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**Building Peace when Solution to Conflict is Not in Sight:
Development Cooperation in the Areas of Protracted
Conflicts in the Eastern Neighborhood**

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Research staff at European Neighbourhood Council (ENC)

This publication is a summary and analysis of the policy dialogue “Building Peace when Solution to Conflict is Not in Sight: Development Cooperation in the Areas of Protracted Conflicts in the Eastern Neighborhood” that took place on the 5th of December 2017. The event was jointly organised by the Mission of Switzerland to the European Union, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the European Neighbourhood Council (ENC).

The information in this publication includes input from the event as well as from the ENC Academic Council Members and ENC research staff.

ABOUT THE EVENT

The **European Neighbourhood Council (ENC)** contributed in the organisation of a policy dialogue held by the **Mission of Switzerland to the European Union** and the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**. **Ms. Cihan Sultanoglu**, United Nations Assistant Secretary General and UNDP Regional Director for Europe and CIS and **H.E. Urs Burcher**, Ambassador of Switzerland to the European Union contributed to the high-level discussion. The panellists who participated in the dialogue included **Mr. Lawrence Meredith**, Director of Neighbourhood East (DG NEAR); **Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting**, Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia, European External Action Service (EEAS); **Mr. Archil Gegeshidze**, Independent Georgian Expert; **Ms. Dafina Gercheva**, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Moldova and **Mr. Niels Scott**, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Georgia.

The policy discussion took place at the Mission of Switzerland to the European Union on the 5th of December and it focused on peace-building efforts, protracted conflict and development cooperation in the Eastern Neighbourhood, where protracted conflict remains an unsolved problem. Following the opening remarks of the Ambassador of Switzerland to the European Union, **H.E Urs Burcher**, the panel discussion proceeded under the moderation of the European Neighbourhood Council (ENC) Managing Director, **Samuel Doveri Vesterbye**.

CONTEXT

Despite the efforts of the international community in establishing lasting peace, the Eastern European Neighbourhood remains an area with decades of protracted conflicts. The frozen conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Eastern Ukraine represent a key security challenges for the European Union (EU). It is within this context that **Ms. Cihan Sultanoglu** and **Ambassador H.E. Urs Burcher**, started the policy dialogue, by converging on a shared position to find a comprehensive and developmental strategy for enabling peace. On this subject, ENC Academic Council

Member and **Professor Maria Raquel Freire** (School of Economics of the University of Coimbra) called into question the meaning of 'peace'. In particular, the concept of '**structural peace**' emerged as a notion to end violence and to proceed with peace negotiations, while developing in terms of societal resilience.

In this regard, the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** represent the guiding framework for this transformation. The Agenda recognises that building a strong society is both the means and the goal for/of development. Ms. Sultanoglu stressed that the **UNDP** supported and **implemented several programs** in a **joint manner** with the EU, other agencies of the United Nations (UN), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) as well as with single EU Member States. These plans included **confidence-building** measures, increasing cooperation, strengthening justice and the rule of law. In particular the **EU-UNDP synergy** was considered important in the Moldovan negotiations. Furthermore, in order to evaluate peace throughout its target areas, the UNDP and the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD), developed the **Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index**¹, a tool for evaluating societies that experience conflicts and that are currently facing peace-building and state-building challenges.

WHERE DO WE STAND?

In light of the recent Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit which took place in November 2017 between the EU and its six Eastern neighbours², **Mr. Meredith** underlined that many lessons must be learned in protracted conflict areas. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was launched more than a decade ago, but now there is a different arrangement, which is framed within the **EU Global Strategy**, the **revised ENP Strategy** and the **2020 key deliverables for 2020**. These last ones focus on four key thematic areas, i.e. good governance (including security), economy, connectivity/transportation and people-to-people contact. In order to achieve the goals conceived under these policy umbrellas, Mr. Meredith insisted on the importance of **coordinating international efforts** as well as **effective allocation of financial resources**.

Building on that, **Mr. Mayr-Harting**, asserted that "the EU instruments aim at shaping a more **resilient Neighbourhood**, both in the terms of EU relations with its unstable neighbouring area, and with its relations with Russia".

¹ SCORE was developed in Cyprus and examines two main components of peace, namely reconciliation and social cohesion, and the interaction between them. The first feature relates to the social consensus of former belligerent groups, while the second considers the nature of the coexistence of the warring parties, and the relation with their surrounding institutions. For more information: <http://www.scoreforpeace.org/eng>.

² Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Talking about the Russian presence in the post-Soviet space, ENC Academic Council Member and **Professor Sergii Glebov** (Odessa Mechnikov National University) explained that Moscow's actions are driven by geopolitical ambitions that find their evidence in the military intervention in Georgia and Ukraine. When annexing Crimea, Moscow managed to impose secessionist ideas on Ukrainian political reality and create a narrative of an ongoing civil war, calling the hybrid aggression in the Eastern part of Ukraine as an "internal Ukrainian conflict".

Talking about the external involvement in the conflict areas, Mr. Mayr-Harting emphasised that the **EU plays a central role**, being either a cautious actor, as in the case of Georgia and Armenia, or a crucial player such as in the Moldovan peace settlement process, or in Ukraine. Giving the last case, the EU provides support to the international peace-building efforts, such as the work of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG)³, and it is directly engaged with the European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM). Overall, **the EU's policy in Ukraine aims at reinforcing the country resilience**, but in the Eastern area, the EU operates through **humanitarian and economic channels**.

When assessing the role of the Western donor community, **Giulia Prez Oltramonti**, ENC Academic Council Member and Research Assistant at Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) took a more critical stand highlighting on the lack of understanding of those stakeholders who reinforce the conflict dynamic. In particular, she noted that many constituencies, such as **de facto authorities in separatist entities**, have enough **leverage** and power to **influence the evolution of the conflict**. While the EU, UN agencies and other international organisations restrained their engagement with these actors, these constituencies endorsed the maintenance of this ongoing warfare status as it "serves for a considerable amount of purposes, including political and geopolitical, but also economic and social ones", Ms. Prez Oltramonti observed.

Against this general background, the second part of this summary will look at the cases in Georgia and Moldova more specifically. Among the distinguished speakers of the policy dialogue, **Mr. Gegeshidze** expressed his concerns on the conflict resolution impasse of Georgia. From an internal perspective, two main problems remain. First, the tools on the ground are meant to ensure stability in the country, without offering a concrete peace design. Secondly, **mistrust and frustration** are spread **among the parties in conflict** and the **population**, hence **hampering the reconciliation activities**. He enhanced that "given the protracted nature of the conflict, conflict resolution is no longer a leading thing in conflict transformation: a number of peace-building community on both sides is not growing, if not shrinking". Taking an external perspective into account, Russia represents another obstacle for a conflict resolution. "Moscow is gaining advantages from the

³ The Trilateral Contact Group (TCG), consisting of senior representatives of Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, was created in response to the Ukrainian Crisis under the framework of the Minsk agreements adopted on 12 February 2015. For more information: <http://www.osce.org/cio/155486>

deadlocked situation in Georgia and it does not seem eager to change its status quo”, Mr. Gegeshidze commented.

Building on that, ENC Academic Council Member and Senior Lecturer at Free International University of Moldova (ULIM), **Larisa Patlis** further insisted on the problematic role of Russian activism in Moldova. In fact, due to the nature of unrecognised states, both the Gaguzia and Transnistria constituency have pro-Russian foreign policy orientations and they look for Russian external support to maintain and strengthen their own identity.

What is even more gripping in Moldova, Ms. Patlis elaborated, is its unique nature, in which both frozen and thawed conflict zones coexist – i.e. Transnistria and Gaguzia respectively. Despite the same temporal collocation, these two cases took two opposite trajectories due to the different nature of the conflict. Yet, different positions marked a line between the central government and Transnistrians. While the first consider the establishment of the Gaguz Yeri in 1994 as a success story to be emulated in Transnistria, the others perceive Gaguzia as a failure, which visibly shows the incapacity of the state authorities to guarantee meaningful territorial Autonomy.

As a result, Moldova is in an ongoing tension, which make it difficult to foreseen a compromise. In particular, **Ms. Gercheva** raised important considerations for the case of Moldova. In her opening remarks, she mentioned that **peace resolution does not lay inside the country** and the implementation of the development Agenda is very critical. Despite some modest progresses, socio-economic problems are a growing concern. Moreover, among other challenges, **“political instability can be the elephant in the room for the implementation of the SDG in Moldova”**, she highlighted. The political issue is a sensible topic and represents the most tangible cause for the development deadlock. The international actors are very prudent with their involvement in the region and **they are not engaging on geo-political matters**, rather on trade or other a-political fields.

Ms. Gercheva further elaborated on this, saying that this external involvement is deployed through **multi-financial instruments**, which have two distinguished goals. First, the programs aim at **building bridges of trust and confidence**, while creating a platform for communication founded on shared values. The second ambition is to target the **population’s needs** such as infrastructure or strengthening the civil society capacity. In her concluding remarks, she pointed out the **visible impact** of such financial tools, such as the implementation of more than 200 projects, the creation of more than 2000 jobs and the increased work with local NGOs. “We have big achievements that weakened the divisions, we managed to create trust and confidence and we can see the benefits of this trust”, Ms. Gercheva argued in her closing words.

Mr. Scott also underlined the UNDP achievements in areas of protracted conflict with particular reference to Georgia. The **UNDP strategy is twofold**. First, it provides

development and support to the population based on people needs. Secondly, it supports **confidence-building**. In particular, he mentioned the diffusion of **people-to-people contact** and the elaboration of a network which includes **different societal groups**, such as domestic civil society organisations (CSOs). These linkages are crucial for local development and they represent a pre-requisite for country transformation. The EU financial instruments (e.g. Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism (COBERM), HORIZON 2020, etc.) are fundamental as they can substantially change the situation in both Moldova and Georgia. Mr. Scott concluded underlining that **peace and justice** can represent an **entry point** for UNDP and other international partners to **link development with peace-building efforts**.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

Overall, each speaker emphasised the need for **collaboration and increased international efforts** in order to make the Eastern Neighbourhood more resilient and stable. Ms. Sultanoglu noted that closer cooperation between local and international actors is crucial, as “**peace cannot be achieved alone, neither locally or internationally**”. The **receptivity of the partners** is fundamental and strongly underlined by Mr. Scott, who identified **capacity-building, collective intervention strategy** and **sustainable development as potential channels for paving the way towards conflict resolution**. For instance, he stressed that, “the SDG falls within the conflict prevention framework because by reducing poverty or promoting gender equality, the drivers of the conflict can be eradicated”.

Digging into the cases of Moldova and Georgia, Ms. Gercheva and Mr. Gegeshidze identified specific ways forward. According to Ms. Gercheva, the presence of international actors is expanding and, **to establish sustainable foundations for peace, these countries and their societies should be supported**. She highlighted the achievements in confidence-building, but she also recognises the **challenging issue of measuring progress and the impact of these trust-building measures** due to the lack of reliable data and indicators. In response to this, UNDP is identifying different and more sophisticated tools to fill this gap and quantify conflict measurement tools. In the case of Georgia, besides preserving dialogue with Moscow, Mr. Gegeshidze suggested that in order to overcome the impasse, a potential channel could be to develop a **policy of country transformation** based on peace, rather than to strive for a solution of the conflict. Yet, he also recognised that **reciprocity** is crucial in this dynamic.

CONCLUSIONS

In his last comments, Mr. Gegeshidze distinguished between different stakeholders in the area of conflict protraction, namely “**status quo**” vs “**revisionist**” **stakeholders**. The main actors included in the first category are Russia and many constituencies, such as the

separatist territories/ *de facto* states. In addition to her previous comments, Ms. Prelz Oltramonti mentioned that the EU, as well as international organisations and other development agencies **must consider the interests and dynamics of these pivotal stakeholders in defining the future peace-building strategy in the EaP countries**. Therefore, she highlighted and recommended the **need of an in-depth analysis of these actors' position** as a way to understand “where these local elites acquire their political and economic capital from, how they exploit conflict protraction, and what could be devised to replace it”.

The second group of stakeholders included those motivated players, which are **willing to transform the conflict dynamic and to review their strategy**. Yet, Mr. Gegeshidze underlined that they **need to agree on core principles** for developing a concrete peace process. The EU and other international players are essential in this respect. Ms. Gercheva agreed on that by referring to the work of the UNDP in post-war situations when governments have limited capacity. She highlighted the presence of a **development-peace-building nexus**, in which the SDG goals have been linked with the peace-building efforts. In fact, by re-addressing the rooted causes of the conflict, it will be possible to achieve the normative and transformative 2020 Agenda. These endeavours must be done with **joint and synergetic efforts**. In order to face the security dilemma in areas of protracted conflict, “the interest of maintaining peace in a state and society in a whole by all means could become a major platform to start negotiating”, commented Professor Glebov.

After the above-mentioned closing remarks of the distinguished participants, Mr. Doveri Vesterbye concluded the high-level policy dialogue highlighting the importance of **methods to both measure progress** and to **guarantee practical approaches for conflict resolution**, especially in the light of the UNDP-EU cooperation. Further steps on building peace in areas of protracted conflict will be shaped also through the works of the civil society sector, academia and NGOs.

PARTNERS

The policy dialogue was co-organised by **the Mission of Switzerland to the European Union**, the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** and the **European Neighbourhood Council (ENC)**.