

**Address to the ASRC by Ambassador Herbert Salber
European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in
Georgia
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The region which I am looking at in a privileged way has too many conflicts in a rather small geographical area. There is no doubt that these conflicts have major negative impact in several aspects:

- security: tensions and distrust prevail; serious incidents take place, impact on human security and generate a climate of insecurity;
- economy: closed borders mean obstacles to trade and business relations; travelling through the region gives evidence about destroyed and unused railway lines;
- development: The conflicts stand in the way for societies and nations to fully develop their potential and benefit from the region's geographical position as a link between Europe and Asia.

The International Community is heavily involved and tries to contribute to conflict-management and resolution. More than 20 years after the eruption of these conflicts nobody can say that we should be satisfied with results. But: Achieve or not to achieve conflicts settlement does not depend first and foremost on efforts by the International Community. It only can assist. Necessary political choices and compromises have to be made by the respective political leaderships.

Let me start with some considerations on the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. The approach of the EU is to support the OSCE Minsk Group and its Co-Chairs as the established conflict settlement format. That does not mean that we stand aside. We maintain regular inclusive contacts with the sides and stakeholders. In our meetings at the highest level we do not hide our views about the need for compromise allowing for a solution, call for political, military and rhetoric restraint. We pass EU messages in support of a consolidated ceasefire and political settlement. The EU supports peacebuilding activities and people-to-people contacts across the conflict divide. Furthermore, the EU signals readiness to provide assistance in the implementation of a peace agreement.

We hope that the results achieved in the recent meetings in Vienna and St Petersburg will be translated into measures that bring us closer to a settlement.

On the crisis in Georgia, the EU has a more proactive role. I am responsible for steering - together with OSCE and UN colleagues - the negotiation mechanism which addresses the consequences of the 2008 conflict: the Geneva International Discussions. It is an original set up, built on ambiguities and broad inclusiveness. It involves all stakeholders: Georgia, Russia, the United-States, as well as Sukhumi and Tskhinvali and UN, OSCE and EU.

The major ambiguity of our Geneva process is that we are tasked to address a dispute, but are not mandated to discuss the core of this dispute, which is the political status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We are mandated to deal with the 'security and stability modalities in/of Abkhazia and South Ossetia'. As a result, we are not exactly in a conflict resolution rational. This is all the more challenging because what prevail in the minds of the participants in our negotiations are precisely considerations over the political status issue. Another ambiguity lies with the format of the negotiations. Some participants focus on a Georgian-Russian dimension of the dispute, which was indeed prominent in 2008, whereas others go back to the 90's and focus on a Georgian-Abkhaz and a Georgian-Ossetian dimension. As a result, we have talks, but no common understanding of who the parties are and in which way they see themselves as a part to a conflict.

The GID have to handle these ambiguities. At the same time, they limit our ability to define a common goal for our negotiations and to consolidate security and stability.

To illustrate how these parameters complicate our work, I would like to give a concrete example. A key topic in our Discussions is non-use of force. All agree with this principle, which is a core element of OSCE norms, principles and commitments. Yet, we are still searching for a formula upon which commitments to the non-use of force could be renewed and reinforced in the GID-framework.

Despite our limitations, we have managed to improve security and stability. Altogether, we have developed the capacity and tools to manage an unresolved dispute, prevent crisis and address concerns and sources of tension. In all our GID rounds, we collectively review the security situation. This has introduced a sense of accountability among the participants for the developments on the ground, which is a major achievement. In addition, we have established security mechanisms - the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) - which involve the security actors on the ground who meet on a monthly basis and maintain permanent contact through hotlines. These IPRMs help improve confidence, predictability and transparency on the ground.

These efforts are very concrete. As we speak my colleague Gunther Baechler - Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the South Caucasus, and Co-Chair of the GID for the OSCE - is co-facilitating, together with the Head of the EU Monitoring Mission, a meeting of the IPRM in Ergneti, on the dividing line with South Ossetia. The agenda covers issues ranging from cases of detention, early warning on military exercises, tension emerging from the installation of various barriers and signs, or repair work the irrigation infrastructure. It might have come to your attention that we were confronted a month ago with a tragic fatal shooting incident on the Abkhaz administrative boundary line, the first incident of this gravity in many years. There as well, the IPRM, known as the Gali-IPRM, was crucial for information exchanges on the incident and for defusing tension. As we speak, some form of co-operation is in place for an investigation to progress. In this respect, we were pleased that this Gali-IPRM, which had stopped working for four years due to

disagreements on its modalities, had resumed its activities. It is now back-on-track. I strongly believe that the IPRM - or similar type of security mechanism - is much needed in the context of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabach. It could make, there as well, a difference on the ground.

Of course, much more would be needed from our GID for building durable stability. In this respect, we are making the best possible use of OSCE tools and expertise for injecting proposals into our debates.

To give you a concrete and recent example, at our latest GID round held two weeks ago, OSCE-associated experts gave a presentation on OSCE measures for "*Communication and transparency*", which included explanation on "*Status neutral formula for arms control*". This was not our first attempt to promote OSCE concepts and tools. We had in the past an extensive briefing by the Head of the FSC Support Section on "*Possibilities for regional CSBMs as provided by OSCE documents*". More recently, OSCE-associated experts presented to GID interested participants their research on "*Threat perception in the OSCE area*". We then invited GID participants to describe in the round their major threats as they perceive them. We received some very precise replies with concerns that can be addressed. We do not expect that we could apply CSBMs as provided for in OSCE documents to the situation we are dealing with. At the same time, we believe that OSCE documents can stimulate discussions on the importance of CSBMs and provide examples for our negotiators to engage in the shaping of what could best fit to the situation.

When we speak about security in the region at least the thinking of the CO-Chairs is very much guided by the OSCE approach: Security in three dimensions, based on a broad concept. Concurrently, we are trying hard to promote understanding of the importance of the human dimension of security. We have managed to get the participants engaging regularly on issues such as humanitarian crossings, documentation and associated rights in conflict-affected areas, multilingual education, missing persons, mobility - including outside of the region, cultural heritage, or environmental patrimony. Although the participants have different priorities, no one is questioning any longer the relevance of these topics for the process and a commitment to achieve progress is well in place.

Obstacles remain for translating these debates into co-operation and concrete actions, and this is mainly due to considerations over the political status issue put forward by participants. Nevertheless, we see positive trends even in very difficult areas. Again I may revert to an example. Since mid-last year, an OSCE-commissioned expert has been granted access also to South Ossetia to work on the fate of missing persons. At the same time we still are encountering difficulties to address adequately the important issue of return of IDPs and Refugees in our GID rounds. The issue is heavily politicized, while all participants admit that it is an important problem.

We also address issues in the 'second dimensions': We have managed to promptly respond to an environmental threat which the Abkhaz participants had raised in the GID last summer. A forest pest, the box tree moth, had started to severely defoliate the flora. We mobilized and deployed expertise for an assessment and the findings were discussed in two workshops with the involvement of experts, including from Georgia, Sukhumi, Russia, Turkey and the Czech Republic. This led to a spraying operation on the ground, to which the EU, the UN and OSCE have jointly contributed. This form of rather effective co-operation can hopefully send the signal that a co-operative approach can also bring about progress in other areas.

All our efforts in the GID, which address the three dimensions of security, strongly benefit from the broad inclusiveness of our negotiation mechanism. I see only advantages in having the EU, the OSCE and UN Co-Chairing the GID together. The OSCE and the UN bring their respective invaluable expertise and experience, including from their long-standing engagement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They were operating there for almost two decades. We try to make the best possible use of the resources available within our three respective organizations. I have already mentioned examples of input provided to the GID by the OSCE Chairmanship and experts on specific OSCE-related issues. Listing them would be very long, ranging from the Gender Unit to the HCNM. Similar invaluable input is provided by the UN. The UNHCR, UNDP and the UN OHCHR participate in the GID. Other UN agencies, such as UNICEF, UNESCO and the FAO have been associated, directly or indirectly to our work. Furthermore, we encourage and support civil society initiatives and try to build, to the extent possible, synergies between our negotiation mechanism and these endeavours to reduce tensions and to build peace. Their contribution is essential.

I am convinced that the close EU, OSCE and UN co-operation that we have established for the conduct of the GID, is something that can serve as an example in other conflict management and resolution processes.