Reconciliation and Engagement Policy of the Government of Georgia and International Engagement

The Government of Georgia’s (GoG) peace policy foresees two main directions: de-occupation of the country and reconciliation of the communities separated by the conflict. The policy aims at taking more dynamic and effective actions to facilitate reconciliation and confidence-building, improvement of the situation of the conflict-affected communities, transformation of the current situation and, consequently, creation of a firm basis for a peaceful and full-scale resolution of the conflict.

After the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, Georgia adopted the “Law on Occupied Territories” and renamed the Office of State Minister for Conflict Resolution created in 2004 to the Office of State Minister for Reintegration. Later in 2013 it was renamed again to the Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality (SMRCE), which is responsible for coordinating peacebuilding and reconciliation policy and overseeing its implementation.

In 2010 the GoG adopted the Engagement Strategy and its Action Plan for the populations of the non-government controlled regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Action Plan anticipates the implementation of initiatives which will promote the general welfare of the populations legitimately residing in these regions, enable their greater access to benefits and participation in wider civic life and lay the foundation for future reconciliation between divided communities. It is intended to create a favourable environment to intensify interaction, cooperation and partnerships between the populations across the dividing lines and build confidence among all the communities of Georgia.

SMRCE has been actively pursuing the implementation of the Engagement Strategy and its Action Plan over the years through making emphasis on such components as confidence-building, people-to-people contacts, facilitation of international engagement, and provision of free of charge healthcare, education and socio-economic assistance to conflict-affected populations. The various instruments envisaged by the Action Plan have already been successfully implemented. In particular, a Liaison Mechanism was established to facilitate informal communication between Tbilisi and Sokhumi and address existing as well as emerging needs on the other side. A Status Neutral ID and travel documents were also devel-
oped for the residents of non-government controlled regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to ensure their access to different state programmes and social benefits as well as to facilitate their free travel abroad.

In 2017 SMRCE further shaped the peaceful conflict settlement policy under eight priority objectives such as: protection and provision of peace; direct dialogue; confidence-building and reconciliation with regard to Abkhazian and Ossetian communities; cooperation based on mutual interests inter alia, where applicable, through status-neutral and humanitarian formats; protection of conflict-affected population; offering more services and opportunities for the residents of the non-government controlled regions; sharing new opportunities and benefits arising from the formats of cooperation and rapprochement with the European Union (EU) and other partners.

Based on the vision of this policy, in 2018, SMRCE, in cooperation with other governmental agencies and international partners, developed a new peace initiative entitled “A Step to a Better Future,” which opened up additional opportunities for the conflict-affected populations. In particular, the residents of the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia are enabled to engage in trade and economic cooperation across dividing lines, enjoy new educational possibilities in the rest of the country as well as abroad, and benefit from simplified access to a number of state services, including Georgian passport services for visa-free travel to EU/Schengen countries through depoliticized approaches and status-neutral instruments, without jeopardizing status issue. SMRCE continues to work actively in order to bring the newly adopted peace initiatives to life.

It is noteworthy that international engagement, mainly in Abkhazia, is quite visible and substantive. An international presence through transnational actors such as international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) plays a crucial role in peacebuilding processes. Many of these organisations have offices in Abkhazia and they support humanitarian and socio-economic development projects there. Some organisations operate through partnership networks with local NGOs, implementing democracy development programmes and strengthening the capacities of civil society in Abkhazia. The United Nations (UN) agencies such as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Children Fund are also present in Abkhazia and through these offices the UN strives to continue having an impact on socio-economic development, human rights and other areas of social protection. Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is also one of the few INGOs which has access to Abkhazia since 2005. The overall objective of DRC’s work is to reduce displacement related risks and support durable solutions for returnees, persons of concern and in a refugee-like situation in Abkhazia to overcome their specific vulnerabilities through prioritising their medium and long-term socio-economic needs, so that they can rebuild their lives with dignity.

Visit of MTot Minister Chernysh to Administrative Boundary Line in village Khurvaleti, Georgia 2018
Successes, Gaps and Challenges in the Planning and Implementation of Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Initiatives in Georgia

The following interview contains direct quotes of the SMRCE First Deputy State Minister and they do not necessarily reflect the views of DRC

Insight from Mr. Lasha Darsalia, First Deputy State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia, the Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia

The Government of Georgia has recently approved a new peace initiative “A Step to a Better Future” presented by SMRCE. What is the objective of this initiative and how the residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia can benefit from it?

The peace initiative, “A Step to a Better Future,” is a new and dynamic step undertaken by the Government of Georgia to serve the needs and pragmatic interests of the population living in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and their aspiration towards development and a better future. […] The local population suffers from various restrictions such as, for example, freedom of movement, education in native language, etc., and lives in dire socio-economic conditions. We aim to counter this artificially-imposed isolation through a reconciliation and engagement policy and by finding new, creative and status-neutral ways for delivering concrete benefits to the residents of occupied territories. Before the comprehensive solution to the existing conflict is reached with the assistance of the international community, we aim to take care of the conflict-affected population by offering them more services and opportunities within the country and easing/expanding access to them as well as sharing new possibilities and benefits arising from the formats of cooperation and rapprochement of Georgia with the EU and other partners. At the same time, our efforts and initiatives are based on mutual interests paving the way for community dialogue, confidence-building, cooperation and engagement.

Our peace initiative has three major dimensions. The first is the facilitation of trade across the dividing lines: here we aim to facilitate, simplify and expand trade across dividing lines through creating new opportunities that do not imply setting additional regulations for already existing petty trade. In particular, the initiative enables the products originating from or produced in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia to access the internal market of Georgia as well as foreign markets through the privileged export opportunities available to Georgia, inter alia the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU. It also implies the supply of goods produced on Georgian-controlled territories, or imported into Georgia, to Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia as well as encouraging activities related to trade across the dividing lines, including joint business initiatives though special financial mechanisms, development of trade related infrastructure along the dividing lines and instalment of tax privileges for those engaged.

The second is enhancing educational opportunities for the residents of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia: the initiative implies easing access for local residents to all stages of education in the rest of Georgia, foremost to higher and vocational ones, and, at the same time, expanding possibilities for participating in international education programmes and simplifying access to international education.
The third is about easing access to various state services: we are simplifying technical procedures for accessing Georgian passports by the residents of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and thus enjoying visa free regime with EU/Schengen countries as well as to life-cycle documents that implies issuance of various civil acts, such as, e.g., birth, death, and marriage/divorce certificates.

For the realisation of each dimension, the peace initiative entails a number of status-neutral instruments and depoliticised approaches that enable the enjoyment by the residents of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia of the proposed services and benefits in absolutely neutral manner. Status-neutral does not imply any revision of status. We simply de-politicise some issues, where feasible, for the sake of the population. We have reiterated number of times that peace initiative is exclusively constructive and serves a humanitarian purpose. It is not directed against anyone and is based on a pragmatic as well as a win-win approach.

How does SMRCE cooperate with international and national civil society organisations in the implementation of peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives?

In the situation when the Government of Georgia is deprived of the possibility to exercise effective control over the occupied territories, international and local civil society organisations serve as our major partners acting towards the shared goal of peaceful conflict settlement and conflict transformation. The engagement of international organisations and implementation of various projects on the ground aimed at improving the lives of local populations and bringing the divided communities together for confidence-building which is vital for reconciliation process. I need to mention that, unfortunately, none of the international organisations is allowed to operate in Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia (the only exception is the International Committee of the Red Cross), which brings a stalemate to the peace process there. We have regular bilateral and multilateral meetings with international donors and organisations as well as the representatives of local Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) exchanging information with each other about the policy, existing situation and developments, ongoing activities and future steps.

How is SMRCE engaged in Geneva Discussions and/or other dialogue formats?

I am heading the second working group in the Geneva Discussions dealing mostly with humanitarian issues. Despite the continuous attempts of politicisation of such issues by the Russian Federation and other participants, we constantly raise the matters of utmost importance, such as the right of IDPs and refugees to safe and dignified return and grave human rights violations of the population residing in the occupied territories. This pertains in particular to the most vulnerable groups, such as the ethnic Georgian population in Gali district in Abkhazia region and Akhalgori district in Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia [. . .] as part of our constructive approach and participation, we remain committed to cooperate on humanitarian issues pertained to the needs of local population, e.g. those related to fighting against stink bug endangering harvests, preserving endemic box trees, delivering requested archive materials, etc. SMRCE is also part of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meetings held regularly in Gali and Erzegneti to discuss various incidents and human rights violations, including constant illegal detentions of the local population by Russian military officers.

In your opinion, what are the key achievements of SMRCE in the implementation of peacebuilding initiatives in Georgia?

The drastic increase of the number of people coming over the dividing lines for free of charge healthcare treatment in the rest of Georgia as well as the rising number of people participating or willing to participate in mutual confidence-building projects are evidences of tangible achievements of Georgia’s peace policy. Through recent years, we have witnessed the growth of interest and credibility on the other side towards the programmes and services offered by the Government of Georgia as well to people-to-people contacts and confidence-building initiatives of various Georgian CSOs and international organisations. We consider this as key to the conflict transformation and reconciliation process. Not surprisingly, the continued installation of barbwires and other artificial barriers along the dividing lines by the Russian Federation and closure of additional crossing points foremost target this raising interest.

What are the gaps and challenges that remain to be addressed by SMRCE in the planning and implementation of peacebuilding initiatives in Georgia?

In our peace policy, we are of course unfortunately witnessing concrete threats and obstacles coming mainly from the Russian Federation. Recently, the so-called decrees were issued in Abkhazia region prohibiting the representatives of de-facto authorities to participate in projects and meetings organised by international non-governmental organisations abroad. At the same time, the de-facto head of the Gali administration demanded that all local projects of international and local non-governmental organisations acted in agreement with him. The participants of some confidence-building projects are frequently attacked and pressured. We consider these decisions and statements as an orchestrated policy of the Rus-
sian Federation targeting the operation of international organisations in the occupied territories of Georgia and directed against the growing interest of local communities to participate in confidence building projects and dialogue meetings. The threats coming from Russia need to be adequately addressed and mitigated. In these endeavours, the active steps of our close partners and support of international community would be crucially important.

Which successful examples of the peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives of the Government of Georgia could be replicated in Ukraine? What recommendations would you suggest to your Ukrainian colleagues?

... [Georgia and Ukraine] have to work more together and share experience and information between each other regarding the reconciliation initiatives [...] The Government of Ukraine has to continue to implement various programmes and projects involving those remaining in annexed/occupied territories. We should not allow artificial barriers to alienate and divide people. This lies at the heart of conflict-generated propaganda and stereotypes [...] We deeply believe that the existing situation in Georgia does not serve the interests of Georgians, Abkhazians or Ossetians. It is the same in Ukraine. It is not the interest of people in Ukraine to live in limbo and face the conflict. We should thus try to assist them through cherishing peace, countering propaganda and facilitating people-to-people contacts.

The Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding and Confidencebuilding in Georgia

Analysis of Ms. Nino Kalandarishvili
Chair of the Board, Institute for the Study of Nationalism and Conflicts

What is the role of civil society organisations and public diplomacy in conflict resolution in Georgia?

Civil society usually operates within the sphere embodied in the competencies of State Institutions. Therefore, civil society is involved in the processes of public diplomacy which is critical in extending the conflict resolution processes. Public diplomacy through its eyes on the future uses a variety of tools and approaches to build mutual understanding among civilians. It creates an environment of trust and respect and seeds the ground for peaceful processes. Hence, integrating public diplomacy into official diplomacy carries an important meaning. Georgia is a quite good example where CSOs are active in creating links with people on the other side of dividing lines. The focus is on conveying strategic communications based on understanding the interests, needs and priorities of those people. I would like to emphasise that being aware of their true feelings does not necessarily mean that we need to agree and accept them as such, but analyse and act sensibly. One of the realistic ways of conflict resolution is reaching out the people itself and creating strong connections with them outside of traditional diplomacy.

What kind of peacebuilding and reconciliation projects and initiatives are being implemented by civil society in Georgia? Can you share few examples?
Georgian civil society organisations are participating in the dialogue meetings with Abkhazians and Ossetians, which also implies extended formats such as inviting international organisations for finding the better ways in conflict regulation possesses. Meetings are devoted to academic, cultural and social aspects of the situation often between school teachers, ecologists, doctors, cultural heritage experts, social entrepreneurs having the same interests and willing to find mutual understanding in contributing effective conflict resolution. The goal of such kind of meetings is purely people-to-people contact restoration through daily processes. Many CSOs work in all those directions in Georgia.

After 25 years active involvement of youth and social activists in confidence building processes has gained crucial importance in Georgia. I would evaluate the work of our CSOs very positively. Particularly, the work on three strongly interlinked levels: 1. Conflict analysis and expertise, 2. Building relationships and mutual understanding at the grassroots level, 3. Sharing the knowledge and information with their professional counterparts. All these imply building trust and the development of confidence-building measures among the conflict-affected population.

Each project and initiative devoted to these ideas can modify perceptions and expectations, which in turn can change relations and behaviours, and thereby change the context of conflict resolution. I would emphasise the tremendous work of the following Georgian national organisations in this direction: Caucasian House, IDP Women Association “Consent”, Charity Humanitarian Center “Abkhazeti”, and Fund “Sokhumi”. Publicising the reliable analytical documents these organisations often do, is also a mean towards a comprehensive analysis of the conflict.

What recommendations would you suggest to your Ukrainian colleagues while working on peacebuilding and reconciliation issues based on your experience?

- It is important to have different parts of society involved in creating and developing state strategy on confidence-building and peacebuilding. This needs to be guiding document covering principles and concrete steps. The expectation that conflict will be solved tomorrow and mutual understanding will be established immediately should not dominate the narrative. Instead, one has to think of a number of incremental, yet consistent, long-term oriented activities, avoiding any means of aggression;

- Having strategic patience is also something that requires attention. If immediate positive reactions are not caused by our initiatives and proposals towards the ones beyond the dividing lines does not mean that our efforts are useless. Even minimal change sometimes takes a long time. So, seeing things from the eyes of those people, working on identifying causes and agreeing on them should be priority;

- Women’s engagement is also important and what I can recommend to the Ukrainian colleagues is to involve women, youth, and social activists to a greater extent because, based on our experience, in a long-term perspective, it will create good people-to-people contacts;

- Encouraging effective coordination between the State, national NGOs and INGOs, so that they can produce joint analysis, agree on strategic approaches and take coordinated steps.

Which principles, methodology and approaches does your organisation apply in the implementation of peacebuilding and reconciliation projects?

Our organisation is oriented to initiate dialogue processes with those living on the other side of the dividing line. It includes different meetings, analytical articles, joint and parallel proposals carrying purely peacebuilding potential. Another important method is analysing the international experience based on which new initiatives are often designed.

In your opinion, what are the key achievements/success stories of peacebuilding and reconciliation projects and initiatives of your organisation? How should they be sustained?

One of the biggest achievement of my organisation is having direct contacts with people from different professions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We have long-standing experience in building the trust and respect with these people. We rely on the expertise, approaches and analysis they have on the confidence building and peacekeeping. This means that on both sides there are people sharing the first hand, reliable and valid information about the ongoing processes. Therefore, information is shared directly from the authentic informational area avoiding propaganda, misinformation and labels.

Second, but equally important is diminishing the alienation syndrome, encouraging people-to-people contacts and looking for not differences but commonalities. All these are part of the work of Institute for the Study of Nationalism and Conflicts.

www.isnc.ge
The European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia is the only international organisation deployed in Georgia with a specific mandate to monitor compliance with the Six-Point agreement that ended hostilities in the August 2008 conflict. The Mission’s role is to help prevent a return to hostilities, largely by monitoring activities and maintaining a presence along the Administrative Boundary Lines between the territory administered by the Government of Georgia and the two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Mission also monitors the Georgian Government’s unilateral commitments to certain restrictions on military and police activities, as outlined in technical agreements between the Mission and the Ministries of Defence and Internal Affairs, and the State Security Service. In addition to monitoring and reporting our findings to the European member States, the Mission is engaged in other conflict management activities. These include the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM). Meetings are held once a month for both Abkhazia and South Ossetia at which the parties to the conflict discuss security incidents and issues of importance to people living along the Administrative Boundary Lines in order to prevent potential tensions from escalating. The Mission is a participant in the meetings for Abkhazia and, along with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), chairs the meetings on South Ossetia. The Mission also manages a Hotline used by personnel on both sides of the Administrative Boundary Lines to communicate and exchange information in real time.

The EU recognises that the inclusion of civil society in peacebuilding processes is a prerequisite for sustainable peace. A more recent addition to the Mission’s peacebuilding and reconciliation effort is the Confidence Building Facility. Launched in 2015, the Confidence Building Facility funds civil society organisations to implement projects that promote confidence, trust and mutual understanding across the Administrative Boundary Lines with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While some projects produce concrete outcomes, such as removing unexploded ordnance (UXOs) from informal grave sites to enable exhumation and identification of missing persons, many take the form of training, dialogues or study trips to neutral third countries. Simple yet powerful, these people-to-people contacts help break negative stereotypes, create new friendships and unite former colleagues. In the process, entrenched narratives on the cause and origin of the conflicts are challenged on all sides. This in itself may not solve the conflict, but the EUMM strongly believes that it contributes to laying the foundations of sustainable peace.
Peacebuilding in Ukraine

The following interview contains direct quotes of the MToT Deputy Head of Division and they do not necessarily reflect the views of DRC

Insight from Ms. Anna Kravchenko, Deputy Head of Division for Conflict and Post Conflict Reconciliation, Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons of Ukraine

Outside the Control of the Government which aims to support people living in the non-government controlled areas, return confidence in Ukraine, unity of the state, etc.

At the initiative of MToT, the Master’s Degree Programme, ‘Conflict Resolution and Mediation’ was launched at the National Technical University ‘Kyiv Polytechnic Institute.’ This is the first educational programme in Ukraine designed to train specialists in conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

The issues of peacebuilding, hybrid conflicts and hybrid threats are exceptionally important for Ukraine. Therefore, MToT has recently established the Scientific Advisory Board with the participation of 12 Ukrainian and international scholars from countries experienced in conflict and post-conflict resolution (Georgia and Moldova). This analytical centre would play an advisory role for the Ministry and other central executive bodies and it has been a far-sighted and long-term investment which would enable to shape a scientific approach in many issues that remain unsearched.

Moreover, within the scope of its mandate, MToT continually monitors the violation of the legal regime in the temporarily occupied territories of Donbas, Crimea and the city of Sevastopol in various fields of activity in regards to individuals and legal entities that by their actions directly or indirectly constitute real and/or potential threats to national interests, national security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

How is MToT engaged in the Minsk process?

Despite the controversial perception of the Minsk agreements by Ukrainian society, it is crucial to save dozens, hundreds and thousands of lives, to release the hostages and rehabilitate those affected by the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The Minsk process is one of the main mechanisms to achieve these goals. The
implementation of the agreements plays an important role in resolving the conflict. Today this is the only possible mechanism that can be utilized to stabilize the situation, reintegrate the population and the occupied territories. People should believe that this is a significant step towards resolving the conflict.

MToT is actively involved in the Minsk process by participating in the meetings of the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk, in particular, humanitarian and socio-economic subgroups. MToT also provides awareness raising on the importance of the Minsk agreements, its key points and goals. Thus, MToT initiated and created a video clip about the Minsk agreements, which can be found on MToT website.

Does MToT implement or plan to implement peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives for IDPs and conflict-affected persons? If yes, what is the geography, target groups and scope of these initiatives?

MToT has been working on the implementation of peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives for IDPs and other conflict-affected persons under the Axis III “Social stability, peacebuilding” of the State Target Programme for Recovery and Peacebuilding in Eastern Regions of Ukraine approved by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine as of 13 December 2018, No. 1071. The priority seeks to increase the dialogue effectiveness as a tool for conflict-prevention and resolution; strengthen the capacity of mediators and dialogue facilitators in Ukraine; establish a conflict mediation platform; build capacity for territorial communities to participate effectively in process management; build capacity for representatives of local self-government bodies and local institutions to develop sensitivity towards conflicts and its resolution in the regions.

In accordance with the objectives of the above-mentioned document it is envisioned to implement the following activities:

♦ To conduct trainings on mediation and facilitation in communities (in order to develop a network of specialists on the provision of mediation and facilitation services, it is foreseen that the training participants will be united by occupational level, which would also enable to convey more focused dialogue meetings (target groups will be selected based on information about community needs);

♦ To carry out dialogue activities between authorities and conflict-affected communities and measures aimed at capacity building of territorial communities to manage processes with the involvement of trained experts;

♦ To launch a stable system on the provision of mediation and facilitation services in Ukraine.

Preliminarily, it is foreseen that pilot projects will be implemented in the communities of Ukraine that have been negatively affected by the conflict.

Furthermore, MToT developed the Action Plan for implementation of certain principles of domestic policy regarding certain areas of Donets and Luhansk Oblasts temporary outside the control of the Government approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine as of 11 January 2017 #8-p. The Action Plan is mandatory for implementation and it envisions a number of activities in economic, cultural and social fields. The main objectives of the above-mentioned document in the realization of peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives for IDPs and other members of the conflict-affected population include the initiation of a dialogue between community representatives to solve common issues related to humanitarian and other problems of a local nature; engaging representatives of international organisations experienced in mediation for peaceful settlement of conflicts, initiation of a dialogue between people living in non-government controlled areas and government controlled areas; involving youth and women into the civil movement through programmes that promote their role as peacekeepers; supporting civil society organisations in promoting structured dialogues on tolerance; distribution of social advertising videos aimed at building tolerant society; maintaining a dialogue between the state and religious organisations on the issue of practical implementation of principles of patience and tolerance, preventing any forms of hostility, intolerance towards non-believers and believers of other denominations.

MToT is not only an executor along with other stakeholders, but it also coordinates the implementation of the Plan # 8-p tasks and activities.

Who are MToT’s key partners (state and/or non-state agencies) in the implementation of peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives?

Drawing on the planned projects in the frame of the priority III ‘Social stability, peacebuilding’ of the State Target Programme for Recovery and Peacebuilding in Eastern Regions of Ukraine, MToT key partners in the implementation of peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives are OSCE, UN Agencies, World Bank, Danish Refugee Council, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, USAID, Great Britain. Many countries, such as Sweden, Norway, and Canada, operate in this area, and many projects have been implemented by the EU Delegation to Ukraine.

What are the key achievements of MToT and other stakeholders in the implementation of peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives in Ukraine?
In the framework of the implementation of the Action Plan regarding certain principles of domestic policy on certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts which are temporarily outside the control of the Government, a set of measures have been taking place to establish a dialogue in society with the aim of creating a framework for successful and rapid reintegration of temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts.

The Action Plan envisions, inter alia, providing citizens with psychological, social, medical, legal, informational, employment services in controlled territory, creating favourable conditions for the provision of legal services at centres for free legal aid, improving the system of administrative (management) and social services etc.

Education has one of the most important roles in the Action Plan #8-p. Hence, in order to provide children from temporarily occupied territories with the access to education, MToT in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Open Policy Foundation, have conducted a large-scale educational information campaign. MToT developed and distributed a video clip to encourage prospective students to enter Ukrainian universities and held a nationwide Open Day in three cities of Ukraine (Kherson, Mariupol and Severodonetsk). In 2017, 1,550 persons from temporarily occupied territories entered Ukrainian higher educational institutions through special educational centres ‘Donbas-Ukraine’ and ‘Crimea-Ukraine’ (educational centres were established within 74 higher educational institutions). There are also some achievements in school education: 1,048 school students from Donetsk Oblast and 196 from Luhansk Oblasts obtained distance education in 2017.

MToT initiated the launching of the Master’s Degree Programme, ‘Conflict Resolution and Mediation’ at the National Technical University ‘Kyiv Polytechnic Institute’. The Programme is aimed at training specialists in conflict resolution and conflict prevention.

To alleviate the conflict consequences, especially for children, MToT organized recreational activities for 258 children from Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts who live along the contact line, as well as for 36 adults who accompanied them on the Adriatic coast (Croatia).

MToT developed a series of social advertising videos ‘Good people live everywhere’ to change the stereotypical attitude towards IDPs. These videos were given wide public distribution. MToT also created a video clip about the Minsk agreements, which I have mentioned above.

During the execution of the Action Plan, the entry/exit checkpoints were properly equipped which enabled more people to cross the contact line, as well as to receive free legal and social services. Furthermore, thanks to mobile service centres of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, such people receive the following services: registration/re-registration of vehicles; issuance of driver’s license; issuance of certificates, acceptance of requests, etc. And this is just a small part of what has been achieved.

What do you think is the most successful example of the work of the Government of Georgia in peacebuilding and reconciliation?

The Government of Georgia has been significantly contributing to peacebuilding and reconciliation. It is not easy to single out one example, since the work of the Government of Georgia is carried out in different directions. It is worth mentioning the peace initiative “A Step to a Better Future.” This initiative was designed to improve the humanitarian and socio-economic situation, receive material benefits, and encourage contacts through the contact lines, free movement and promotion of relations based on the common interests of the population living in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia. In our opinion, such initiatives foreshadow the reconciliation and are designed for people.

Does MToT plan to apply any Georgian experience in the planning or implementation of peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives in Ukraine?

It certainly does, as the Georgian experience on planning and implementation of peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives is very important for Ukraine. MToT cooperates actively with representatives of Georgia. Several joint visits were held to share relevant experiences. The Government of Georgia has an interesting and useful experience towards cooperation with non-governmental organisations. The positive models would be a very valuable example to implement in Ukrainian realities.

We are very grateful to the Georgian counterparts for their openness to share mistakes that were made in Georgia at first stages of the post-conflict resolution. We look forward to continuing our cooperation.
This thematic bulletin stems from a recognition that many of the challenges to the support of IDPs currently faced by the Government of Ukraine, have after many years been addressed successfully by the Government of Georgia and civil society. The DRC Capacity Building Programme uses the respective experiences of the Georgian Government and NGOs to build the capacities of the Government of Ukraine and inform policies to enable effective response to IDP related challenges – by learning and applying successful lessons from Georgia.

About the Project

This newsletter is issued under the project ‘Technical Assistance to the Government of Ukraine through the Georgian Experience’ which is implemented by Danish Refugee Council Georgia and Ukraine Offices with the financial support of the US Department of State – Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration. The primary objective of the project is to use the experiences of addressing internal displacement by the Government and civil society in Georgia to build the capacity of the Government of Ukraine to improve the lives of IDPs and conflict affected persons by supporting IDP integration and protection of the displaced to international standards.
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