

Workshop Paper „Protracted Conflicts in the OSCE Region: Building Security and Cooperation in the Conflict Zones“

Tools of social and cultural engagement, including the fields of exchanges, human rights and reconciliation (Basket 3)

**New Corridors of Dialogue:
Strengthening Durable Formats for Engagement
across the Protracted Conflict Zones**

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Introduction

The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) was created in the early 1970s to serve as a multilateral forum for dialogue and negotiation between the East and West. Since the establishment of OSCE's permanent structures in the early 1990s onwards, they have facilitated multilateral platforms of dialogue on a variety of themes as well as between different actors and partners. Some dialogue platforms have not been directly part of the OSCE organization but closely related or supported by it. Thus, the OSCE has a huge amount of expertise and a number of instruments at its disposal to provide support for dialogue processes on different levels. The OSCE is involved in mediation efforts in several unresolved conflicts including Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Solving these protracted conflicts is an inherently difficult process. Territorial disputes over self-determination of people and territorial integrity of states pose multiple challenges for intergovernmental organisations in general and the OSCE in particular. So far, the track record of successful international mediation has been rather limited and various initiatives have come to a standstill. Recent scholarly works on peacebuilding and empirical

findings from the conflict regions demand new approaches to overcome the backlog. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to highlight new ideas that could trigger new dynamics of cooperation and support the ongoing peace processes.

We will argue in this paper that new multi-level corridors of dialogue that bring together actors from different protracted conflict areas should be created and fostered. The corridor metaphor is used to strengthen the idea of a multi-actor, multi-level dialogue processes, which would not be based on the prevailing form of facilitation that emphasizes problem-solving workshops and interest-based negotiation. Spaces for dialogue should rather be created beyond the conflict lines between actors from different conflict zones. Corridors exclusively between the conflict parties are limited due to zero-sum assumptions, inflexibility, and mutual enemy images. To overcome the current stalemate, a new approach would give emphasis on identifying common fields of interest between the conflict societies such as issues of freedom of movement, environment, gender equality, small and medium size enterprises, and education. We will argue that the empowering this level of dialogue in regional or thematic frames could lead to cooperation beyond conflict lines and be beneficial for the peace processes in general. This paper will not pretend to find alternatives for the current peace processes, but aims to identify new corridors of dialogue which could provide existing negotiation frames with new impetus and food for thought as well as which could improve communication within and between conflict affected areas.

First, this paper explores the main obstacles for current dialogue initiatives focusing on geopolitical developments, frustrations, divisions and frictions in the protracted conflict areas in order to identify points of entry for new dialogic approaches. Based on those findings, the paper draws secondly from recent critical peace building literature to suggest a new way to think about multi-layer, multi-actor dialogue. Thirdly, the paper comes up with a concrete suggestion how to enhance *Dialogue through Cooperation*. Finally, the main prerequisites, support from the OSCE member states as well as the OSCE structures including the Chairmanship are highlighted.

Current State of Affairs:

What are the main international and domestic obstacles for current dialogue initiatives?

International Divisions and the revival of geo-politics – A difficult framework for Dialogue and Cooperation

The protracted conflicts in the former Soviet space all have some features in common. They are conflicts over a contested status or statehood of an area and conflicts with an increased international dimension. In all the cases, the open-ended peace processes are very much overseen by the OSCE, the actor in the field encompassing all external powers with vested interests in these regions, and this includes countries such as the United States, the EU member states, Russia, and Turkey. Thus, these protracted conflict areas and the related peace processes do not only reflect the conflict realities on the ground. They also reflect the global divisions that since the recognition of Kosovo, the war in Georgia 2008 and especially since the conflict in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea have become more and more outspoken. The discursive and ideological divisions that are currently being drawn between the West and Russia limit the room for manoeuvring in protracted conflicts. In addition, the relations between Russia and Turkey have become strained. These profound regional divisions cast a deep shadow on specific negotiation frames.

Nevertheless, the recent positive experience of OSCE succeeding in facilitating dialogue in Moldova-Transnistria surrounding the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) shows how cooperation can work under difficult conditions: the key was to *de-geopoliticise*. OSCE in Moldova-Transnistria, with the reputation of an honest broker among the local and international stakeholders, equipped with unique knowledge about the conflict and willingness to exercise openness with all conflict parties, was able to identify common problems and practical issues for dialogue, reducing the backlash from geopolitical developments. This approach should similarly be applied to civil society dialogue. Only by focusing on non-sensitive (not conflict resolution related) issues fundamental questions can be touched upon and new perspectives on joint concerns may be

identified. Becoming involved in this type of dialogue process would benefit actors from different levels and fields in conflict affected societies.

Local Frustrations and the failure to address the needs of societies in protracted conflicts

It is an often stated frustration among both internal and external actors that the current negotiation and dialogue formats focusing on the protracted conflicts have little dynamic. Indeed, the local frustrations very much focus on the fact that the local needs are not taken into account in the current peace processes. This becomes apparent, for instance, in the case of Abkhazia. A whole generation has grown up in the shadows of the conflict and the blockade of the 1990s. Even today, nearly 25 years after the outbreak of a civil war, isolation remains the main problem for the people living in Abkhazia. International isolation affects in various ways the social, economic and political development in the region. Freedom of movement is restricted as most Abkhazians have no possibility to travel abroad except to Russia. Consequently, the potential for international exchange for students, scholars, civil society activists and entrepreneurs is very limited. The need for such an approach has been identified in talks with people from the region. The interviews conducted in Abkhazia and Transnistria have revealed that despite the activities of many international organisations (IGOs and INGOs), there is very little focus on de-isolation, knowledge transfer, education, exchange, training and investment. These, however, are the main areas identified as relevant by local actors, who hold international peace builders to high expectations.

Also, a growing frustration and attitude of self-isolation, particularly within the young generation, is the result. This is especially dangerous as it is within the youth that new agents of change are to be found. The second main development is the growing dependence on Russia and the decreasing international presence in the region since 2008. Changing this development through the opening of new corridors for engagement and exchange is crucial. Relationship with Russia is becoming more complicated and the limited international engagement on the ground increases isolation and lack of knowledge. The third main obstacle is the strong deterioration of the political environment and social acceptance for bilateral dialogue initiatives between Abkhazia and Georgia. Regional formats for dialogue and cooperation could overcome this problem and broaden the corridors for dialogue.

As we can see from recent developments in Transnistria, international engagement, integration and knowledge are crucial for any progress in peace processes. While the EU is perceived as a one-sided supporter of the Georgian position, OSCE has facilitated initiatives through which it has earned more trust among local stakeholders.

In Transnistria, which is facing a steep economic decline, the civil society is even weaker than in Abkhazia. According to Iulia Kirnitki, “complex and multi-layer European bureaucratic procedures make it almost impossible for civic actors in Transnistria to access funds in order to build capacity, thus civil society in Transnistria remains embryonic and under tense scrutiny by the authorities”.¹ International engagement has focused on governmental dialogue with authorities from Chisinau and Tiraspol. Bringing them together in informal settings like the Bavarian conference was a huge success and has distinguished the Moldovian-Transnistrian dialogue from most of the other protracted conflicts. Nevertheless, more grassroots initiatives are needed to engage with possible spoilers and prepare both conflict societies for compromise. As people from Transnistria suffer less from isolation, there is a need for long-term support from civil society, education and access to international platforms. A clear recognition of these local frustrations and an honest attempt to work on their mitigation are crucial prerequisites for progress in the relevant conflict resolution processes in the region. Peace processes should be seen as inclusive, as engaging sidelined local stakeholders can actually have surprisingly positive effects on the overall situation.

Current Findings from Critical Peacebuilding Literature

The concept of friction has recently been used in peacebuilding studies to understand the “unexpected and unstable aspects of global interaction”². Peacebuilding sites produce new political, social and cultural dynamics. As mentioned, peacebuilding literature has highlighted the problems of the logic of how “empowered international actors” conduct peacebuilding interventions while “unpowered local beneficiaries” are just simple objects of action. The concept of friction helps us to understand that actors at all levels are potential agents and may be actively engaged.

¹ Iulia Kirnitki: “Post-Soviet de facto states and European integration: the case of Transnistria” in Boers, Iskandaryan and Minasyan (2015) *The unrecognized politics of de facto states in the Post-Soviet Space*, Yerevan: Caucasus Institute and Interantioanl Association for the Study of the Caucasus, p. 277.

² Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing in Björkdahl, Höglund, Millar, van der Linj and Verkoren (2016): *Peacebuilding and Friction: Global and local encounters in post-conflict societies*, London: Routledge, p. 1.

Peacebuilding spaces can thus be sites for both empowerment as well as domination.³ Most recent studies of Annika Björkdahl *et al.* show how agency is produced through frictional encounters in peacebuilding processes. From such studies we can draw policy relevant lessons that friction is actually a multi-layered process, a key feature of peacebuilding interaction between global and local actors, the outcomes of which cannot be predetermined in advance.⁴

Liberal peace building discourse is based on the ambition to reconcile and reintegrate post-conflict societies by transforming exclusive ethnic identities into inclusive civic ones. Such an approach can only strengthen the existential fears for group survival (often referred to as the ontological insecurity) of populations who identify themselves with non-recognized entities. “Issues pertaining to ontological insecurity may therefore constitute a more essential obstacle for achieving sustainable peace than threats to physical security.”⁵ Clearly there is a friction between internationally promoted civic identity and locally upheld ethnonationalist identity discourses. The needs and interests of the local stakeholders, even though often expressed in economic terms, are still linked with issues of identity and ontological security. In purely interest based negotiations such holistic approach is ignored or sidelined.

Civil society plays an important role in peacebuilding – this is rarely denied by any international actors. There is a major gap, however, note Verkoren and van Leeuwen, between this idea and local realities in conflict affected non-Western countries, both in terms of who important societal actors might be and what roles they play.⁶ Who gets a seat at the negotiation table or who is even involved in the dialogic spaces are important questions. NGO-isation is not always the best outcome, even though this is the exercised approach by many international organisations who promote civil society. Aid dependency and hidden agendas of outside funders bring in new, often negative, dynamics into the conflict areas.

³ Björkdahl et al. (2016): *Peacebuilding and Friction: Global and local encounters in post-conflict societies*, London: Routledge., p. 2.

⁴ Idem., p. 5-6.

⁵ Marko Lehti (2016): “Rethinking Identities and Dialogue in Conflict Transformation”, in Samuel Goda, Maksym Khylo and Oleksandr Tytarchuk (eds.), *International Crisis Management: NATO, EU, OSCE and Civil Society*. Collected Essays on Best Practices and Lessons Learned, Amsterdam, Berlin, Washington, DC: IOS Press 2016, p. 24.

⁶ Willemijn Verkoren and Mathijs van Leeuwen: “The imagined agent of peace: Frictions in peacebuilding through civil society strengthening” in Björkdahl et al. (2016): *Peacebuilding and Friction: Global and local encounters in post-conflict societies*, London: Routledge, 103.

These assumptions are consistent with local findings and explain the friction between intended outcomes of international peacebuilding initiatives and local realities. Due to the lack of conflict-specific knowledge and (hidden) agendas, the policies of international organisations in conflicts have unintended and often negative consequences. The recent debate on hybrid peace has concentrated on the question of “local agency,” giving rise to calls for “localized practices of peace formation.” According to Oliver Richmond, “international and national-level peace agreements, peace processes and progressive reforms have little meaning” if they are not tailored and explained into the local context, enabling a “localized process of peace formation.”⁷ Local communities need to have more ownership in the dialogue processes. This also includes agenda-setting, which should be led in an inclusive manner by the conflict affected societies, where the knowledge of the situation and needs lie. Nevertheless, critical peacebuilding literature does warn against the over “romanticisation of the local” as well. The concept of inclusiveness is indeed crucial when identifying and structuring a “locally” led dialogue processes. “Local” should never be seen as “united” or “frameable”, however.

Bringing in the grassroots level, giving voice to the silenced and the sidelined in otherwise traditionally top-down processes has proven to be a positive approach in peacebuilding. Thus, in order to find the best ways to support already existing negotiation structures, build mutual trust and reinforce actors for positive change, we need to rethink many of the approaches traditionally applied to conflict resolution in protracted conflicts. The unintentional outcome of modern peacebuilding practices with international intervention is the emergence of an unending process of “constant rescuing.” Many scholars have pointed out that even after decade-long peacebuilding operations or negotiation processes; sustainable peace has often remained a distant goal because of the prevailing practices of international peace promotion. Bahar Rumelili argues that “far from generating peace, various peacebuilding interventions end up maintaining, at best, conflicts-in-resolution, and, at worst, unstable conflicts.”⁸ Thus, new thinking is needed.

⁷ Oliver Richmond (2014): *Failed Statebuilding. Intervention, the State, and the Dynamics of Peace Formation*, Yale University Press, p. 133.

⁸ Bahar Rumelili (2015): ‘Ontological (in)security and peace anxieties: a framework for conflict resolution’, in Rumelili (ed.), *Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security. Peace anxieties*. London: Routledge, p. 26.

Chantal Mouffe writes that antagonism is human and cannot simply be solved away, but rather what is essential for achieving peace is the transformation of an enemy that one wants to destroy into an adversary “whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question.” There cannot, therefore, be a “rational resolution of the conflict, hence its antagonistic dimension.” The aim of democratic politics is therefore to transform antagonism into agonism, i.e. to bring about “a conflictual consensus.”⁹

Marko Lehti argues that the major obstacle to conflict transformation is not antagonism as such, but antagonism without dialogue. The currently prevailing approach to mediation is grounded in a Habermasian understanding of dialogue and its problem-solving method. This approach may be important for achieving cease-fires and similar milestones, but it does not support a transformation from antagonism into agonism. Consequently, there is a need for alternative models when conducting dialogue.¹⁰ Indeed, dialogue should refer to ongoing discussion processes that do not resolve themselves after finding a common ground: “Though no shared agreement may be reached, through the process of exchange people may become more aware of their own views and expand their understanding of one another”.¹¹ Habermasian problem-solving – resolution seeking – should be complemented with *problem finding* dialogue that emphasizes listening.

The international technical “problem-solving” oriented perception of ideal peacebuilding has influenced the understanding of dialogue settings for protracted conflicts. Regional approaches have made room for conflict specific dialogue spaces, as it has been thought that only in this kind of settings conflict-specific problems can be addressed. In such contexts pre-given identities characterize the setting: it is all about the talks between the “two” opposing parties facilitated by a third party.

However, there could be other “sites of friction” that could be used for a dialogic encounter. A regional space would provide a platform for different, overlapping frictions, which would allow for dynamic encounters. Such would not focus on transforming identities nor conciliating identities, but would give space for **transforming antagonistic identities into agonistic ones**. Dialogue

⁹ Chantal Mouffe (1999): “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism”, *Social Research* 3, 66, p. 755-756.

¹⁰ See Marko Lehti (2016).

¹¹ Richard Sennett (2012): *Together. The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*. Allen Lane, p. 19-30.

processes differ from negotiations in many ways because the participants are not expected to argue for their specific cause but to explore and discover the perspectives of others.

In this way, a multi-actor approach with many, not only opposing groups, meeting each other could increase potential for regional cooperation. Furthermore, it could also be seen as a dialogue process with the aim of creating more positive conditions for already existing peace processes such as formal talks and negotiations. Dialogue should not replace, but lay the groundwork for more formal talks. Unlike in debate, in dialogue there are no winners – just fellow explorers. Thus, a regional/thematic dialogue process can only be a starting point, which could then lead to positive attitudes with regards to discussions and engagement. By putting dialogue in a regional setting and focusing on issues of common interest, deadlocks in current initiatives can be bypassed, if not overcome.

Recommendations

In brief, we argue that new **multi-level corridors of dialogue, bringing together actors from different protracted conflicts, should be created and fostered.** In a multi-layer environment mutual trust can be built through new forms of regional problem-finding dialogues, which would on one hand create a setting allowing for a transformation of antagonism to agonism in a safe environment, while at the same time encouraging participants to jointly identify interesting problems and challenges. Such corridors could have multiple doors that will need to be opened and closed according to needs – so that different level civil society actors could be invited in when necessary or on the contrary, more official actors could have more sensitive talks amongst each other.

OSCE is already creating different spaces for dialogue – our proposal to strengthen multi-level corridors for the actors from protracted conflicts would strengthen this existing role of the organization. A multilateral frame could allow learning from each other's experiences and would draw the attention away from the specific conflict and force actors to look at the wider regional picture. The need for such an approach has been clearly identified within our empirical work on the

ground. Despite the various international initiatives, there is very little focus on the needs of the people. Main areas identified by local actors like de-isolation, knowledge transfer, education, exchange, training and investment are not properly addressed by international peace builders.

Different possibilities for opening up such corridors of dialogue exist, as the “Follow us” initiative of women MPs from Serbia and Kosovo highlights. Supported by the OSCE Missions in Serbia and Kosovo, a functioning dialogue setting as well as a “Dialogue Academy” for young women from both post-conflict societies has been established.¹² The Dialogue Academy takes place on a yearly basis on “neutral ground” in Austria and brings together new agents of change. In the Northern Caucasus, the Ediniy Kavkazskiy Forum, a cooperation and dialogue platform of human rights activists, is another specific regional example. This time taking place in the conflict affected region itself. Our suggestion, however, is to take such thinking on another level, to open the horizons of thinking from one specific conflict area to a larger level, where the participants could still have the opportunity to draw from similar cultural basis and learn from each other’s experiences.

It is of utmost importance for the sustainability of any dialogue format that it deals with issues that are important and relevant for local stakeholders. The participants should set and shape the agenda (ownership). Even if the main goal of the dialogue setting itself should be to create spaces where friction and communication can co-exist, such a setting should have the open possibilities for deepening cooperation and joint projects in areas identified by the actors. In this sense, a corridor is a good metaphor as it could also open up doors for other types of cooperation. These corridors could and should be physical (concrete meetings on a neutral soil) as well as digital (ensuring constant communication also takes place outside meetings), and build a kind of solidarity and community of civil society actors from protracted conflicts. This could provide a support/learning net on issues beyond the existing conflict lines.

OSCE as an initiator or facilitator could suggest a number of thematic approaches from academic cooperation (e.g. “dialogue academy”), civil society cooperation (incl. capacity building and training) to knowledge transfer (a major tool of empowering agents of change), but in the end the

¹² See <http://www.osce.org/node/159091>

agenda-setting should be kept in the hands of local participants. This would enhance ownership, ensure better sustainability, and also strengthen solidarity and understanding beyond the conflict lines as the same needs and hopes seem to pop up in the discussions with civil society actors in different protracted conflict areas.

In brief, our recommendation to the OSCE would be to support the development of a multi-layer, multi-actor cooperation network for **Dialogue through Cooperation**. This network should include academic institutions and civil society organisations in the wider Black Sea Region and Europe. This network should function as a creative hub which would facilitate new and innovative projects for regional cooperation and as a bridge between societies.

Prerequisites

It is indeed difficult for an intergovernmental organization to engage in civil society processes – but this is not impossible if these processes are not directly linked with conflict resolution attempts, but rather aim to create dialogic spaces beyond conflict lines. However, to use these policy frames and initiatives to empower civil society actors in the protracted conflict areas requires political will and institutional support. To ensure that any multilateral dialogue platform could function, it is of utmost importance to ensure that such a platform can be organized on neutral ground. Even if using the South Caucasus format for some actors is relevant, it would be difficult to gather all representatives in one place within the region: Armenians do not travel to Baku; Abkhazians do not travel to Tbilisi, etc. Turkey as a useful destination for regional cooperation platforms has recently lost its attraction. Thus, the other OSCE member states need to be on-board for supporting such an initiative. Providing a safe venue for the meeting will not be enough, as the EU's visa regulations will need to be taken into account and the host country needs to be willing to support the visit of the civil society representatives of these conflict affected areas. Many well-functioning dialogue processes in the OSCE area are supported by OSCE Missions – just to mention inter-ethnic dialogues in Bosnia-Herzegovina. OSCE does not have field missions, however, in all the protracted conflict areas (for instance not in Georgia). Thus, the institutional support for such a dialogue process beyond the conflict lines should come from the other OSCE structures. As a side-

product, this would enhance the knowledge and capacities in areas where the OSCE is facing structural deficits.

OSCE support and possible facilitation

When suggesting a multi-actor, multi-level dialogue processes, which would create spaces for dialogue beyond conflict lines between civil society actors from different conflict zones, Secretary General Zannier in the online “Security Jam”, pointed out that: “Engaging with civil society in the margins may help create better conditions for conflict resolution by preparing the societies for scenarios that may not be entirely to the liking of governments”¹³. This can be done on different levels of OSCE’s engagement, utilizing already existing initiatives such as, for instance, the *Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative*, founded to reduce environment and security risks primarily through transboundary co-operation¹⁴, the OSCE's youth projects that focus on human rights, tolerance and education, and the initiatives to foster women entrepreneurship. According to the OSCE Reference Guide on *Mediation and Dialogue Facilitation in the OSCE*, the “dialogue facilitation represents a distinct approach insofar as it is ‘a more open-ended communication process between conflict parties in order to foster mutual understanding, recognition, empathy and trust’”.¹⁵ OSCE, similarly to scholars writing on dialogue, agree that the primary aim of a dialogue process is “not to reach a specific settlement, but to gain a better understanding on the different perspectives involved in a conflict”.¹⁶

The dialogue platform, which we suggest in this paper, brings together civil society actors and individuals from different protracted conflict zones, fits in the general definition of the OSCE yet it also steps out of the box and looks at the currently used instruments with a new perspective. OSCE facilitates “dialogue between participating States”, it also facilitates dialogue “to foster the inclusions of national minorities”, and in addition it “facilitates dialogue between communities at

¹³ Lamberto Zannier on 25 April 2016, online answer to the question of the author in the 2016 Security Jam. For more information on the Security Jam see

http://www.friendsofeurope.org/media/uploads/2016/04/FoE_SecJam16_Programme.pdf

¹⁴ <http://www.osce.org/node/245211>

¹⁵ OSCE: *Mediation and Dialogue Facilitation in the OSCE*, p. 10.

¹⁶ Idem.

the local level, building capacities of local actors in conflict prevention and mediation”.¹⁷ A regional dialogue platform (new corridors of dialogue that would bypass the conflict specific context) would indeed build local capacities for conflict prevention.

Strategic vision

To ensure the necessary support from the OSCE membership, such a bold initiative to engage multi-layer dialogue process between actors from different conflict zones, of course, requires a strategic vision. The only actors able to launch such a strategic vision would be on one hand, the Chairman-in-Office, and on the other the Parliamentary Assembly.

German Foreign Minister Steinmeier, as the Chairman-in-Office, has highlighted the importance of dialogue. The German Chairmanships’ objective has used “the OSCE as a platform for dialogue”¹⁸ For Germany this means: 1) *Dialogue on pan-European security issues*; 2) *Confidence- and security-building measures (CSBM) and arms control* and 3) *Addressing common threats*. However, using OSCE as a platform can be seen from a slightly different angle as well. This strategic vision of the German Chairmanship “to bridge the differences and foster renewed dialogue” can be enlarged to encompass the recommendations suggested in this paper. Fostering communication across conflict lines is also a confidence- and security-building measure even if it would take place on the civil society level. The German Chairmanship indeed underlines in its strategy paper that various “discussions and processes” will be used.¹⁹ In order to support the high level and hard security, discussions need to be focused in such a way to create new openings for civil society at the same time. Such an inclusive approach could already be initiated under the German Chairmanship and taken forward by the Austrian Chairmanship in 2017. The suggested ‘regional’ and ‘inclusive’ vision could also be supported by complementary initiatives by the High Commissioner on National Minorities²⁰ and by the Parliamentary Assembly²¹.

¹⁷ Idem. 15-16.

¹⁸ See OSCE Deutschland 2016: *Renewing dialogue, rebuilding trust, restoring security: The priorities of the German OSCE Chairmanship in 2016* online on <http://www.osce.org/cio/215791?download=true>

¹⁹ Idem. P.6.

²⁰ See for instance “education rights” <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/234981>

²¹ See for instance meeting of the OSCE Parliamentarians discussing protracted conflicts in April 2016 <http://www.osce.org/pa/234161>

Conclusions

The societies affected by protracted conflicts are isolated due to the dynamics of conflict. Our paper argues that such state capture by conflict dynamics can only be bypassed by empowering the silenced voices. This should be done by creating and strengthening other types of platforms of dialogue and engagement than those directly linked with stalled conflict resolution attempts. Multi-actor dialogue platforms, bringing together participants from different conflict zones, would empower civil society actors as actors of change by giving them new skills and knowledge. Such open-ended dialogue processes could also serve as early warning and conflict prevention mechanisms. While negotiations exclusively between conflict parties are limited due to zero-sum assumptions, this kind of multi-actor processes could foster sustainable dialogue and bring about a transformation of conflicts.

In brief, to complement and support current conflict specific negotiation settings

- a multi-level multi-actor dialogue process beyond the protracted conflict lines should be introduced;
- local ownership of the agenda setting should be enhanced;
- inclusive civil society participation should be encouraged and supported (e.g. by facilitating visa procedures to enable meetings on neutral ground);
- this dialogue process should not be seen with the goal of problem-solving but rather from the perspective of problem-identifying.

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