



“Hearing about the attitudes of people on the other side of the conflict forces me to think differently about what needs to change.”

An Abkhaz NGO activist

CAUCASUS PROGRAMME

Improving the prospects for peace

In what was an important year of elections throughout the South Caucasus, political leaders were particularly reluctant to take risks or make compromises. Yet civil society continued to play an important role in challenging them and pushing for social change.

The official peace processes aimed at resolving the conflicts over Abkhazia and Nagorny Karabakh remained deadlocked. Aggressive rhetoric prevailed and people living in the region, including more than a million displaced, felt vulnerable while facing the everyday challenges of economic hardship and social exclusion.

Influencing peacemaking strategies

Building on our experience in convening informal Georgian-Abkhaz political dialogue meetings, we encouraged both sides to adopt a more strategic approach to their role in the peace process.

We held workshops for officials and policymakers in Georgia, inviting international experts and politicians with experience of developing strategy in violent conflicts and political struggle. Discussion topics included the role of political leaders and international law in peace processes, how best to prepare for dialogue and how to persuade opponents and hardliners to come to the negotiating table.

Eight Georgian politicians and officials involved in developing policy on Abkhazia visited Northern Ireland to examine the peace process there. The aim was to help build a clearer, more coordinated strategy within Georgian official circles toward the conflict.

Encouraging debate

Work continued with internally displaced people (IDPs) in Georgia and with teachers and young people in Abkhazia on civic education, political participation, and changing attitudes.

Xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance were a particular focus. Together with the University of Birmingham, CR and our partners carried out various activities. These included an oral history project, youth discussion groups and practical research aimed at encouraging public debate. We aim to influence policy on inter-ethnic relations and multiculturalism in Georgia and Abkhazia.

Photo: Teachers from different regions of Abkhazia compile materials for a civic education textbook for use in the school curriculum.



Opportunities for learning

Our fourth annual summer university on international relations was held in Abkhazia. This intensive programme gives young professionals from the Caucasus an opportunity to develop their analytical and critical thinking, and debate international issues with tutors and fellow students from all over Europe.

Four officials from Georgia and Abkhazia travelled to London and Belfast for work experience with government departments and civic organizations to help develop their policymaking skills.

Shifting public opinion and understanding conflict

Our collaboration with international and national partners in the Consortium Initiative, focusing on the Nagorny Karabakh conflict entered its second year. Our media activities raise awareness about the conflict, challenge negative stereotypes and allow ordinary people to be heard.

The Karabakh page on BBC Russian.com provides analysis and information about the conflict and allows former colleagues, neighbours and friends separated by the conflict to get in touch. This popular web resource won the BBC Original Online Journalism award.

In partnership with Internews Azerbaijan and BBC World Service, we launched a monthly Azeri language radio series for people displaced by the conflict.

Demo, the independent newspaper we support in Nagorny Karabakh, increased its readership. So did *Panorama*, the newspaper produced with the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, edited in Tbilisi and Sukhum/i. The 'Your Abkhazia' page in the Georgian national paper *24 Hours* continued, and a monthly civil society journal produced by partners in Abkhazia entered its sixth year.

These and our many other radio and television initiatives in Georgia/Abkhazia provided access to impartial information and offered alternative visions for the future.

Looking ahead

In this dynamic period in the South Caucasus, our partners and activists will continue to work at different levels within their communities and across the conflict divides. CR will support them to pursue opportunities for peace and strategies for change.

For more information about our work see our website: www.c-r.org

"By approaching the conflict more strategically, we can help avoid repeating past mistakes."

Georgian politician, during a visit to Northern Ireland

Photo: Saadat Mamedova from Internews Azerbaijan interviews a local woman for our joint monthly radio series on internally displaced people, broadcast by the BBC World Service.



Informal political dialogue

"Reporting in the media and statements by officials all too often antagonize relations between us," says one Georgian politician. "So the opportunity to meet for face-to-face dialogue in the Schlaining process has been crucial."

The Schlaining process is a series of discussion workshops for Georgian and Abkhaz officials, politicians and civic leaders. Since it began in 2000 more than 80 participants have been involved in 16 meetings.

With constant tensions underscoring the fragility of the Georgian-Abkhaz peace process, Schlaining is one of few opportunities for such meetings. Its unofficial format is welcomed.

"Nowhere else can we meet informally to analyse our conflict jointly and to understand why we are so stuck, and what we have to do to move forward," says one participant.

In 2005, we organized workshops in the UK, Germany and Austria, working with the Berghof Center and the Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution.

" Nowhere else can we meet informally to analyse our conflict jointly ... "

Photo: Irakli Alasania, the Georgian President's Special Envoy on the Georgian-Abkhaz Negotiations and Garik Samanba, an Abkhaz MP, take advantage of a rare chance to talk in person at a Schlaining dialogue workshop.

Addressing community needs

"We didn't choose the time we live in, but we can choose how to improve our lives."

These are the words of a young person, displaced by the 1992–3 Georgian-Abkhaz war, after taking part in a local TV discussion about IDP rights and the unresolved conflict.

His words are central to our belief that durable peace needs the active participation of ordinary people.

In 2005 NGOs in Abkhazia worked for change in electoral legislation, voting practices, disability policy and minority rights, and provided legal aid and civic education to local people.

Young IDP activists from four Georgian regions met regularly to share experiences, gain the confidence to express opinions, and change their lives. By bucking the trend toward nihilism and despair, they have become examples to their community, and challenge the stereotype of IDPs in Georgia.

" We didn't choose the time we live in, but we can choose how to improve our lives. "