



Civil Society Dialogue Network Geographic Meeting

Nagorno-Karabakh: Continuing EU support for building peace – Gathering civil society input

Tuesday 12 May 2015

MEETING REPORT

Introduction

The overall objective of this Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) meeting was to gather analysis and recommendations from civil society on the action required to advance the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement process in order to feed into the design of future EU assistance to it.

The specific objectives were:

- To analyse the current context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement process
- To share lessons learned from the implementation of projects in the region, in particular the European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (EPNK)
- To provide recommendations on what future activities should be envisaged to advance the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement process, in particular civil society-led initiatives, which could then be considered for EU support.

The meeting brought together more than 30 participants, including 19 representatives of peacebuilding civil society organisations (CSOs) working in the region, and officials from the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS).

This report is a summary of the discussions which took place and the key recommendations made by individual participants during the meeting, which was held under the Chatham House Rule. As such, the views expressed may not be attributed to any participating individual or institution nor do they necessarily represent the views of all of the meeting participants, the European Peacebuilding Office (EPLO) and its member organisations, or the co-organisers.

For more information about this CSDN meeting, please contact Ben Moore at EPLO (E-mail bmoore@eplo.org).

Civil Society Dialogue Network

The Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) is a mechanism for dialogue between civil society and EU policy-makers on issues related to peace and conflict. It is co-financed by the European Union (Instrument for Stability). It is managed by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), a civil society network, in co-operation with the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS). The second phase of the CSDN will last from 2014 to 2016. For more information, please visit the [EPLO website](#).

Session 1: Current context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement process

The aim of the first session was to analyse the current context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement process and its impact on peacebuilding activities, with a particular focus on recent developments and both the short- and medium-term forecast.

Participants raised the following issues:

- It has been a difficult year for the conflict settlement process and a political solution is not imminent given the absence of political will on both sides.
- The year ahead is also likely to be difficult and the dual impact of the 100th commemoration of the Armenian genocide and the Baku European Games will make for a challenging environment for the conflict settlement process.
- The EU's approach remains unchanged: it continues to recognise the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Minsk Group as the leading actor in the conflict settlement process.
- The EU is keen to offer support through dialogue at civil society level.
- People-to-people contacts are among the few ongoing activities and they must be maintained.
- The political elites on both sides have become entrenched in their positions and hostage to their own hard-line rhetoric.
- It should not be assumed that the self-regulated ceasefire will hold; there is potential for an uncontrolled escalation of violence.
- The EU could add value by working with civil society and helping to influence a bottom-up initiative to build a pro-peace constituency across the divide.
- The upcoming review of the European Neighbourhood policy (ENP) could provide a good opportunity to formulate policies for each entity in the conflict.
- People in the region would be receptive to a geopolitical perspective other than that of Russia.
- There is currently little room for manoeuvre for CSOs in the region and they are extremely dependent on government goodwill to be able to operate.
- CSOs could play a role in preserving what has been achieved thus far and continue to generate analysis, ideas and evidence-based material for politicians to consider if/when the political conditions became more conducive to progress.
- The status quo is deplorable as it is a tremendous waste of both resources and of the opportunity for regional co-operation. The longer it remains, the more difficult it will be to find a solution.
- The international community expects the status quo to be overcome. However, the current strategic configuration is not helpful to achieving this end.

Session 2: Lessons learned by project implementers, partners and beneficiaries

The aim of the second session was for participants to share lessons learned from the implementation of projects in the region, in particular the first and second phases of the European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (EPNK 1 and EPNK 2), but also other non-EU-funded relevant projects.

Participants raised the following issues:

- Future assistance is being planned and the EU is ready to stay engaged both politically and financially.

- The EU is seeking exchanges of ideas in order to design EPNK 3 on the basis of EPNK 1 and EPNK 2.
- The EPNK has been helpful to CSOs in that it has provided a longer-term basis for their work, as opposed to a short-term, results-oriented funding environment.
- Efforts to achieve a critical mass of people supportive of peace have so far been unsuccessful, as demonstrated when tensions or incidents on the front lines have led to an immediate mobilisation of society.
- One weakness of the EPNK is that the numerous dialogue processes which exist are largely unconnected to each other. There should be one overall dialogue process into which the others could feed on a regular basis.
- It is important to challenge narratives (e.g. by providing reporting of events acceptable to both sides) and many CSOs within the EPNK have done so effectively without being condemned by either side.
- There is a need for greater public outreach.
- There is a need to reach out to people living in border territories.
- It would be useful to continue the efforts which have been made to link Track I and Track II activities.
- Governments in the region need to be linked to Track II mediation efforts, not just as listeners but as part of the process.
- A more decentralised arrangement might help the EPNK to find a happy medium between information-sharing, coordination and joint advocacy.
- CSOs need to build in strategies for dealing with governments.
- CSOs working in Azerbaijan need to think carefully about how they frame their activities.
- There is a need for an external actor (e.g. an international CSO) to build a platform for local civil society actors and for them to have regular meetings. However, any efforts aimed at encouraging organisations to work together need to have a clear purpose.
- There is an ongoing challenge to establish the proper evaluation methodology for projects under the aegis of the EPNK.
- The EU needs to embed flexibility in its implementation mechanisms if it is to be able to respond to unforeseen circumstances.

Session 3: Ideas for future support to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement process

The aim of the third session was to present and discuss possible ideas for future support to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement process, in particular civil society-led initiatives, and establish what a potential third phase of the EPNK might look like.

Participants raised the following issues and made the following recommendations:

- It is important to start with what is needed in Nagorno-Karabakh and then to establish how to respond to those needs.
- The regional and global contexts have changed since the launch of EPNK 1: there are more crises and less funding available, meaning that partners need to be more selective in their choice of activities and able to justify those choices.
- The Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) is not risk-averse so changes are possible, including one-off, high-impact actions.
- There are numerous initiatives involving the media so it would be useful to start mapping them.
- There is a fundamental need to form a vision of what peace might look like in Nagorno-Karabakh: this exercise should involve public outreach, analysis and people-to-people contacts.
- There is a need to focus more on conflict transformation rather than on conflict resolution.

- CSOs need to get out of their comfort zone and test out new ideas.
- CSOs need to think how to frame their activities in such a way as to make governments, including local governments, more receptive.
- There is a need for more gender-disaggregated data.
- There should be continued support for cross-border dialogues.
- There is a need to focus on political and youth issues in the future.
- It would be useful to include in future budgets items such as contingency funding for urgent actions and seed funding.
- The conflict settlement process is not promising at the moment but the EU intends to continue and even to intensify its work on it.
- There should be no gap after EPNK 2.
- The EU requires concrete proposals in a format which can be checked by the relevant institutions in order to ensure that they match the funding requirements.
- The EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia might make a useful contribution by strengthening the links between Track I and Track II, in support to the work of the Minsk Group. In this context, he could chair a biannual process on strengthening the link between the two tracks.
- The EU should:
 - Support peace polling (e.g. Northern Ireland)
 - Empower local actors (e.g. establish a significant small grant scheme)
 - Build local voices “from the middle up”
 - Support the development of a regional think tank
 - Introduce new genres for reporting
 - Adapt outcome indicators to the particular context and apply them
 - Undertake mapping of projects which have had a positive impact
 - Set up an online platform: “EPNK+”
 - Use the EPNK to disseminate information (e.g. CSO activities, funding opportunities etc.).
 - Continue to try to be flexible in its programming based upon evolving needs.

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