INTERNATIONAL PEACE FORUM CAUCASUS (IPFC)

| Conference Report |

Identities as an obstacle for conflict resolution in the region?

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Organized by

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SUMMARY

The first International Peace Forum Caucasus (IPFC) – organized by the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) in cooperation with the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS) – took place from 22 to 27 June 2015 in Tbilisi, Georgia. The title "Identities as an obstacle for conflict resolution in the region?" set the agenda for four days of presentations and discussion. From a more theoretical, socio-psychological perspective, the conference was to discuss how ethnic and national identities influence the course of (potentially) violent conflicts and the prospects for their resolution. This theoretical approach was then to be applied to identifying strategies for stabilization and conflict resolution in the South Caucasus and to uncovering the role that external actors may play in supporting reconciliation efforts in the region.

About 40 participants attended the meeting hosted by GFSIS, including journalists, representatives from civil society organizations and government, university students and researchers from Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Germany and Switzerland. The conference was held in Russian and German, with simultaneous interpretation provided. In the course of four days, over ten presentations were given by international experts, each followed by lively and often heated discussion. As a special highlight, the conference featured a role-playing game on the topic of political reconciliation on the third day. This simulation brought participants from Armenia and Azerbaijan together in each of the negotiation teams with the aim of producing a peace plan for the two countries. With real-life peace talks at a stalemate for many years, the two mixed delegations had difficulty moving beyond the entrenched positions, despite efforts made by a helpful and impartial team of chairpersons.

The topics discussed on the various conference panels covered a broad range of issues pertaining to conflicts in the South Caucasus region. On the first day, the participants addressed the general concept of identities as well as the specific concept of ethnic and national identities from a socio-psychological and historical perspective. Using this theoretical basis, the panelists from Day 2 analyzed the effects of identity issues in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The second panel of the day, "History, national identity and collective consciousness", also delved into the historical roots of unceasing hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The third day commenced with a panel on Georgia and the state's problems concerning the de facto independent political entities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. During this discussion in particular, the role of external actors such as Russia, NATO and the EU along with their (limited) possibilities for exerting influence came into focus. The fourth and final day began with a presentation by the Ambassador of the Swiss Confederation to Georgia, Guenther Baechler, who presented interesting details about the existing discourse among political elites within both Georgia and the EU. Finally, a closing session provided participants with the opportunity to revisit the most controversial topics and sum up the results attained in the four days prior.

The conference primarily aimed to bring together excellent young academics, journalists and future leaders from countries in the South Caucasus. In this region, personal contacts between the different countries are rare and all too often happen in a negative or even hostile context, particularly between Armenia and Azerbaijan. So apart from academic debates, merely spending time together was a success in itself and will hopefully go on to have a positive impact on conflict dynamics in the region.

SESSIONS

DAY ONE: TUESDAY, 23 JUNE 2015

After welcoming remarks made by **Kakha Gogolashvili** from the host organization GFSIS and **Egbert Jahn** from the University of Frankfurt, **Christopher Cohrs** from the Jacobs University Bremen opened the conference with a presentation on recent identity-related research topics and results in social psychology. He first introduced the concept of *social identity* and explained how one's belonging to a certain group has been an important factor for human survival throughout history. Strong identification within one's own group – to which all positive traits are attributed (*ingroup love*) – may at times lead to a negative perception of other groups (*outgroup hate*).

Dr. Christopher Cohrs, Jacobs University, Bremen:
Construction of identities in modern society: from a socio-psychological perspective

Cohrs did, however, argue that this correlation is not inevitable, as evidenced by empirical studies of aboriginal tribes from South Africa and New Zealand. Enmity between groups only occurs under specific conditions, such as salient group boundaries, competition over scarce resources, inequality in power or economic status, and real or perceived safety threats to one's own group. He pointed out the especially problematic situation of conflicts persisting so long that hate towards the other group has become part of a group's own identity. **Cohrs** suggested that in this case only a change of identity can resolve the confrontation and enable peaceful coexistence or even cooperation.

A change of identity, however, represents a drawn-out and difficult process. Some strategies that have proven useful include, above all, trust-building measures and the establishment of contact, be it personal, extended or through media. Equally important is a re-evaluation of one's own position, the acceptance of guilt or mistakes and the development of a common understanding of historical events. The main goal of all these instruments is to increase the capacity for empathy towards the other group. At the end of his presentation, **Christopher Cohrs** reminded the audience that measures that seem so simple and plausible in theory may take years to implement and face repeated setbacks in practice.

Christopher Cohrs, Kakha Gogolashvili

Bruno Schoch from PRIF likewise brought the concept of identity into focus in his presentation. In contrast to **Cohrs**, he dealt with a specific form of group identification: the nation. According to **Schoch**, the nation as an "imagined political community" is a relatively young idea, which only became prominent in the late 18th century and which is intertwined with the development of the modern state and the rise of an educated middle class. It is also a highly subjective category being

that it is based on selectively narrated historical events. **Schoch** criticized that, while this view is broadly accepted in academic debate, many political actors still treat nationality as something objective that cannot be denied or altered.

In the second part of his presentation, **Bruno Schoch** emphasized the particular role of war and violence in the formation of a nation. The correlation between the two goes both ways: On the one hand, a group's identity is built and solidified through shared experiences of danger and violence. Concurrently, the demarcation of one's own people and the definition of a common enemy helps generate the social cohesion necessary to win wars. As such, nationality and prejudice against the "others" are often exploited for political reasons. As the previous speaker, **Schoch** concluded that ethnicity and nationality are not problematic in themselves; it is their political instrumentalization that leads to conflict.

With regard to concrete conflicts in the Caucasus, **Bruno Schoch** rejected the idea of separation as a possible solution. According to him, the ethnically heterogeneous nation-state where people of any ethnical or religious background may live together peacefully should be seen as the ultimate goal in any conflict resolution. As a necessary precondition for this model, an equitable implementation of each person's human and civil rights must be secured. Often, dividing territories presents itself as a straightforward method for ending ethnic clashes. But in the long run, as **Schoch** concluded, conflict resolution remains incomplete as its deeper roots are not eliminated. The tense relations that exist between Greece and Turkey decades after the division of Cyprus serve as a cautionary example.

Dr. Bruno Schoch, PRIF: Images of others and enemies: the ambivalent role of identity factors for conflict dynamics and resolution

The notion of identity, its impact on conflict, and the possibilities of reconciliation were met with interest by most of the participants. However, as became evident in the ensuing discussion, some aspects would need further clarification. **Kakha Gogolashvili** and **Nazrin Husanova** expressed concerns that the effort to dilute important identity traits such as national or ethnic identity may actually be harmful since historically identities have played a central role in survival. **Christopher Cohrs** made clear, however, that he did not suggest dismissing identity traits but transforming them into a more cooperative position. Such a transformation would aim at removing enmity towards a certain other group as a defining feature of identity.

Responding to **David Leupold's** remark that ethnicity is likewise not an objective notion, **Christopher Cohrs** recommended substituting ethnicity as a defining category with other traits. According to him, the idea of civil society could prove promising: here, all people are to be seen as members of one multicultural and multiethnic society, with the same rights and the same value. However, cultural competence is a crucial precondition for the success of such a societal order; this can only be developed by way of frequent intercultural contact. **Bruno Schoch** again emphasized the distinction between *ethnos* and *demos*, which he had justified in his presentation. National identity in itself is a dangerous idea: it has a strong impact on people's lives and can override other identities such as education and social background, hindering them from unfolding their unifying potential.

The first two sessions of the day gave the participants the opportunity to exchange views on theoretical concepts in understanding ethnic conflict. Their interdisciplinarity also made it possible to

combine helpful insights from the areas of political theory, history and social psychology. As such, the first panels laid the groundwork for the ensuing discussions that more closely investigated the practice of conflict resolution and transformation in the South Caucasus region.

In the afternoon of the first conference day, **Eva-Maria Auch** from the Humboldt University of Berlin spoke on the historical roots of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict or, more broadly, the confrontation between Azerbaijan and Armenia. At the very outset of her presentation, she stressed that it would be too simple to completely deny the role of identity factors in this conflict or to reduce it to mere political or economic competition. The disputed territories have a deeper, historical meaning for both peoples; for that reason, **Auch** suggested viewing identity and other conflict generating factors as intertwined and mutually reinforcing.

While Armenians and Azerbaijanis have experienced disputes and violent clashes throughout the 20[th]century, only the collapse of Soviet statehood led to unprecedented violent escalation in the late 1980s. **Eva-Maria Auch** made it clear that the Soviet government certainly played a central role in generating, or at least aggravating, the conditions that ultimately led to war. The Stalinist definition of a nation by a particular language and territory politicized ethnic groups in the Caucasus; the alteration of border demarcations and mass resettlements paved the way for subsequent conflicts. Still, all these factors only became relevant once the central government in Moscow loosened its hold on the Republics. With the collapse of the state monopoly, wild privatization and unchecked competition for political and economic power began; new values and political ideas led to the radicalization of societal groups along ethnic boundaries.

Prof. Dr. Eva-Maria Auch, Humboldt University of Berlin: Genesis and character of the South Caucasus conflicts

In the discussion that followed, **Bruno Schoch** supposed that there might exist a correlation between the Stalinist definition of a nation, which was almost identical to ethnicity, and today's aggressively ethnic-nationalist rhetoric in many of the former Soviet Republics. However, **Egbert Jahn** reminded the audience that Stalin's "nation" also had political, though not democratic, implications: a self-determined working class represented by the Communist Party.

Eva-Maria Auch drew numerous similarities among conflicts in Georgia and those between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In both cases, the discourse has evolved by way of notions such as land, ethnogenesis and the history of settlement. History generally assumes a central role in the perception of presently unfolding events: all conflict parties attempt to trace their modern statehood back to ancient times.

This was and is still the case for the broad majority of the population. On the other hand, elites have often exploited identity, threat perceptions and trauma in order to secure domestic political power. At the end of her presentation, **Auch** criticized that enemy images and stereotypes are still common in the public discourse of both countries.

Egbert Jahn, the second speaker of the afternoon, questioned the notion that national identity is simply one characteristic among others. Instead, he argued that national affiliation is special on account that it goes along with a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. National identity also differs from ethnicity since it implies the political will of all persons to maintain their state. The interconnection between nationalism and violence represents the other side of the coin: de-facto state actors – such as separatist movements in Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh or Transnistria – claim the right to exert legitimate violence, and thereby confront the acting government.

Christopher Cohrs, Bruno Schoch, Eva-Maria Auch

Jahn further described the relationship between national identity and conflict. In his view, nationality is not fixed but subject to constant transformation in line with historical circumstances and experience. The transformation of national identity, for its part, can lead to conflict transformation. This finding also accorded with **Cohr's** presentation, in which the latter had outlined practical strategies for how identity transformation can be encouraged and used for conflict regulation.

Regarding the conflict situation in the South Caucasus, especially the tense relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, **Egbert Jahn** introduced the concrete, albeit bold, idea of forming a South Caucasus Confederation between Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. According to him, there are beneficial reasons for such an unconventional strategy. Firstly, it is futile to look into history in order to try to establish which ethnic group has lived on which territories in which century. Conflict resolution demands an acceptance of the needs of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, Georgians and Abkhazians today. **Jahn** emphasized that all ethnic groups will only agree upon living together if they have autonomous territories and the same rights in regards to political representation. The model of a confederation satisfies all of these conditions. Concluding his presentation, **Egbert Jahn** admitted that though a South Caucasian Confederation is not feasible at the moment or even in the medium term, it should be understood as the ultimate goal for the region.

> Prof. Dr. Egbert Jahn, Goethe University Frankfurt: From identity transformation to conflict transformation in the South Caucasus: an attempt to give "directions"

In the discussion that followed the two expert speeches, the idea of a South Caucasus Confederation prompted most of the comments. Participants from the region, like the Georgian Ambassador **Giorgi Badridze**, doubted that the countries in the South Caucasus could ever agree upon a common strategy for their economies and foreign relations. Today, Georgia is oriented towards the EU, Armenia has recently joined the Eurasian Union, and Azerbaijan again has its very own strategy. Additionally, the negative influence of Russia substantially hinders cooperation and reconciliation in the region, since a weak and conflict-ridden Caucasus suits its imperialistic interests. **Zurab Managadze** also supported this view and added that Russia would not let Abkhazia and South Ossetia join a political alliance which Moscow could not effectively control.

Altay Goyushov took a more positive stance towards **Jahn's** proposal. He reminded the audience that the idea of a Caucasus Confederation has existed in elite discourses since 1918, and has still not lost its relevance. On the contrary, in the last 20 years, European ideas such as minority rights and democracy have regained importance, making a democratic and inclusive confederation model not entirely out of reach. **Farhad Huseynov** also maintained the position that peaceful coexistence is possible despite past experiences of war and violence on both sides. The decisive factor rests in the state's ability to integrate all the peoples and become their main point of identification.

The first day of the conference addressed the implications of identity factors in conflicts among ethnic or national groups in general, and in the South Caucasus region in particular. The expert presentations provided helpful insights from a more theoretical point of view, though a number of concrete ideas such as the Caucasus Confederation were also discussed. Remarkable about these first panels was the very constructive debate that saw relatively little disagreement among the participants. In the end, it remained to be seen whether the positive and respectful atmosphere could be retained in the subsequent days and during the more concrete debates on Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

DAY TWO: WEDNESDAY, 24 JUNE 2015

Panel I: Construction of conflicting identities in Armenia and Azerbaijan

The second day of the conference covered the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Some theoretical findings from Day One assisted in assessing the impact of competing identity factors on the conflict's trajectory and the prospects of a peaceful resolution. The first two presentations specifically dealt with representation of the opponent within both Azerbaijani and Armenian media and public discourse.

David Leupold, Varsenik Minasyan, Siranush Adamyan

Striking here was the high degree of similarity between the language, historical narratives and enemy images on both sides. As became evident in the course of the debate, inherent differences between the two parties do not pose the primary obstacle for reconciliation but rather their very similar, unalterable claims.

Artak Ayunts began his presentation about the "Armenian" point of view by citing a recent study according to which over 90 percent of the Armenian respondents named Azerbaijan and Turkey as key threats to Armenia's security. Some explanation for this rests in the aggressive Azerbaijani rhetoric and, of course, in the trauma caused by frequent violence, displacement, and even genocide that Armenian people endured in the past.

Though this historical experience makes the Armenian position understandable, it is certainly not helpful in achieving peace. On the level of rhetoric and language, the conflict's perpetuation is taking place on a daily basis: in calling Nagorno-Karabakh "the freed territories", in changing formerly Azerbaijani city and village names into Armenian, in including the area in Armenian state territory on maps and in school books, and so on. These geographical "facts" render it increasingly difficult to return to the previous status quo.

In the further course of his presentation, **Ayunts** highlighted a few of the most important stereotypes present in the Armenian media, namely:

1) Armenians and Azerbaijanis are irreconcilable enemies that can never live in peace together.
2) Azerbaijanis are assigned the worst possible characteristics; they are uncivilized and devious.
3) Azerbaijan does not possess its own national history, which is why it falsifies historical facts and appropriates other peoples' cultural heritage.
4) Azerbaijan poses a great and permanent threat to the Armenians, be it in Armenia itself or in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Dr. Artak Ayunts, State University of Yerevan: Azerbaijan and "Azerbaijanis" in Armenian perception

Artak Ayunts criticized the Armenian media for perpetuating prejudices and for failing to provide objective and professional coverage of current political events. As a result, public opinion is strongly manipulated by media discourse and government rhetoric while agents for peace and alternative voices from the civil society remain marginalized.

The next speaker on the panel, **Rail Safiyev**, reported a very similar situation in Azerbaijan's media landscape and public discourse. The existing narratives of violence and war lay the ground for a pronouncedly negative image of Armenia, perceived as a dangerous and unpredictable aggressor. The trauma of losing homeland territories in the Nagorno-Karabakh War further increases the threat perception among Azerbaijanis. Being that the conflict has had such a long duration and has caused so many deaths, any effort towards dialogue and reconciliation would be considered a lack of respect for the victims. Additionally, external actors play a role in the Azerbaijani understanding of the conflict situation: Armenia is often described as Moscow's instrument, used to prevent Azerbaijan from becoming a strong and independent actor in the region.

Rail Safiyev, Free University Berlin: Armenia and "Armenians" in Azerbaijani perception

Safiyev further described that a change in language is taking place as well: the people in Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh region are called barbarians and terrorists. In contrast, many Azerbaijanis consider their country an innocent victim, ignoring the actual historical circumstances and developments leading up to the 1988 war and preventing critical reflection of their own role and position. The conflict now constitutes an essential part of Azerbaijan's collective memory.

One of the main differences in public discourse between the two countries, according to **Rail Safiyev**, is the comparatively greater role assumed by the Azerbaijani government. Although freedom of press and expression are restricted in Armenia as well, media in Azerbaijan have experienced massive and increasing pressure since 2005. Today, the government largely controls the debate and expressing differing or critical views can be dangerous. Civil society actors are excluded from political negotiation processes, which limits their ability to confront aggressive government rhetoric and promote a more peaceable position.

Summarizing the main findings of his presentation, **Safiyev** made clear that the role of the media in Azerbaijan is highly problematic as it lacks professionalism and tends to worsen the already heated public opinion.

The two presentations demonstrated why reconciliation between Armenia and Azerbaijan appears to be out of reach at the moment, in the context of fruitless negotiations that have dragged on for decades and violence that is still a part of everyday life. Rapprochement will remain difficult as long as enmity and threat – instead of empathy and cooperation – are the primary components of the two national identities. In the ensuing discussion, **Christopher Cohrs** stressed that small steps toward trust-building and shared positive experience are the only measures that may finally lead to reconciliation. Concrete examples for such steps would be common projects in trade, the fight against crime or academic exchange. **Rail Safiyev**, however, questioned the effectivity of a "small steps" strategy: as long as fighting and killing are ongoing on the frontlines or at the borders, there will be little room for economic or any other form of cooperation. **Safiyev** added that in the case of Azerbaijan, any constructive dialogue with the "enemy" would be prevented by the government. **Artak Ayunts** shared these concerns, but also stressed the danger of excluding civil society from the peace process and simply waiting for the two governments to reach a compromise. Not only should all Armenians and all Azerbaijanis be able to determine their own future, one must bear in mind that a peace agreement not supported by a majority of the people will prove unsustainable.

Regarding the media landscape in the two countries, **Rail Safiyev** added that social media is playing an increasingly important role as it is mostly free of censorship and political control. However, its impact on the conflict trajectory cannot yet be evaluated. Some misuse the freedom of the internet to disseminate hate speech and solidify prejudice.

The positions and roles of external actors in the conflict also attracted particular interest among the participants. **Bruno Schoch** and **Eva-Maria Auch** pointed out that, from the Armenian point of view, Azerbaijan bears direct relation to the Ottoman Empire and its successor, Turkey. Thus, the trauma of genocide is blended with war experience from the Caucasus, only increasing present security concerns. Azerbaijan's decisive support for Turkey in the recent Armenian genocide debate only exacerbated this problem. In terms of Russian influence in the Caucasus, **Rail Safiyev** called on both the Armenian and the Azerbaijani delegations to take their countries' destiny into their own hands and avoid using Russian politics as an excuse to remain passive.

Panel II: History, national identity and collective consciousness

While the previous panel addressed the present relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the afternoon was dedicated to the history of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The panel's main aim was to achieve a better understanding of the conflict parties' disparate interests and positions by looking into their common past.

Altay Goyushov spoke on the history of Azerbaijan and the formation and features of its identity. He noted that, in the early 20th century, when the Republic of Azerbaijan was first proclaimed, the path that the country would take was not yet clear. At that time, the Azerbaijani identity was markedly pluralistic: Muslim religiosity and modern secularism, nationalism and an Ottoman identity were all present in society and among the elites. The close bonds between Azerbaijan and Turkey soon had problematic repercussions. Amidst rising tensions with the Armenian minority in the Ottoman Empire, the conflict spilled over into the South Caucasus. From 1920 onwards, cooperation between the neighbors ended and violence and segregation increased.

> Altay Goyushov, State University of Baku: The historical developments and their significance for national identity in Azerbaijan

In the next part of his presentation, **Goyushov** described developments that occurred under Soviet rule. These pacified, or at least suppressed, enmity in some ways but exacerbated it in others. The central government in Moscow did not tolerate Azerbaijani nationalism, at least officially, and successfully prevented any violent escalation. However, this situation did not equate to reconciliation between Armenia and Azerbaijan: for both peoples, demarcation towards the "others" has become part of the national identity over time. As a result, the collapse of the Soviet Union promptly led to a resurgence of nationalism and violent conflict.

Altay Goyushov

Concluding his remarks, **Altay Goyushov** argued that the last four to five years have exhibited some rather positive developments. The normative orientation of, at least parts of, Azerbaijani civil society have shifted from radical nationalism towards European ideas such as civil and minority rights. In line with this tendency, a more conciliatory position towards the Armenian neighbors seems to be emerging.

Tigran Zakaryan focused on the Christian Armenian identity during his presentation. Unlike Azerbaijan, where a secular movement gained importance early on, Armenia understood itself preeminently as a Christian country surrounded, and oftentimes threatened, by its Muslim neighbors. The narrative of religious strife – Christianity versus Islam – and cultural divisions – the modern West versus the uncivilized, backward East – have shaped its political and societal

orientation. One intention was to make Armenia a part of Europe and leave the restrictive Eastern influence behind. **Zakaryan** underlined the condescending implications of this idea: the West was understood as the ideal of development and all other countries were measured by this standard.

Another problematic aspect in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations dating back to the early 20th century relates to the lack of differentiation between the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, on one side, and Azerbaijan, on the other. As a result, fear, hatred and a desire for revenge caused by the trauma of genocide in 1915 were directly transferred into the Caucasus and inflicted lasting damage to relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In the final part of his presentation, **Tigran Zakaryan** spoke about the current situation in Armenia. He noted that conflict resolution efforts remain difficult at the moment for two main reasons. Firstly,

Tigran Zakaryan, National Academy of Sciences, Yerevan: The historical developments and their significance for national identity in Armenia

although the official government position declares a pragmatic regional strategy and supports differentiation between relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, in reality, the two are often mixed. The controversy surrounding the international recognition of the Armenian genocide has certainly not helped defuse the situation. On the other hand, the Azerbaijani government's aggressive rhetoric likewise contributes to an increased threat perception and skepticism towards any rapprochement. A constructive dialogue – a necessary condition for fruitful peace negotiations – remains out of reach for the time being.

In the course of the panel, it became clear that Azerbaijan and Armenia share a common history shaped by a similar geographic location, the strong influence of the Soviet Union and the experience of power vacuum after the collapse of the latter. However, differences and conflicts between the two countries largely go back for decades and are still very present today. The long experience of violence and confrontation makes it difficult to adopt a constructive and future-oriented position for either of the conflict-parties as enmity has become an integral part of the national identity.

Both speakers, however, expressed hope that these conditions may be overcome in the near future, pointing to a change in values that is underway in at least some parts of society. Protecting human and minority rights and building an inclusive civil society hold promise for being the unifying project able to supersede radical nationalism and confrontation.

DAY THREE: THURSDAY, 25 JUNE 2015

Beyond Nagorno-Karabakh – Georgian cases in consideration of identity factors

The morning of Day Three focused on the other important conflict in the South Caucasus: the territorial dispute between Georgia and the separatist movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia represents an additional important party in this context as it supports the separatist regions politically and – at least in the 2008 war – also through a military presence. While the two Georgian panelists presented interesting and important insights into the differing interests in and the political

debate surrounding these conflicts, the subsequent debate remained somewhat one-sided. The reason for this was that, unlike the Nagorno-Karabakh panels in which participants from both sides were able to exchange their views, there was an absence of conference guests from Abkhazia, South Ossetia or Russia. Nevertheless, the panel developed an interesting dynamic, discussing, above all, the role of Western institutions such as the EU and NATO in the conflict and its prospective resolution.

At the beginning of his presentation, **Nika Vaskakidze** made his point of view very clear as to the crucial factor for understanding conflict in the South Caucasus: the harmful Russian influence. This holds true both for the region's history and its current situation. Firstly, Soviet politics of nation building and altering borders in the Caucasus laid the ground for today's problems. In order to achieve stability, the Stalinist central government in Moscow defined "new" nations such the Abkhazians by intentionally falsifying historical facts. Present-day Russian politics is no less damaging: the Kremlin's main interest is to keep the Caucasus republics weak and divided and, in so doing, ensure Russian influence and military presence in the region.

Dr. Nika Vashakidze, former Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia: Conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Vashakidze also opposed the idea of political dialog with the separatist governments, let alone a referendum in the territories. As a reason for this position, he reminded the audience of the undemocratic conditions that persist in South Ossetia and Abkhazia under which minority rights of the Georgian – and also the Armenian – communities are violated on a daily basis. These groups are mostly excluded from economic resources and political debates; as such, representation of their interests in negotiations would not exist. Georgia, as **Nika Vashakidze** emphasized, rejects any dialog from which the Georgian population of the separatist provinces is excluded. Another problematic issue in terms of a prospective referendum relates to the killing and mass displacement of minorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia over the last decades, especially during the August 2008 war. As the result of this ethnic cleansing, the majorities in a possible referendum seem clear – yet this would not represent the actual population of the region, but reward crimes against humanity.

Mher Hakobyan, Zurab Managadze, Azer Babayev

Alluding to the title of his presentation – the influence of competing identity factors – **Vashakidze** repeated his position that the conflicts do not primarily pertain to conflicting identities but rather to Russian interests in the South Caucasus. As a concluding remark, the speaker presented a possible solution for the stalemate: if Georgia could preserve its democratic system and further develop economically, voluntary return may become a real alternative for those living in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Sergi Kapandze's presentation continued this line of argumentation while also emphasizing Western responsibility for Georgia's future. At the start, he argued that a solution will not be possible without Russia, meaning that talks between all parties are needed. The US and EU should pressure Moscow into assuming a more constructive position on the issue. However, in the subsequent discussion, some participants expressed doubts that the West would challenge Russia over Georgia. The conflict is not as "hot" as the situation in Ukraine and has less international implications. Relative stability seems to be a good alternative, at least at the moment, compared to igniting another confrontation with Russia. As **Zurab Managadze** summed up: world peace is more important than Georgia.

Later in his presentation, **Sergi Kapanadze** outlined the main problems of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia issue. First of all, the conflict has two dimensions, a regional one with local players from the provinces themselves and an international one in terms of conflict between Georgia and Russia; this makes it especially difficult to find a straightforward solution. Russia's main interest, from the speaker's point of view, is to prevent former Soviet states from integrating into Western organizations such as NATO or the EU. This was (and is) the case in Moldova and Georgia, and we are now seeing the same pattern in Ukraine. In Russia's understanding, the post-Soviet space represents its own "backyard" where decisions cannot be made without Moscow's approval.

Dr. Sergi Kapanadze, Caucasus University, Tbilisi: Georgian lessons and stance on the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia – especially with a view to the Five-Day War in 2008

Sergi Kapanadze concluded his presentation by stating that, as far as Georgia is concerned, the only possible solution for the Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts is a return of the territories. However, this outcome is very unlikely without a regime change in Russia. At this point, **Hans-Joachim Spanger** warned the Georgian participants against relying solely on uncertain external factors such as democratization in Russia that may lie in the distant future. Every people in the world is not only object but also subject of its history and must assume responsibility for its own fate.

During the discussion following the two presentations, the idea of Georgia's potential integration into the EU and NATO became the central topic of debate. Three main positions could be identified: no integration, a partial "neutral" integration and full integration. As a proponent of the first position, **Bruno Schoch** expressed doubts that integration would be possible as long as territorial conflicts remain on Georgian ground. The EU has no interest in bringing unresolved border disputes onto the European level. **Kakha Gogolashvili** represented a moderate position on this issue. On the one hand, he argued that countries like Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova are clearly oriented towards Europe, meaning that the West should not disappoint these peoples' hopes. He also showed understanding for **Schoch's** position and proposed a middle course: a "functional integration" with European countries and cooperation on economic issues without membership. **Sergi Kapanadze**, however, was disappointed by this "lack of courage". According to him, neutrality does not exist in the South Caucasus and functional integration will not be possible. Consequently, the two alternatives are "letting Moscow win" or offering Georgia – as well as Ukraine and Moldova – the prospect for full membership, even against Russia's will. It is now up to the West to decide whether it wants to accept Russia's imperialistic ambitions or stand up for freedom and democracy.

Role-playing game: Political reconciliation. Simulation of a bilateral meeting in Armenian-Azerbaijani peace talks

The role-playing game that took place on Thursday afternoon mainly aimed at bringing participants from Azerbaijan and Armenia together and initiating dialog and cooperation between them. Most participants were young professionals or university students who will hopefully serve as multipliers and share their positive experience within their country, thereby contributing to the direly needed change in perception vis-à-vis the "others".

As had become clear in the first days of the conference, communication between the two groups was not always easy. Some of the participants had indeed never met anyone from the other country before; the delegations chose to sit in two separated groups at the conference location and mingled little during coffee breaks and dinner. A role-playing game – carefully prepared and moderated in order to prevent misunderstandings and unobjective discussions – presented a good opportunity to bring all the participants together.

For this purpose, the participants from Armenia and Azerbaijan (except for the "senior" panelists) were divided into two mixed groups, one which was to represent Armenia in the negotiations and the other Azerbaijan. Some German and Georgian participants represented the external actors: the US, the EU and Russia. Their task was to introduce their respective points of view, without being central to the debate.

For the first 45 minutes of the role play, the two groups were given time to agree upon a common position and phrase concrete provisions for a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. After this discussion, the formal negotiations began. First, both groups presented their ideas for the final document and then responded to the other side's position.

It soon became clear that there were some aspects on which there was a broad consensus, and some for which compromise would prove difficult. Both "delegations" agreed that violence at the border needed to stop as soon as possible and were ready to take concrete steps towards this aim. Also, economic cooperation, trust-building measures such as academic exchange, and common efforts towards the development of the Nagorno-Karabakh region did not seem out of reach, at least in the medium term. Thus, the atmosphere was positive and constructive in the first hour of negotiations.

However, the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh prompted a much more heated debate, with rigid positions on both sides. This topic became more and more

Hans-Joachim Spanger, Bruno Schoch, Rail Safiyev, Elnur Ismayilov

prominent in the course of the session and affected dialogue on other issues as well. When the "Azerbaijani" group came forward with a concrete proposal for the future of Nagorno-Karabakh – namely, no independence but far-reaching autonomy and extensive economic aid and investment from the Azerbaijani government –, the "Armenian" representatives rejected any such debate as long

as Azerbaijan did not accept the region's independence and thereby guarantee the safety of the Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh. For the next hour, the debate went back and forth without any tangible results. Though the external actor representatives and the chairs of the session tried to bring in new ideas and leave the question of status aside, the discussion did not escape from this stalemate until the very end.

The experiment of conducting a role-playing scenario with mixed groups achieved its main goal: participants from Armenia and Azerbaijan ended up working together on the difficult topic of Nagorno-Karabakh and were even ready to see things from the others' perspective. There was a common position on some aspects of the conflict such as border violence and economic cooperation. On the other hand, the debate largely followed well-known patterns from "real" negotiations: compromise on questions such as the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh or the future of the occupied territories seemed entirely out of reach. The conference participants did not seize the opportunity to go beyond the actual political situation in the region.

At the end of the role-playing game, no concrete provisions were agreed upon and there was no "Final Act".

DAY FOUR: FRIDAY, 26 JUNE 2015

The closing day of the conference, which ended at lunchtime, was divided into two parts. During the first panel, the Ambassador of the Swiss Confederation to Georgia, **Guenther Baechler**, presented a European view on the conflicts in the South Caucasus, their possible solutions, and the role that

Europe and the West could potentially play in it. The second session, chaired by **Lothar Brock**, created space for a final discussion and summarization of the main findings from the four-day conference.

With his presentation, **Guenther Baechler** addressed the last day's topic of Georgian relations with the West. He appealed to the Georgian participants to allow for a constructive discussion on all possible outcomes and not to focus too much on Western support and a hard stance vis à vis Moscow.

The Caucasus, with its geographic location between East and West, has always comprised an instable region. Here, the failure to establish an inclusive European security order after the Cold War is especially visible today. With this historic opportunity missed, a culture of mistrust and division has prevailed, not only in Western discourse but to no lesser extent in Russia.

According to **Baechler**, a peaceful solution in the Caucasus will only be possible through the establishment of overarching political and security institutions that can balance the interests of all

the region's diverse actors. Exclusively Western organizations such as the EU or NATO will not be able to play that role; the OSCE, in contrast, may very well progress in the right direction. With regard to Georgia, **Guenther Baechler** noted that its successful democratic transition and commitment to reform is under threat by general instability in the region.

It would be in the interest of both the EU and Russia to support these post-Soviet countries on their path to development and modernization, and thereby transform the region into a "zone of innovation and prosperity". As concrete measures, **Baechler** proposed the following:

1) reaffirming of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act;
2) shared commitment to the non-use of force, including concrete mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement;
3) establishing a system of collective security;
4) trust building and military disengagement;
5) renegotiating the CFE Treaty;
6) support for research and investment in alternative energy sources;
7) initiating dialog on possible cooperation between the EU and the Eurasian Union;
8) in the long term: referendums in disputed territories.

At the end of his presentation, **Guenther Baechler** repeated that only an inclusive solution will be able to bring stability and peace to the region. He did not see a possibility of Georgia reclaiming Abkhazia and South Ossetia by force; the country's only option is to accept the realities on the ground and hope that time will reunite all European countries in a common integration project. However, such an idea cannot openly be discussed in Georgian politics, meaning that constructive approaches remain out of reach. On the other hand, **Baechler** noted that there have been some positive developments since the new Georgian government came into power. This administration follows a more pragmatic strategy and is open to dialog, as the recent talks with Russia about the prospects of economic cooperation have demonstrated.

Ambassador of the Swiss Confederation Dr. Guenther Baechler: A new regional security architecture: situation an alysis and elements

In the discussion that followed, two contradictory positions prevailed, especially among the Georgian participants: while some called on Europe and NATO to be more supportive as well as assertive towards Russia, others concluded that a one-sided reliance on the West would not be able to pacify the region, let alone reunite divided countries and peoples.

CONCLUSION

Main findings

The conference "Identities as an obstacle for conflict resolution in the region?" dealt with the conflicts in the South Caucasus from both a theoretical and a practical perspective. The explanatory power of national identities and deep-rooted mutual enemy images in relation to conflict dynamics became apparent once again: they can considerably hamper political compromise. Specifically, from the theoretical point of view, the concept of identities seems helpful for gaining a better understanding of ethno-territorial conflicts. In most cases, however, identities are not problematic as such but are damaging only when exploited for political or economic reasons. The causes of conflict can thus be understood as a combination of identity factors and material interests.

The Tbilisi Forum revealed that, with regard to conflict management, a great deal of work on the societal level still lies ahead in the conflicting countries. Unfortunately, the practical implications of this finding are not entirely straightforward. As became clear in the course of the conference, there are some topics both in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and the dispute between Georgia and the separatist movements in Abkhazia and South-Ossetia for which compromise will be very difficult. The influence of external actors with their very own, and sometimes conflicting, ideas and interests complicates the situation further. On the other hand, there have been some positive developments in Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian society that might render peace possible in the medium term. A normative change towards democratization and the idea of a multiethnic and multicultural (civil) society, in which every individual enjoys the same rights and is granted the same value, could be a way to finally resolve the stalemate.

Based on this perspective, the organizers aim to develop the Tbilisi Forum initiative into an international dialog platform, organized annually between representatives from academia and politics, particularly between those from the countries in the region. Such a forum does not yet exist, and recent events have clearly demonstrated the importance of establishing a dialog platform to gradually pave the way for conflict resolution. This is all the more important as tensions persist without any significant signs of rapprochement and conflict can easily erupt again – as happened in August 2008 in Georgia. Since the potential repercussions beyond the region are hardly calculable, interest should be both regional and equally international in finding a peaceful settlement.

Practical implications: Organizing a conference on conflict resolution (in the South Caucasus)

Organizing an international, nearly week-long conference on a sensitive topic such as conflict resolution requires long and careful preparations – along with a healthy amount of flexibility and sense of humor during the event itself. Despite the efforts of the organizational team, some lessons can help make future conferences an even greater success. Throughout the conference, the participants were asked to approach the organizational team and share any criticism or suggestions, which they fortunately did. The main points can be summarized as follows:

Panels and content

1) A careful selection of speakers and "balancing" of presentations so that all conflict parties feel that their views and interests are represented
2) Stricter selection of participants – for example through Skype interviews – in order to guarantee high quality of debate
3) Making the conference venue more comfortable for participants by providing notebooks, pens and additional information on the panels and the lecturers

Activities and general atmosphere

4) Thinking about a seating order before beginning of the conference: the delegations from the conflicting countries should be mixed and thus encouraged to communicate. It is not a matter of course that the two groups will get to know each other during coffee breaks and meals.
5) Small icebreakers at the beginning of the conference can help create a favorable atmosphere and make it easier for the participants to talk to the "others" (some of them have never met anyone from the other country before!)
6) When choosing dinner locations and organizing free-time activities, it is important to think about how the delegations could interact with each other in the given venue. For example, if there are two large tables at a restaurant, it is very likely that the two groups will sit separated and preclude the opportunity for dialog.

When working with groups from countries that have experienced decades of conflict, cultural competence and awareness are vital to ensure a constructive atmosphere throughout the conference. It is worth trying to empathize with the participants and thinking about potential problems, along with their solutions, in advance. From our experience, even minor details can cause or prevent uncomfortable situations.

Rapporteur: Vera Rogova

ANNEX: PROGRAM AND LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Program

Monday 22 June

Until 18:00	Arrivals
20.00	Dinner

Tuesday 23 June

10:00	Welcome and introductory remarks *Mr. Kakha Gogolashvili, GFSIS* *Professor Egbert Jahn, University of Frankfurt*
10:30	Construction of identities in modern society: from a socio-psychological perspective *Professor Christopher Cohrs, Jacobs University Bremen*
11:00	Discussion
11:30	Coffee
12:00	Images of others and enemies: ambivalent role of identity factors for conflict dynamics and resolution *Dr. Bruno Schoch, PRIF*
12:30	Discussion
13:00	Lunch
14:30	Genesis and character of the South Caucasus conflicts: To what extent are they an expression of competing identities? *Professor Eva-Maria Auch, Humboldt-University of Berlin*
15:00	Discussion
15:30	Coffee
16:00	From identity transformation to conflict transformation in the South Caucasus: an attempt to give "directions" *Professor Egbert Jahn, University of Frankfurt*
17.30	**Close of Day 1**
19:00	Dinner

Chair of Day 1: Amb. Giorgi Badridze, GFSIS

Wednesday 24 June

Panel I: Construction of conflicting identities in Armenia and Azerbaijan

10:00	Azerbaijan and "Azerbaijanis" in Armenian perception: the preservation (and relativization) of the enemy image through mass media and civil society *Dr. Artak Ayunts, State University of Yerevan/ Eurasia Partnership Foundation*
	Armenia and "Armenians" in Azerbaijani perception: the preservation (and relativization) of the enemy image through mass media and civil society *Mr. Rail Safiyev, Free University Berlin*
11:00	Coffee
11:30	Discussion
12:30	Lunch

Panel II: History, national identity and collective consciousness

14:00	The historical developments and their significance for national identity in Azerbaijan: the role of science and the universities as factors shaping public opinion *Dr. Altay Goyushov, State University of Baku*
	The historical developments and their significance for national identity in Armenia: the role of science and the universities as factors shaping public opinion *Mr. Tigran Zakaryan, National Academy of Sciences, Yerevan*
15:00	Coffee
15:30	Discussion
16:30	**Close of Day 2**
19:00	Dinner

Chair of Day 2: Professor Egbert Jahn, University of Frankfurt

Thursday 25 June

Panel discussion: Beyond Nagorno-Karabakh-Georgian cases in consideration of factors of identity

10:00	Conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia: how strong are they "loaded" by competing identity factors? *Dr. Nika Vashakidze, Former Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia*
	Georgian lessons and stance on the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia-especially with a view to the Five-Day war in 2008 *Dr. Sergi Kapanadze, Caucasus University, Tbilisi*
11:30	Coffee
12:00	Discussion
13:00	Lunch

Role-playing game (RPG) on political reconciliation

14:00	Simulation of a bilateral meeting on Armenian-Azerbaijani peace talks
18:00	End of RPG / Close of Day 3
19:00	Dinner

Chair of Day 3: Dr. Hans-Joachim Spanger, PRIF

Friday 26 June

Practical implications and conclusions

10:00	A New Regional Security Architecture: Situation Analysis and Elements *Dr. Guenther Baechler, Ambassador of the Swiss Confederation in Georgia*
11:00	Developing and discussing concrete ideas for reconciliation and dealing with the past *Workshop, moderated by Professor Lothar Brock, PRIF*
13:00	Lunch

Concluding Session: Summary and Prospects

14:00   Workshop (*continued)*

15:00   Coffee

15:30   Possibilities of international actors for marginalizing the hostile identity in the region
Concluding discussion

17:00   **End of the forum**

Chair of Day 4: Dr. Azer Babayev, PRIF

Saturday 27 June

Departures

List of Participants

Name	Position/Institution	Country
1. Adamyan, Siranush	American University of Armenia	Armenia
2. Auch, Eva-Maria	Professor of History, Humboldt-University of Berlin	Germany
3. Ayunts, Artak	State University of Yerevan/ Eurasia Partnership Foundation	Armenia
4. Babayev, Azer	PRIF	Azerbaijan
5. Baechler, Guenther	Ambassador of the Swiss Confederation in Georgia	Switzerland
6. Badridze, Giorgi	Georgian Foundation For Strategic and International Studies, Tbilisi	Georgia
7. Baghdasaryan, Bella	Project Coordinator R-Insights Research and Consulting	Armenia
8. Brock, Lothar	Professor (em.) of Political Science, University of Frankfurt	Germany
9. Cohrs, Christopher	Professor of Psychology, Jacobs University Bremen	Germany
10. Gasimova, Turkay	State University of Baku	Azerbaijan
11. Ghazaryan, Anush	Research Analyst - Regional Studies Center, Yerevan	Armenia
12. Gogolashvili, Kakha	Georgian Foundation For Strategic and International Studies, Tbilisi	Georgia
13. Goyushov, Altay	Professor of History, State University of Baku	Azerbaijan
14. Hakobyan, Mher	State University of Yerevan	Armenia
15. Harutyunyan, Aghavni	Journalist, Editor, Armenian Daily Newspaper "AZG"	Armenia
16. Hasanova, Nazrin	Azerbaijan State Economic University	Azerbaijan
17. Huseynov, Farhad S.	Lecturer - Department of International Relations, Baku State University	Azerbaijan
18. Huseynova, Ulviyya	Khazar University, Baku	Azerbaijan
19. Ismayilov, Elnur	University of Münster, Germany	Azerbaijan
20. Ismayilova, Zumrud	Transparency International Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan
21. Ismikhanova, Gunel	Chief adviser - Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Republic of Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan

Name	Position/Institution	Country
22. Jahn, Egbert	Professor (em.) of Political Science, University of Frankfurt	Germany
23. Kapanadze, Sergi	Dean of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Caucasus University	Georgia
24. Kusavlov, Valery	Interpreter, Moscow	Russia
25. Lavrina, Anastasya	ADA University, Baku	Azerbaijan
26. Leopold, David	Humboldt University of Berlin	Germany
27. Managadze, Zurab	University of Frankfurt	Georgia
28. Minasjan, Varsenik	Theodor HeussKolleg, Berlin	Armenia
29. Momjyan, Garnik	Senior specialist, Ministry of Culture of Armenia	Armenia
30. Rogova, Vera	PRIF	Germany
31. Safiyev, Rail	Ph.D. Candidate, Free University of Berlin	Azerbaijan
32. Sahakyan, Naira	Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Arabic studies, Yerevan State University	Armenia
33. Samadov, Khayal	State University of Baku	Azerbaijan
34. Schoch, Bruno	Senior Research Fellow, PRIF	Germany
35. Sikharulidze, Nika	Founder and Executive Director of *Society XXI* (NGO)	Georgia
36. Spanger, Hans-Joachim	Member of the Executive Board, PRIF	Germany
37. Vashakidze, Nika	Former Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia	Georgia
38. Vinogradov, Sergey	Interpreter, Moscow	Russia
39. Zakaryan,Tigran	National Academy of Sciences, Yerevan	Armenia