhazian population for more than half of our lives and we believe that we can maintain relations with Abkhazian women. We should give a positive impetus for Georgian-Abkhazian relations to our children.

... There are moments in life which leave behind an everlasting bright memory.

Sukhumi and return... these two words are blissful for us.

**KETEVAN CHEBANI**

**Training participant (Poti)**

Today Georgia and Georgians face a problem which is painful for all. The ties between the two sides have been broken. It seems that we have adapted to it and we keep quiet.

... There is no progress, even the smallest one. Today all of us should unite and we should try to change our attitudes to each other. Resolving a conflict is not an easy task, but this does not mean that we should stop and conform to the state that we have already been in for 25 years.

It seems that Georgian people have adopted a passive stance and all the ways to Abkhazia are cut. But I believe that the efforts and endeavor of Georgian people will bear fruits! Strength is in unity!

# BEGINNING CIVIC DIALOGUE

## Series of round-table meetings in West Georgia

GURANDA GVANTSELADZE

Project assistant

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For the purpose of creating new space for civic dialogue, a series of round-table meetings have been conducted in five towns of West Georgia: Kutaisi, Senaki, Zugdidi, Ts-kaltubo and Poti. Representatives from local government, IDP and local communities, media and youth participated in the meetings.

The main topics of the meetings included creating new conditions for development and peaceful coexistence of Georgian and Abkhazian societies, new approaches to regulation of Georgian-Abkhazian conflict and negotiation process with due consideration of existing realities and political context. The meetings identified attitudes to new visions related to conflict resolution among different strata of society, especially women's groups.

Research carried out by Fund "Sukhumi" - "Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict, Rethinking Approaches to Conflict Resolution and New Directions for its Transformation" was presented at the meetings and the feedback from the participants was received.

The issue proved to be topical and even painful for the participants. It was noted that without activities carried out by NGOs the problem would sink into oblivion. The civic society has formed an attitude that nothing can be changed and their involvement has no importance at all.

It was emphasized that work in this direction is crucial for creating safe platform for di-

alogue on humanitarian problems and effective solutions between women groups from conflicting sides. It will also help increase women's role in the decision-making process for peaceful resolution of the conflict, contribute to forming positive attitudes in the society towards women's involvement in politics, including issues of sustainable peace and human security.

The participants agreed that it is necessary to disseminate the information in the society regarding successful diplomatic experience of women which would be a step forward on the way to positive transformation of the conflict.

The presentation on the study allowed the participants to receive detailed information on Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, as well as get to the roots of the conflict and learn more about its results. They had a good chance to understand the positions of the sides and the dangers perceived by the Abkhazian side that impede conflict resolution.

The participants were particularly interested in the information regarding different formats of negotiations and agreements since 1992. The failed attempts during this period were also stressed.

Based on this information the participants had an opportunity to assess the new approaches outlined in the research which will contribute to the positive transformation of the conflict.



The participants noted that they had had little information about the processes which led to protraction of the conflict and they had not been able to analyze the mistakes which still produced negative results. According to them, the meeting allowed them to rethink everything done before and together with the authors of the study realize the mistakes made by the sides.

“It is very important to raise awareness of the society and to carry out an active examination of the history of Georgian-Abkhazian conflict in order to analyze the mistakes, learn from previous experience and the steps taken and try to attract an active part of the society in order to implement new approaches to conflict transformation”. *Nato Karaia (the participant of the round-table discussion in Senaki).*

Although a number of initiatives were developed by the participants, they still perceive the third party, which is an integral part of the conflict and possesses enough power to manipulate the conflict, as an impediment for their realization. This is exactly what they consider the principal danger to the conflict resolution and achieving stability. However, it cannot be denied that everyone was unanimous in accepting the importance of strengthening public opinion so that it is heard despite the presence of external factors. Public opinion should be the leading point in forming internal policies of conflict resolution.

Decline in public interest to this problem in general was identified as one of the limiting factors for women's involvement in Georgian-Abkhazian conflict resolution. People have adapted to the fact that nothing is changing. It

has lost the primary importance even for IDPs due to the daily routine and everyday necessities. Therefore, it is important to work permanently to keep the issue topical, to avoid government and public inactivity. The NGO sector should contribute to promoting public diplomacy in this direction. Using resources of youth was also identified as crucial:

“Active work with youth on these issues, scrutinizing the whole process, discussion of the dynamics of Georgian-Abkhazian conflict will lead to increased motivation in young people to think of new visions of conflict transformation and most of all, to see themselves as part of the process”. *Dalila Chikava (the participant of round-table discussion in Zugdidi).*

The participants noted that there is no strategy for conflict regulation. They give the preference to direct communication, discussions and relations directly between conflicting sides. Opinions of young people are very interesting:

“We, students attend many discussions but Abkhazian topic is of less interest. It appears that this issue is important only for those who were affected by the conflict. This attitude is absolutely unacceptable. Active young people should be involved in finding solutions to this problem as devotedly as I was fired by the discussion of these issues today” – *Nino Gagua (the participant of the round-table discussion in Kutaisi).*

## *Round-table meetings: discussions, different opinions*

### SENAKI



### POTI



### ZUGDIDI



### TSKHALTUBO



### KUTAISI



## Extracts from essays

**MARIAM CHARGALEISHVILI**  
training participant (Khoni)

It does not really matter that I have never stepped on the Abkhazian soil and I have never crossed Enguri bridge. This does not mean at all that my heart does not speed up when I think of Abkhazia... Someone said that solution comes with desire. But weren't we led by desire for so many years? What is the use of desire if no action will follow? I think the solution lies in unity, motivation and uncompromising stand. Yes, uncompromising stand against the present situation.

It is just a waste of time to argue about who was guilty, why it happened or how it happened. This has already happened and we cannot change that. Time passes and the situation remains unchanged. Therefore, we need to compromise, recognize our mistakes and strive for better future. Youth is ready for changes because they use wider resources of information, they are educated, interested, they can compromise and achieve consensus and on top of everything they know the price of freedom...

We should demonstrate to our Abkhazian peers that we are not their enemies, we respect them and we strive for peace. We should show to them where we are going, what our goal is and how they will benefit from the relations with us.

The main path lies through negotiations and establishing relations. This is my vision for conflict transformation and I strongly believe that it will bring results.

As I was once told by one highly respected person, faith moves mountains. I have believed in the power of faith since...

For these reasons, negative attitude to fruitless official negotiation process, which is not based on compromises from both sides, was evident. Geneva talks also proved to be unsuccessful. New realities and political context are often ignored. In the process of round-table discussions the participants underlined the role of civic diplomacy and its importance but they also noted scarcity of its resources and they see the role of NGO sector in its encouragement and promotion.

The main recommendation from the participants stated that permanent references to discord and old resentments existing between the two people will prevent them from conducting any dialogue and impede confidence building.

The main result of the round-table discussions is that the participants realized the relevance of the research findings. The participants stressed the following points, whose implementation they are willing to participate in:

Involvement of women in the negotiation process will contribute to identifying new visions of conflict resolution;

It is important to conduct informational meetings with population in order to identify public opinion about the conflict transformation;

It is necessary to exploit resources of youth. They generate creative ideas and they are enthusiastic in carrying out these ideas. They are open to learning and are ready to be involved in the process.



# THE SPACE BETWEEN US - A FEW DAYS IN CYPRUS

## A place and background for Georgian-Abkhazian Meeting

LALI SHENGELIA

Editor of information sector

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### Why Cyprus?

According to the great writer Leo Tolstoy “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”

You can say the same for countries: All developed, happy countries are alike, the rest, especially countries with conflicts differ in their problems. Each conflict has its own reasons, roots, developments and ways of regulation... However, you can still find many things in common. Understanding different conflicts is one of the key aspects of the peace strategy of Fund “Sukhumi”. The very first book published by Fund “Sukhumi” was “The Space between Us” by Cynthia Cockburn – a book about women peacemakers, their joint work, attempts of conflict regulation, peacebuilding experiences of Bosnian, Jewish, Palestinian women.

This book has influenced each member of the Fund. And from those years we started to look for the space which always exists between people on different sides of a conflict, the space for dialogue, negotiations and solutions.

Since then Fund “Sukhumi” has been studying conflict experiences together with women organizations operating in Abkhazia. There have been visits to Northern Ireland, Israel, Bosnia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, Serbia... One might think of these visits as pleasant journeys only, but we can only describe

them as stressful days when the participants try to look at the conflicts of other countries through the prism of their own conflict, when they find similarities: peaceful mothers, heat of fighters, human tragedies and finally, they look for the ways to peace.

That’s why Cyprus was chosen...

10 years ago representatives of Fund “Sukhumi” visited Cyprus together with two Abkhazian women. Meeting with local women peacemakers was unforgettable and exciting. The meeting with two former mayors of Nicosia was especially interesting and their narrative was extraordinary: the story about the time when the city’s sewage system was damaged. Nicosia is the only capital city in the world divided by conflict. Not surprisingly the city has two mayors: a mayor of the Turkish part and a mayor of the Greek part. When the sewage system was damaged there was no other way then to meet and find the solution together, because as they noted with bitter irony, the sewage equally stinks on both sides...

In similar fashion you find common problems on both sides of the conflict and it is hard to solve them without joint efforts.

In short... after 10 years we arrived in Cyprus again, 10 women from Fund “Sukhumi” and 10 women from Abkhazian organizations.

The meeting with local organizations was especially interesting.



And, of course, comparing, sharing experiences, lessons learned from conflicts and peace initiatives.

## Cyprus Experience

The brief history is as follows: on 16 August, 1960 Cyprus was declared as an independent republic and in September it became the member of UN. 1963 was marked by clashes between the Greek and Turkish communities provoked by destructive forces. In 1974 Turkish military forces invaded the northern part of the island and occupied it. In 1976 “The Republic of Northern Cyprus” was declared.

For 40 years Cyprus has tried to resolve the conflict. The island is divided into two unequal parts. Formally they have reached agreement on reunification under federal state but they still cannot agree on structural division. There are problems which are hard to solve, for example returning Greek Cypriots to the places from which they were evicted by Turkish Cypriots, the issue of compensation for the lost property or the issue of more than one hundred thousand people who were resettled from Turkey in order to strengthen Turkish part of the island. The Republic of Cyprus has become an EU member, or as they say, they were the only ones to get the prize. The northern part, which is recognized only by Turkey, was left out of the picture and found itself in political and economic isolation.

## What happens on the level of human relations?

People do not wait for political solutions, they work, cooperate, look for ways to each other. This is exactly what is most important – human relations. We discussed these relations at the meetings with local organizations. The Home for Cooperation is located in the buffer zone, so called green line. You

can find different organizations here, including the Association for Historical Research, which tries to produce common history of the island as different types of history are offered to students on different sides of the island.

Some work on gender issues, others on peace initiatives. For example, one of the projects called “Peace Bus” envisages visiting different places on the island and conducting meetings with local population.

Greek and Turkish Cypriots meet in the Home for Cooperation. There are business meetings and meetings between ordinary people who miss each other, when they just sit on the veranda and talk over a cup of coffee.

Media Centre is the first inter-community organization. It is also located in the buffer zone and was created in 2009. They have radio broadcasts in different languages. It is very important for the island as everyone can come and share their opinions. Of course this is peace-oriented radio and people on different sides send peaceful messages to each other.

The organization “City Partisans” was established in 2013 by activists. They breathe new life into public places in Larnaca, Nicosia, and Limassol. They organize installations, presentations, performances, concerts. Once they set the dinner table on the beach in Larnaca. This was announced by social networks and many people were involved in it. People came with their meals and they dined together and talked. On another occasion they arranged dinner on the roof. On the opposite sides people sat on the roofs. There was eye contact, a workshop, Skype contact and they felt that they were together again...

One day they opened gates of all houses and organized different activities in the houses. The people just entered the yards of other people, greeted each other and engaged in communication.

Then they painted the wall which is erected on the demarcation line... One person started the painting, others continued and soon the whole wall was covered.

We learnt many interesting things about children's activities. The children played together, they were engaged in competitions and made friends. They never talked about politics and conflict. Sport helped them to get closer. The name of the project was "Peace Players". Naturally, there were winners and losers but the important thing was that the teams were of mixed composition and there was no resentment.

There are different programmes for young-

sters: going to camps together and organizing study visits. All in all, they do everything that unites people and everyone is involved in this: NGOs, active members of society, representatives of both sides and especially young people. Funds for the activities are allocated by donors and the state.

Before 2003 there were no possibilities for the sides to meet. There was only one check-point operating with very strict rules (the people were shot on that border even for taking photos). Now there are several check-points. While walking down a broad street with fashionable shops and nice cafes you may come across a check-

### *Meetings and sharing experience*



point! Policemen are controlling the flow of people, border-guards are checking the documents and people, including tourists, guests, locals are strolling up and down to meet each other, to shop, to work, to date...

"I have a son and Sophia has a daughter. Our children play together. This was impossible before 2003"- says one of our hostesses.

"For peace it is important to understand each other and to share the stories. Peace is a global notion. If there is no peace in one place, there is no peace in the world!"- this is an opinion of another peacemaker.

"You should engage in more contacts, open more check-points, people should have more possibilities for communication" – suggests the third.

## We

This is how the Cypriots from both sides work, they expand their contacts, they communicate with each other – former friends and neighbors, women, children, young people... One might get an impression that no one is left to be reconciled.

But Cyprus was simply a background for our Georgian-Abkhazian meeting. There was some tension but in general the atmosphere was amicable. We shared information about our work accomplished under the project, attitudes of training and workshop participants, and the results of research, presentations and round tables.

The research of our Abkhaz partners analyzed the process of Georgian-Abkhazian negotiations, its stages, achievements, challenges, Geneva talks and women's role in conflict transformation process.

Our research "Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict, Rethinking Approaches to Conflict Res-

olution and New Directions for its Transformation" was well received by our partners, especially for the purpose of future work.

A number of issues were raised for work and advocacy to the governments on both sides of the Enguri. The most topical were the problems of Gali population. These problems had always stressed by our organization and they were reflected in our research. These include the population left without passports, Georgian schools closed since 2011 on the whole territory of Gali districts, a single check-point left on the Enguri bridge, in short, restrictions of education in the native language, restrictions of movement and health care. Another pressing issue is brown marmorated stink bugs (BMSB). This is now the top priority in Abkhazia (as well as in the whole of Georgia). The bugs have destroyed harvest of hazelnut, maize and fruit... Unless joint, urgent and effective measures are taken against the vermin, the issue of Gali district population remaining in their houses will be put in jeopardy. For years they have tolerated a lot of injustice and oppression but they still refuse to abandon their houses. I would compare this case with the case of the two mayors of Nicosia and believe that both sides should advocate this issue...

## After Cyprus

The Cyprus meetings were held in the beginning of November. The reactions to the visit were mixed. Some Abkhazians criticized their countrywomen for meeting Georgians and trying to expand Georgian influence on politics and youth.

Georgian society always welcomes meetings and dialogues of all formats as the government is a strong supporter of peaceful regulation and people have peaceful at-



***Cyprus is so diverse: jovial and melancholy at the same time. A sunny beach. The building in the buffer zone destroyed decades ago. A check-point at the end of the shopping street. The road leading to the other part of Nicosia. Graffiti on the wall: One Cyprus***



titudes. These attitudes were evident during the round-table discussions we organized in Tbilisi. This was a kind of report to the society (you can find a relevant article in the magazine). Besides, the participants of the meeting shared their impressions with regional television audience with the help of TV Company "Rioni"...

We received valuable experience from

Cyprus. There are issues to think over and some experiences that can be applied in practice. As we summarized this small-scale project, several new ideas were outlined. Of course, not all of the ideas are to be fulfilled; some of them will face obstacles, others will be implemented. What matters is how we use the space between us.



## Extracts from essays

**MARIAM CHERKEZIA**

**training participant (Kutaisi)**

I am Mariam Cherkezia, an IDP from Abkhazia. I am only 16 but still I cannot be indifferent to the topic of Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. I am a patriot and this issue is a top priority for me. Since my childhood I have been asking my parents and grandparents about Abkhazia and people living there, about its past and its present. My parents' families left Abkhazia because of the conflict. It was very hard for them as they had been born and brought up there, they had had plans for their future... But now they are here and they have had to start everything from scratch. What I like the most is listening to my father's mother. She is Abkhazian and for me this is something very special. I listen with great interest to her stories about Abkhazian customs and traditions, about peaceful life in the past when Georgian-Abkhazian families were created. I keep in touch with my relatives in Abkhazia and I hope that in the future I can meet them without any barriers.

It is impossible to cut ties among the people who lived side by side for decades.

I have received a lot of new and valuable information regarding the conflict from Fund "Sukhumi". I have met peers who are interested in this topic as much as I am although not all of them are from Abkhazia. They are ordinary citizens of our country who want to return to peaceful and fair life. They are against war.

Under the project we conducted various role plays in groups on the topics of Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. We outlined a number of ideas that can really make a difference but their realization takes time. Negotiation is the most important stage in conflict management and communication is the integral part of negotiations.

Crucially, Georgian young people are ready to make an effort and work for the peaceful future. Of course, we need support from older generation. We do not blame any one side for the conflict; both sides should share this burden. Our desire is to meet our Abkhazian peers and to communicate with them. There is no need to remember unpleasant moments from the past, moments of war and conflict, to blame each other. We want to build a brighter future.

We cannot change the past. We are now in the present and the future ahead is in our hands.

We are the generation that can change a lot.

# ONE MORE SPACE FOR CIVIC DIALOGUE...

## Summary presentation in Tbilisi

EMA KAMKIA  
Project assistant

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On 7 December hotel “Courtyard by Marriott” in Tbilisi hosted the presentation of research “Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict, Rethinking Approaches to Conflict Resolution and New Directions for its Transformation” carried out by Fund “Sukhumi”. Ekaterine Gamakharia, the author of the study has also written a number of works on the theme of Georgian-Abkhazian conflict.

The presentation was attended by representatives of local and international organizations, embassies, government bodies, public defender’s office, academic circles as well as IDP communities.

At the beginning of the meeting Alla Gamakharia, the head of Fund “Sukhumi” and Lali Shengelia, the editor of the information sector, talked about almost 20-year history of peacebuilding of the organization emphasizing that the issues of peaceful resolution of the conflict, involvement of women and youth and advocating their initiatives and needs have been principal throughout this time. The topics included using public diplomacy and resources of women peacebuilding for confidence building and reconciliation of Georgian and Abkhazian societies, studying and understanding similar models worldwide.

It was noted that the issue of peaceful regulation of the conflict, which is sometimes pressing and topical but at other times forgotten and neglected by the whole society, is always central for the organization. This can be traced in the activities carried out by the organization: in tough meetings with the Abkhazian side, which are full of emotions, in educational trainings with participation of women and youth conducted regularly, in methodological handbooks. Studies which are always discussed with wide audience for receiving proper feedback are especially valuable. They always deal with the most topical issues, are innovative and serve as springboards for dialogue and discussions.

*Lali Shengelia:* “This time we present to the participants another desk research or “analytical article” as the author calls it. It is clear from the title that it is an attempt to rethink the approaches to the conflict resolution and to outline new directions for its transformation. Public discussion around the study has already started and the present meeting is one more attempt to broaden the space for dialogue in order to move the issues out of the state of “frozen conflict” and “stagnation”.

Ekaterine Gamakharia presented the main conclusions and recommendations of the research to the participants of the meeting. As she noted at the beginning of the meeting, the research is focused on specific actions which are not result-oriented. It may include approaches which are not coherent with the political course, which are unpopular and non-mainstream, but it identifies all the factors and barriers which impede positive transformation of the conflict.

*Ekaterine Gamakharia:* “The starting point for us was to consider the prospects of Georgian-Abkhazian conflict resolution through the prism of positive transformation of the conflict, which unlike conflict settlement and regulation, cannot offer fast and predetermined solutions and its results are open. The idea of transformation implies that it is based on sensible, consistent and pragmatic actions, on the process which is focused on satisfying needs of conflict-affected population, solving their everyday problems and in general, on developing the society and sustainable peace-building and only after this can the final goal be formulated.”

The author of the research noted with disappointment: “We often start conflict resolution upside down, so we face problems. Our attitude, our goal is to take an objective and critical look at the path taken, the mistakes that keep us in the state of frozen conflict.

We do not offer “ready-made” solutions for the conflict regulation. But we have an ambition to open the space for the discussions on sensitive issues. Those who want to overcome the deadlock should show more courage in order to make positive changes. Once, a representative of the Abkhazian side said: “when something rational comes up, it is followed by rejection; we return to it later but it is too late then”. We call it the process of “missed boat”.

The researcher overviewed all the key issues that impede reaching agreements between Georgian and Abkhazian sides. These issues include: incompatible positions of the sides on the issues of political status and disagreement on the models of Georgian state; different attitudes of the sides to the agreement on non-use of force; denial of the conflict with Abkhazia and Abkhazian people in the present-day rhetoric; formulating the issue in the following way: “Isolation of Abkhazia or Wide-Open Door to Russia” or “Gali District – “Achilles Heel” or Resource for Cooperation”.

During the presentation the author discussed how the peace process will benefit from the approach “non-recognition of sovereignty but recognition of conflict with Abkhazia”; more active engagement of Abkhazia in negotiations with European institutions as effective transformation of the European policy “engagement without recognition”, which has not been fully put into action yet. She stressed the importance of recognizing

the potential and capabilities of this strategy and filling its goals and objectives with neutral and apolitical content.

Later, questions and open dialogue followed. The participants of the meeting gave high evaluation to the research. Some of them noted that despite the fact that they had different approaches to a number of issues, they had read the study very carefully and waited for the meeting with great interest. Some argued that it would be very hard to start a dialogue without considering political status and without setting the final goals, as suggested in the analytical article.

Participants of the discussion welcome the beginning of the dialogue on the issues of free movement for all residents of Abkhazia regardless of their ethnical origin, as well as issues of safety, development programmes, health care, economic relations, students exchange, activation of people's diplomacy, increasing the role of women,

supporting women initiatives focused on women's needs and solving their daily problems.

*Mary Gelashvili:* "It is important to exploit resources of people's diplomacy in order to advocate certain issues. For example, Georgian society should try to reduce dependence of Abkhazian youth on Russia and open the door to Europe for them; On the other hand, Abkhazian side should be more actively involved in solving acute problems of the Georgian population of Gali district. It is notable that any single step made in the direction to each other is unacceptable and is perceived as a threat in the part of the Abkhazian society opposed to the reconciliation of Georgian and Abkhazian sides.

Discussion around the research topics started right during the meeting: There were differences of opinions on the following topic: "Would it be productive to start the process of de-isolation of Abkhazia and to





give Abkhazia an opportunity to cooperate with Europe in certain fields without permission from Georgia, in other words to demonstrate the goodwill from the Georgian side.” Should Georgia revise and soften its position on the above? Would opening the door to Europe change the attitudes and visions of Abkhazians regarding Georgian-Abkhazian relations?

The researcher argued that europeaniza-

tion, democratization and access to western resources for modernization will have a positive influence on the values of the Abkhazian society. Closer relations with EU and non-EU countries will contribute to establishing the supremacy of law and democratic rule in Abkhazia, which will lead to the transparency and accountability of the institutions that carry the responsibility for protecting the rights of their population, including Georgians.

### *Discussion of peacebuilding activity*



The author paid special attention to the need to start direct political dialogue with the Abkhazian side and to reach agreement on a number of social, economic and infra-structural issues by applying status-neutral approaches. She gave an example from international experience about cooperation between Serbia and Kosovo by engaging in status-neutral agreements, for example official agreements on doing business together and on free movement. A question was raised on how this experience can be applied in the Georgian context considering our reality and the nature of the conflict.

Some of the questions were rhetorical and they required deeper analysis of the specific features of the conflict and search for solutions. However, there was no dispute around the issue that direct dialogue with Abkhazians will contribute to the positive transformation of the conflict.

The meeting participants noted that the article provided analysis of those factors which hamper the peacebuilding efforts and positive transformation of the conflict, which is rather rare in our reality. It was also stated that the article does not provide ready-made solutions, but offers certain directions to the public, politicians and decision-makers and points to the changed paradigms for conflict resolution. It is an attempt to open the space for considering the issues which are at present discussed to a lesser degree. These are the approaches that could help to revitalize the process which is in stagnation at the moment.

In general the participants agreed with the main claim of the research that it is im-

portant that the conflict regulation is viewed as a long-term, consistent and well-organized dynamic process which could have open outputs. It is vital that the sides agree on the ways and stages of positive transformation of the conflict rather than discuss the final outcomes which have always lead the attempts of negotiation into deadlocks so far.

The representatives of peacebuilding NGOs expressed their disappointment by noting that “the conflict is no longer high-priority and topical”.

*Nino Kutateladze, Chairperson of the Union of Spouses of Disabled Veterans and War Widows:* “I would like to thank you for your work. I share the opinion that the direct dialogue among the conflict sides is vitally important. It is direct dialogues that give us an opportunity to understand each other’s attitudes that are not reflected in any report. The importance of youth involvement was mentioned here, but in South Ossetia there are virtually no young people left. This is a severe and irrevocable result of the war”.

Naira Bepieva (NNLE “Caucasian Mosaic”) saw not only work on specific issues but also a new wave of peacebuilding movement which Fund “Sukhumi” always pioneered. “We are not naïve enough to think that we can easily resolve the conflict. We are far from this illusion, but it is a big mistake to be indifferent to the frozen conflicts. I believe that there are no desperate situations; we should never stop our peace efforts. Most importantly, we should

help Abkhazian and Ossetian youth to receive education in Europe together with Georgians.”

The issue of state support to Abkhazian young people in receiving European education was discussed. According to the participants, programs creating preconditions for the young people from conflict regions for studying in Georgian higher education institutes proved to be ineffective. Therefore, the chances of their integration in Georgian society are decreased.

According to one opinion, the 2008 August conflict on one hand totally changed the disposition of conflicting sides and stressed Russian geopolitical interests in the region and their desire to maintain their influence, but on the other hand, it overshadowed the conflict between Georgians and Abkhazians. This moved us away from the direct dialogue for mitigating tensions between Georgians and Abkhazians.

Some participants representing government bodies agreed with many points of the research; however, they remarked on certain ideas that are unacceptable for them. For example, they believe that the Abkhazian side should not be recognized as a party, especially given that they express only Russian policy and Abkhazians are becoming an ethnic minority in Abkhazia. Moreover, they did not agree with the notion that the Georgian side tries to isolate Abkhazia. They supported this claim with an argument that Georgia’s official policy allows Abkhazian population to have free access to health care system. Also, they pointed to the steps taken by

the Georgian side and their cooperation with Abkhazians for the protection of the Abkhazian language. However, they acknowledged that the research in this direction is not sufficient and NGO input is invaluable.

Representatives of international organizations (including women’s organization “Kvinna till Kvinna”) also expressed their positions. They expressed belief that it is very important to conduct such meetings, to involve women and youth in conflict resolution. They noted that it is not easy to appreciate fully the role of public diplomacy as it cannot produce immediate results. However the peacebuilding process should continue. Dialogue should be focused on effective involvement of women’s organizations in the conflict resolution process.

The meeting can be viewed as civic dialogue within the Georgian society involving partners and peace process stakeholders which is crucial for positive transformation of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict.

The meeting organizers expressed their sincere gratitude to all organizations that supported efforts of Fund “Sukhumi” and Abkhazian partners to promote aspirations of Georgian and Abkhazian societies to peace, well-being and safety. This support has ensured women’s involvement in building bridges of trust.

The meeting proved that fortunately we all agree on one point- there are no alternatives to dialogue, sustainable peace-building, search for new ways in a new political context!



*Active dialogue  
Ideas  
Initiatives  
Proposals*



# LOOKING FORWARD TO NEW CHALLENGES

## Documentary reflecting all project activities

**NANA ROBAKIDZE**

Editor of TV Company “Rioni”

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For the last 25 years Georgian-Abkhazian conflict has been on the top of the agenda. The need for careful approach to sensitive topics has always existed but there are many questions concerning the past, present and future that people ask, but there are as yet no answers.

I have been cooperating with Fund “Sukhumi” for years. I know how much effort they put in these activities. Their activities in different directions are well known and one of these is conflict transformation.

The project activities revealed sensible and well-considered attitudes of young people. During interviews no restriction was felt and they talked frankly about the issues, which was not the case before. They openly expressed their attitudes and outlined ideas which, in their opinion, are necessary for conflict transformation.

As young people noted, conducting trainings and workshops is important as it gives them an opportunity to expand their knowledge, receive information and conduct deeper analysis.

A few years ago greater part of the society saw the solution to the conflict in using force but at present dialogue is viewed as the main instrument for the conflict regulation.

The visit to Cyprus organized under the project was remarkable: meetings with Ab-



khazian NGOs, sharing peacebuilding experience, two conflicting but non-aggressive communities on the island, barbed wire fences and free movement, different visions and buffer zone where Greek and Turkish Cypriots can communicate, peaceful talks and making future plans.

I had extraordinary impressions from the meeting; my consciousness has also been transformed which was reflected in my work and daily life. Now I have many new ideas that I will definitely implement.

The project was summarized in Tbilisi. The guests got acquainted with the activities carried out under the project. Showing a film produced by us made the event more interesting. I interviewed representatives of the parliament, gender equality council and UN women organization. They talked about the contribution of Fund “Sukhumi” to transformation of the conflict. These interviews enriched the film and as a result it fully describes the project which has been successfully implemented.

Now we look forward to new challenges.

