

DRAFT FOR GEORGE QUESTER ADDITIONS, CHANGES, SUGGESTIONS  
SEPTEMBER 1997

To: Ernie Wilson, Director CIDCM (name to be changed to other interested parties, list appended)  
From: Edy Kaufman and George Quester

Re: PARTNERS IN CONFLICT IN THE TRANSCAUCASUS: Preliminary Evaluation of Eckero Workshop

At the initiative of the Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) of the University of Maryland at College Park and hosted by the Aland Peace Research Institute an Innovative Problem Solving Workshop took place in the Eckero Island during August 23-29, 1997. The workshop was attended by seven of the initial "Partners" (from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and South Ossetia). Dr. Giorgi Otyrba, the eight participant from Abkhazia is now the Deputy Foreign Minister and his travel restrictions made it impossible for him and for a designated additional Abkhazian to come to Finland. Six additional participants joined the Partners (two from Ngorno-Karabakh, two from Azerbaijan and two from Georgia). For part of the time, they were joined by academics from the Tampere Peace Research Center (Finland), Upsala University (Sweden), representatives of the Swedish and Finish foreign ministries in charge of the "Minsk Process" and mediating on Ngorno Karabakh on behalf of the OSCE, as well as several dignitaries of the Aland government, Parliament and Finish representative to the islands. It is necessary to stress that it was a low budget operation (total of approx \$27,000) and that the Aland Peace Research Institute covered travel grants from the Transcaucasus and most of the cost on location. Enclosed herewith are the detailed program and list of participants. We would like to succinctly present the main objectives and the degree of accomplishment. This is followed by a short list of problems, identified as main challenges to work in the region with our "Partners" and civil society at large. This first report is being submitted only a few days after the meeting ended. A more elaborated implementation report is being prepared by Barri Sanders, and will be available upon request.

OBJECTIVE 1: TO COMPLETE PREPARATIONS FOR COLLABORATIVE BOOK:

a) The revision of the Russian version of the multidisciplinary book of the "Partners" and CIDCM contributions was completed, following the old "Partners" short presentation and a discussion led by the new "Partners", expected publication is in December 1997. b) The English version was thoroughly discussed, and the "Partners" undertook to explore ways of integrating attitudes and needs of the "other" side to their conflicts in their respective chapters. The brief final chapter prepared by Barri was reviewed and many additional consensual ideas were proposed, to enrich its contents into a real collaborative venture. The "Partners" chapters are expected to be send back to CIDCM not later than December 1st, 1997. c) The possibility of future academic collaborative work in the region was discussed, and the preference was expressed for more systematic coverage of focused themes (minority groups, early warnings to ethnopolitical conflicts),

with contributions within a specific discipline.

**OBJECTIVE 2: TO INTRODUCE NEW TECHNOLOGY IN THE "PARTNERS" WORK:**

The presentation on the use of WWW was received with intellectual interest but was largely considered unfeasible, given its high cost in Baku and Yerivan. The "Partners" from Abkhazia, Ngorno Karabakh and South Ossetia do not normally have access to such technology. Still, it may be worth exploring regular access through foreign representatives in the region. Meanwhile, there has been an agreement to use the home page of one of the "Partners" centers in Tbilisi for gathering and publishing information about conflict resolution activity in the region. Meanwhile the discussion about maximizing the use of e-mail as a bulletin board, newsletter and discussion group was fruitful and it is expected that CIDCM will play a major role in the first stage of operationalizing the network.

**OBJECTIVE 3: TO FAMILIARIZE THE "PARTNERS" WITH THE MODELS OF DIFFUSION OF POWER ELSEWHERE THROUGH EXPERIMENTATION WITH NEW TECHNIQUES:**

Through the introduction of a new consensus building technique (Minimal Common Denominators- MCD), the participants were effectively able to express their agreement on a significant number of attributes of the cases of the Aland Islands Autonomy, the Generalitat of Catalonia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. MCD was useful in leading the contending sides to find out shared options rather than stressing differences in their positions, it is also feasible to find common ground. With additional training, the "Partners" will be able to use it in addition to the ARI technique (J.Rothman) that is already introduced in their workshops. For CIDCM, it was important to establish not through simulations but through real "Partners in Conflict" that we now have an additional tool to encourage people to move from adversarial stands into shared interests, and possibly use it elsewhere.

**OBJECTIVE 4: TO STIMULATE THE "PARTNERS" TO WIDEN THEIR ROLE, BY INVOLVING THEMSELVES INTO POLICY-RELEVANT ACTIVITIES:**

**This major** objective of this workshop was to assess if there is a potential for the "scholar-practitioner" in the Transcaucasus in upgrading their current academic and grassroots-NGO activity into shared positions towards the resolution of ethnopolitical conflicts in the region and its effective dissemination. The success in the use of MCD triggered the subsequent discussion about expressing the shared principles publicly. While the idea of stating their agreement in a statement about regional principles for conflict resolution was more difficult, it yet generated a more general statement (The "Partners" preferred to call it a Proclamation), which was presented in a press conference in Mariehamn, as well as to the Finnish and Swedish Foreign Ministers (attending another meeting in Aland), in a short but meaningful ceremony and informal exchange with both. When back home, the "Partners" pledged to conduct press conferences, interviews in TV shows, write articles in the printed media, meeting with the NGO community as well as representatives of IGOs in the region to discuss the Aland Island model. They are also committed to bring this Proclamation to the attention of the highest policy-makers

(Presidents, and /or Foreign Ministers, leaders of parliamentary factions, government and opposition).

It is now clear, that if modest means are providing, the activity plan for 1998 will enrich the present work at the academic level (teaching, research, teacher's training, co-authoring and curriculum development in conflict resolution ), and NGO level (transboundary and domestic workshops and seminars with journalists, activities with the NGO community, refugees, etc) with policy relevant action. Now the major effort is to put the second track diplomacy results and new ideas into policy makers agendas. Among several other, two programs are planned, if additional moderate funding can be secured (estimated \$ 15,000 each):

a) Meeting in border area (possibly in corner with Georgian territory) for dialogue among political leaders of government and opposition from Armenia, Azserbaijan and Ngorno Karabakh to discuss new ideas. For instance, Nikolay Hovhanissian has published a booklet covering nine options (including the idea of Associate State formula as discussed in Eckero about Puerto Rico) and now being published in 17 installments in the Russian language Yerivan newspaper, with the encouragement of President Lev Petrossian). The Azeri participants are interested in discussing this an other options and CIDCM will provided the Partners with the methodology to conduct the dialogue as an innovative problem solving workshop.

b) In reference to the South Ossetia/Georgia conflict, our "Partners" are committed to discuss in detail with political leaders the Aland Islands model, and if possible to arrange for a meeting in the Caucasus with the participation of Aland Peace Research Institute and Parliamentary representatives.

#### OBJECTIVE 5: CONTINUATION OF TEAM BUILDING, AND EXPANDING THE NETWORK OF "PARTNERS":

The use of the unstructured time in the program, (often through lengthy evenings in the large room adjacent to the sauna) and specially designed activities, contributed once more to enrich the high level of trust and friendship existing among the "old Partners" as well the acceptance of most of the "new Partners" who by large blended remarkably well with the group. The possibility of having the entire network (now 13, and possibly 16 with an additional South Ossetian and two Abkhazians) meeting together at least once a year, remains a high priority for their work, provided that such gatherings they are run proactively as a collaborative problem solving workshop and with clear and immediate objectives, as in Eckero.

While focusing on the accomplishments of the workshop, it is also necessary to flash the main problems for the implementation of the above mentioned plans:

**PROBLEM I- THE LEVEL OF EMPOWERMENT:** As in other parts of the former Soviet Union, the reticence among academics and others to involve themselves into interactions with the authorities in advancing popular causes through public information, dialogue, lobbying, protesting and exposing negative policies is also felt with our "Partners". A mixture of pessimism and cynicism as to the ability of influence decisions, together with some concern about possible adverse personal

consequences, makes it difficult to assess if the sporadic open discussions on the subject have led into a revision of such passive attitudes.

PROBLEM II- THE LEVEL OF NATIONALISM: Many of our "Partners" seem to be in the main stream of their societies when expressing strong nationalistic feelings, bringing up the question to what extent their disputes are "mature" for resolution. At times, the search for a significant compromise solution seems to be remote from their priority and as much as they find themselves in opposition to their governments in domestic political and economic policies, there is less of tendency to express criticism on ethnopolitical issues.

3) PROBLEM III- OWNERSHIP: The "Partners" have felt very comfortable with the current situation in which CIDCM is assisting them considerably not only in training in conflict resolution and academic writing, but also in fundraising for their NGOs and organizing events outside the region. We feel that after two years it is time for them to take the leading role, generating their own strategic plans and looking for means of implementation. CIDCM should conclude the evaluation of these three stages and become an assisting element on very specific and well defined needs. We were encouraged to note that the "Partners" are currently considering to formalize their bonds through this project into a regional NGO focusing on conflict resolution. It seems to us that with adequate planning and support this transition could occur during the next year.

Additional problems that may deserve further discussion, is the low level of voluntarism in NGO activity, the degree of internal democracy and accountability within civil society organizations, and others.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS:**

In retrospect the anticipated goals of the workshop were to a large extent met. Once more, as in the other activities that took place since its inception, the Eckero workshop was cost-effective. In many ways, it represents a watershed, to the extent that the participants agreed to become jointly involved in policy relevant activities. We strongly feel the need to accompany the "Partners" at least till early 1999, both in the process of becoming policy-relevant as well as institutionalizing themselves into a regional NGO with a long-term strategy.

ACTIVITIES

ARMENIAN-AZERI POLICY MAKERS DIALOGUE

MEETING IN BORDER AREA

NGO CONSULTATION IN OCTOBER AMONG GEORGIAN NGOS 2 DAYS, 3RD DAY  
GOVERNMENT

QUARTERLY BULLETIN, ASSIM

GOGI PARTNERS HOME PAGE

FACE-TO-FACE GOVERNMENT MEETING

IMAGE OF THE ENEMY DISCUSSION WITH FILM

NEGOTIATE WITH TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR C, .I.S. (TACIS) THERE 25%  
FOR A BUDGET FOR PARTNERS IN CONFLICT IN THE REGION, WE PT 75% TO  
INCLUDE EQUIPMENT