VOICES LOST IN THE ENDLESS WAR

The perspective on peace and the future
of people displaced from Abkhazia

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Voices Lost in the Endless War:
The perspective on peace and the future of people displaced from Abkhazia

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Table of Contents

Introduction

As a result of the political crises that began in Georgia in the 20th century, the country went through multiple wars as well as internal political and military disputes within the country. The thirty-year post-independence history has been defined by contradictory political and social experiences. These experiences have had serious repercussions on the systemic, micro-social, and individual levels.

Up until this day, one of the unexplored episodes in the nation's history is the war in Abkhazia, which is believed to have claimed over 13,000 lives, left over 18,000 injured or crippled, up to 2,000 persons reported missing, and 300,000 people with the status of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

With the passage of time, the impossibility of a quick resolution of the conflict and the constantly changing political and geopolitical context once again puts the need to review peace initiatives and search for new opportunities. It is important that these initiatives be created with the participation of conflict-affected communities, including internally displaced persons. In this context, theories of peace building focus mainly on the participation of the displaced community and the establishment of forums for dialogue on matters of justice, forgiveness, truth, and peace.

Involvement of the displaced community is not sufficiently supported neither in Georgian nor in Georgian-Abkhazian discussions. Moreover, expectations about them are limited in advance. IDPs, as a traumatized society, are often considered only in terms of socio-economic and emotional dimensions, and their potentials for the peaceful resolution of the conflict is unexplored. Although various public surveys reveal that a large part of the IDPs show an open readiness for dialogue and a peaceful resolution of the conflict, the voices of the displaced community is practically not represented in the peace policy. A radicalized and exclusionist discourse field further complicates the representation of these perspectives.

The purpose of the present study is to explore the views and perspectives of the internally displaced population from Abkhazia in relation to peace and conflict resolution.

The objectives of the study are to analyze the perceptions of the internally displaced population from Abkhazia on issues related to the past, conflict, and peace. The broad objective of the research is to generate critical and evidence-based knowledge related to conflict and peace issues and to present alternative perspectives on the structural causes of conflicts and ways to achieve peace.

Research Methodology and Design

For the present study, it is interesting to study the views in relation to the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict of IDPs living in collective settlements.

The presented research uses qualitative research methods to fulfill the set goals and objectives. First of all, a systematic analysis of existing literature and relevant field material was carried out as part of the desk research, which includes scientific literature in the direction of conflict transformation and peace building, as well as a historical retrospective of military confrontations and wars that began in Georgia in the 90s. In order to avoid bias, to study the historical, political and social dimensions of the conflict, historical sources, scientific articles, policy documents prepared by the state, local or international organization, studies and statistical data were reviewed.

Prior to empirical data collection, expert interviews were conducted after systematic literature review[1] (SLR) - 5 interviews in total (three peace policy researchers, one historian, one social policy researcher). The discussion plan was based on expert interviews and desk research, and biographical-narrative and in-depth interview methods were used to collect empirical data.

IDPs living in Tbilisi and Tskaltubo IDP settlements, as well as in Zugdidi were defined as the object of the research. The research was carried out in two stages. The first stage included a pilot study, during which 2-2 in-depth interviews were conducted in Tbilisi and in Tskaltubo in the first week of August 2023. During the pilot study, the discussion plan was tested and the interview guide was slightly adjusted. The data obtained at this stage was not integrated with the final findings of the study. The second stage of the research began in the second half of August 2023 and ended at the end of September 2023. A total of 27 in-depth interviews were conducted.

The general target group of the study was determined as a result of considering the research objectives and represented a homogeneous group from the selected cities. In accordance with the maximal variation (Patton, 2015) approach of purposive sampling, the selection was made according to pre-defined characteristics:
- Geographical location: Tbilisi (the capital), Tskaltubo, and Zugdidi (the city located close to the conflict region)
- Gender: out of 27 respondents, 16 were women and 11 were men.
- Age: over 35 years; (Interviews were also conducted with four young IDPs < 35 years old).
- Ethnicity – Georgian.
- Respondents' place of residence in Abkhazia: Gali (3), Sukhumi, (7) Gagra (7), Kolkhida village (2), Ochamchire (4), Kochara village (3); Gulriff (1). (see attachment #1)

The research participants live in the IDP settlement in Tbilisi and Tskaltubo, namely in the former sanatoriums and collective centers, as well as in the new settlement of displaced persons in Tskaltubo and near the sea in Tbilisi. The survey respondents live in a similar reality from a social and economic point of view. The results of the study may be different in groups of IDPs with other social experiences.

The present study was not conducted following ethnographic research methods, however, it produced field notes based on IDPs' discussions in various public (Tskaltubo Central Park, the courtyard of the new IDP settlement) and private spaces (the fieldwork coincided with the birthday of one of the respondents).

It should be noted that the present study does not claim to generalize the results, the surveys are not representative and the results reflect only the attitudes and evaluations of the respondents who took part in the survey.

Empirical information obtained within the framework of the research was recorded both on audio material and through field notes. Transcripts and field notes were coded into thematic categories, such as: "views of the initial period of the conflict"; "Prospects of conflict resolution"; "Information about peace policy", "Public and political relations with Abkhazians", "Justice and peace", etc. Based on the thematic categories, a discussion about the findings of the research took place.

Because the target population of the study is the traumatized community, along with the informed consent form prior to the in-depth interview, the respondents were informed that they could decline answering any unwanted question or stop participating in the study at any time.

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[1] Petticrew, M., & Roberts, H. (2006). *Systematic reviews in the social sciences: A practical guide.* Blackwell Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470754887

Collective settlements and target cities

As a result of the armed conflict in Abkhazia which started more than 30 years ago, 13 thousand people died, and 300 thousand became displaced. During the war, IDPs were chaotically resettled throughout Georgia, and their shelters became collective centers: public schools, kindergartens, factories, hotels, sanatoriums, or other public buildings. As a result of the resettlement, 111, 939 IDPs settled in Tbilisi; 27,839 settled in Imereti (more than 10,000 in Tskaltubo), and 90,102 settled in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti (IDP Agency, 2022).

Today, in Tbilisi, as well as in Tskaltubo and Zugdidi, the resettlement process of IDPs in new apartments/houses is underway. Those who are still waiting for an apartment, or for whom the accommodation conditions are not satisfactory, still live in sanatoriums (Tskaltubo).

It was in these collective settlements that the stories of the internally displaced people were created over time. These settlements served both as public and residential areas. Over the past thirty years, various perspectives and narratives regarding the reasons behind conflict and methods for peaceful resolution have come together in the inner courtyards of IDP settlements, the lengthy hallways of sanatoriums, and the "hanging out spaces" (გაჩუმება).

Even though, based on the objectives of the research, it was not reflected in the findings, the recorded interviews contain complex and interesting information about the resettlement policy in Georgia and its challenges; Also, the research may become an inspiration for future studies of such issues as:
(i) the impact of the dominant political discourse on the perceptions and opinions of internally displaced people over the past 30 years;
(ii) temporal and spatial dimensions of IDP perspectives in peacebuilding;
(iii) IDP engagement issues, opportunities and practices in peacebuilding policies.

Conflict Transformation: Theory and its components

In the scientific literature, peace building is an umbrella term that combines many other theories and practical methods in this field. International academic debates on peace and sustainable peacebuilding are largely concerned with the practical application of theoretical frameworks. According to this paradigm, in order to translate theories into effective practical measures, it is important to consider the root causes of conflict. From this prism, peacebuilding is a fully social process, it does not offer certain rules for how peace is achieved or conflict resolved. Moreover, it does not consider peace building as a static process, and the temporal component is seen as an opportunity to change and transform the conflict[2]. In the process of searching for theories or practical means, new approaches to conflict management and resolution are united in the now well-known Conflict Transformation Theory.

For followers of critical theory, the starting point for the peace building process should be the actor/agent of conflict transformation. For example, in some cases, the dominant role of political elites and international actors is highlighted, which calls into question the involvement of the conflict parties in the process of conflict transformation and, in general, makes the democratic aspect of peace building questionable.[3]

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[2] Bigdon, Ch., Korf, B. (2004). The Role of Development Aid in Conflict Transformation: Facilitating Empowerement Processes and Community Building. In: Austin, A., Fischer, M. and Ropers, N. eds. Transforming Ethnopolitical Conflict: The Berghof Handbook. Berlin, Germany: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, p. 349-369.

[3] Christoph Zurcher, Carrie Manning, Kristie Evenson, Rachel Hayman, Sarah Riese, and Nora Roehner, Costly Democracy: Peacebuilding and Democratization after War (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013);

Conflict transformation is not only related to the final resolution of conflicts (conflict resolution), it also includes the concepts of democracy and development[4]. In this sense, it is seen as a path to social change that also combats structural violence.

Structural Violence

The struggle against social inequality in the process of conflict transformation is one of the contradictory components of this theory developed by Galtung in 1976. For some scientists, economic and social development has an impact on the transformation of the conflict, but others disagree[5]. In the UN reports of 1992 and 1995 - "An Agenda for Peace" and "Supplement to an Agenda for Peace" - social and economic development is called as "social peace" which is equally important as strategic or political peace ("social peace is as important as strategic or political peace")[6].

Violent conflicts in the short term cause such social and economic losses to the displaced people as the loss of human life and property, delay of the opportunity to receive education, creation of deep psychological trauma, increase in the number of the unemployed people and of general poverty and health problems, destruction of social infrastructure in the country and limitation of development opportunities. In the long run, however, its consequences translate into structural violence. Poverty, economic inequality, social mobility and related challenges, legacy of trauma, and lack of permanent housing, are just a small list of the losses these people experience in their daily lives.

In academic sources, structural violence is among the factors that influence IDPs' perceptions of the causes of war, issues of peace, understanding of justice, culprits and victims. A broad discussion of structural violence is seen as the basis for conflict transformation, where peace strategies are based on the socio-economic situation of the parties to the conflict. This may not be the only possibility for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, but it is certainly one. As Rupesinghe writes, "Survivors of violent conflict cannot eat peace,"[7] and no matter how safe they feel, structural violence will always be a threat they have to deal with (Rupesinghe, 1995).

Radical Narratives and the Dominant Political Discourse

Licklider (Licklider) 1995 wrote about the concept of Sustained Wars and pointed out that wars generate such forms of hatred that cannot disappear immediately after the end of the war (Licklider, 1995, p, 8). This idea is shared by the well-known conflict researcher Joanna Regulska (Regulska, 2012, p.123), who expresses the opinion that in small countries where ethnic conflicts occur, it is political rhetoric that creates the perceptions of conflict-affected societies about wars (Mannergren Selimovic, 2010). Thus, it is critically important for her to study the origins of consciousness, approaches, and narratives of conflict-affected groups, especially to study the context of how and on what basis the dominant discourse of 'who is to blame' is produced. The same approach is shared by the Theory of

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Andrea Ruggeri, Theodora-Ismene Gizelis, and Han Dorussen, "Managing Mistrust an Analysis of Cooperation with UN Peacekeeping in Africa," Journal of Conflict Resolution 57, no. 3 (2013): 380–410.

[4] P. Collier, 'Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy', in C.A. Crocker, F.O. Hampson and P. Aall (eds), Leashing the Dogs of War. Conflict Management in a Divided World (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007), pp. 190–210.

[5] J. Galtung, Peace by Peaceful Means. Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization (Oslo/London: International Peace Research Institute/Sage, 1996), p. 9-15;

[6] B. Boutros-Ghali, 'An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peace Making and Peace Keeping', UN Doc. A/47/277-S/24111 (New York, 17 June 1992), paragraph 20-21.

[7] K. Rupesinghe, 'Conflict Transformation', in K. Rupesinghe (ed.), Conflict Transformation (London: St Martin's Press, 1995), p. 90-99.

Biased Collective Memory, according to which the collective memory of the parties to the conflict is manipulated in different ways, which prevents the success of peace policy[8]. According to this theory, various radical narratives represent the reasons for the transformation of collective memory, and their critical analysis often becomes the subject of judgment and censorship, since "this criticism means deviation from the dominant line" (Sara Cobb, 2013)[9]. It is also of interest to look at which groups have the right to speak or produce these narratives.

The British organization "Conciliation Resources" writes in one of its reports that some of the narratives established in the Georgian political discourse about Abkhazians and Ossetians do not reflect public opinion[10]. This approach is also confirmed by public surveys from 2013 to 2020. For example, according to a 2020 CRRC survey, 69.7% of respondents support direct dialogue, 48.4% hold that finding common interests and ways to jointly resolve conflict is important[11] (CRRC, 2020).

Radical narratives determine trajectories of conflict, collective traumas and memories of society. In fact, they are a collection of stories that "have been told once and then repeated many times" (Harre and van Langenhove, 1991, 1999, Pearce, 2008, Tan&Moghaddam, Winslade and monk, 2000). It is these stories that create the narratives which, in turn, show other characteristics of the conflict: physical - temporal boundaries, and moral boundaries, which imply the legitimization of one particular story and giving it an identity (Sara Cobb, 2013). Such stories usually do not tell us the full picture of history and only reveal layers of hatred between conflict-affected societies.

In conflict-ridden societies, "hate" and "blame-seeking" are feelings that, according to many researchers, "never die", although they are sometimes additionally fed through radical narratives that prevent conflict resolution (Halverson, 2004, Porat, 2004).

For critical theories of the construction of discourses and memory, the complex study of narratives is interesting to the extent that every conflict has a different narrative - especially ethnic conflicts, where the politics of narratives are changed/revised and reinforced by ethnic groups, the state, international actors[12]. In this context, IDP narratives are understood as the result of passage of time, spatial distance, individual experiences or protracted conflicts. At the same time, memory is constantly undergoing reorganization, it is not the product of a single narrative or experience, it is flexible and transforms in time and space "according to the current demands of power and identity construction".[13]

Along with the stories, the temporal and spatial aspects of their distribution are also important. The stories people tell about the war as their "own stories" or as "others/enemies' stories" also create certain narratives within specific groups and the spaces in which these people live (Coleman et al., 2007). The study of both local and dominant narratives and their critical analysis is seen as a new way of conflict transformation.

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[8] Peter Kabachnik, Joanna Regulska & Beth Mitchneck (2012) Displacing Blame: Georgian Internally Displaced Person Perspectives of the Georgia–Abkhazia Conflict, Ethnopolitics: Formerly Global Review of Ethnopolitics, 11:2, 123-140, DOI: 10.1080/17449057.2012.675210

[9] Cobb, Sara (2013). "Speaking of Violence. The Politics and Poetics of Narrative in Conflict Resolution";

[10] Concilation Resources, "Majority of Georgians see prospects for change to improve relations with Abkhaz", 2020; https://www.c-r.org/news-and-insight/majority-georgians-see-prospects-change-improve-relations-abkhaz

[11] Concilation Resources, "Majority of Georgians see prospects for change to improve relations with Abkhaz", 2020; https://www.c-r.org/news-and-insight/majority-georgians-see-prospects-change-improve-relations-abkhaz

[12] Cobb, Sara (2013). "Speaking of Violence. The Politics and Poetics of Narrative in Conflict Resolution";

[13] Nino Chikovani, Ketevan Kakitelashvili, Irakli Chkhaidze, Ivane Tsereteli, Ketevan Epadze, (2022). Georgia: Trauma and Triumph on the Path to Independence.

One of the interesting episodes in the analysis of the issue is related to the idea that in some cases, radical narratives already exist long before conflicts arise. They cause war and live long after the war (Sara Cobb, 2013); Institutional spaces such as courtrooms, public meetings, parliamentary sessions, peace or direct dialogue meetings should create opportunities to transform radical narratives into a transformative process of conflict, although, in many cases, these institutions become the source of their legitimation (Sara Cobb, 2013).

Collective Memory and Trauma

Another issue that is of particular interest in the context of conflict transformation is the study of collective memory and the phenomenon of trauma. The study of trauma is important to the extent that, in the wake of events and the passage of time, it contributes to the formation of new identities, which in turn influence the values, expectations, and behaviors of war-torn societies and individuals within them.[14]

The theories of collective memory and cultural trauma discussed in the international academic literature largely associate cultural trauma with such social, radical events that fundamentally change the life of societies. However, one of the interesting episodes in the study of the nature of collective trauma is related to the expression of trauma - the process when people begin to share emotions, tell stories,[15] discuss causes, identify culprits. These find expression in public discussions, politics, media, art, etc. The phenomenon of trauma is divided into two main dimensions in the academic community: one is individual trauma, when it ends with the death of the individual, and the other is collective trauma, which is passed from generation to generation. After 30 years, the displaced society today already has groups of individuals who have not experienced the trauma of the war, although they have inherited it.[16]

In the book "Georgia: Trauma and Triumph on the Road to Independence" dedicated to the study of the phenomenon of cultural trauma and collective memory in Georgia, the ideas of Aleida Assmann (Assmann, Jan, 2010) are discussed about the concepts of impact event and impact narrative. It is explained there how narratives are created in such a time in terms of content and structure and how they are deposited in collective memory. Collective memory "keeps" some of these narratives unchanged, in some cases transforms some of them, or in other cases completely forgets them. In this context, Aleida Asman introduces the concepts of "active" and "passive" forgetting – first is related to the intentional forgetting and erasure of some events, while in the case of passive forgetting, some pages of history are simply ignored by the collective memory, and their meaning is lost in the background of dominant narratives.

For IDPs from Abkhazia, the experience of collective trauma was primarily based on war and human and material losses. Beyond that, the trauma that these people suffered was related to the difficult experience of marginalization in the new environment and integration with the local population.[17]

Thus, the study of the nature of trauma is considered part of the transformation of the conflict, which in turn implies the analysis of the collective trauma of the war-torn society, the past buried in memory, or the narratives in the community.

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[14] Nino Chikovani, Ketevan Kakitelashvili, Irakli Chkhaidze, Ivane Tsereteli, Ketevan Epadze, (2022). Georgia: Trauma and Triumph on the Path to Independence, pp. 18-27

[15] Ibid., 258-260'

[16] Reimann, U.K. (2018). Closing a gap in conflict transformation: Understanding collective and transgenerational trauma.

[17] Nino Chikovani, Ketevan Kakitelashvili, Irakli Chkhaidze, Ivane Tsereteli, Ketevan Epadze, (2022). Georgia: Trauma and Triumph on the Path to Independence, p. 256.

Inclusive Peace Policy

As already mentioned, the transformation of the conflict does not include only the management of the conflict, it is also related to the democratization and inclusiveness of the peace policy, where the parties to the conflict are fully involved in the peace policy, international or local initiatives. According to Bush and Folger, conflict transformation theory leaves more room for the involvement of individuals and small groups of individuals in the peacebuilding process. "Bottom-up" practices in peacebuilding are not new, they have gained interest since the mid-1990s, although from time to time they have been integrated into complex methods and lost as a separate approach. However, today theorists and practitioners are already actively discussing such empirical studies that examine the perceptions of conflict-affected parties[18] and consider these findings as the basis for peace-building strategies. In this case, social and human dimensions are seen as active actors of peace policy.[19]

In this context, the academic reasoning that peace building strategies and the concept of security should be simultaneously based on political, social, cultural or historical features is also relevant.[20] The conflict transformation paradigm as an approach to peacebuilding incorporates the very social and cultural characteristics that are so important to sustainable peacebuilding. Adherents of critical theory emphasize that sustainable peace is supported by individuals and not only by large social groups or the state. Thus, approaches to engaging in bottom-up peacebuilding rely on two key practices:
(1) individual dimension - when individuals are the initiators of social changes;
(2) public dimension (interpersonal relations) - which is based on the relationship between the parties affected by the conflict in peace building, which is expressed in dialogue, friendship, kinship, or neighborhood deepening (Hewstone and Brown, 1986). Lederach (2005) emphasizes the importance of studying these relationships in analyzing social changes, which has become the research interest of many anthropologists.

Since "Bottom up" approaches mainly include formal or informal meetings and initiatives of community groups, they need to be supported by the state in daily practice; Practitioners point out that conflict-affected societies already have the experience of living together in the past, however, the perceptions of these experiences change with the passage of time, therefore, the development of formal or informal initiatives by the state should not have a one-time character and should be perceived as a learning process for the displaced community.[21] It is desirable that these initiatives eliminate the disagreements between the societies divided by the conflict through highlighting common and relevant interests for both sides.

Conflict transformation aims to change the structural causes of conflict. This results-oriented approach focuses on peace-building opportunities in the local context, which involves a long process of dialogue and building common interests between communities experiencing conflict.

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[18] Peshkopia, R. (2020). A Bottom-Up View at Peacebuilding: Pragmatism, Public Opinion, and the Individual as Unit of Analysis in Postconflict Societies. In H. Carey (Ed.), *Peacebuilding Paradigms: The Impact of Theoretical Diversity on Implementing Sustainable Peace* (pp. 304-323). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781108652162.019 p.12-34;

[19] The Critical Theory Paradigm. (2020). In H. Carey (Ed.), Peacebuilding Paradigms: The Impact of Theoretical Diversity on Implementing Sustainable Peace (pp. 188-238). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[20] Bachler, G. (2004). Conflict Transformation through State Reform. In: Austin, A., Fischer, M. and Ropers, N. eds. Transforming Ethnopolitical Conflict: The Berghof Handbook. Berlin, Germany: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, p. 260-282

[21] Sandrine Lefranc. A Critique of 'Bottom-up' Peacebuilding: Do Peaceful Individuals Make Peaceful Societies?. 2011. ffhalshs-00646986, p.12-18;

This theory observes from its own prism the perceptions and attitudes of people affected by the conflict and their opinions regarding the conflict[22]. In order to achieve the change, this approach aims to study four issues in practice. These are perceptions of truth, forgiveness, justice and peace.[23]

The present study is united around these four issues and observes the perspectives related to them among the internally displaced persons from Abkhazia who lived in collective centers together with other IDPs for three decades. From the perspective of the conflict transformation theory, the attempt to understand the root causes of the conflict between ethnic Georgians and Abkhazians will create spaces for discussion on common goals in the future.

Peace Policy: Instruments

Georgia's peace policy can be conventionally divided into two stages. The first stage starts from the 90s and includes the period of the August 2008 war, the second - from August 2008 to the present day. From the point of view of experts, despite the fact that the peace policy was activated in the post-war period, it did not bring fundamental changes. The reason for this is that the flow of this process was entrusted only to the efforts of the international community[24]. Georgia's peace policy has been repeatedly criticized for its one-sidedness,[25] which is seen in the conflict transformation paradigm as an obstacle that must be overcome through trust and dialogue between the parties affected by the conflict.

Today's peace policy in the state is largely related to official negotiations (Geneva international discussions, Karasin-Abashidze format) and civil dialogue formats abroad (Georgian-Abkhazian closed meetings). The displaced population has no information about the goals and achievements of both official and unofficial meetings. In addition, in 2018, the government abolished the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons, Resettlement and Refugees from the Occupied Territories, and IDPs lost the opportunity to influence the political agenda and voice their needs and interests with decision-makers.

Nevertheless, new opportunities have emerged for civil societies to engage in peacebuilding politics. In 2021, in the Office of the Minister of State, a consultative group of experts working on reconciliation and engagement was created in order to analyze the current situation in conflict regions, identify challenges, discuss and share expert opinions on further steps in peace policy. One of the goals of the group was to review the "State Strategy for the Occupied Territories - Engagement through Cooperation and Action Plan Evaluation Document for the Engagement Strategy" developed by the Office of the Minister of State; In addition, there is also a consultative platform, which meets twice a year to increase women's participation in peace processes and discuss gender issues.

Despite the changes, the existing institutional engagement mechanisms are only formal in nature and do not offer real (here and now), participatory political decision-making practices. According to the assessment of the civil organizations involved in the process (including the civil organizations created

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[22] Lederach, J.P. (1997). Building peace : sustainable reconciliation in divided societies. Washington, D.C: United States Institute of Peace Press. pp. 23-25

[23] Kriesberg, L. (2011). The State of the Art in Conflict Transformation.In: Austin, B., Fischer, M., and Giessmann H.J. eds. Advancing Conflict Transformation: The Berghof Handbook II. Opladen & Farmington Hills. Barbara Budrich Publisher. pp. 50-68

[24] Abramashvili, I., & Koiava, R. (2018). „25 Years of Georgia's Peace Policy.". *Caucasian House*. pp 170-179.

by the displaced community), there is no substantive work on specific challenges from the side of the government agencies, and the meetings are held in a formal discussion mode.[26]

If we are not in war, do we have peace?

You will often hear from internally displaced persons from Abkhazia that the war is not yet over for them. This phrase is perhaps reminiscent of Johan Galtung's idea of positive and negative peace, according to which what the respondents talk about is part of negative peace, a peace that involves the absence of war and violence; If the war has not yet ended, then what is the name of the situation in which the internally displaced persons in Georgia live today?

For the respondents, peace is not a given when you are struggling with daily social and economic problems related to the need for housing, health care and social security. During the in-depth interviews, the respondents repeatedly pointed out the difficult social existence of the IDPs today. Most of them are waiting for new apartments, although it is still problematic for some families to purchase basic necessities, household equipment and accommodation at home. These IDP stories once again bring to the surface the close connections between community political agency and socio-economic problems.

"I go to my new and empty house as a guest, my son went to Turkey, I work at the open market (bazaar) and we help each other, we want to bring new things to the new house" (Tskaltobo #27, woman, 63 years old;)

The difficulties caused by the conflict for the internally displaced persons from Abkhazia 30 years ago still have not decreased today. Over time, challenges and traumas in IDP families are passed down from generation to generation, depriving both individuals and families of the opportunity for stable development. Some of the interviewed respondents were young when the war started, while others remember well the pre-conflict period.

We started the conversation with the respondents by discussing the life in Abkhazia and the stories that happened long before the war. In doing so, we tried to understand the change in their opinions over several time dimensions - a long time before the war; in the pre-war period (several years before); in the recent past (Georgian-Abkhazian public and political relations in the last 30 years); and visions of the future regarding conflict resolution.

How did the war in Abkhazia begin?

Questions related to the beginnings of the conflict were not only related to the pre-conflict period. The purpose of this part of the interview guide was to get the respondents to recall relatively earlier periods, for example, memories from childhood, in playgrounds, or in school rooms, what were the relations of the displaced families with the Abkhazians, whether their memory preserves specific stories of confrontation with the Abkhazians. Most of the interviewed respondents say that they have never felt war-like tension in their cities or villages. They remember the period before the war as "harmonious", "non-conflict", "friendly" and full with "family relations". Respondents tell various stories about the peaceful coexistence of Abkhazians and Georgians. Abkhazia was a "place for everyone" for the IDPs, where different ethnic groups could live together.

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[26] Center for Social Justice, Eto Kopaliani, "Critical Analysis of the Mandate and Activities of the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civil Equality, 2023

"Where I worked, in Sukhumi, I had Abkhaz, Magrelian, Russian, Armenian and even Greek employees. There were Abkhazians in previous positions and we had no problem, on the contrary, we knew that it should be so, we respected them." (Rep. #2, woman, 53 years old, Tbilisi)

"One day would not be enough for me to tell you how we lived and how we respected [the Abkhazians]. It is very painful for me to remember this good life. As if it should have been so - we grew up thinking that he is Abkhazian and should be respected, we should respect them. So, we could not imagine what would happen, what these respectable people would do. But there were also those in whom vanity was awakened by Russians." (Rep. 17, man, 70 years old, Zugdidi).

Nostalgic memories of living together with Abkhazians also depict images of minor tensions between the communities. The events depicted on them take place a decade before the war in Abkhazia. for example,

(i) Respondent (#3, man, 48 years old) from Tskaltubo tells that confrontation between Abkhazian and Georgian boys often happened at school; that Abkhazians always helped Abkhazians, Georgians always helped Georgians.
(ii) One of the respondents (#19, female, 59 years old) from Zugdidi remembers that before the war, an Abkhazian neighbor visiting his family talked about the dangers of the war and mentioned the weapons that the Abkhazians secretly imported from Turkey, the same respondent says that the family soon forgot this "absurd" story;
(iii) Respondent (#12, female, 40 years old) from Tbilisi recalls that Georgians were often worried about the privileged positions of Abkhazians in Abkhazia (which was reflected in their appointment to positions), but they did not protest it loudly.
(iv) Respondent (#19, 46, female 59) from Zugdidi recalls that two years before the war, she witnessed a fight on a bus in Sukhumi, where an ethnic Abkhazian confronted a drunk Megrelian and told him that he was on his land.
(iv) One of the male respondents living in the new settlement of Tskaltubo (#22, male, 83 years old) recalls that a few years before the war, he heard news about how the Abkhazians were collecting money for weapons.

"[Abkhazians] always had a pro-Russian attitude, not pro-Georgian. After the Soviet Union, we were separating from Russia, and they did not want to separate from Russia, even though they were Caucasians and we have common kinship ties and traditions. But we were still a threat for them. In fact, Russia is more of a threat. They thought that we would Georgianize them, that they would lose their language and culture. Let's put it this way, this seemed a legitimate threat to them." Tskaltubo, #3, male, 48 years old.

It was revealed in the interviews that long before the war and in the pre-war period, the Abkhazians were not perceived as enemies, although they were thought of as constantly dissatisfied (#10, man, 54 years old, Tbilisi), and it was thought that they started the war with the support of Russia - "they were persuaded by the Russians", "The Russians provoked them".

"All this became problematic for me in 1989: in the first stage of the national movement, a counter-national movement appeared, instigated of course by the Russian special services, it was 88-89, and in 89 the first clash took place. I was already 14 years old and I remember that one of the epicenters of the tension was the place where I lived, on the border of Sukhumi and Gulrifshi. I remember two buses of the Russian special forces, they entered our yard and 2-meters tall soldiers checked the yard to make sure there were no weapons." (Tbilisi, #10, man, 54 years old)

Along with these small stories, internally displaced persons say that for them these stories have never been noteworthy and would not have become such if it were not for "Russia", which "turned these processes into a war". A respondent living in one of the Tskaltubo sanatoriums (#23, female, 49 years old) says that at the beginning of the war, an ethnically Georgian elderly woman living in her neighborhood could not believe that the Abkhaz separatists were attacking her village and was not leaving her home: "In order to save her, we lied that the Germans were attacking us, and then she believed, while before that she could not believe how the Abkhazians would attack us." Respondent (#23, Tskaltubo).

"Even during the war, when we moved here [Tskaltubo], we could not perceive that this was called a war. The older generation couldn't understand it, they are still having a hard time. Our generation now understands better than our parents that it was war and enmity."
(Tskaltubo, #23, woman, 49 years old)

IDPs about the "two faces" of Abkhaz people

"We didn't have a conflict with our neighbors, but I can't say anything about this Russianized new generation of Abkhazians
(Respondent 17, Zugdidi, man, 70 years old)

In the stories told by the IDPs, on the one hand, good neighborliness, cooperation, and kinship ties with the Abkhazians can be seen in the past, and on the other hand, the Abkhazians living in Abkhazia today are referred to as the descendants of the "Apsues", "new Abkhazians". For them, the face of "ancient Abkhazia" is replaced by "Russianized Abkhazia."

In their memory, "pre-war Abkhazian" is associated with a "cultured", "trustworthy" person. According to the respondents' terminology, the "new generation" living in Abkhazia today, or the generation that fought in the war against the Georgians, is referred to as the "other Abkhazian".

What actually happened in Abkhazia, what is the sense of truth and justice for the displaced, who is the culprit and who is the victim? - For all interviewed respondents, the reality and truth in the period before the war is related to such narratives as: "Before the war, tension was not felt between Abkhazians and Georgians"; "Georgians respected the privilege of Abkhazians"; "There were friendly Abkhazians and there were "other Abkhazians" who started the war"; "Russia incited the Abkhazians to war".

There is also the Georgian nationalist narrative among the IDPs, which in turn influences their opinions regarding the Abkhazian nation and, in general, the issues of first settlement in the territory of Abkhazia.

"Russia called other people Abkhazians. People were settled there during Beria's time, but Beria himself was from Abkhazia, then what could this mean? Who made him settle there? This story is not correct. The Christian population, which was called Abkhaz, were all Georgians. They were the ones who were called "Apsua". Our attitude was not like that, we didn't call them "apsues" or anything, we just thought that you were Georgian or you weren't Georgian. We didn't know each other that way, either we were all Georgians, or we weren't and there were Estonians, Greeks, Armenians, somewhere up to 25% of non-Georgian population. Abkhazians then constituted 17%, 70% were Georgians and the rest were other residents. The villages there were Estonian, Armenian, Greek." (Tskaltubo, #23, woman, 49 years old)

"I am an Abkhazian by mother, from Mokvi. The Mokvi Monastery was not inhabited by Apsu people, then when it became necessary for Russia, the "Apsus" were resettled. When I was going to school, someone said that they were taking the passports of schoolchildren from one of the villages in Gali to write 'national Abkhazian' in the passports for everyone, regardless the fact that no one wanted it. Otherwise, no one ethnically Apsua lived in Gali. Abkhazians are really Georgian Abkhazians - Galian people, and ethnically Apsua never lived in Gali. They were not in the valleys. I have a friend whose grandmother said that when she got married in Gudaut, when she married an Abkhazian there, there was not even a single apsua who spoke non-Georgian, that is, at the beginning of the 20th century." (Tskaltobo #23, woman, 49 years old)

At the same time, IDPs remember their next-door neighbors, or fellow Abkhazians, whom they do not hold responsible for the war, and tell stories when Abkhazians helped Georgians to leave the territory safely. Some of the respondents have different experiences: they clearly remember Abkhaz relatives and neighbors who committed murders, physically assaulted their family members, and robbed their houses. These heavy stories are followed by rhetorical questions of the respondents regarding the motive of the Abkhazians.

The analysis of the interviews of the respondents showed that trying to introduce a temporal aspect into the discussion is difficult, as the opinions of the respondents can be considered both in the past and in the future. For them, the beginning of the war and the current state of the conflict are the result of Russia's political game.

Searching for the culprit

During the interviews, the respondents shared their perspectives about the "culprits" on their own initiative. Their thoughts on the political responsibility of the war are multi-layered, which is expressed by highlighting several actors in the attempt to find the culprit. Based on the memories, stories, or various collective narratives left in their memory, the political responsibility of the war for them is related both to Russia, and to the Abkhazian and Georgian sides. On the one hand, IDPs hold that Russia and its imperialist goals are to blame, on the other hand, part of the Abkhazian population, in which the anti-Georgian movement was being prepared for a long time, is also to blame. IDPs also talk about the political mistakes made by the Georgian side, both before and during the war. Despite these mistakes, they add that it was impossible for the Georgian side to avoid the war.

"We all thought that there would be anti-Georgian movements, but we knew that it would be resolved within the framework of preserving the integrity of Georgia, and no one thought that it would turn into a war. This problem more or less subsided before the collapse of the Soviet Union. I remember a small clash in 1989. But In 1991 the Soviet Union was officially dissolved, and of course counter-actions from the Abkhaz side would follow, and that was expected. It would definitely happen, and Russia and their politicians did everything to make sure it would." Zugdidi, #17, man, 70 years old.

"No matter who fired first, Peter or Pavle, the bloodshed happened, right? The Russians needed it, because they could not throw out the Georgians with one blow, so the Russian special service, army, and aviation got involved. Russia was actually a participant in this conflict from a military point of view, and both Russia and the Chechens decided its fate. Abkhazians saw a great damage and loss of human lives, and that is why it is difficult to talk to them today. Someone may regret it, but they cannot say it out loud - they will be asked, what did we fight for then, why did we shed blood? That is what we Georgians also say. If we join Russia now, what will we say about April 9th? What would the people have had sacrificed themselves for, what would the people have had died for?" Tskaltubo, #3, man, 48 years old

23 out of 27 respondents identified Russia as the culprit in the conflict. Some of the interviewed respondents simultaneously accuse Russia and the Abkhaz side of war crimes committed against the civilian Georgian population during the war. For them, the current Abkhazian political class is completely merged with Russia and it is difficult to distinguish an Abkhazian politician from a Russian politician.

"My father, a great man, was killed by Abkhazians. His forehead was pierced. We were already on our way leaving, and he just went to get something, I don't know what, and then there was a fight near the market, someone was killed there, and the Georgians were defending him, and one of these Georgians was my father. And you know how these things happen. They didn't even hesitate, they shot him in an instant. I know a lot of other people they were tortured by the Abkhazians, the terrible stories that are told… […] It's hard for me to talk like this, to think about this. I know exactly who killed my father, we knew that family. I also know the last name. Then an Abkhaz relative helped us bury him." (Zugdidi, #19, woman, 59 years old).

The respondent from Zugdidel (#17, male, 70 years old) recalls an episode where he met an ethnically Georgian soldier.

"An 80-year-old man was looking for a cow, they said he was an agent, and he tied him to a tree. The people of Jaba (Jaba Ioseliani) tied him to a huge eucalyptus. I said 'boys, what are you doing to the poor man', but they responded by ordering to tie me to the tree as well."

His wife continues:

"I screamed and dragged him out from there, and that's how they killed that man with a machine gun, that's how our men killed our man. What could that old man spy on? Who would spare you then? They did such horrible things and then would Abkhazians spare you? Then they also had Chechens, and the Chechens didn't know me or anyone there and didn't respect anyone. They started to burn whole villages. Chechens killed my father." (Respondent #15, woman, 69 years old, Zugdidi).

In the context of the sense of justice, the respondents' harsh assessments of the political class and nationalism of that time are interesting. For example, two respondents from Zugdidi say that in their opinion, the mistakes of Georgian politicians in the period before the war, as well as the "uncontrollable situations in the Georgian army" during the war (Respondent #15, female, 69 years old, Zugdidi) (Respondent #17, female, 70 years old, Zugdidi) is the responsibility of the then-existing government. Some respondents refrain from this assessment and say that whatever decision the Georgian political class made, the events would still develop according to Russia's imperialist plans (#3, man, 48 years old, Tskaltubo).

"I knew that something like Bartholomew's Night was being prepared. Bit it wasn't Stalin's times, to put Georgians in a wagon and take them to the gulags. The Abkhazians didn't even have the resources for this, the Russians couldn't even do it so openly. Therefore, something had to happen and it had to be a conflict, and the Abkhazian side did everything for it. On this side, there was civil war and banditry, with its pretend army and guard. Everything turned out so that Russia took maximum advantage and did what it was going to do, including with our [ethnic Georgians] even direct help - we had a direct agency. [...] What could they [Georgian political class] do? They could not do anything, everything was already decided. One thing they should have known was that many people would die and they should have avoided that and controlled the army" Tskaltubo, #3, man, 48 years old

Criticism of the Georgian political class is also related to the past 30 years of non-investigation of crimes committed by both the Georgian and Abkhaz sides. Respondents also name specific reasons for

"mistakes" (#3, man, 48 years old, Tskaltubo), among which was the questionable composition of the army ranks. "Mkhedrion took an oath and at first it was made up of brave boys, but then it was filled with traitors and robbers" (respondent from the new settlement of Tskaltubo).

"There were Abkhazians in the main positions, Georgians as advisors. We, Georgians, had no enmity with them. But they did not want us and chose Russia. Our politicians turned out to be weak, they could not control the situation. When Russian peacekeepers were legalized in 1994-95, then I decided in my heart that we lost Abkhazia. When the Russian army arrived there as peacekeepers, our government at that time literally handed over Georgia to Russia. Abkhazia ended for me then. But it will always exist in my thoughts." Tskaltubo, #20, woman, 72 years old;

"Chechen terrorists, that is, the army of the Russian Federation, took Kochara, my village. At that time, my Abkhaz uncles came to us, talked to the elders and then they took us to their village. If there was ethnic enmity, would my Abkhazian uncles have been able to move us, Georgians, to their village? This part of the population decided to continue living in Russia, and the rest decided to make their own state independent. Russia saw the commonality among those people that were ethnically different, otherwise my villager, ethnically Abkhazian, fought here, on the side of the Georgians. (Tskaltubo, #23, woman, 49 years old)

Respondents name Russia and its weakening as both the cause and the solution to the conflict. For them, the current events in Ukraine are perceived as a precondition for Russia's weakening, which, in their opinion, will lead to the disappearance of Russia's interests in Abkhazia. Some respondents think that the war started in Ukraine will create new opportunities for Georgia in terms of negotiations with Abkhazians. For other respondents, on the contrary, the ongoing war is associated with a great danger and is perceived as the beginning of a new conflict/war. This part of the interviews is particularly interesting, as their positions reveal the fear of war and the desire to avoid war/maintain peace.

The multi-layeredness of the conflict is indicated by the inconsistency of the opinions of the respondents regarding the beginnings of the war. For the respondents, the pre-war period is harmoniously characterized in the context of relations with Abkhazians. It is difficult for them to recall such stories that reflect the severe tension between Abkhazians and Georgians, or if they do recall such stories, they add that these were isolated cases. Georgian IDPs believe that both before and after the war, Abkhazians were not only neighbors, but also brothers and family members. They are sure that their neighbors in Abkhazia or those people who "remember" living with Georgians, still think the same way about Georgians. And if anyone is complicating the relationship between these two ethnic groups today, it is Russia and Russian-led Abkhazian politicians, as well as "new generation" Abkhazians, who are growing up under Russian propaganda.

Respondents' assessments also reflect the political chaos and weak state and political decisions of the 1990s. The respondents agree that "the Abkhazians would not start the war by their own decision" and such a development of events was part of Russia's plans. This was facilitated by the 2008 war and the occupation of Georgian territories by Russia. During the crimes committed in the war, the majority of the respondents recall separate stories about the brutal actions of the Abkhazians. In some cases, there is also talk about the responsibilities of the government of that time in relation to the introduction of the army into Abkhazia and the control of the army in general.

"Georgians did not spare Georgians – you know what did they do in Samegrelo, what kind of punitive operations they undertook, the gang formation of that time? So why would Abkhazians not have the same fears? No matter what one says, both sides need to consider the outlook of the other side. If you shout from here that you are right in everything, the Abkhazian will say the same. Of course, Georgia is united and Abkhazia is Georgia, this is a historical fact. If we talk about who is settler and who is not,

then we were also once displaced, these are nuances and will take us very far. We had to think about how to maintain each other." (Zugdidi, #19, female, 59)

Searching for solutions: IDP perspectives on current issues of conflict transformation and peacebuilding

Return to Abkhazia and inadmissibility of war

"We are mothers and we have children. No mother will agree to war. [...] For me, it cannot be worth killing my boys. For what? I don't think anything is worth the death of my children, I don't know what others think, but I went through the war, I was 15 years old when my father died in the war, and I know what war is and I know exactly why I don't want it. I and other women will tell you, all the men here as well, that we do not want war with anyone. Nothing is worth going through that once more. (Respondent from the new settlement of Tskaltubo).

The main political desire of the interviewed respondents is to return to Abkhazia. It is important that none of them considers the return of the territories by force, the return to Abkhazia is considered for them as a result of dialogue and negotiations, with the return of their homes and planning to live there later. The majority of respondents note that with the passage of time, this issue should become a critical priority for the state, since for them the way of "return" that goes through the dialogue is connected to those people who still remember Abkhazia and have relatives in Abkhazia.

Regarding the peaceful return of Abkhazia, one part of the respondents thinks that these events will start in parallel with the weakening of Russia; And the second part indicates the importance of the activation of the state's peace policy. Security guarantees for them are related to Europe and the EU integration. IDPs see the prospects of the country's development in the integration with the West and note that the dialogue with the Abkhazian side should be devoted to the existing and future successful cooperation with the West and introduction of the new opportunities.

"No one, and not many Georgians, know better than us, the dislocated community, what Russia is like and what its goals are. Who would look towards Russia for a better future?! Therefore, we travel - my neighbor's son is in Obcha, his wine has gone beyond Europe and America. We have these prospects and security and we have to communicate this to them, that if they want to sell something in Europe, go somewhere, if they want to travel, or study, that we have these opportunities. We need to explain that we want to be in the European Union and we have other goals altogether, and to ask to come join us. We should express that we do not want war and their destruction, that we are all talking about the European Union. We should tell them that.''

Survey respondents whose family members or relatives died in the war in Abkhazia say that "everyone has anger", but today "peace is more important" for everyone (respondent #26, female, 35 years old, Tskaltubo). One of the respondents from the IDP settlement of Tskaltubo says that he, together with his family and neighbors, "almost every day" thinks about peace, the past and the future, which, according to our observation, has turned into one and the same time dimension for people affected by the conflict.

For the IDPs, the main reason for the inadmissibility of the war is primarily related to the loss of human lives. Respondents of different age categories of the research tell what they saw and experienced 30 years ago: tragic news - about deceased parents, children, young children, friends or other family members were part of their daily life. Fear of death of loved ones is their main argument when talking about the inadmissibility of war.

"My aunt lost three family members. I never talk to her about my house in Sukhumi or any other things there. It's a pain that never goes away, you know?! The war took everything away from us, I think people forget this. And what will bring all of this back? Nothing, especially not another war. Who can you mention another war to, to the mother whose child is dead?" (Respondent #5, man, 40 years old, Tskaltubo)

"I have thought about what you are asking me now, I keep thinking about that when we are sitting here, my neighbors, or whoever, sometimes even passers-by, we talk and reminisce about everything. We don't forget any detail and we tell the horrors that we experienced. We think how we could have avoided war and what to do now. We tell our children. I tell them to sit down, they understand what we say and they should know. The future must know what is bad, that war is bad." (Respondent #26, woman, 35 years old, Tskaltubo).

"When you realize that war does not bring results, you think that good attitude is better, reconciliation is better, that way we will be stronger, together.[...] both sides have suffered a lot. I have suffered and I know. We should be able to do more by living together." (Respondent #5, male, 40 years old, Tskaltubo)

One of the respondents from Tskaltubo (#5, man, 40 years old), who was 9 years old when the war started, recalls episodes when small children played war games on the street, in which their enemy was an Abkhazian. But now an Abkhazian is a brother to him and he tries to emphasize this in his personal conversations with Abkhazians. When asked how the face of the enemy was transformed into the face of the brother today, the respondent tells us that he does not know exactly when this change happened, although he can confidently say that this change was brought about by the desire to avoid war.

"I always had aggression towards Abkhazians. And the tragedy of my family is an injustice to me. They too may have lost loved ones, but at least they still lived in their homes. I still have [aggression] but I don't think about it... it doesn't help, now I think about something else - that if we and the Abkhazians will have the same future, we should live together and in peace." [#5, man, 40 years old, Tskaltubo)

This context is important to the extent that the desire to avoid violent conflict has led to a discussion about the need for "dialogue" and "negotiations" among internally displaced persons.

Peace

"Peace for me is security, freedom and love. You can't conduct peaceful politics if you don't love the person with whom you have to fix the relationship. Relationship, friendship, if you don't have either of these, then you can't do anything." Tskaltubo. #25, female, 43 years old;

Abkhaz family members, distant relatives, classmates, godchildren and old friends are groups of people with whom IDPs try to establish communication in their own ways. 12 out of 27 surveyed respondents say that they have maintained active communication in Abkhazia through social networks. "Missing them", "Interest in how they live" - these are the reasons cited by the respondents as a motive for communication. Only 2 out of 12 respondents participated in a dialogue format abroad with Abkhazians, and only one of them has maintained communication with an Abkhazian participant.

Research participants say that IDPs have enough information about the political picture in Abkhazia. The social network provides an opportunity for this, where they see that some Abkhazians "want

neither Georgia nor Russia". The respondent points out that the Georgian side should talk to these people, show them the possibilities that they have if they stay with Georgia.

An important part of the findings of the research is related to stories about the possibilities of citizens' migration to Abkhazia and the current situation there. The aunt of one of the respondents was invited to Abkhazia by her Abkhazian relatives and was warned to refrain from speaking Georgian. The same story is told by another respondent who experienced the risk of speaking Georgian in Abkhazia.

And yet, it is interesting to see what topics unite Georgians and Abkhazians. The unusual narratives of the respondents reflect a great gap between active contact with Abkhazians on the one hand, and, alienation on the other. The respondents say that they do not talk about the Georgian-Abkhazian war at all. Expressing opinions related to war is a significant communication barrier for both sides. According to them, they generally cannot agree on Georgia's role in this war - Georgian refugees are trying to emphasize Russia's crimes, and Abkhazian relatives see this approach as blaming Georgians' guilt on Russia. After the war in Abkhazia, a small number of IDPs went to Russia. One of the respondents from Zugdidi tells that while he was in Russia shortly after the end of the war, he met his Abkhaz neighbors, with whom he still has contact. "Unheard stories were told to me from all sides. Today we don't talk about the war anymore, for us the war is a red line, if we have to talk about the war then we have to argue." (Respondent #13, woman, 58 years old, Zugdidi).

Each respondent has individual definitions of peace, conflict resolution, reconciliation. For them, peace is related to "security", "stability", "goods".

One of the respondents also recalls that her Abkhazian relative had shared a Georgian song on her Facebook page: "I wrote to her that she should beware that her husband doesn't see it, because her husband is a "bitter Abkhazian"; But she wrote back to me saying that he can see it if he wants to, because he already knows her attitude regarding the Georgians; then I wrote back that she talks in such a way that if that's really how things stand there at the moment, then I can just as well get up and go down there now; and she wrote back that I should get up and go down there, who is stopping me?" (respondent #25, woman, 43 years old, Tskaltubo).

One of the survey respondents living in the new settlement of Tskaltubo IDPs showed us a video taken by a member of his family living in Abkhazia. The video shows the respondent's house in Gagra and an Abkhazian living there, who gives permission to a Georgian to shoot a video of the house. Abkhaz says in the video that this house belongs to his grandmother and he will start renovating it soon.

The stories of the IDPs show that talking about ways to resolve the conflict from the Georgian side is related to the weakening of Russia, but on the other hand, the Abkhazians look at this fact with fear. One respondent from Tbilisi notes that the format of direct dialogue with the Abkhazian people is acceptable for him, but it is unacceptable for the state to talk to the representatives of the de facto administration of Abkhazia.

"The government may change in Russia, it may weaken as a result of the war in Ukraine, and the Allies may not support it. Russia will always be stronger than us, but maybe the events in Ukraine will weaken it. We should use this moment and talk to the Abkhazians, to show that we are not, as the Russians tell them, cannibals." Tbilisi, #16, female, 31 years old;

The analysis of the interviews showed that it is quite difficult to find a common language between the Abkhaz and Georgian sides regarding the war. This also makes it relevant to discuss the weaknesses of the peace policy, which for years should have systematically conducted bilateral discussions about the search for truth or justice. Today, IDPs are left alone in direct dialogue with Abkhazians. On the one

hand, they have the feeling that they cannot influence the peace policy and have lost confidence in these processes, on the other hand, they continue strengthening individual relations with the Abkhazians.

"If some individuals Sukhumi alone manage to contact the Abkhazians there, come on, we could look for such people and try to talk to the Abkhazians through these people. I think the problem is that there is still no desire from the upper classes." (Respondent #25, female, 43 years old, Tskaltubo);

"Someone may have been convinced to change their mind through propaganda in Abkhazia. We should bring them this information that we don't want to destroy them, on the contrary we want to co-exist. They need to consider our position as well, that we have the right to live there, just like they do. Such information can be brought to them, otherwise I do not believe in these peace processes or some kind of conflict resolution. The conflict can be resolved and stopped only if the force that maintains this conflict is stopped, it doesn't matter whose force it is, as long as this force is strong, this conflict will not be resolved." Tskaltubo, #3, male, 48 years old

Despite these difficulties, according to the respondents, relations between Abkhazians and Georgians in the social network are becoming more active day by day. Maintained human relations are an important resource for the transformation of the conflict, which the IDPs themselves see the need to take into account in the political agenda. For them, this resource is limited, as future generations will find it difficult to find these types of human connections with their fellow Abkhazians.

"If my generation and the generation older than me does not assume the role of mediation, believe me, politicians cannot do it. If you haven't lived there, you don't know the rules of where to caress and where to fight, to put it bluntly, then you can't talk to them. We had a lot of fights, but still we were achieving something in the end, we all had some good stories about Sokhumi and then we would start laughing about them. I think that politicians will not be able to do anything. Not even the Minister of Reconciliation will be able to achieve something, they are not doing anything, there are many issues to be resolved. This will not be done by sitting in the offices, if they do not come out and talk to the people. We want the dialogue. But perhaps they do not allow our minister to do more. I really have thought about this. Because otherwise, why doesn't anyone ask us anything? (Tskaltubo. #25, woman, 43 years old;)

Involvement of IDPs in peace politics and future perspectives

Radical Optimism vs Radical Pessimism

In the last 30 years, war and structural violence, internal and external political events, have significantly transformed the collective memory of the displaced people, their traumas and their anger. From the end of the war until 2008, the possibility of returning to Abkhazia and the political reality were promising for them. After 2008, this hope and, accordingly, the perception of the community as a political agent, is slowly disappearing. This is accompanied by severe social problems. The radical optimism of the IDPs is gradually turning into radical pessimism.

They perceive themselves as "invisible side", "already forgotten", "not interesting". IDPs believe that in the global political conflict, where there are big political players, their voice is lost. These views of the IDPs are critically important to monitor, as there is a danger that over time, their trust, interest and initiatives in the politics of peace will slow down and be forgotten.

Peace as a way to resolve the conflict interestingly enters the respondents' perceptions in their daily life and in such cultural and traditional details as celebrations or mourning rituals and the toasts of Abkhazian IDPs, which changed according to the political processes in the country for 30 years. If during the end of the war, the toasts sounded like "we shall return if not this year, then next year" [to Abkhazia], now the prospects of return have been "postponed" for an indefinite period of time and the Abkhaz IDPs are now toasting for the "peaceful return" and add that " the blood of the Georgians in Abkhazia shall not pass without a trace".

Although the main course of the state's peace policy is known to the interviewed respondents, they think that their opinions as opinions of the internally displaced people are not reflected in the state policy. In response to the question of whether they have information on the current peace policy of Georgia, the interviewed respondents say that they get information mainly through media and social networks. 2 of them have participated in a direct dialogue format, but through a meeting organized by an international organization abroad.

"We are so isolated that we don't know anything about what is happening. We, the IDPs, who can actually do something. As a matter of fact, these [state institutions] can't do anything, and they won't be able to do anything. A person who has no basic memories, no stories about the city, what can you talk to them about. Just as I cannot become a historian of Tbilisi, neither can a person from Tbilisi speak about Sukhumi. It is me who knows my Abkhaz neighbor." Zugdidi, #13, woman, 58 years old

While the IDPs talk about their involvement in direct dialogue, their narratives show more skepticism along with their support. For most of the interviewed IDPs, the format and efforts of peace talks developed by the state over the last 30 years are insufficient.

Skepticism is also caused by the fact that (i) IDPs are not actively involved in negotiations; (ii) ties/relationships between both Abkhaz and Georgian older generations are suspended, while it is believed that it will be much easier to find a common language between these generations than with Abkhazians born after the war; (iii) their social and economic problems make it difficult to participate in peace processes, first of all because the needs of the IDPs have not yet been met and, as in Tskaltubo, people are still living in sanatoriums; and secondly, because the low-class groups of the IDPs are separated from the peace process: while their emotional connection with the conflict and their personal information about the war should become the main marker for state peace policy, this same emotional aspect often creates a barrier for it.

"For them, we are the people who are always asking for something. For example, they know me like that here, even now I have documents in court demanding something. Because of this, then they don't think about involving you in these activities. They will take the one who is satisfied, and they will not ask me. I have problems and I'm justifiably angry, but I want them to still ask me my opinion as well - I'm still an IDP" (Tskaltubo, #23, female, 49 years old).

"I am the direct source, I saw what happened there, and I know the thoughts of the neighbors and relatives of the other displaced people. If not me, who else should be involved in this process?" (Respondent #15, woman, 69 years old, Zugdidi).

Respondents positively evaluate the health and educational prospects for Abkhazians in Georgia today, but in return they demand the weakening of radical positions on the part of Abkhazians and the emergence of opportunities for an effective direct dialogue. They also talk about the importance of women's involvement in the process of peace building, and talk about this in more general context of the need for new initiatives and approaches from the state. Female respondents emphasize common points of contact between Abkhazian women and Georgian women, which are related to dead

children, husbands, family members, and the subsequent difficult life in exile and feeling of constant danger.

Observing the interviews in this part of the questionnaire, as well as observing the level of information of the respondents about the aspects of the peace policy of Georgia, it is clear that internally displaced persons have a vague idea about the issues of official negotiations, the topics to be discussed, the results, international discussions, the agenda of the civil dialogue format, and the work of local organizations.

When asked what should be done in order for Georgian-Abkhazian political and public relations to be peaceful until the conflict is resolved, the respondents answer that the Abkhazian and Georgian sides should promote dialogue and relations between them, and some respondents believe that the Georgian side is ready for this and Abkhazians have no political will. One of the respondents from Tbilisi believes that in this context it is important to activate the state policy. The experts working in the field have the same opinion, according to them, Georgia should make the trajectory of peace policy more dynamic under the conditions of occupation and send more initiatives towards Abkhazia.

At the end of the in-depth interviews, as a summary, we once again asked the respondents to identify the roles of the West, Russia, and domestic forces in the conflict resolution process. In contrast to the role of Russia, respondents' opinions regarding the West are divided into two. One part thinks that the West, and in particular, the European Union and NATO, may become the tools that will regulate the internal conflicts in Georgia. The second part of the respondents supports the opinions of the government representatives and says that the country should maintain peace and "should not engage in war", "should not anger Russia", "the West will start another war in Georgia" - say the respondents (#3, #19, # 21,29). For this part of the interviewed respondents, the way to resolve the conflict starts with weakening Russia, and then they talk about the need for direct dialogue.

Direct dialogue

An important finding of the study is related to the perceptions of the respondents regarding the issues of conflict resolution. For them, opportunities for direct dialogue and daily connections with Abkhaz relatives open the way to conflict resolution. For the IDPs, the possibility of return to Abkhazia is based on small achievements, which have various benefits for Georgians and Abkhazians, for example, freedom of movement for both parties.

"We have an organization for women IDPs about freedom of movement and we have talked about it many times. Recently, this topic has become more active. What matters here are the conditions we impose. They have many opportunities from us, but what type of movement do they want, whether they will accept Georgian passports or not, and if they do not, maybe they will offer us something better instead, these should be a matter of this dialogue and we should work hard on both sides for this." (Respondent # 6, woman, 54 years old, Tbilisi)

It can be said that the attempt of direct dialogue between IDPs and Abkhazians through social networks has already started. Those respondents who have active communication with the nearby Abkhazians are optimistic about the possibility of direct dialogue.

At the same time, they perceive the experience of coexistence in the past, common stories, traditions, memories, as the basis for an opportunity to transform relations into peaceful coexistence with Abkhazians in the future.

"I remember that the death of "Maradona" from Sokhumi united Georgians and Abkhazians the most. He lived in Sokhumi and was loved by the whole village. "Maradona" was my whole childhood. We would give him 20 kopecks and he would dance. When we heard that „Maradona" passed away, about 10 years ago, I swear to humanity, we were united by that pain, it was a memory of our common childhood. Here we collected money and asked the Abkhazians to put up a stone on his grave in our name." (Rep. #25, woman, 40 years old, Tskaltubo).

Peaceful coexistence with Abkhazians is "possible" for all interviewed respondents. However, with the passage of time, they see the change of generations and the loss of the experiences and stories of coexistence as a threat to it. Radical pessimism still appears in the conversation about the future.

According to the respondents, the perception of Abkhazia as an ideal multicultural living environment and harmonious place may be lost as a result of generational change. Discussions about the passage of time and new generations cause them "fear" and hopelessness. This once again allows them to stress that those who "remember" and those who have "experienced" living with the Abkhazians should be involved in the peace policy as much as possible and should be able to communicate with the Abkhazians.

"I am still a representative of the generation that remembers what it was like to live with Abkhazians when I was young. I took part in a dialogue format in one of the countries where there were Abkhazians, and I got scared - I realized how much difference there is between Abkhazians of my generation and those much younger than me. You can't even talk to the new generation, when together with an Abkhazian girl of my age ... we soon found something in common." (Respondent #25, woman, 40 years old, Tskaltubo).

After the return to Abkhazia, the respondents' opinions about the management of the country are vague and not concrete. Their perspectives are mostly limited to daily coexistence practices, about which they have certain ideas: for example, they are sure that if they return to Abkhazia, relations will be restored very soon; On the other hand, some respondents are more skeptical about the first period of return to Abkhazia and believe that security guarantees will be needed; One of the respondents says that he plans to open a cafe together with his cousin living in Abkhazia; A 40-year-old male respondent from Tskaltubo says that his family is already here (in Tskaltubo), but he will definitely find his own house and yard in Abkhazia and arrange it so that he can go back for vacations in summer.

Conclusion

The purpose of the interviews conducted within the framework of this study was to explore the views and perspectives of the internally displaced population from Abkhazia in relation to peace and conflict resolution. For the interviewed IDPs, the period before the war is perceived through harmonious memories. Despite the fact that long before the war, alienation and small interpersonal conflicts between Abkhazians and Georgians were already felt, all respondents participating in the research say that such a scenario of the development of events was unexpected for them.

The political responsibility of the war for the IDPs is first of all related to Russia's political goals - goals that, according to them, easily convinced the Abkhazian population with anti-Georgian sentiments. Parallel to this, according to the IDPs, the political class in Georgia was distinguished by its weak and inconsistent decisions and was unable to prevent the large-scale losses of the war.

The conversation with the IDPs is accompanied by an ambivalent perception of the Abkhazians. Aggression towards Abkhazians and the feeling of injustice during and after the war have now transformed into a desire for dialogue and for finding a common ground. Direct dialogue, involvement

in peace processes, formal and informal meetings are supported by the interviewed IDPs, although less trust in state institutions and geopolitical events cause some skepticism among them.

The war started by Russia in Ukraine again reminded the IDPs of the brutality of war and the rapidly changing geopolitical context. For one part of them these events are associated with fear, for the other - with hope. The reason for fear is that Russia could start a war in Georgia, the reason for hope is that in the conditions of the weakening of Russia's influence, a window of opportunity opens for finding a common language with the Abkhazians, which should be used adequately. The West and Europe are the right path of the country for the surveyed respondents.

The difficult economic existence of the displaced persons, which has not changed much for them in the last 30 years, is transforming into structural violence. In this context, our respondent IDPs consider the creation of social, health, educational, employment, or other types of programs along with material assistance programs as crucial. Otherwise, it is possible to lose them as a stigmatized and marginalized part of society, and risk losing an important actor of peace policy.

Based on the interviews we conducted, despite the fact that a number of issues related to war and conflict in the past are still tabooed in the process of communication between Abkhazians and Georgians, they still have the desire to actively communicate. This is expressed in daily communication, especially in sharing joys and sorrows, emotional support and cooperation. Thus, it is important that these examples of direct dialogue and informal communications are integrated into peace policy and shared at an institutional level.

In the part of the research about forgiveness, peace, or finding a solution, the opinions of the IDPs varied. However, the common markers are related to the fact that they are all victims of an unjust conflict, and all this has changed their lives and brought "endless poverty" (Respondent, #7, female, 52 years old, Tskaltubo). The feeling that they are victims of injustice is intensified by the fact that the future is "unclear" for them: (i) they have economic and social problems, they worry about the future of their children and their education; (ii) they do not have a stable sense of security due to geopolitical events; (iii) under these conditions, there is distrust towards the peace policy - in the case of a dialogue with the local government or the government of Abkhazia, this "only chance" would still be used by them to talk about primary needs.

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Appendix 1

	Tbilisi	Tskaltubo	Zugdidi
Number (sum 27)	8	15	4
Respondent #, gender, age	#2/ woman, age 43 #4/ woman, age 55 ;#6/ woman, age 54 #8/ man, age 61 #10/ man, age 54 #12/ woman, age 49; #14/ man, age 29; #16/ woman, age 31	#1/ man, age 68; #3/ man, age 48; #5/ man, age 49; #7/ woman, age 52; #9/ woman, age 64; #11/ woman, age 32; #21/ woman, age 28; #20/ woman, age 72; #22/ man, age 83; #23/ woman, age 42; #24/ woman, age 67; #25/ woman, age 43; #26/ woman, age 35; #27/ woman, age 63; #18/ woman, age 55	#13/ woman, age 58; #15/ woman, age 69; #17/ man, age 70; #19/ woman, age 59