The Other Side of Conflict Resolution: Mobilizing Peace Constituencies in the South Caucasus

By Elkhan Nuriyev

This article reflects the key elements of policy advice derived from the analysis of prospects and challenges for creating peace constituencies in the South Caucasus countries. In his policy paper, the author looks into possibilities of breaking the long-lasting impasse in the conflict-torn societies and describes collaborative steps that can make the confrontation more bearable for the people and less risky for regional stability. The opinion piece concludes with providing innovative proposals and specific recommendations for rebuilding trust and promoting reconciliation in the South Caucasus.

Introduction

The international community has so far paid little attention to the South Caucasus where conflict resolution process is stuck in political limbo for years. This apparent neglect and the lack of understanding of the deep-rooted issues have created an informational landscape where fake news stories harm the ordinary people and violate their fundamental right to make informed choices on the basis of accurate information that is free of deception and manipulation. In effect, the current climate of disinformation aggravates regional tensions and makes incumbent authorities vulnerable to instability. More to the point, false information not only leads to disastrous results for regional stability but also directly affects peace process in the conflict-torn areas.

The fact that misinformation has a devastating impact on conflict resolution in the South Caucasus is evidenced by the recent effects of handling crisis situations in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. Certainly, international efforts to resolve protracted conflicts in the region must increasingly be looked for at the political, diplomatic and human levels instead of applying traditional forms of information warfare. What is most important today, however, is to develop the art of waging peace. This needs to be done by all the parties involved in the negotiating process to prevent further escalation of never-ending conflicts.

Clearly, none of the South Caucasus states can cope with regional security problems without external help. The United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are all international actors with an interest in ending the long-running conflicts. Russia, Turkey and Iran are all affected negatively by continued regional hostilities. Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia expect principal powers to focus their resources, determine their priorities and thoroughly review the instruments in their foreign policy toolkit. Even as Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan are seeking greater intermediary assistance from well-respected global forces, Russia and the West have become involved in the geopolitical tug-of-war over dominance in Eurasia, continuing to draw up war plans against one another. Such a complicated state of affairs explains why geopolitical shifts impede conflict resolution and adversely affect peace in the region.

Given the fluidity of the strategic situation in the South Caucasus and the speed with which events unfold there, the wider public in the three countries is gravely concerned about the possibility of a drastic new turn in the enduring hostilities. Indeed, there is sufficient justification for such concerns, since the peace process continues to languish in the doldrums. People living in this region have therefore become increasingly discouraged by the lack of any real progress in reaching a lasting breakthrough. Although after each round of talks, political leaders maintain that they stand in favour of a peaceful conflict settlement, all involved parties

have yet to demonstrate any real inclination towards reaching a coordinated understanding of the intractable problems and achieving a joint resolution.

Turning Information Warfare into Information Peacefare

Obviously, the dissemination of disinformation and propaganda through traditional media and social networks poses numerous problems and challenges that sow discord, undermine free society and damage public trust. Information warfare as a major source of fake news is highly politicized in the South Caucasus where since 1990s local media has increasingly been used as a tool of information warfare – a weapon of words that influences public minds, and a weapon of operations that affects domestic policies. The ability to conduct information warfare activities and disseminate fake stories to shape the public narratives has rapidly transformed local media outlets into strategic weapons in the hands of incumbent governments engaged in the protracted conflicts. Hence, information warfare waged between conflicting parties strongly influences peace talks conducted by the OSCE Minsk Group[1] and the Geneva International Discussions[2].

More precisely, information warfare can have effects on mediation efforts and stances of the peace brokers, and on their own interests, and on the methods they usually use to prevent an escalation in the intractable conflict and its extremely negative consequences. This explains why diplomatic efforts of the international mediators imply actions aimed at achieving "negative" peace: preventing, stopping, or not permitting a renewal of hostilities in the conflict zone. In fact, ineffective methods of conflict resolution are mostly directed to reach speedy agreements, hence establish negative peace[3]. Further to the point, negotiations on stopping wars and entering agreements on non-use of force are only attempts to halt or at least, control violence already happening, which has been caused by deep-rooted problems and circumstances.

However, there is also "positive" peace which implies eliminating the internal and structural reasons and conditions arousing a violent conflict, toward the curtailment of which "negative" peace processes are aimed. So far, unfortunately, very little has been done to achieve "positive" peace. There is no intention of belittling the role of the mediators and reducing their efforts to naught. No one also denies the fact that peace brokers have made rather persistent attempts to resolve the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus. But if conflicting parties are unable to reach "positive" peace under the auspices of the international mediators in the near future, "negative" peace will easily collapse and one way or another will lead to renewed hostilities it was aimed against. This process could go on forever, which is evidenced by the existing political deadlocks around Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh where fragile "negative" peace has been kept up for more than twenty five years now.

In essence, there are at least two important circumstances that the OSCE Minsk Group and the Geneva International Discussions should take into account in the present-day situation. First, it is the potential impact that negative consequences of information warfare already pose to the

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[1] The Minsk Group, the activities of which have become known as the Minsk Process, spearheads the OSCE's mediation efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It is co-chaired by Russia, France, and the United States.

[2] The Geneva International Discussions are multilateral talks, launched in Geneva, Switzerland in October 2008, to address the consequences of the territorial conflicts in Georgia. Mediated by the OSCE, the EU, and the UN, the Geneva process involves representatives from Georgia, Russia and the United States, as well as members of both the Georgian exiled administrations of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the de-facto authorities of the two breakaway regions.

[3] See Elkhan Nuriyev, "Re-engaging Armenia and Azerbaijan in Reconciliation Process: Prospects and Incentives for Nagorno-Karabakh Breakthrough". In *What Kind of Sovereignty? Examining Alternative Governance Methods in the South Caucasus*, edited by Ernst Felberbauer and Frederic Labarre, Vienna: National Defense Academy, 2014, pp. 163-180.

current negotiating stalemate in the South Caucasus where the wider public reaction could be aroused by unsuccessful mediation efforts. Second, these are the tenacious mores, mentality and culture motivating the conduct of the people in the conflict situation, let alone the expediency of reckoning with the realistic possibilities, the specific situation, and public opinion.

On the other hand, the present impasse exists not only because a solution cannot be found, but because established narratives, thought patterns and distrust have been deliberately nurtured. Achieving political settlement, therefore, is but one element of a bigger challenge, whose essence is to change the perspectives of the respective governments as to the utility of ongoing stalemate. Exploring and promoting innovative ideas could certainly help inspire and motivate conflicting parties to unjam the frozen peace process[4]. For this to happen, there is a strong need to adopt a changed narrative on conflict resolution reflecting a constructive, dialogue-oriented approach. The main goal is to develop more effective ways to better inform the wider public, protect society from illegitimate pressures and thereby safeguard internal stability.

But still, dangerously spreading misinformation calculated to demonize and threaten the other party remains a major obstacle to bringing about peace in the South Caucasus. Given the absence of broad civic discourse on the approaches to the speedy conflict resolution in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh, the co-chairs of both the OSCE Minsk Group and the Geneva International Discussions should therefore undertake commitment to meet renowned scholars, civil society activists and media representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia on a regular basis to engage them in a more nuanced public debate searching for innovative ways to shape compromise and promote reconciliation. The initial point of such an initiative is to establish an expert group in each South Caucasus country as a means for fostering "positive" peace in the conflict-torn areas and to help local media outlets rather move away from information warfare to "information peacefare".

Building Corridors for Peace Dialogue

As is well known, dialogue and peace always serve as common language spoken among nations. Problems of lack of mutual understanding are usually solved by dialogue which is the only way forward to ease tensions and resolve conflicts. Doing enough dialogue means doing enough peace, thereby bridging the gap between the parties and bringing them together for increased understanding how demanding peace dialogue is. That is why using the language of peace as a vital component in the pursuit of reconciliation is so essential to find any common ground needed to push the peace process further.

Obviously, one of the most challenging problems the South Caucasus is facing today is that incumbent political elites have so far failed to create a viable language for peace as part of a new technology for information peacefare. While there is a relatively well-developed technology of information warfare, political leaderships throughout the entire region still lack a concrete image of what information peacefare might look like. There is a strong need to begin to address this problem by creating and testing new innovative ways to build a platform of mutual dialogue that will enable the parties in conflict to establish a climate of trust and achieve reconciliation. In other words, it is necessary to invent an art of waging "positive" peace, instead of maintaining "negative" peace. With this in mind, the ruling authorities in the conflict-ridden

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[4] For example, it would be a mistake to call the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict "frozen". On the contrary, it remains alive and is now heating up even more, obstructing the development plans and deteriorating good neighbourhood relations in the region. This was most vividly demonstrated in the military flare-up of April 2016, later termed the "Four Day War". Likewise, ceasefire violations on the line of contact between the armies of Armenia and Azerbaijan have been regular occurrences over the last several years. What is therefore frozen indeed, is the peace process, which perpetuates the existence of absolutely uncontrolled territories that easily become the safe haven for terrorists, criminals, and all sorts of illicit trafficking.

areas must search for alternative approaches and avenues that will provide a way out of the current impasse to negotiate constructively and move seriously towards a political solution.

More frequently, politicians and policy analysts use words like "conflict freeze," "nonviolence" and "non-use of force" to protest the use of warfare. But yet they have to look at the other side of conflict resolution. It is about a space of deliberation, learning, and looking inward. It is a time of looking at relationships from a different perspective. Openness, tolerance and hope are key factors that foster healthy conflict resolution. Trust is the ability to build confidence in relationships in which the parties believe they will act in their best common interest. There is only one thing that can restore broken trust. It is a mutual forgiveness that could indeed bring about reconciliation and peace to the conflict-torn region. But when peace supporters talk about "forgiveness," their efforts are not taken seriously by decision-makers. This is a very real problem for those of scholars working in the field of peacebuilding.

Paradoxically, incumbent elites have not yet been able to invent a practical tool of peacefare itself. This explains why they cannot develop and apply the technology of "information peacefare". This is still not being done largely because they either want to continue to do things the way they have been doing them down through the recent decades, or because they don't know how to find new and better ways of resolving intractable disputes and how to take an innovative approach to making peace with modern information society tools.

Nonetheless, conflicting parties should first build corridors for dialogue through interaction and mutual understanding, and only then move on to foster and facilitate the practice of information peacefare. In order to develop helpful technologies and new approaches in information peacefare, there is certainly an increasing need for a new type of leadership with far more robust diplomacy and strong strategic vision to end still unresolved conflicts. This job could, after all, be done by a new generation of credible leaders willing to invest more of their countries' resources in establishing and conducting positive peacefare[5]. They could create a professional team of conflict resolution facilitators who would test specific models in the field of peacebuilding that could eventually supersede information warfare and promote genuine peace dialogue instead.

Commercial and Economic Values of Peace

It is believed that mutual economic gains can reshape regional mindsets, which, at present, get in the way of tackling the most serious disagreements. Only a radical change of regional outlook and behaviour could really make the difference in breaching the impasse. A common vision of a peaceful, secure, stable, and prosperous future for the South Caucasus should have a new-found economic pragmatism that must be pursued and prevail over national security concerns. In order to move peace talks forward from the current deadlock, each party should first demonstrate decisive political will to take risks while accepting a compromise solution. That would include preparing political and psychological conditions for readying wider circles of the local populace to accept negotiated compromise solutions to thorny territorial disputes over Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Shaping compromise in the South Caucasus may well start with creating discussion platforms for exchange of views on energy, transport, trade issues, including their possible social implications, and the rehabilitation of the territories affected by the conflict and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their homeland. The purpose of this dialogue is to progressively shape new conditions that would alleviate the existing tensions to enable incumbent elites on each side to stop using vitriolic war rhetoric, and to allow stability to prevail, and even compromise to be considered by political leaderships. Public debate on

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[5] See Hebert Lewis Swan, *Positive (Negative) Peacefare: The Neglected Art of Waging Peace*. New York: Vantage Press, 1966.

commercial and economic values of peace could hence help promote intra-regional confidence building cooperation. In this way, political leaders might be offered flexibility on making tough decisions related to conflict settlement by providing them with a careful consideration of post-conflict regional development scenarios.

More precisely, economic benefits of commercial and political rapprochement should be realized, acknowledged, and trickled down to the general public at large. Consistent economic dialogue, including local specialists and international experts, civil society representatives, investors and businessmen, aimed at discussing a roadmap for regional economic development would need to occur with the goal of demonstrating that there is more to gain from trade, commerce and mutual investment than from deadlocked conflict. Such a dialogue could promote regional integration by proposing concrete free trade initiatives and establishing different types of special economic zones. In particular, free economic zones, qualified economic zones, and urban zones could well be established in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, with Armenian and Azerbaijani communities, as well as Georgians, Abkhazians and Ossetians working together on locally-sponsored programs and internationally-supported projects.

Such intra-regional interaction would actually help overcome stereotypes and set an example to the youth of the three countries. A format for interregional youth programs could be created to revise concepts and perceptions. If these attitudes alter, the nature of the political process will also change. The parties also need to see that conflict resolution can achieve physical security and ensure the return of IDPs. Focusing on the advantages of choosing regional economic cooperation and integration over the current state of enmity is hence essential.

A Role for the Private Sector in Peacebuilding

The private sector has a vital role to play in fostering socio-economic development. But it also has a role in contributing to the resolution of long-running conflicts by engaging in public debate on commercial and economic benefits of peace[6]. For this reason, a particular emphasis should be laid on the crucial role of the private sector as the driving force in incentivizing regional network and in making economic reintegration possible. The main goal is to look at all possible ways the private sector could contribute to building up the constituencies for peace and to shaping conditions that allow incumbent political elites to facilitate reconciliation between the parties. This means that the private sector can help promote commercial and economic values of peace.

On the other hand, the private sector should play a critical role in assisting the central authorities to defuse tensions by undertaking key investments targeting the vulnerable regions. It is about resource mobilization support aimed at creating a peace agenda for regional development. It is not sufficient to merely promote new thinking and fresh approaches. Mindful of the limited resources of the national governments and international organizations, it is also necessary to mobilize practical support among new partners to help in implementing this agenda. These new partners include business entrepreneurs, private companies and media holdings which may become actively involved in the conflict resolution process.

In other words, there is a need to bring the private sector into concrete projects and to mobilize businesses and inform them of the new framework, within which their investments can have such beneficial outcomes for themselves and the communities in which they operate. One may suggest that a constant dialogue between private sector organizations be launched to identify

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[6] For interesting insight into the private sector's role in contributing both directly and indirectly to the prevention and resolution of violent conflict, see Jane Nelson, *The Business of Peace: The Private Sector as a Partner in Conflict Prevention and Resolution*. London: Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum, 2000. Available online at http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/publications/The%20Business%20of%20Peace.pdf.

long-term peace strategies as well as individual operational activities to enhance political, social and economic development in the region. Among specific blueprints that can be considered and implemented in the post-conflict regional development scenarios are investment promotion, support for small-scale joint enterprises and employment for the young generation.

In fact, through its active investments, the private sector can play a significant role in building up the economies of the conflict-torn areas in the South Caucasus. A special program entitled "Jobs for the Young," needs to be encouraged and could be founded by the private sector in order to provide not only employment opportunities but also job training. Last but not least, the promotion of small- and medium-sized enterprise development is a vital measure to strengthen economic and social development and to ensure long-term political stability within the entire region.

Towards Creating Peace Constituencies: Key Recommendations

To date the constituency of peace in the South Caucasus is quite small and weak. Any change of attitude will require a commensurate preparation of the public opinion. Adversaries must become partners in the public mind before they become so in reality. This is also necessary for business endeavours to take place in safety. If there was political will to promote inter-ethnic and inter-community reconciliation, restore international legality, ensure freedom for all people, and foster prosperity through economic reintegration, there would be a way to make the regional conflicts come to peaceful, mutually agreed solutions. In that sense, economic dialogues at both the intra- and inter-society levels should become building blocks in conflict resolution processes.

Albert Einstein (1879-1955), one of the world's leading spokesmen for nonviolent conflict resolution in his speech to the New History Society on 14 December 1930 famously said, "Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding"[7]. This inspirational quote seems to mean that if conflicting parties do not understand one another, there cannot be a peace. There will be misunderstandings leading to heated disagreements which will eventually cause conflict. If they really do not understand each other's motivations, there is little chance for de-escalation of conflict. Hence, effective communication is the only way to defuse tension and create the right atmosphere for the peace talks to succeed.

But the following interesting question arises: How is peace actually waged? Yet the answer is very simple. Eye to eye, the parties should talk and cooperate in exploring how their differences and disagreements could eventually be buried. In particular, a meaningful public discourse can extensively be employed as a crucial tool for achieving peace, with the precepts that academics and media are significant instruments for promoting mutual understanding and reconciliation. In this context, the EU, the OSCE, the Council of Europe (CoE), international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and other public authorities, such as regional governments and civil society organizations must strongly support and encourage greater participation of research scholars and media professionals in the peace dialogue process.

The establishment of the South Caucasus Peacebuilding Platform, a regional network that would aim to provide an open intellectual space for academics and media to learn from each other and jointly work to shape public discourse of reconciliation could be an important step forward in trying to contribute towards stimulating progress in the peace talks. The presence of such an interactive network could play a substantial role in helping to prepare fertile ground for accepting a compromise solution and building up the constituencies for peace when new opportunities would emerge.

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[7] See Alice Calaprice, *The New Quotable Einstein*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Most notably, prestigious international think-tanks should actively support peace studies scholars in a variety of ways to encourage debate and bring about positive change within and between their societies. One specific recommendation is to launch a program or initiative called "Scholars Waging Peace"[8]. It is about a special project aimed at building a team of conflict resolution facilitators working to investigate technology's potential for stimulating and strengthening approaches that can pave the way to true reconciliation process. This group must be made up of professionals who have specific skills, significant competency and extensive knowledge to deal with conflict settlement and with information peacefare technology.

In effect, the initiative described above could help bring experts, their experiences and insights to the table with policymakers, attempting to resolve territorial conflicts. Scholars could share their views and ideas, building coalitions to come up with a new concept and to develop a concrete image of a workable model for "South Caucasus Peacefare" in the public mind. The primary purpose of the Scholars Waging Peace Program would be to demonstrate to sceptical leaders that there are indeed more effective ways to deal with differences than the use of military force.

But even so, it is still necessary to devise a coherent strategic vision and to be able to visualize the possibility of reaching a solution. If a team of impartial facilitators can point to something important that has worked much better or more effectively than warfare, incumbent political leaders will be under severe pressure to search for alternatives and to use the new tools. This in turn will allow the conflicting parties to reshape their perspectives and to visibly turn obstacles into opportunities. Given expertise and capabilities offered by professionals, the world's most respected think-tanks could guide Scholars for Peace initiative to a positive outcome. So all in all, the program's work could yield tangible results satisfactory to all the parties searching for innovative ways of breaking the current impasse and resolving the protracted conflicts.

Most importantly, the idea of organizing an international conference for peace scholars, policymakers and practitioners could be a starting point in establishing some kind of regional networking. A select group of specialists in focused field of study could first present their innovative proposals, then debate and deliberate about case scenarios and possible solutions. The main intention is to add value to a new cooperation project with participation of key speakers – peace promoters who could focus especially on a strategic roadmap for fostering dialogue and reconciliation by offering insider perspectives and sharing their expertise.

Meanwhile, information can be for better or for worse. It is just as important to talk about information that serves to create common understanding and peace. In this respect, the media is a vital tool in helping to shape public opinion. Hence the media can indeed play a key role in "peace mainstreaming" and in setting up the image of "information peacefare". The media representatives should talk more and more about valuable contributions to "information peacefare" and/or about innovative possibilities of information "peacekeeping" as an activity to create and to use situations with symmetric or identical information and knowledge to construct public opinion and to prepare for constructive change in relations among the parties. Addressing the challenges of waging "information peacefare" would be best handled by acting nationally first, and then regionally. This is because the presence of external actors, for example, such as Western and/or Russian media might lead to unnecessary tensions. This kind of promotion could therefore be done by cooperative efforts of the three major media outlets in the South Caucasus.

Certainly, coordinated action by regional media holdings will be critical to successful "information peacefare" campaigning. For instance, regional media agencies could launch a pilot project that would deal with conversion of media to journalism of peace. One could start

8 The initiative can also be referred to as "Scholars for Peace".

with inviting the makers of Peace Journalism to present their ideas and views on potential opportunities for regional cooperation of promoters of peace media. One of the main aims is to set up the South Caucasus Learning Partnership on Peace Journalism and to help people to access and produce alternative sources of information. The pilot project would work with selected local media agencies to make films and documentaries as well as publish opinion articles, essays, commentaries and promote stories that speak of human and cultural diplomacy, using examples of successful multi-ethnic societies and advantages of maintaining good neighbourly relations.

More specifically, a website project called "South Caucasus for Reconciliation and Peace" whose purpose would be to promote an exchange of knowledge and experience at the service of the construction of an art of peacebuilding could be launched jointly by the respective media outlets in each South Caucasus country. The website could serve as a tool that would help to translate creative and innovative ideas into action. Its mission should be to make available expertise and know-how about peacebuilding at the service of the implementation of common initiatives at regional level. The main goal is to bring together scholars, journalists, and civil society activists through online tool to form a regional network and to create a synergy between those working effectively in favour of promoting reconciliation and rebuilding peace in the South Caucasus. This initiative could help regional peacebuilders confront information warfare activities by creating new opportunities for them to facilitate the practice of "information peacefare" and make the image of "making peace" real in public mind.

Nonetheless, specific measures aimed at triggering relaxation of tensions can be envisaged to promote a constructive dialogue through a well thought-out media campaign:

Refocus the media narratives on "information peacefare" and post-conflict reconciliation. It is necessary to put forward a fairly straightforward message containing a rhetoric that favours rapprochement, for example, by jointly addressing common security challenges such as terrorism, energy disasters, and other global issues.

Better inform the wider public on the benefits of peace, regional integration and commercial exchange for prosperity of all sides.

Engage media to support and promote television talk shows and newspaper stories advocating greater transfer of public funds to peace education.

Increase social and humanitarian reporting with a view of developing a common view on particular topic of concern, such as return of refugees and IDPs, thereby giving a larger voice to NGOs and civil society activists.

Evidently, a de-polarized and independent media has the power to build up a constituency of peace through promoting cross-border cooperation and success stories in fields like economics, energy, tourism, education and culture. Estimating economic benefits of peace is fundamental in understanding economic incentives which might drive political leaders to break deadlocks and accept compromise solutions. Perhaps more to the point, only a successful media campaign can move the South Caucasus audience from emotionality to rationality, from open warfare to true peacefare, and hence from prejudice to prosperity.

Conclusion

For centuries the peoples of the South Caucasus lived side by side peacefully as neighbours. Even today, despite public resentments, Azerbaijanis and Armenians, as well as Georgians, Abkhazians and Ossetians wish to live in peace and concord. These nations are indeed capable of rebuilding peace, stability and security in the aftermath of the conflicts in the region. This is because they have a rich experience of good neighbourhood relations, which covers a period much longer than the periods of tension and conflict. Hence, opportunities and conditions for

re-establishing cooperation can be obtained if the parties strive to restore confidence between them. It will certainly take a long time to rebuild trust between Abkhazians, Ossetians and Georgians, and between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. However, a start is needed on steps that can make the confrontation more bearable for the people and less risky for regional stability.

Overall, the benefits of peace are indeed abundant because there are many areas for hope, but strong political will and firm determination are necessary to initiate such change. Halting arms race, reducing military activity, re-establishing economic relations based on mutual interest, opening the border for free trade and other types of commercial exchanges are potential areas for laying a solid foundation for stability, peace and prosperity. Business interaction, educational and intercultural communication may likewise prove to be rich areas for wider cooperation. In order to facilitate the process, however, there is increased awareness of the need to actively involve the private sector and the media systems on all sides, amidst fears of reigniting hostilities and a potential economic decline across the region.

Peace is not simply the absence of war. It is also a process in search of socio-economic recovery, reintegration of conflict-affected communities, and successful knowledge-based economy benefiting all the countries in the region. Even notwithstanding numerous complications, difficulties and challenges facing the South Caucasus today, there are sensible forces ready to think strategically about tomorrow's peace and to add value to the conflict settlement process. They strongly advocate investment in information peacefare and often argue for economic incentives that can most effectively contribute to creating conditions of mutual consent and advancing reconciliation.

By materializing the whole package of initiatives outlined above, peace scholars, business leaders and media professionals could therefore generate wider public opinion to convince or pressure incumbent political elites to use modern tools and apply new approaches to constructive conflict resolution. By doing so, relations between conflicting parties would evolve into a "warm peace" that could include things like mutual trade, tourism, and cultural exchanges. Achieving such peace certainly requires years of hard work and may even take generations as it needs to be fully blossomed. That, however, proves to be no simple task. It takes a great deal of patience, effort, diligence and commitment to achieve tangible progress. Yet it is believed that there is a light at the end of the tunnel for conflict-troubled societies. Once the peace process is really underway, economic collaboration and regional integration promises to be beneficial for all involved parties in the South Caucasus.

About the Author

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