



# ADVANCING THE PROSPECTS FOR PEACE

20 years of civil peacebuilding in the context of  
the Nagorny Karabakh conflict



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## About the contributors

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# Executive summary

## Introduction

Almost two decades after the ceasefire agreement, the official peace process on the Nagorny Karabakh conflict mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group has been unable to reach a peaceful settlement. In the meantime, civil society groups in the region have sought to advance the prospects for peace at different levels of society outside of political negotiations. This study represents a landmark attempt to collectively reflect on 20 years of civil society-led peacebuilding efforts. The study is divided into three reports, each of which reflects the prevailing opinions from local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society leaders working on peacebuilding projects in one society. Taken together, they paint a picture of how the peacebuilding community itself assesses its role in transforming the conflict, looking back from the present.

International Alert has been engaged in conflict transformation in the South Caucasus since the mid-1990s. In the Nagorny Karabakh conflict context, we have sought to empower different sectors of society to build trust across the divide, explore alternative narratives on the conflict and advocate for peace among policymakers. This study, initiated within the European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (EPNK), supported by the European Union, represents the first step in a new process to facilitate joint research and introduce fresh thinking on the conflict to the affected societies. International Alert has brought together a group of experts from the conflict region for comparative learning from other conflict contexts and to stimulate broad, inclusive debate in their societies based on new ideas and perspectives on transforming the conflict. As a starting point for this comparative work, the group investigated perceptions of peacebuilding efforts among civil society from their own conflict context to date. The results of this work form the basis of this study.

This study has the following objectives:

1. To enable people in each society to pause and reflect on the efforts made and lessons learnt at the community level over 20 years of striving for peace;
2. To share information on peacebuilding efforts between the societies, improve understanding of different perspectives and help communities identify with each other through the discovery of areas of common interest; and
3. To identify gaps in civil peacebuilding processes as a basis from which to explore other conflict contexts.

Each of the three reports considers the perceived objectives of peacebuilding activities carried out over the 20-year period, before addressing the question of their effectiveness in reaching these objectives as well as their impact on the political level and on participants in these projects. In addition, the authors explore external factors perceived to have affected the success of peacebuilding projects. Finally, each draws conclusions for the reader's consideration.

The research process was designed to be inclusive, and participatory methods were used to capture a broad base of views across different segments of civil society. The experts conducted focus groups and interviews with key civil society actors involved in peacebuilding in the conflict context in their societies, as well as extensive desk research. In total, more than 100 people took part in focus groups and interviews across the three societies. Groups represented among the research participants include NGOs, women's organisations, associations of mothers of war victims, displaced people, young activists, war veterans, media, religious actors, academics and analysts.

A limitation of the research is that participation was restricted to civil society groups already engaged in peacebuilding activities – groups that are themselves often marginalised and for whom it can be a struggle to reach out to broader society. The opinions presented here therefore do not necessarily reflect those of the societies as a whole, but rather form an internal reflection of civil society views by those actors already involved in peacebuilding.

The study captures a snapshot of prevailing opinions on peacebuilding efforts across a diverse spectrum of civil society groups. It does not aim to present an exhaustive characterisation or in-depth analysis of the peacebuilding initiatives that have taken place. The reports give significant insight into the perspectives of local actors on their work in the wider context. Read together, we believe they can serve as a valuable resource for the institutional memory of peacebuilders going forward.

## Summary of findings

Each report reflects the views from a particular society and therefore differs in perspective. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that many messages are shared across the conflict divide. These can be grouped into factors affecting progress in peacebuilding, shortcomings in approaches taken, and impact or achievements. The following summary presents key common findings of the research, which offer an opportunity for further reflection. Of course, we recognise the inherent limitations of providing a summary and we encourage you to read the papers themselves for more detail, additional insights, nuances and examples.

### Factors affecting progress in peacebuilding

- Geopolitical forces and external powers play a larger role in determining the decision-making process of elite groups than the long-term interest of the population they represent. The “neither peace nor war” situation serves the interests of elite groups; at worst, this makes the peacebuilding agenda irrelevant at the top levels.
- There are no real mechanisms for dialogue between official and unofficial actors and processes. Monopolisation of the peace process by official institutions leads to the marginalisation of civil society. Peacebuilders in some cases are seen as troublemakers and become targets of criticism in their own society.
- Civil society is weak in every community affected by the conflict. Therefore, it needs more support to strengthen and broaden the reach of alternative thinking. At the same time, the rise of government organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) undermines the independence of the civil society sector and the credibility of peacebuilding projects in particular. The risk of politicisation of peacebuilding efforts is increasing.
- There is a huge disparity between the level of investment in war and confrontational ideology and the resources available for building peace. As a result, peacebuilders constantly struggle against a tide of adverse forces, and it can often feel like any achievements made are rendered invisible.
- Many peacebuilding interventions are poorly coordinated and patchy. The lack of long-term commitment or joint strategy by the international community makes progress piecemeal and staggered. The absence of coordination among local civil society actors is equally highlighted as a problem.

### Shortcomings in peacebuilding approaches

- Only small numbers of people are involved in peacebuilding activities and, as a result, the potential for wider outreach in the societies is limited. Peacebuilders struggle to balance the need to broaden engagement with providing enough time and space for deeper trust-building processes to mature and strengthen, which in the long term lay the foundations for sustainable impact.



- Projects are often limited to narrow groups and do not leverage the potential of those left outside the process – such as retired diplomats, diasporas, businesses, teachers, cultural figures and local administration.
- Insufficient effort has been put into developing effective approaches to engaging the younger generation. This group has little experience of contact with the other side and is more heavily influenced by nationalistic rhetoric and enemy images promulgated by mainstream media.
- Work on fostering professionalism, ethical attitudes and cross-border contacts in the media has decreased over the years. Previously established contacts and momentum for joint initiatives have weakened. Building relationships between media professionals is especially important for preventing conflict escalation, as the media has the potential to influence the prevailing nationalist discourse and play a positive role in mitigating the information war.
- Awareness of peacebuilding initiatives and their results is low in the societies. Participants lack resources and capacity to share information and cope with challenging reactions from their communities. This feeds into suspicion and cynicism towards peacebuilding in the societies.
- Peacebuilding initiatives have emerged and persisted mainly with the facilitation of international NGOs. While some sporadic projects have been organised on the initiative of local groups, peace work still relies on support from international organisations and their facilitation remains crucial.

### Peacebuilding dividends so far – Impact

The challenges to peacebuilding over the past 20 years have meant that its impact has been diluted and can sometimes be difficult to discern. However, the research revealed a conviction among expert voices that efforts to date constitute an investment in social capital that can be drawn upon in the future to build the trust, compromise and reconciliation required for a sustainable peace to be negotiated and implemented. Among specific achievements highlighted in the reports, the following common messages emerged:

- **Communication channels:** Cross-conflict projects are the only way to create and maintain channels of communication between all parties to the conflict. In a context where the societies are totally isolated from one another, contacts across the divide have been critical in mitigating the radicalising effects of nationalist rhetoric promoted at national policy level. This has helped to slow down the development of deepening enmity between the societies.
- **Non-political platform:** The civil formats for participation offered by peacebuilding initiatives have given groups excluded from official formats a unique opportunity to contribute to discussion about the future of the conflict-resolution process. This inclusive space makes possible dialogue between the populations that will eventually have to find mechanisms for peaceful coexistence, which lays the foundations for a settlement that is stable and durable.
- **Personal transformation:** An important achievement of peacebuilding activities to date has been the personal transformation of the individuals involved. This area of impact is difficult to quantify and often underestimated. Nevertheless, long-term participants develop a deeper understanding and greater tolerance of the other sides. They also become more resistant to myths and stereotypes as well as accepting of the possibility of compromise. The benefits of personal transformation cannot, however, be achieved through participation in *ad hoc* events, but must be built and consolidated through steady, prolonged work.
- **Change agents:** Over 20 years, peacebuilding processes have led to the emergence of a cohort of civil society leaders who have developed a clear understanding that mutual trust and compromise are essential for achieving peace. These individuals, who have forged relationships across the conflict divide, have the potential to play a crucial role in promoting understanding of views from the other sides and increasing openness to dialogue. Their peacebuilding expertise, vision and motivation can be drawn upon to promote a culture of peace and bring about change in their societies.

## View from Baku

### Introduction

As a result of the current stalemate in official talks to resolve the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorny Karabakh, there is an urgent need for a critical analysis of the potential arising from “people-to-people diplomacy” activities in the region over the last 20 years (1992–2012). To achieve this, a study was conducted in Azerbaijan in January 2013 of representatives of civil society (heads of NGOs, experts, journalists, young people, etc.), who have been involved in implementing a range of peacebuilding initiatives in previous years.

This report is based on the results of this study, which involved two focus groups as well as oral and written interviews with a number of experts. The report was provided according to the “Chatham House Rule”, under which participants provide their views anonymously.

On the basis of this study:

- A reference timeline and brief overview of peacebuilding initiatives are provided;
- The main participants and subject matter of peacebuilding initiatives are examined;
- The influence of peacebuilding projects on real political processes is analysed;
- The influence of peacebuilding initiatives on the attitude to the conflict of the beneficiary groups is assessed;
- The factors affecting the effectiveness of implementing peacebuilding projects are examined; and
- A set of recommendations that could increase the impact of peacebuilding initiatives is provided.

The study once again confirms the need to systematise the peacebuilding initiatives implemented and analyse their results. As one of the participants in the study rightly remarked, unless this is done, ‘the impression will be created that we start from scratch every time without taking into consideration the work of others’.

### Brief overview of peacebuilding initiatives

Participants in the study divided the peacebuilding process relating to the resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorny Karabakh of the last 20 years (1992–2012) into a number of distinct stages, as follows.

#### Stage I – 1992–1994

During this stage of active military operations, leading intellectuals in Azerbaijani society generally tried to prevent tensions from being whipped up.

In 1993, the Armenian-Azerbaijani initiative referred to as the “Ben Lomond Peace Process” was launched. Following the signing of a ceasefire agreement (1994), the Azerbaijani and Armenian National Committees of the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly held two meetings in border regions – in Idzhevan (Armenia) and Gazakh (Azerbaijan) – which were attended by women’s and youth groups.

## Stage II – 1994–2000

In this period, international organisations, NGOs and donors launched peacebuilding projects in Azerbaijan, with the participation of representatives of local NGOs, the expert community, students, journalists and women leaders.

- Operations were carried out to find prisoners and hostages by the Azerbaijani National Committee of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly jointly with the organisation Helsinki Initiative 92 (Nagorny Karabakh);
- The “Ben Lomond Peace Process” continued (1993–1998);
- In 1994–1996, under the National Peace Foundation (US) initiative “Women for Peace and Democracy in the South Caucasus”, meetings were organised between female representatives from the countries of the South Caucasus;
- The Centre for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) at Maryland University, US implemented the first stage of the programme (August to December 1995) entitled “Partners in Conflict: Building Bridges to Peace in Transcaucasia” – with representatives of academia from Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, and this continued up to 1999;
- In 1997 and 1998, with financial support from the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation–Azerbaijan and organisational support from the National Peace Foundation (US), week-long courses on “Leadership in conflict prevention and resolution” were run at the Tbilisi State University for students from Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. The project was implemented by the Azerbaijan branch of the regional organisation Women for Peace and Democracy in the South Caucasus jointly with partners from Armenia and Georgia. A total of around 120 students attended these courses during this period;
- In 1997–1999, summer and winter schools for young people were held with the assistance of the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Georgian National Committees of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly;
- In 1997–2000, visits by Azerbaijani journalists were organised to Armenia (1997) and Nagorny Karabakh (1998), and by Armenian journalists to Azerbaijan (1999), under a three-year project supporting the media of the Caucasus, sponsored by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA); and
- In February, May and June 2000, the Academy of Educational Development (AED) organised three seminars on conflict resolution and women's leadership in Bakuriani (Georgia), Tsakhkadzor (Armenia) and Baku (Azerbaijan). Twenty women from each country (Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia) attended seminars sponsored by the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

## Stage III – 2000–2007

The third stage is characterised by initiatives aimed at strengthening operations to find prisoners and hostages and the start of implementing a long-term regional peacebuilding project involving international organisations and NGOs.

- In 2000–2007, operations to locate prisoners and hostages were continued by the International Group on the freeing of prisoners and hostages and locating of missing persons, founded in Germany. The coordinators of this group operated in Baku, Yerevan and Khankendi (Stepanakert). During this period, exchange visits between coordinators took place;
- In 2001–2006, a regional project entitled “Women for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in the South Caucasus” of the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was implemented in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Under this project, a women's “Coalition 1325” was created in Azerbaijan. Its members actively participated in many peacebuilding events at country level and also in the work of the regional coalition “Women for Peace”, launched by UNIFEM in 2003;

- In 2001, the Dartmouth Conference on the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorny Karabakh was launched. This initiative lasted six years, during which 11 meetings were held (2001–2006);
- In the same period, the “Consortium Initiative” (2003–2009) was launched. This project was sponsored by the UK government and was aimed at creating a favourable enabling environment for the peaceful resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorny Karabakh. The project was implemented by a coalition consisting of American NGO Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and three UK organisations Conciliation Resources, International Alert and the London Information Network on Conflicts and State-building (LINKS). These organisations with their partners in the region carried out a great deal of public awareness-raising work on peacebuilding. Working with young people, women leaders, representatives of various NGOs and the expert community, along with parliamentarians, this project enabled mutual understanding and confidence building between the parties to the conflict; and
- In 2006, in Baku, Yerevan and Khankendi (Stepanakert), Conflict Transformation Resource Centres were created with funding from International Alert.

### Stage IV – 2007–2013

This stage is distinguished by the fact that, from 2007 onwards, members of intellectual and official circles had the opportunity to participate jointly in peacebuilding initiatives. In this period, a major long-term regional project began operating: the European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (EPNK), sponsored by the European Union.

- In July 2007, at the initiative of the Azerbaijani and Armenian ambassadors to the Russian Federation, delegations of representatives of the Armenian and Azerbaijani intellectuals visited Nagorny Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan. During the visit, the delegations met the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan;
- In July 2009, the delegations took part in a further visit to Nagorny Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan; this visit involved the participation of the Azerbaijani and Armenian ambassadors as well as meetings with the heads of state;
- In April 2010, the head of the Armenian church, the Catholicos of All Armenians, Garegin II, visited Azerbaijan for the first time to attend the Baku World Summit of Religious Leaders. During the visit, he also met the president of Azerbaijan;
- In November 2011, the Chairman of the Caucasian Muslims Board, Allahshükür Pashazade, attended a meeting of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Interreligious Council Presidium, held in Yerevan. During the visit, he also met the president of Armenia;
- Azerbaijani deputies attended a session of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Education, Culture and Civil Society, organised in Yerevan in February 2012. In turn, Armenian deputies attended the second Plenary Session of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, which was convened in April 2012 in Baku; and
- The year 2010 saw the launch of the first phase of the long-term EPNK project, which ended in 2011. The project was implemented through the efforts of the Finnish NGO Crisis Management Initiative, the Swedish NGO the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation and the three UK organisations Conciliation Resources, International Alert and LINKS. The second phase of this project began in 2012 and continues with the participation of the same organisations.

### The main participants of peacebuilding initiatives

On the Azerbaijani side, civil society leaders (heads of NGOs, independent experts, journalists, young students, women) were widely represented in peacebuilding projects; also represented, to a rather lesser extent, were representatives of refugee and forced migrant communities as well as the creative sector. Respondents also noted that families of the deceased, the rural population, residents

of border areas and members of political parties were only partly involved in these projects; moreover, it was observed that entrepreneurs, state officials, representatives of municipalities and also such professions as teachers and doctors, etc. were not sufficiently involved in these initiatives. Participants in the study felt that, although members of the political classes can also be encountered at the various conferences and seminars, such encounters can hardly be referred to as constructive dialogue, since ‘the politicians try to outdo each other in mutual recriminations’.

One participant thought that virtually all sections of society and groups took part in the peacebuilding initiatives. However, he felt that the absence of any real results could be ascribed to the fact that, ‘by comparison with the resources allocated to war, the resources available for building peace were entirely insignificant.’

On the Armenian side, counterparts to the Azerbaijani participants were most frequently experts, journalists, representatives of young people, the intellectuals and NGOs, women, as well as deputies from Armenia and the Armenian community of Nagorny Karabakh.

## The main topics covered by peacebuilding initiatives

The peacebuilding initiatives were, on the whole, directed at resolving a wide range of problems associated with the conflict in the following areas:

- Initiatives for the exchange of prisoners of war and hostages as well as the bodies of victims;
- Initiatives by media organisations and individual journalists on objective reporting of the conflict and its individual aspects, improving access to information, protecting freedom of speech, increasing the professionalism of journalists, and ensuring consistent legislation on the media sector;
- Initiatives to study existing conflicts and ways of resolving them, research and analysis of options for post-conflict *modus vivendi*;
- Initiatives on organising peace talks in parallel with the official process, etc.; and
- Initiatives directed at strengthening the role of women and young people in the peacebuilding process;
- Initiatives to organise festivals and screenings of joint films and documentaries;
- Initiatives directed at establishing trust between the sides and looking for mutual understanding: building dialogue within civil society, the inclusion of civil society in the process of identifying a peaceful resolution, and proposals for building confidence between the sides;
- Initiatives on resolving humanitarian problems (in particular, searches for family members and restoring contacts between them, research into the problems of mixed families), discussions on the issue of refugees, forced migrants, etc.;
- Initiatives directed at strengthening the role of women and young people in the peacebuilding process.

## The effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives

The study participants felt that the most effective peacebuilding initiatives were those that met “public demand” in both societies and that they were most likely to achieve positive results. These projects included: initiatives on exchanges of prisoners of war, hostages, missing persons and the bodies of the deceased; and some media initiatives directed at working with public opinion and the exchange of information (projects to create press clubs).

Systematic meetings between academics and public actors also helped to increase mutual understanding between representatives of the sides in the conflict. These contacts led to some interesting ideas on implementing joint projects and the setting up of good person-to-person

relationships. One particular example was the book entitled *The Nagorny Karabakh conflict: Possible solutions*, published jointly by Professor Ali Abbasov and his Armenian colleague Arutyun Khachatryan.

The study participants stated that some results were achieved in building dialogue through trips made by journalists and intellectuals. At a certain point, the parties were able to break free from the constraints of distant and recent historical events and to relate to one another freely and calmly. However, there was little progress on building confidence or developing productive proposals to promote peaceful conflict resolution.

The participants stated that initiatives that claimed to provide potential solutions to the Nagorny Karabakh problem were generally unsuccessful. One of the participants went so far as to say that all projects had failed, since the conflict remained unresolved. Another example of a specific unsuccessful project was an Armenian-Georgian-Azerbaijani project implemented in the early 2000s but later halted due to the failure of one of the partners to carry out its functions.

There was disagreement among participants in the study over the extent to which the peacebuilding initiatives influence real policy.

A view expressed by some experts was that, prior to 2003, there was a positive trend in the peacebuilding process under “people-to-people diplomacy”. Most notable were the increased number of visits by Azerbaijani journalists to Armenia and vice versa along with the joint visits made by Azerbaijani and Armenian journalists to Nagorny Karabakh. Journalists from Nagorny Karabakh took part in the projects and this was supported by the government. However, from 2003 onwards the situation changed and the new government policy put a serious constraint on media-related initiatives.

Nevertheless, some of the respondents thought that peacebuilding initiatives had some influence on policy, although they also often met with a negative response from the authorities and radical political forces. Otherwise, some thought, there would not have been such ‘ferocious attacks by the authorities’ on the peacebuilders. At the same time, as one of the study participants noted, even ‘the West saw that there were responsible and peace-loving people in Azerbaijan’.

One example of this influence cited by respondents was the public association the Azerbaijani community of Nagorny Karabakh, which was set up after many proposals had been submitted by civil society. The question of opening a new 125th electoral constituency for voters to the Azerbaijani Parliament and the election of a deputy from Khankendi also figured among the proposals submitted by civil society, and the authorities subsequently passed a resolution upholding these. Outcomes of the peace process included the involvement of the Organisation for the Liberation of Nagorny Karabakh in the process of discussing the question of Nagorny Karabakh and the holding of annual debates on this issue, which led to the publication of a series of books entitled *Nagorny Karabakh: Yesterday, today, tomorrow*.

On the other hand, it was emphasised that, for a number of objective and subjective reasons, no targeted work has been carried out over the years to establish contact between representatives of the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities of Nagorny Karabakh, and that this has been one of the serious gaps in the peacebuilding process. The return of Azerbaijani forced migrants from Nagorny Karabakh to their homeland and the creation of the conditions necessary for their peaceful coexistence with Armenians in the region are among key objectives on the road to the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Experts believe that the social unification of the Azerbaijani community of Nagorny Karabakh could in future facilitate the development of contact and meetings between people who directly suffered the conflict.

Some participants felt that the initiatives had had a negligible effect on real policy processes; others even rejected the idea that peacebuilding initiatives had influenced policy at all. One participant attributed this to the fact that ‘firstly, the politicians are conducting sham talks and secondly, civil society in our countries is either non-existent or very weak. And that means that the authorities have no intention of taking account of the public.’ It was also noted that, whenever there was an indication at the talks that a breakthrough to a peaceful settlement might be possible, the attitude to the programmes and initiatives from the civil society sector became positive. However, when the indications were that the talks had yet again stalled and confrontation had increased, the attitude to peacebuilding projects deteriorated abruptly.

When respondents talked of the absence of any positive effects, they seemed to be basing this on evidence of the continuation of the military conflict – the “neither war nor peace” situation that remains – and the lack of success in the official peace talks. The view was also expressed that one reason for the lack of influence of peacebuilding initiatives at the policy level was the lack of necessary weight by the NGOs engaged in the peacebuilding process. Their financial resources and organisational structures were deemed inadequate, and communication between decision-makers and those participating in the peacebuilding initiatives was also very weak.

At the same time, the focus group participants noted that, after 2007, a new stage in the implementation of peacebuilding projects began, with the participation of deputies, ambassadors and religious actors who had previously disapproved of civil society initiatives. The involvement of these persons as well as leading representatives of the society’s intellectuals in the conflict-resolution process is viewed as a demonstration by the authorities of their interest in peacebuilding initiatives. The participants felt that the peacebuilding projects implemented prior to this point had played a serious role in this change in the authorities’ position.

The study participants also noted that the need to develop humanitarian contacts based on the formats for dialogue that had already been developed was emphasised at the most recent meetings of the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan. In statements made at their meeting with the presidents and foreign ministers, the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group also expressed a hope that the peacebuilding process and involvement of active representatives of society would continue.

Study participants stated that peacebuilding initiatives had influenced beneficiary groups’ attitudes to the conflict. In some cases, prior to the meeting, project participants (beneficiaries) would not have countenanced any possibility of carrying out joint work with colleagues from the opposite side. However, as time went on, they discovered that some things were possible and they were able at least to build up trust on a personal level. For example, journalists became more tolerant and reflective, they had direct sources of information on the other side, and they were able to learn to work in a team with representatives of the other side and report on conflict in a more professional manner.

Some of those studied felt that people directly engaged in peacebuilding processes started to have a more objective view of the conflict itself and of individual aspects of it. In this they differ considerably from the majority of citizens, who are still subjected to manipulation by official propaganda. The former are more tolerant and accepting of pluralistic assessments of the conflict; they are no longer in thrall to myths and stereotypes; and they are less emotional and more constructive, with a greater understanding that compromises are inevitable. For example, films made by Internews-Azerbaijan and Internews-Armenia allowed young people from both sides of the conflict to challenge stereotypes of “the enemy”. Joint courts and hearings of the Women’s Alliance for Civil Society (Azerbaijan) and the Centre for Peacebuilding Initiatives (Armenia) introduced societies in both countries to interesting and original peacebuilding initiatives. These initiatives led to the “Tekalin” hearings in Georgia, which were attended by Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

One study participant did, however, suggest that, after some time away from these projects, beneficiaries’ views of the conflict were more or less the same as those of people who had not been

involved in peacebuilding activities. His view was that peacebuilding activities acted as a restraint on public expression of overly aggressive attitudes.

## Factors constraining and enabling peacebuilding

A thorough analysis of the factors affecting the effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives is clearly required if the potential of “people-to-people diplomacy” is to continue to be used in the context of resolving the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorny Karabakh.

The study participants identified the following factors as enabling the implementation of peacebuilding initiatives:

- The personal motivation factors driving each participant (ranging from a purely personal interest to meeting professional needs);
- The engagement of serious international bodies;
- Widening of the format (for example to include Turkish partners);
- The diversity of formats (team reporting, joint studies, joint films, satellite press conferences, etc.);
- The support of government bodies (in 1997–2002);
- The material/financial interest of participants;
- The attempt to overcome existing barriers to build a new peace;
- Participants’ desire to make at least some contribution to the resolution of the conflict and the interest of international organisations and donors in peacebuilding projects;
- Mutual, long-term communication, the ability to listen to one another and to find areas of common interest;
- The presence of experienced experts, the existence of persons with positive experiences and memories of coexistence, and opportunities for exchanging these experiences; and
- The willingness of some media to report accurately on the conflict.

The study participants felt that factors constraining the implementation of peacebuilding initiatives were:

- The lack of government will to support these initiatives after 2003;
- The short-term and inconsistent nature of funding of successful initiatives;
- The absence of any progress in the talks process, the lack of information about the talks and mistrust of the actions of the OSCE Minsk Group;
- The presence of internal stereotypes;
- The refusal by most members of society to accept peacebuilding as a principle in the realm of *Realpolitik*;
- The desire of the authorities to prolong the conflict and to use it as a tactic for maintaining power;
- The intention of the leading powers to use the conflict to increase their influence on the region;
- The absence of a considered and agreed strategy for peacebuilding among the various donors;
- A condescending attitude to the knowledge and experience of local NGOs;
- The recruitment of participants with different motivations (as one of the study participants noted, ‘an irredentist and a peacebuilder cannot work together’);
- The nationalist rhetoric that suits the authorities in both countries and that is supported by the media in each case; and
- The multiple instances of violations of the ceasefire agreement on the border; the death of soldiers, memories of the period of active military action, the experience in Khodzhal, etc.

Recommendations on making more effective use of civil society’s potential for conflict resolution in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorny Karabakh could certainly be developed on



the basis of a comparative analysis of the factors enabling and constraining the implementation of peacebuilding initiatives.

## Conclusion

During the study, the participants provided recommendations on how they thought the impact of peacebuilding initiatives could be increased. One expert suggested that peacebuilding initiatives should not concentrate on the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorny Karabakh. Instead, he believed that the aim of peacebuilding initiatives should be to educate children and young people, since a generation is now growing up that does not know anything about the other side and is subjected from an early age to the impact of “anti-Azerbaijani” and “anti-Armenian” propaganda. The expert highlighted: ‘We must not live in thrall to historical myths, historical aspirations and collective responsibility.’ He also believed that most peacebuilding initiatives do not have realistic or precise goals and questioned whether peacebuilding initiatives should duplicate the work of politicians. He clarified: ‘I would say the main goal is to reach level “zero”, where no one quotes historical and nationalist arguments, at least at the local level. We are no better and no worse than each other.’

Another expert contended that a more serious transformation of young people’s world view can only be achieved through steady, prolonged work, which cannot be implemented through local grants.

One study participant also expressed the view that it is unfortunate that peacebuilding initiatives cannot emerge organically but are based on funders’ requirements. In his view, the fundamental problem is that there has not yet been a single independent joint initiative by citizens of Azerbaijan and Armenia. He added: ‘Every time we need a third party to make us sit down at the negotiating table. That is the problem, our lack of civic maturity.’

The following recommendations are based on a preliminary analysis of the study results:

- Interaction and exchange of information between civil society representatives and official bodies, research centres working on issues relating to the resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorny Karabakh should be increased;
- Positive peacebuilding experiences of resolving similar conflicts in other countries should be studied;
- Awareness of positive experiences of holding discussions to develop multilateral peace agreements and of effective ways of presenting the views of the opposite side to the public should be raised; and
- The role of the media in achieving a lasting peace should be studied using examples from resolved conflicts.

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## View from Yerevan

### Introduction

For more than two decades, peacebuilding initiatives aimed at the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Nagorny Karabakh have been implemented at different levels and by a range of actors, with the participation of civil society representatives from the countries engaged in the conflict. The effectiveness of these initiatives has quite naturally been subjected to periodic questioning by the authors, participants and donors behind these initiatives, as well as by wider sections of society. The essential question has been whether these initiatives have been worth all the time, effort and money expended on them, not just inside the countries engaged in the conflict but outside them too. This question is particularly valid, since participation in these initiatives involves a certain degree of risk. Although most of those participating in these initiatives live and work peacefully in their countries at the moment, there have been occasions in the past where peacebuilding has had some rather unpleasant consequences for the peacebuilders. Moreover, if current trends continue, it is hard to predict how comfortable participants in peacebuilding processes will be in their countries in the near future.

The main question addressed in this study can be formulated as follows: are peacebuilding initiatives aimed at enabling a settlement of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict through dialogue at civil society level justified? Of course, participants in this study are hardly likely to answer this question in the negative, as the fact that they are participating in a joint study at all suggests that they will give an affirmative response (otherwise they would simply not have participated in these initiatives). However, a number of complex questions still remain, even if the overall response is positive. What is the optimum format for peacebuilding initiatives? Who should participate in these projects and how should they do so? What factors determine the success or failure of these initiatives? How do peacebuilding initiatives influence their participants? How is the success of these projects defined and measured? This study considers these and related questions, although we make no claim to be exhaustive in our answers.

The study methodology used was that of focus groups and expert interviews with participants in peace initiatives, representatives of civil society, political scientists, conflict experts and journalists.

### General comments: The role of civil society and political elites in conflict resolution

Before examining the peacebuilding initiatives themselves, we need to come to some understanding of the extent to which initiatives involving civil society actors can influence the political decision-making processes in our countries. Our answer will depend on the nature of relations between the authorities (more precisely, the political elites), on the one hand, and society as a whole (civil society in particular), on the other.

Many conflict-resolution initiatives have been based on the dubious assumption that the ruling elites in the conflict states have an interest in resolving the conflicts. This assumption is, in turn, based on a further assumption: namely, that the ruling elites act in the interests of broad sections of the population in these states; or to put it another way that the interests of the ruling elites or other influential groupings coincide with the interests of the societies or countries as a whole. It may be reasonable to assume this in developed democracies, where the ruling elite is subject to public controls through a viable system of checks and balances, a functioning electoral system

and a free press. Of course, even in developed democracies political elites have their own agenda, which may be counter to the interests of the majority of citizens. The difference, however, is that, in a democratic state, decisions that are contrary to the public good may ultimately be counterproductive for the elites themselves, since society has the ability to “punish” representatives of the elite if they make decisions of this kind.

Observers with any knowledge of the realities of the South Caucasus will recognise that none of this applies there. This is not the place to initiate a discussion about the level of democracy in the political systems of the countries of the South Caucasus. Let us just say that the public has extremely limited opportunities for influencing the political elites’ decision-making processes. In this region, elections seldom lead to a change in the political elite; criticism of members of the political elite by the opposition, mass media and civil society is subjected to some censorship (usually informal). Even where there is little or no censorship, such criticism still generally does not have the effect it has in established democracies: the political elites are able to ignore public opinion with impunity. This means in practice that the ruling elites are not subject to any restrictions or control mechanisms that might oblige them to prioritise the public good above their own narrow group interests. This is not to say, of course, that all members of the ruling elites act solely in their own self-interest. However, it is clear that the actions of the elite are generally dictated by considerations other than the public interest.

Developed democracies tend to have a built-in model of compromise between the elites and other sections of society, whereby political elites at least to some extent take into account the demands of broad sections of society. In our countries, however, not only do the political elites depend to a relatively small extent on the public will, but they actually depend on external forces that have no interest in resolving the conflict, thus complicating the situation even further. Since, for the most part, political leaders in our countries come to power (or more often remain in power) through elections that fall well below the standards of developed democracies, they cannot always count on public trust or support, as their legitimacy is contested both inside and outside the country.

Decision-making by political elites is thus dependent to a significant extent on various external forces such as global and regional powers, transnational corporations, international criminal networks, etc. This dependence on external forces is exacerbated by the fact that many individuals within the political elites in our countries are vulnerable to pressure arising from their business activities (public scandals, bank accounts, property owned abroad, etc.). Many are prosperous people who have acquired their wealth by not entirely lawful means and whose wealth is generally exported out of the country and deposited abroad. If we also factor in the strong possibility that our countries, including the ruling elites, have been infiltrated by foreign secret services, the extent to which the ruling elites in our countries are subjected to external influence starts to become clear. It comes as no surprise that the ruling elites’ decisions are guided less by the long-term interests of their own countries and more by fears of incurring the wrath of influential players from outside the country.

All this makes it clear that the political elites in our countries can hardly be expected to come up with complex and responsible decisions over conflict resolution, even if these decisions are in the long-term interests of the countries run by these elites. For the most part, the chief underlying consideration guiding the political elites is how to hang on to and bolster their political and socio-economic standing. Any abrupt changes in the status quo, even if generally favourable for the society, could bring about a loss in this standing. All other considerations are subordinate to the ruling elites’ desire to hang on to their positions.

The ruling elites might have an interest in resolving conflicts if the “status quo” situation threatened their positions. This could happen in the event of external intervention or the “unfreezing” of the conflict. However, the current status quo (in other words, “neither war nor peace”) generally suits the ruling elites in all the states involved. By contrast, any action aimed at achieving a real

settlement could have unpredictable consequences and endanger the positions of the ruling elites. Against this background, any peacebuilding initiatives face virtually insurmountable obstacles in terms of influencing the political decision-making process.

## Peacebuilding initiatives: Whom should they work with and how?

Despite the above reality, peacebuilding initiatives associated with the Nagorny Karabakh conflict have been undertaken for over 20 years and continue to be undertaken. The very fact that these initiatives take place is certainly positive, if only because they provide people from these countries, where cross-border communications have been virtually suspended, with an opportunity to meet and communicate. However insignificant this outcome may appear at first glance, it is in fact a very important achievement in terms of peacebuilding, as it creates a channel for communication; this is a vital consideration, given that the societies are almost totally cut off from one another due to the actions of the ruling elites. Where governments either deliberately stand in the way of establishing such contacts or at best ignore them, without the efforts of international organisations and donors it is hard to imagine how such a communications channel could have emerged and could persist.

Initiatives that include representatives of Nagorny Karabakh are particularly important in this regard. In fact, representatives of Armenia and Azerbaijan have a number of opportunities to meet outside of initiatives launched by the various international organisations and foundations. They can meet under the auspices of regional and international events, with the most varied of formats ranging from inter-governmental summits to academic seminars, projects under the EU's Eastern Partnership Programme or events organised under the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). However, the representatives of unrecognised or partly recognised states are generally excluded from these formats. As a result, although there are some contacts between the elites and societies of Armenia and Azerbaijan, societies in Azerbaijan and Nagorny Karabakh are totally isolated from one another. This means that initiatives by international organisations and donors in which representatives of Nagorny Karabakh can take part are virtually their only opportunity for establishing any contact at all between Nagorny Karabakh and Azerbaijan.

One of the serious dilemmas regularly facing peacebuilding initiatives that involve non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is the issue of organisations that are, let us say, loyal to the ruling elites in their countries and that are conventionally referred to as government organised NGOs (GONGOs). Should these organisations be invited to attend peacebuilding initiatives and, if so, to what extent? On the one hand, there are many of these organisations and they do represent the opinions and approaches of a certain section of society whom it would be wrong to ignore. Such organisations could perhaps act as a communication channel to the ruling elites, and this could be extremely helpful given that all-important decisions are ultimately taken by politicians. They could, of course, be useful if the authorities in the conflicting states were genuinely interested in resolving the conflict and adopted specific outreach measures aimed at addressing public reluctance to compromise. However, this applies more in theory than in practice, at least in the South Caucasus. In reality, given that governments in our region are not particularly in favour of peacebuilding initiatives, the involvement of GONGOs not only fails to bring any particular benefits, but also entails significant risks that threaten to derail the peacebuilding initiatives or turn them into a sham process.

Another problem associated with peacebuilding initiatives is that their end products are frequently only accessible to a relatively narrow circle of "professional" peacebuilders, with a relatively limited circulation of these products to a wider public. The products are not distributed widely enough in either the traditional or "new" media. This means that most Armenians and Azerbaijanis are unaware of these products. Indeed, many have mythologised and stereotypical notions that the initiatives are in some way directed against their countries' national interests.

But of course we also need to take into account the practical difficulties of presenting these products to the public. In some cases, attempts to draw attention to peacebuilding initiatives and their products backfire, as happened for example with one initiative to hold a festival of Azerbaijani films in Armenia. Here, the attempt to raise public awareness of peacebuilding initiatives not only failed to bring about the desired results, but even played into the hands of the forces acting against such initiatives.

Most peacebuilding initiatives directed at resolving the Nagorny Karabakh conflict can be divided into the following categories:

- Dialogue at the level of NGOs;
- Dialogue between representatives of the media;
- Projects involving political science experts;
- Dialogue between representatives of the academic communities; and
- Dialogue between representatives of certain groups of the population (including vulnerable groups): young people, women, refugees, members of various professions, etc.

The problems that these peacebuilding initiatives dealt with have been wide-ranging. As one of the experts questioned in this study put it: ‘since the early 1990s, peacebuilding projects have addressed many aspects of the conflicts from the status of unrecognised states/territories, including issues of displaced persons, to communication between those on different sides of the conflict such as young people, women, etc.’ In one expert’s view, there had been relatively few projects devoted to creating a vision of the future or conducting a realistic study of the situation. There was also a dearth of non-dialogue projects – that is, projects working inside one’s own society. In the same expert’s view, the least interesting projects were geopolitical ones ‘where old and young gather and again say what they think about the conflict, analysing it as it were’.

Another expert’s view was that projects had focused on different sets of problems at different stages. For example, in the initial period, the overriding priorities were prisoner exchanges, searches for missing persons and the formation of a set of peacebuilders who could engage productively with the other side. The second period lasted longer and was aimed at identifying possible solutions to the conflict, using various models and examples from other countries. Once these projects started to be blocked due to the policy shift by the Azerbaijani authorities in the early 2000s, there was once again an urgent need for communication, this time with the added task of overcoming the stereotypes that had emerged in the post-war period among young people, historians, the media, etc.

From a theoretical perspective, one expert identified three fundamental topics that most peacebuilding initiatives dealt with:

- Overcoming mutual distrust;
- Attempts to overcome the image of the enemy, which continues to be created from above; and
- The attempt to identify possible areas of collaboration that could be helpful for peacebuilding.

One important question in relation to peacebuilding initiatives is how comprehensive their coverage of the different social segments is. How open are peacebuilding initiatives to the different social groups and to what extent can they communicate their peacebuilding message to broad public constituencies? Most of the experts agreed that, although the projects have formally engaged representatives from a very diverse range of groups, their focus remains relatively narrow and this continues to be one of the main problems in peacebuilding. It seems appropriate at this point to quote one of the expert respondents, who thought that the most diverse groups had been engaged, but that all too often peacebuilding projects attracted the wrong people: ‘so-called analysts and guys with ties, so-called women [sic] who make a career out of gender issues, sometimes so-called young people – ambitious

future professionals – and far less so people from the regions or real people in general ... Of course, there aren't many real people and the problem with these projects is that most of them are in it for the money ... To achieve anything in these projects, you need to be working for the sake of civil society and the future of the region and not for money ... That's difficult ... Being a peacebuilder is as difficult as being a talented artist today ... Such people are one-offs.'

As another expert commented: 'most of the people involved were already directly involved with the issue professionally ... the projects did not make use of the potential of academics or retired diplomats.' In this expert's opinion, Azerbaijan's decision to restrict all types of contact had a negative effect, as did the sometimes misguided policy of donors, who frequently missed the opportunity to widen the circle of people engaged in peacebuilding initiatives. With some exceptions, the opportunity was missed to involve business and create structures that would have been sponsored by business people from Armenia and Azerbaijan themselves. In this expert's opinion, it might have been helpful to create joint business projects involving Armenian and Azerbaijani business people (in third countries, naturally). Over time, this might have enabled economic lobbies with a stake in peace to emerge.

As another expert noted, some projects implemented did manage to include the most diverse actors and social groups. However, not all projects were successful and they did not always achieve their objective of engaging the new social groups in the dialogue. Some experts also commented that there were few projects involving members of the diaspora. Another expert noted that: 'apart from projects dealing with young people, gender and refugees, activities were limited by the scope of the project (journalists, human rights defenders, members of the academic community, etc.); people who did not fit into one of these groups were unable to participate.' One of the experts also noted that too little attention was paid to various marginal groups as well as conservative and nationalist-minded groups; although it is extremely difficult to imagine dialogue between them, ways must be found to engage them.

## The effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives

Any consideration of the success of peacebuilding initiatives raises the question of how we should define the criteria we use to evaluate the success of these initiatives. One of the experts suggests distinguishing between success in a wider sense ("effectiveness") and success in a narrow sense ("efficiency"). Purely in terms of efficiency, the overwhelming majority of projects were unsuccessful, since many did not in fact yield concrete outputs; even where they did, these outputs were almost never used in practice. However, if we consider their "effectiveness", many projects were successful, since they created significant potential for the future. In particular, contacts were established between people from diverse walks of life in the societies engaged in conflict and these contacts are a resource that could be used in the future. Studies were also produced during these initiatives which could be useful in the future if the societies and political elites had the political will to resolve the conflict.

Another expert felt that there had been no particular achievements, one reason being that: 'it is impossible for new people to come across any of these projects – people don't know where to look for the information ... and this is because dissemination of information about the projects a) was not usually included in the project budgets, or b) even where it was, the project participants have a deep-rooted interest in avoiding telling anyone that they took part in these projects or drawing attention to them ... this is because they either have a financial interest in milking the foreign grants process or they are afraid they will be publicly criticised for their involvement, or a combination of the two.' Peacebuilding, this expert believes, has not helped to overcome public resistance. Neither has it helped to 'create a less nationalist, racist, fascist community within the countries ... unfortunately the authorities have gone down the road of cultivating a fascist attitude to the other side for the sake of holding onto power ... the idea that a breakthrough in

the conflict can be achieved without achieving democracy in the communities has been shown to be false.’ Even so, as the same expert notes, in its totality the peacebuilding movement has been useful, since it maintained contacts and dialogue.

Another expert proposed a more specific criterion for determining the success of projects: a project’s initial success can be assessed on the basis of its success in establishing communication; if this is achieved, it makes sense to proceed and attempt to develop the opportunities for communication and continue the project. Providing communication is successful, any joint or agreed product could be viewed as successful, whether this takes the form of a text, an audio-visual output or skills and knowledge acquired jointly. Another expert developed this point, saying that everything depends on how we measure success: if we measure it by whether these initiatives continued, for example with follow-up projects, then many of them were successful in this sense. However, if we judge the projects by the extent to which they have resulted in societies coming closer to reconciliation, it is still too early to say and it may take years before the effects of these initiatives become clear. In one expert’s view, initiatives aimed at promoting a systematic union across the South Caucasus are promising (say, a South Caucasus Union somewhat along the lines of the EU). However, there has been little call for such initiatives due to the absence of any real interest from the authorities in our countries, as well as the lack of outreach initiatives on working inside the societies themselves.

In terms of the influence that peacebuilding initiatives have had at policy level, most experts agreed that peacebuilding initiatives had generally had minimal influence on decision-making at policy and government level. Some experts agreed that all the initiatives may possibly have had an influence at policy level, but it is still too early to tell; if they have, it will only become clear in the long term.

As one of the experts outlined: ‘it was wrong from the start to position the peacebuilding projects as “civil diplomacy”, which had to feed into policy dialogue at an official level ... these initiatives should not have been viewed as something that could influence decision making at the policy level, since this can only be achieved if the authorities have the right attitude ... it is only possible once a commitment has been made at the official level, for example as was the case for some time in the Key West period, when the governments had to prepare their societies for a potential compromise.’

One of the experts emphasised that the Nagorny Karabakh and the Armenian-Turkish processes differ in this respect: while the governments in both cases show little public enthusiasm for the peace dialogue, in one case they at least do not try to prevent civil society from entering into dialogue. Another expert also believed that: ‘there is still some point in continuing these activities; work is always needed, since this has a positive influence on the situation within society, incentivises young people and is the only way to mitigate the impact of nationalistic ideologies.’

Although the impact of peacebuilding at policy level is still relatively unclear, another question is its impact on the beneficiary groups involved in the projects themselves. One of the experts pointed out that: ‘the fact that there is some communication between representatives of the sides in the conflict is a serious factor in changing attitudes and overcoming stereotypes. Initiatives that are constructive in terms of circulating ideas are also useful for changing attitudes to the conflict, the other side and options for resolving the conflict.’

As another expert noted: ‘the groups engaged do not become more “loving” towards the other side but become less “loving” towards their side – that is, they behave in a less stereotypical, more reflective and critical manner.’ A further expert stated that participants realise that, ‘for example, Armenians do not drink blood and not all Azerbaijanis are Ramil Safarovs.’ With respect to those who do not take part in the dialogue, one of the experts felt that even those who are not hidebound by negative stereotypes and images of the enemy and who speak in favour of peace

still do not believe in the power of dialogue; they think that they cannot change anything and that nothing depends on them.

Some experts expressed a more pessimistic view on this question. For example, one expert acknowledged that he is a pessimist in this regard, since even the most successful initiatives have at best merely helped to slow down the process of deepening enmity and the prospects for any progress under current conditions remain bleak. Moreover, where essential components are missing – such as the competence and sincerity of the organisers – the quality of peacebuilding projects may be reduced and they could even backfire, increasing tension between the participants from the different sides. In some cases, even where relations between participants in the initiatives improved or at least did not worsen at an interpersonal level, the messages they took back to their societies were negative and helped to deepen the conflict.

Another expert also drew attention to the potential harm caused by initiatives that have not been sufficiently thought through: ‘meetings are of course useful if only to increase awareness and people can be influenced at meetings where they find out new information; but the limited numbers of participants and their lack of experience can lead to a reduction in sincerity and their value can become negligible, since every time the participants return to their country, they face such aggressive criticism that their sincerity disappears.’

## Factors constraining and enabling peacebuilding

What are the factors that have enabled or constrained the success of peacebuilding initiatives? Unfortunately, the current impression is that it is far easier to recall constraining rather than enabling factors. The experts identify the following factors:

- Political factors: as one expert puts it, all the states engaged in the conflict ‘have authoritarian regimes that are dependent on external forces’. The direct result of this is that, in Azerbaijan, the official response to the initiatives is to actively campaign to discredit them. In Armenia and Nagorny Karabakh, the response is to passively ignore them (of course the latter do occasionally attempt to discredit peacebuilding initiatives; however, this is not systemic and is aimed not at discrediting the idea of peacebuilding overall, but at undermining specific civil society actors whom the government finds irritating for other reasons such as criticising them for human rights violations);
- Conflict within societies between a mainstream that supports a nationalist discourse and an alternative position advanced by a small number of people;
- Attempts to use methods that have not been approved locally and which in practice ultimately turned out to be counterproductive, although they should have worked in theory;
- The incompetence of those initiating projects, often due to the agenda being dictated by people from other regions and countries; from the late 1990s onwards, this was exacerbated by the fact that many of these incompetent organisations continued to receive significant funding by default;
- Lack of publicity and the resultant lack of public awareness of these initiatives; and
- Nationalist propaganda which particularly impacts on the young generation; the older generation with its Soviet experience is more disposed to sincerity.

Factors enabling peacebuilding are far fewer in number, but they do exist. In one expert’s view, the most important factor is that ‘a surprising number of people in all the states engaged in the conflict are committed to the idea of dialogue and are prepared to expend a great deal of effort to achieve something ... these people who know what will work and what won’t exist at all sorts of levels and include politicians, journalists and NGO activists.’ Another crucial factor noted by most of the experts is the attention of international donors, although we should note that this factor is variable. In one expert’s view, ‘funding was an enabling factor, but the conditions under which the funding was provided sometimes acted as a constraint. One



example is the condition that projects exclude Nagorny Karabakh and the people of Nagorny Karabakh.’

Another expert considered the most important factor to be active willingness to participate in peacebuilding initiatives as well as the motives for participating. People who are capable of overcoming the dominant nationalist discourse have more means and opportunities at their disposal to find new solutions and ideas. A second important factor is whether funding is available for organising these initiatives; the involvement of international organisations is important in this respect. The diversified formats within the initiatives (regional, thematic, professional) were also a factor enabling their implementation.

Whilst there are more constraining than enabling factors in relation to peacebuilding in the region itself, global trends are more favourable for conflict resolution in the view of many of the study participants. In one expert’s view, ‘the only factor that might truly be positive is the current global trend where a new world is forming based on different relationships, due to the emergence of the internet, increased personal freedom, people becoming more responsible for their personal decision making.’ However, it will be some time before the positive impact of these trends is felt in this region. In the words of the same expert, ‘since this factor is still in its infancy and old systems of governance remain in place, the result is the chaos we see and which impacts on all attempts at peacebuilding.’

One of the experts questioned during the study felt that experience shows that conflicts similar to that in Nagorny Karabakh are generally resolved in one of two ways. In some cases, they are resolved democratically, where issues of trust do not raise doubts. (The best example is Quebec, which remained part of Canada despite only a tiny majority opposing independence.) This path is based on a democratic resolution process, involving, for example, referendums, other forms of canvassing popular opinion and outreach work by state bodies. Alternatively, they are resolved through conflict transformation, which ‘is also premised on a high level of democratisation and development of real processes in society, the best example being the history of the creation of the EU ... the fact that we cannot yet talk of a viable civil society in the South Caucasus is the fundamental reason for these failures.’ Other reasons for the failure of peacebuilding projects noted by the experts included a weak civil society, a total lack of outreach activities, and the peddling of nationalist ideology by the authorities in order to maintain a status quo that favours the authorities.

## Conclusion

Overall, a number of conclusions can be drawn from the statements made by the experts, organisers and participants in peacebuilding initiatives during our study. It is clear that peacebuilding initiatives are generally useful for societies engaged in conflict and must be continued despite all the difficulties. With regard to the effectiveness of these initiatives, this is difficult to measure at this stage. In terms of direct influence on the political decision-making process, these initiatives are not very effective since the political elites in our countries do not yet have the political will to resolve the conflict. However, in terms of the creation and maintenance of communication channels – which can help to overcome societies’ isolation from one another and which represent a potential resource for peacebuilding that can be exploited once there is a shift in the position of the political elites – peacebuilding activities can generally be considered to be successful.

Many difficulties remain, however, at the structural and individual level. The fundamental difficulty is the negative attitude of the political elites, which neither the peacebuilders in our countries nor international donors can surmount. This results from a very specific combination of domestic and foreign policy-related factors. Nonetheless, it is amenable to change – for example, if the political system within our countries changes or if there are geopolitical changes within our region and around it.

Apart from global political factors, there are also problems at an individual level. These problems could be resolved by extending the circle of organisations participating in peacebuilding initiatives, and developing more open and effective strategies for outreach within society and the media in order to back up peacebuilding initiatives.

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## View from Stepanakert

### Brief overview of peacebuilding initiatives

The creation of the first non-governmental organisation (NGO) in the Nagorny Karabakh Republic (NKR) – the Nagorny Karabakh “Helsinki Initiative 92 Committee” (NKC “HI-92”) – was directly linked to the Nagorny Karabakh conflict and was a response to the violence inflicted during the military action against the civilian population. The primary objective of NKC “HI-92” was to end military action between Azerbaijan and Nagorny Karabakh and to launch peace negotiations on resolving the conflict. In the view of the coordinator of “HI-92”, Karen Ohanjanyan, NKC “HI-92” comprised virtually the entire civil society of Nagorny Karabakh between 1992 and 1998 and was in fact its only NGO.

Civil society activities in relation to the conflict can be classified as follows:

#### *The emergence of civil society and establishment of relations with colleagues from the region:*

- The establishment of contacts with the civil society sector of Azerbaijan and Armenia for the purpose of coordinating joint actions aimed at ending military action, preventing war and redressing the aftermath of the war (the humanitarian sphere); in addition, the launch of direct negotiations between representatives of civil society from the conflicting sides to identify pathways for reconciliation and assist the authorities to achieve a peaceful settlement of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict;
- The start of the real implementation of cross-border initiatives and grassroots initiatives, based on exchange visits from 1993 to 2005, and real impact on the progress of official negotiations under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group;
- A conference on Nagorny Karabakh held in the German *Bundestag* and attended by civil society leaders from the conflicting sides as well as OSCE country ambassadors (a joint resolution was approved by the leaders of political parties represented in the *Bundestag* on Nagorny Karabakh, and an unprecedented message by the President of the *Bundestag*, Rita Süsmuth, to the leaders of the sides in the conflict, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Nagorny Karabakh, called on them to release all prisoners of war and hostages by the first anniversary of the ceasefire agreement of 12th May 1995 on the “all for all” principle);
- The start of the development of democratic processes in the conflict countries – the democratisation of civil society, the emergence of a real third sector in the conflict countries (1996–1998); and
- The start of the implementation of projects aimed at the peaceful transformation of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict (professionalisation of the civil society sector of the conflicting sides’ societies).

#### *Assistance to the authorities in resolving humanitarian issues:*

This was generated by the military action and its aftermath (the problem of prisoners of war, hostages and missing persons, along with the issue of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs)); in addition, the start of post-war rehabilitation and the reintegration of ex-combatants into society, including engaging some of them in the peacebuilding process.

### *The establishment of relations with international organisations:*

This centred on the resolution of issues connected with conflict resolution and the democratisation of post-war societies as an essential criterion during discussions on approaches and models for conflict resolution (recruitment of experts to work in these areas in the period 1998–2012).

The following developments occurred from 2000 onwards:

- Monopolisation by state institutions of the negotiation processes on the Nagorny Karabakh conflict (international inter-governmental institutions played an egregious role here); the gradual ousting from the current agenda of civil society initiatives aimed at establishing confidence-building measures between the civil societies of the conflicting countries and the implementation of joint humanitarian projects;
- Marginalisation of civil society despite unprecedented international grant support for peacebuilding initiatives; the rise of belligerent rhetoric in the conflicting countries as well as an increase in tension (with the involvement of the media and some sections of civil society);
- Total stagnation of the peacebuilding process both within the official negotiations under the aegis of the OSCE Minsk Group and in other inter-governmental institutions and NGOs; public rejection of compromise; speculation by the authorities on public rejection of compromise, whilst alleging that only the authorities were interested in resolving the conflict; and
- Increased threat that the frozen conflict would shift to a hot phase (OSCE documents and statements by leaders of the Minsk Group countries on the illegality of resolving the problem of Nagorny Karabakh by violent means).<sup>1</sup>

## The main participants of peacebuilding initiatives

Virtually all sections of Nagorny Karabakh society were involved in the initiatives. These included representatives of the educated classes (doctors, professors, students, professionals in the arts sector), religious actors, politicians including young politicians (who implemented the project entitled “Youth in Politics”), political scientists, representatives of the authorities (including the speaker of the parliament and deputies, ministers and representatives of the president’s office), representatives of the media and NGOs, entrepreneurs, ex-combatants, pensioners, relatives of prisoners of war and missing persons, refugees, persons with a disability, representatives of religious minorities, young people, women and school children.

The Nagorny Karabakh rural population and citizens from districts bordering Azerbaijan had little involvement in the peacebuilding processes. As a result, there was a regional imbalance in the engagement of NKR citizens. Stepanakert is the main focus when implementing projects. This clearly does not help to ensure that the development of peace initiatives and democracy also extend to the periphery of Nagorny Karabakh.

In the focus group discussions, it was noted that the majority of participants in the peacebuilding projects and primarily the NGOs are “capital” organisations that do not have strong or permanent connections with residents in the outlying districts. There were few projects with participants from the periphery and few projects that presented their results to rural inhabitants, particularly the population living in border districts.

<sup>1</sup> «Совместное заявление глав делегаций стран-сопредседателей Минской группы ОБСЕ и президентов Азербайджана и Армении на саммите ОБСЕ в Астане, Казахстан» [Joint statement by the heads of the delegations of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries and the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia at the OSCE Summit in Astana, Kazakhstan], OSCE. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/ru/home/87440>; ‘Statement by H.E. Ms. Hillary Rodham Clinton, US Secretary of State, Astana, 1 December 2010. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/cio/73875>; ‘Joint statement by the Presidents of the United States, the Russian Federation and France on Nagorno-Karabakh’, Los Cabos, Mexico, 19 June 2012. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/mg/91393>

## The main topics covered in peacebuilding initiatives

In the first stage, the initiatives were aimed at resolving humanitarian problems such as the freeing of prisoners of war and hostages, searching for missing persons, and the social and psychological rehabilitation of refugees and IDPs. Subsequently, the initiatives were aimed at developing an independent media, breaking down images of the enemy, developing confidence-building measures between the conflicting sides, and preparing reconciliation and peaceful coexistence processes. Additional aims included rejecting the propaganda of hatred, creating an atmosphere of trust, and dealing with problems of the perception and presentation of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict in the media.

Peaceful and civilised resolution of the conflict was at the heart of the peacebuilding initiatives. The priority in the “pilot” peacebuilding projects was less about the topics of discussion and more about ensuring the presence of representatives of the conflicting sides around the table. The first period could be called a period of “getting used to one another”. To achieve this, representatives from other hotspots were invited to demonstrate the possibility of and need for a civilised discussion of the problems.

There were also initiatives directed at increasing the role of women in domestic political processes and in the peacebuilding process. In addition, attempts were made to involve former commanders and ex-combatants in the peacebuilding process, although this resource was later developed outside the peacebuilding process.

## The effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives

The peacebuilding initiatives aimed at resolving humanitarian issues in the 1992–1997 period can be considered successful. The reasons for their success were as follows:

- The urgent need to resolve problems in wartime;
- The fact that there were few, if any, other channels for communication between the conflicting sides and for the resolution of urgent humanitarian problems (contacts took place at the level of NGOs);
- The high levels of public support;
- Support from the authorities for civil society initiatives; and
- The clear public demand for the initiatives.

Projects funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) had a positive effect on the development of the NGO sector in Nagorny Karabakh. A number of local organisations took part in these under the guidance of International Alert and Conciliation Resources. These initiatives laid the basis for new approaches in democratic institution building, in particular the creation of alternative media and the training of professional journalists.

Participants in the discussions held emphasised the importance of the independent newspaper *Demo*, which became a kind of democratically flavoured distributor of information in Nagorny Karabakh society. Focus group participants noted the need for at least two to three independent media outlets. The development of the media is an important tool for changing public opinion on issues relating to peaceful conflict transformation. In this regard, the importance was acknowledged of online media and other modern approaches to distribution of information that exist around the world, including the wide range of social networks. In this respect, it is very important to train the up-and-coming generation in NKR to successfully implement peacebuilding projects in the information sphere.

Projects can succeed if they are transparent, have the backing of democratic development in society and have an outreach function.

One example of a project considered by the study participants to be positive was the “Civic Minsk Process”, supported by IKV Pax Christi. The results of this initiative were achieved in a particularly short space of time (declarations were approved, which were indisputably a breakthrough in the minds of the experts from the three conflicting sides). However, the initiative was not subsequently supported by donors.

At the same time, one of the participants in the first meetings of the group expressed doubts about the prospects for this project, since the country allegiance of the persons representing the respective countries was not expressed overtly. In her opinion, the time has come to state clearly that we are citizens of NKR and to express the interests of our country, not the interests of those who currently live outside NKR and call themselves refugees from Nagorny Karabakh.

One example of a successful project and initiative was the Discussion Club. This club has functioned since 2004 under the leadership of the Nagorny Karabakh Committee “HI-92” and is very popular in Nagorny Karabakh society.

Another positive example of the implementation of international projects, according to the participants, was the so-called “Dartmouth process”. Under this process, representatives of the authorities and civil society from the conflicting countries attempted to develop recommendations for the OSCE Minsk Group. The process, which was launched in 2001, in fact provided an alternative to the official peace process at civil society level up until 2006. In practice, it was supported by representatives of government bodies from the conflicting sides.

Another project considered successful was “Dialogue through film”, which was supported by Conciliation Resources. In this project, the Stepanakert Press Club participated from the Nagorny Karabakh side. One of the positive elements of the project was its bilateral nature (comprising participants from Azerbaijan and Nagorny Karabakh).

One of the focus group participants noted the importance of a project on gender issues: ‘Involving women and increasing women’s opportunities for peace in the South Caucasus.’ This initiative was supported by the European Union and the organisation Care (Austria).

One project viewed as fairly successful and useful was the independent analytical journal *Analitikon*. The journal is currently the only independent publication in Nagorny Karabakh that presents an alternative view and that also publishes exclusive materials from Azerbaijan. It has been published by the Stepanakert Press Club since 2009. Since the middle of 2010, the publication has received funding from Conciliation Resources and the European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (EPNK). The project beneficiaries are the authorities, the expert community, NGOs, and students from Nagorny Karabakh and the region.

International Alert’s project on studying other conflicts and the public discussions held in various cities of NKR which were attended by local and foreign experts were also useful and successful. The involvement of Nagorny Karabakh journalists in these projects was also welcomed.

In the focus groups, the view was expressed that regional projects in which representatives from all six societies/entities of the South Caucasus take part are effective. Such projects help to avoid participants getting bogged down in local differences and to view the prospects for the region in a wider context.

There seems to be a consolidated view that the problem of developing democracy – including protecting human rights and building civil society, together with the development of an independent media – must be a priority in all peacebuilding initiatives. No conflict can have a lasting solution without the democratisation of the societies involved.

There were also projects that were unrealistic. However, these projects cannot be called complete failures either, given that ‘it is not just the result but the process too that counts’. In terms of results, the most often noted projects related to journalism, which produced outputs such as books, journals and films and which provided information to people from opposite sides interested in the conflict. One focus group participant said that films made by the conflicting parties served as a guide for young peacebuilders.

Some focus group participants noted the importance of having specific results and specific “products”, noting that this could be used as a criterion for evaluating peacebuilding projects.

In one respondent’s view, many people think that joint business projects can also contribute towards peaceful conflict resolution. There were also projects that resulted in a joint product. The respondent also noted that there is little public awareness of these projects and emphasised the importance of projects in which young people from the conflicting sides are engaged.

Focus group participants considered that attempts to initiate projects at an inter-community level or to impose a bicomunal format on already active elements of projects were short sighted and dangerous.<sup>2</sup>

Some projects and meetings from the initial period when Azerbaijani participants criticised the participation of Nagorny Karabakh representatives were considered unsuccessful and the result of inadequate preparation in advance of the meetings. One participant cited a recent example where the selection of participants had been inappropriate for peacebuilding purposes, noting that even at the present stage it is important to have selection criteria for participants and partner organisations.

In the view of some participants, the role of project coordinators and trainers had a very important impact on the success or failure of the project.

## Effectiveness at policy level

In the initial stage of peacebuilding, civil society initiatives had a very substantial effect on state policy in the humanitarian sphere and on the negotiations process. With NGOs acting as mediators, direct contact was established between representatives of the authorities of Azerbaijan and NKR (Kh. Gadzhizade and A. Gukasyan, Moscow, 1993).

One peacebuilding initiative prevented a new twist in the military confrontation between Armenia and NKR, on the one hand, and Azerbaijan, on the other.

Initially, the peacebuilding initiatives were aimed at problems generated by the military action. These problems had to be addressed urgently and provided an opportunity to demonstrate signs of mutual trust between the conflicting sides. This helped to strengthen the role of civil society in the peacebuilding process.

There was a focus on the problems of prisoners of war and hostages, as well as the social and psychological rehabilitation of refugees and IDPs. The NGO “HI-92” made use of public support to have a real impact on the ruling elite of Nagorny Karabakh, encouraging it to take the right

2 «В НКР обсуждают нынешнюю ситуацию в переговорном процессе» [Current situation in the negotiation process discussed in NKR], Panarmenian.net, 7 July 2009. Available at: <http://www.panarmenian.net/rus/world/news/33889/>; K. Oganian. «Азербайджан: диалог с армянами получает “политические оттенки”» [Azerbaijan: the dialogue with Armenians takes on a political shade], Armedia.am, 14 December 2011. Available at: <http://armedia.am/?action=NKR&what=show&id=1247167004&lang=rus>; M. Mayilian. «“Кипрский сценарий” азербайджанских властей провалился» [The Azerbaijani authorities’ “Cyprus scenario” falls apart], Armtoday.info, 30 November 2011. Available at: [http://armtoday.info/default.asp?Lang=\\_Ru&NewsID=56180](http://armtoday.info/default.asp?Lang=_Ru&NewsID=56180)

decisions in the humanitarian sphere. Despite the militarised situation, the role of civil society in NKR was hugely significant and the authorities were forced to take it into account. There were interactive relations between civil society, society and the government.

The positive resolution of humanitarian problems within the country – such as improving attitudes to prisoners of war and hostages and the shift by the authorities in favour of releasing them – not only strengthened the role of the organisations working on these problems within the country; they also created a positive image outside the country and in relations with partners from Azerbaijan and Armenia. Overall, this attitude in NKR and the successes associated with NGO and civil society activities also spread to Armenia and Azerbaijan. As a result, the authorities in these countries started to become aware of civil society's role in resolving humanitarian problems generated by the war.

With no direct contact between government bodies of the conflicting sides in the first stage of military action, the practical collaboration of the civil societies from the conflicting parties started to produce serious results. For example, the activities of civil society, assisted by the OSCE Minsk Group and the International Committee of the Red Cross, resulted in the freeing of over 500 prisoners of war and hostages without any preconditions. They included those whom the Azerbaijani authorities had sentenced to death or long prison terms. Possibly, this success was also due to the fact that civil society on the conflicting sides was the only channel for resolving urgent tasks and was accepted by practically all sections of Nagorny Karabakh society – including representatives of the authorities, intellectuals, the professions and student bodies, business people, the media, relatives of wartime victims, school children, representatives of the arts, etc. Consequently, the authorities themselves also provided assistance to civil society initiatives in many ways. Cross-border initiatives on a range of topics took place on both sides of the border between NKR, Azerbaijan and Armenia; such initiatives included discussions on humanitarian issues, meetings between separated family members, discussions on women's issues, and meetings of young people and others. The authorities of Nagorny Karabakh, Azerbaijan and Armenia also provided assistance to these initiatives, since there was a clear public demand for them and the authorities and society needed to meet this demand. Moreover, the only channel for meeting the demand was that comprising the structures activated within the civil societies of the conflicting sides.

During the war and the initial post-war period, civil society thus acted as the “legislator” of the peacebuilding process, wielding a significant influence on the authorities and international mediators alike.

Given that Nagorny Karabakh does not officially take part in the negotiations process, NKR authorities understand the importance of Nagorny Karabakh representatives participating in discussions at [civil] society level. However, they are occasionally defensive towards them, fearing catches in peacebuilding initiatives. At the same time, they are interested in the experience of NGOs in building bridges of trust and in finding out information about public attitudes in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Some focus group participants pointed to the fact that there are few former civil society leaders in the Nagorny Karabakh government circles. They believe that this is partly the reason for their failure to understand the importance of the NGOs' mission.

In addition, the authorities are concerned about their image in international circles and they attempt to address this by establishing a “constructive” dialogue with the NGOs.

All this suggests that the third sector is taken into account one way or another in Nagorny Karabakh. However, some focus group participants are inclined to think that peacebuilding initiatives have not had any practical influence on policy.



## Effectiveness at grassroots level

Participants in the peacebuilding initiatives commented that the projects have clearly had an impact on the beneficiaries involved: there has been a change in the beneficiaries' potential (knowledge, mentality, social activism, tolerance, etc.). The attitude they show to the conflict and the opponents differs significantly from that of those who did not have the opportunity to engage in the peacebuilding initiatives.

They indicated that there was a need to run professional skills training programmes. What is needed is not simply fundraising, but also the introduction of methods based on European ideas and values for changing society (a depoliticised public opinion based on humanitarian values and professional knowledge).

There are no precise quantitative or qualitative indicators or evaluation criteria for the changes and transformations that occurred in the minds of the participants in the peacebuilding projects. This is more of an internal psychological process. However, if we compare the atmosphere of the first meetings with the mood of the peacebuilding initiatives in the last few years, the changes are immediately evident. Discussions are now more fluid and less forced; the discourse of the discussions has changed. Many participants in the peacebuilding projects acknowledge that these projects were a watershed for them and that their mental perception of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict is divided into two periods – “before” and “after” they took part in the peacebuilding projects.

## Factors constraining and enabling peacebuilding

A key enabling factor for the implementation of the initiatives for most participants was that they corresponded to a social, political and humanitarian demand from the public and the authorities. An important element that determines the potential of civil society is its capacity for self-sacrifice and ability to adopt a position that differs in many ways from the majority position and the official position of the authorities. This allows it to promote ideas that may not be currently on the public agenda but that are required to secure regional security and form a culture of peace as well as democratic values. It is hoped that such values will ultimately lead to the increased physical security of the citizens of NKR.

Most, although not all, participants believe that the politicisation of civil society is the main constraint on successful project implementation. Participants also referred to Azerbaijan's belligerent rhetoric and revanchist policy, which prevent the potential for trust from being realised between the civil societies from the conflicting countries. The third most substantive factor constraining successful progress in projects is poorly developed democracies (authoritarian regimes).

Some focus group participants felt that enabling factors were direct communication, practical work within the projects and shared professional interest. Conversely, constraining factors were the general atmosphere of mistrust between the parties and the stereotypes used in propaganda.

The current state of Nagorny Karabakh civil society means that there are limited opportunities for peacebuilding. As a rule, organisations engaged in peacebuilding are mostly independent NGOs – although there are also government organised NGOs (GONGOs). Moreover, there are many problems preventing them from emerging and growing. Independent organisations in NKR are under fire from two sides: the authorities are not very interested in seeing strong independent NGOs develop and perceive them as competitors; at the same time, most international non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations avoid direct contact with Nagorny Karabakh NGOs due to the rigid position of the official administration in Baku. This is why some focus

group participants highlighted that it is absolutely essential for Nagorny Karabakh NGOs to be included in regional and international projects. Special projects supporting the emergence and development of Nagorny Karabakh NGOs were deemed particularly crucial.

## Conclusion

The following conclusions and recommendations can be made based on the focus group participants' views and summing up the experience and observations of the study's authors regarding the peacebuilding process and public attitudes:

- Given that the propaganda war means that there are no prospects for the negotiations process or peacebuilding activities, and hence also the mediators, the international community must pay particular attention to the belligerent rhetoric of the authorities from the conflicting sides. As long as the propaganda war continues, there are no serious prospects of a political settlement;
- One of the factors discrediting the peacebuilding process and restricting its prospects is the anti-Armenian rhetoric and hysteria of the Azerbaijani authorities. Phenomena such as the heroicising of Ramil Safarov and the persecution of members of the creative intelligentsia, and moral authorities (such as the writer Akram Ailisi) for their tolerant views weaken the positions of peacebuilding organisations in the public consciousness;
- Mediators and the international community should take serious steps to involve the societies of the conflicting sides in the process of conflict resolution. However, mediators generally avoid contact with the societies and restrict themselves to meetings at administration level. The public has always been ignored, both by the authorities themselves and by mediators and other international players;
- “Semi-official statements” are very harmful in the peacebuilding process, such as when actors from the artistic and other spheres present peacebuilding initiatives at events with the public and non-public participation of the authorities. Sometimes, dealing with the aftermath of this kind of “peacebuilding” can take a long time. For example, visits by representatives of the Armenian and Azerbaijani intelligentsia to Baku, Yerevan and Stepanakert and subsequent comments, particularly by the famous singer Polad Byul-byul ogly, had a very damaging effect on peacebuilding efforts;
- Peacebuilding cannot be confidential and so clandestine peacebuilding missions must be avoided. For example, the visits by representatives of the Armenian and Azerbaijani intelligentsia to Baku, Yerevan and Stepanakert were conducted as clandestine operations. The impression formed is that they want to reconcile the peoples secretly without anyone knowing, including the peoples themselves;
- The strict confidentiality of the negotiations process also harms the peacebuilding process. Naturally, every negotiations process is predicated on a certain level of confidentiality; however, it is not acceptable for the public on the conflicting sides to be kept in total ignorance of the negotiations process. Excessive confidentiality robs the public of the conflicting sides of the opportunity to take part in preparing momentous decisions and leaves the authorities holding all the cards;
- There is a need to coordinate all peacebuilding initiatives and efforts, create a network of peacebuilding organisations and engender a sense of collective responsibility for the outcome of the peacebuilding process among all participants in peacebuilding projects. The fragmentary nature of peacebuilding projects is one reason why peacebuilding overall is so ineffective;
- Peacebuilding would have greater potential if the European agencies had a well-defined position and strategy in relation to the non-recognised countries, particularly Nagorny Karabakh. This would facilitate the inclusion of these state entities into the orbit of European integration;
- There are two prevailing views and concepts regarding conflict resolution. The first is that only by resolving problems as quickly as possible can the normal process of state-building and

the emergence of genuine democracy be started. The second view is that a political settlement of the problems is only possible once genuine democracy emerges and a civil society is created. Each concept is correct as far as it goes, but each is incomplete. Certainly, the second path is preferable, since the present-day realities in the conflicting countries are such that the societies are isolated from the negotiations process and dialogue. But the key is to combine the two, whilst retaining the main focus on democratisation. The predominant view now is that creating conditions for the growth of democracy should in any case take priority over resolving the problem;

- The imbalance in the democratic development of the societies on the conflicting sides may be a challenge for regional stability in the future. The converse also applies: as the countries in the region become more democratic, it will be easier to achieve regional and European integration. European integration may become common ground for the reconciliation of the peoples;
- Particular attention must be paid to the emergence of the institution of independent media in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorny Karabakh. This would help to expand resources for expressing alternative views, increase opportunities for peacebuilding organisations and assist in the formation of a genuine public opinion. The leading media, particularly television channels, are controlled by the authorities. Policy is also made by means of the controlled media. These media do not reflect public attitudes, but the attitudes of the governing elite which are presented as public opinion. Attempts to develop the third sector and strengthen the fourth estate could reverse this: an “underground” (genuine) public opinion could influence the attitudes of the political establishment; and
- It is very important to ensure that peacebuilding includes not just the inhabitants of the capitals and major cities, but also the populations of rural areas. This is necessary in order to prevent an imbalance in public opinion across the country.

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