Advisory Board to the Federal Government
Civilian Crisis Prevention and Peacebuilding

Germany's Contributions to Civilian Conflict Management and Peacebuilding in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood

Past Experience and Future Prospects

STUDY 6 FROM THE ADVISORY BOARD'S STUDY SERIES

Study commissioned by the Advisory Board to the Federal Government for Civilian Crisis Prevention and Peacebuilding

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Foreword

Foreword

In the light of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, German political discourse has been increasingly focussing on the military support of Ukraine and improvement of security for the European Union. In spite of these pressing challenges linked to Ukraine, it should not be forgotten that in the Eastern Neighbourhood of the European Union, a variety of protracted conflicts are looming. In fact, the brief military offensive of Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023 has shown the potential for rapid conflict escalation. What range of means of civilian conflict management and peacebuilding could Germany offer in the face of these protracted, multi-scale conflicts?

According to the German Federal Government's Guidelines *Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace*, measures in this field should respect and protect human rights, give priority to prevention, be context-specific, inclusive and focus on long-term action and make risks transparent. Germany recently published its first ever *National Security Strategy* promoting a broad concept of integrated security. According to this strategy, Germany intends to play a substantial role in preserving international security in cooperation with its partners and allies.

The Advisory Board presents a study that focusses on five conflict settings in the Eastern Neighbourhood of the European Union: Ukraine/Donbas/Crimea, Moldova/Transnistria, Georgia/Abkhazia and Georgia/South Ossetia as well as Armenia/Azerbaijan/Nagorno-Karabakh. The study thus deals with civilian conflict management in regions where the interests of the conflict parties were often also pursued by military means.

The study sheds light on the settings of these five conflicts, their complex conflict history and current dynamics. Most of all, it reviews the measures of civilian conflict management and peacebuilding the German Federal Government has employed over the course of the past 20 years. The study shows the diversity of measures and activities, assesses their effectiveness and performance, but also uncovers their limitations. It also reflects on the realities and changes that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has brought upon the whole region, and what these changed conditions bear for future conflict management and peacebuilding. Indeed, the study makes abundantly clear how important it is to have a variety of effective, context-sensitive measures in conflict management and peacebuilding at hand. It draws lessons for German and European engagement in the region's protracted conflicts and generates new ideas and concrete recommendations for Germany's engagement in civilian crisis prevention and peacebuilding in the conflict regions in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood.

Dr Kira Vinke **Deputy Commissioner Crime (retired) Lars Wagner**

Advisory Board for Civilian Crisis Prevention and Peacebuilding

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Acronyms and Conflict-Related Formats

AA	German Federal Foreign Office
ABL	Administrative Boundary Line
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CBMs	Confidence-building measures
CiO	Chairperson-in-Office (of the OSCE)
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EEAS	European External Action Service
ENPARD	European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Regional Development
EPIC	Economic and Social Participation of Vulnerable Displaced and Local Population in the South Caucasus (GIZ project)
EU	European Union
EUAM	EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform Ukraine
EUMA	European Union Mission in Armenia
EUMAM	European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine
EUMCAP	EU Monitoring Capacity to Armenia
EUMM	European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia
EUSR	European Union Special Representative

GID	Geneva International Discussions to address the consequences of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war Co-chairs: UN, EU, OSCE Participants: Representatives of Georgia, Russia, the United States, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (in personal capacity)
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HLPG	OSCE High Level Planning Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
IPRM	Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OEPR	German Federal Foreign Office Programme “Expanding Cooperation with Civil Society in the Eastern Partnership Countries and Russia”
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Minsk Group	OSCE group to deal with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict Co-chairs: France, Russia, the United States Permanent members: Belarus, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan, OSCE Troika (on a rotating basis)
Normandy Format (until 2022)	Group of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine to resolve the conflict in and around Ukraine
PCU (until 2022)	OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine
SMM	OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine
SPU	OSCE Extra-budgetary (ExB) Support Programme for Ukraine (SPU)
Trilateral Contact Group (until 2022)	Group of representatives from Ukraine, Russia and the Special Representative of the OSCE CiO to find a peaceful settlement in eastern Ukraine

UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/UN Refugee Agency
UNOMIG	United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia
US	United States of America
VET	Vocational Education and Training
3+2 (until 2002)	Transnistria settlement format Conflict parties: Moldova, Transnistria Mediators and guarantors: OSCE, Russia, Ukraine
5+2 (since 2005)	Permanent Conference on Political Issues in the Transnistrian settlement process Conflict parties: Moldova, Transnistria Mediators and guarantors: OSCE, Russia, Ukraine Observers: EU, US

Executive Summary

The EU's Eastern Neighbourhood is marked by protracted conflicts and, especially since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, increasing geopolitical instability. Recent escalations, such as in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, show that the potential for large-scale violence remains high, posing serious risks for human and national security in the region and beyond and undermining prospects for peaceful conflict resolution.

The German government has long contributed to civilian conflict management and peacebuilding efforts in the protracted conflicts in the region, including in Georgia/Abkhazia, Georgia/South Ossetia, Armenia/Nagorno-Karabakh/Azerbaijan, Moldova/Transnistria and Ukraine/Donbas/Crimea. Despite various bilateral and multilateral engagements, containing violence, let alone building peace has been a challenging and often futile endeavour.

This study explores key aspects of the German engagement in civilian conflict management and peacebuilding over the past two decades. Driven by the need to enhance the effectiveness of Germany's engagement with the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, we address the following questions:

- Which approaches and instruments has Germany supported to promote conflict management and peacebuilding and what have been the results?
- How do the changed realities in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood affect the conditions for civilian conflict management and peacebuilding?
- What lessons can be drawn for future German and European engagement in the region's protracted conflicts?

The conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood are multi-level, multi-actor conflicts, involving secessionist territories, "parent states" and international actors, most notably, Russia. Over the years, local parties have demonstrated little commitment to peaceful solutions, often maintaining maximalist positions. Russia has at different times appeared as a conflict party, patron and/or self-interested conflict manager. Its increasingly aggressive policies, especially in Georgia since 2008 and in Ukraine since 2014, have exemplified the inadequacy of current conflict management strategies across the region. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has also negatively impacted multilateral engagement in civilian conflict management, almost paralysing the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

Seeing itself as a mediator, Germany's approach to the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood was long focussed on dialogue and engagement with Russia. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has led to a significant shift in Germany's policy, reviving strategies of deterrence and containment. This shift has financial implications, too: Germany's military spending has increased, while budgets for crisis prevention and peacebuilding are likely to be cut. This suggests a deprioritisation of civilian conflict management in favour of defence and military capabilities.

However, neglecting civilian conflict management and peacebuilding is not a suitable response to the region's current dynamics, and the conflicts cannot be effectively addressed solely through increased defence spending and sanctions against Russia. Transforming protracted conflicts requires a full range of civilian conflict management and peacebuilding tools, adapted to local conditions and dynamics. In fact, the present uncertainties in the region exacerbated by Russia's war against Ukraine might offer not only risks but also valuable opportunities for Germany to step up its engagement.

Germany and the EU have compelling reasons to prioritise the protracted conflicts in the Eastern Neighbourhood; first, preventing mass atrocities, war crimes and crimes against humanity is of utmost importance. Second, stronger engagement now can prevent further instability that would result in significant political and economic burdens in the future. Third, securing the cultural and economic inclusion and sense of belonging of the Eastern Neighbourhood in Europe makes addressing these conflicts imperative. Fourth, containing Russia and the military and political threats it poses to international law and a stable international order is evidently in Germany's and the EU's self-interest and aligned with the values for which they stand. The consequences of inaction, as witnessed in Ukraine, are excessively costly. Preventing a recurrence of such a scenario is paramount.

Key Findings

Germany's role: Germany has been a major donor in humanitarian assistance, stabilisation, mediation and civil society peacebuilding in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. While Germany has often increased its engagement during times of urgent crises, such as in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014/15, its approach has lacked a strategic vision.

Humanitarian assistance: Germany has taken a leading role in humanitarian aid, especially after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. However, the aid has often lacked inclusivity.

Stabilisation: Stabilisation measures, such as Germany's support to EU CSDP missions, have contributed to human security but failed to prevent the re-escalation of violence.

Mediation: Germany has been active in mediation processes, particularly in Ukraine and Moldova, but with limited success, which can partially be explained by a lack of suitable incentives provided and pressure exerted to increase conflict parties' commitment to peace.

Development cooperation: Development cooperation has generally not focussed on conflict-related aspects, missing opportunities for peacebuilding. Moreover, German development cooperation has only to a very limited extent engaged with the conflict zones.

Civil society peacebuilding: Civil society actors, supported by German public funds, have developed and maintained valuable connections across conflict divides. Nonetheless, they have faced challenges such as lack of long-term funding and political backing as well as over-bureaucratisation due to funding regulations.

Recommendations

Strategic vision: Germany needs to develop a comprehensive strategy for civilian conflict management and peacebuilding in the region, based on thorough conflict analysis and strategic foresight and with conflict-specific road maps. Important short- to mid-term goals should include entrenching the principle of non-use of force, establishing credible multilateral implementation and enforcement mechanisms, improving the living conditions for conflict-affected populations on all sides and overcoming their isolation.

Better coordination and resource allocation: There is a need for better coordination among German conflict management and peacebuilding actors and between different instruments. This requires political backing and adequate staffing in embassies.

Fostering civil society peacebuilding: For civil society to further increase its peacebuilding potential, more long-term as well as core funding and a reduction in bureaucracy are needed. Moreover, the focus on conflict management and peacebuilding within existing civil society support programmes, such as the OEPR programme, should be increased and other programmes like the Civil Peace Service should be extended to include Georgia, Armenia, and Moldova, with a potential enlargement of the closed circle of sending organisations.

Development for peace: Development cooperation should be considered more strongly in terms of its peacebuilding potential and designed accordingly. Development projects could then be linked to ongoing mediation processes and thus provide incentives, or, in some cases, even employ conditionality, compliance with which would require political buy-in from Germany, the EU and local authorities. Development cooperation could thereby decrease the isolation of the conflict zones and their economic dependency on Russia.

More substantial and inclusive mediation: Germany should take on a more active mediation role that makes use of both positive and, when necessary, negative incentives. By defining mutually beneficial goals instead of merely fixing "principles" and by expanding the use of technical working groups within mediation formats, Germany could improve chances of success. Mediation efforts should become more inclusive, involving local conflict actors and civil society stakeholders. Existing mediation formats that are no longer functional or relevant should be creatively rethought.

Utilising EU integration perspectives: Germany should leverage EU integration to foster peacebuilding in the region, linking, where feasible, integration to progress in conflict management. Germany and the EU should also strive to improve the image of the EU in the conflict zones through the provision of tangible benefits to the wider population.

Exploiting windows of opportunity: Germany should attempt to capitalise on the current geopolitical shifts, especially Russia's weakening, to engage more proactively in the region. Reducing dependence on Moscow could be in the interest of some of the local conflict actors. Germany and the EU should make attractive development offers, but also consider alternative mediation and security provision. In order to identify and anticipate future opportunities as well as risks, it is important to further develop early warning and crisis response mechanisms, incorporating research and analysis from think tanks, universities and civil society.

Zusammenfassung

Die östliche Nachbarschaft der EU ist von langwierigen Konflikten und, insbesondere seit Beginn der umfassenden Invasion Russlands in der Ukraine im Februar 2022, einer zunehmenden geopolitischen Instabilität geprägt. Jüngere Entwicklungen, etwa im armenisch-aserbaidschanischen Konflikt, zeigen, dass das Potenzial für (militärische) Gewalteskalation weiterhin hoch ist. Damit einher gehen ernsthafte Risiken für die menschliche und nationale Sicherheit in der Region und darüber hinaus. Aussichten auf eine friedliche Konfliktlösung werden untergraben.

Die Bundesregierung leistet seit langem einen umfassenden Beitrag zur zivilen Konfliktbearbeitung und Friedensförderung in den langwierigen Konflikten in der Region: in Georgien/Abchasien, Georgien/Südossetien, Armenien/Bergkarabach/Aserbaidschan, Moldawien/Transnistrien und Ukraine/Donbas/Krim. Trotz verschiedenen bilateralen und multilateralen Engagements blieb die Eindämmung der Gewalt und erst recht die Friedensförderung herausfordernd und oft erfolglos.

Diese Studie untersucht zentrale Aspekte des deutschen Engagements in der zivilen Konfliktbearbeitung und Friedensförderung in der östlichen Nachbarschaft der EU in den letzten zwei Jahrzehnten. Mit dem Ziel, zu einer verbesserten Effektivität dieses Engagements beizutragen, adressieren wir folgende Fragen:

- Welche Ansätze und Instrumente hat Deutschland zur Konfliktbearbeitung und Friedensförderung unterstützt? Mit welchen Ergebnissen?
- Was bedeuten die veränderten Realitäten in der östlichen Nachbarschaft der EU für die Bedingungen ziviler Konfliktbearbeitung und Friedensförderung?
- Welche Lehren lassen sich für das künftige deutsche und europäische Engagement bei der Bearbeitung der langwierigen Konflikte der Region ziehen?

Die Konflikte in der östlichen Nachbarschaft der EU entfalten sich auf mehreren Ebenen und umfassen verschiedene Akteure wie sezessionistische Gebiete, deren „Mutterstaaten“ und internationale Akteure, hier allen voran Russland. Im Laufe der Jahre zeigten die lokalen Akteure wenig Interesse an und Engagement für friedliche Lösungen; oft vertraten sie maximalistische Positionen. Russland trat zu unterschiedlichen Zeiten als Konfliktpartei, Unterstützer der sezessionistischen Bestrebungen und/oder eigennütziger Konfliktmanager auf. Russlands immer aggressivere Politik, insbesondere in Georgien seit 2008 und in der Ukraine seit 2014, zeigt die Unzulänglichkeit aktueller Konfliktbearbeitungsstrategien in der Region. Russlands umfassende Invasion in der Ukraine 2022 hat sich zudem negativ auf multilaterale Formate der zivilen Konfliktbearbeitung ausgewirkt und etwa die Organisation für Sicherheit und Zusammenarbeit in Europa (OSZE) in weiten Teilen gelähmt.

Deutschlands Ansatz in der östlichen Nachbarschaft der EU war seit langem auf Dialog und Zusammenarbeit mit Russland ausgerichtet; Berlin verstand sich vornehmlich als Vermittler. Die groß angelegte Invasion Russlands in der Ukraine hat allerdings zu einem bedeutenden Wandel in der deutschen Politik geführt und verschaffte Abschreckungs- und Eindämmungsstrategien zu neuer Relevanz. Diese Verschiebung hat auch finanzielle Auswirkungen: Während die deutschen Militärausgaben gestiegen sind, wird es bei den Budgets für Krisenprävention und Friedensförderung voraussichtlich zu Kürzungen kommen. Dies deutet auf eine Depriorisierung der zivilen Konfliktbearbeitung zugunsten Verteidigungs- und militärischer Fähigkeiten hin.

Eine Vernachlässigung ziviler Konfliktbearbeitung und Friedensförderung ist jedoch keine geeignete Antwort auf die aktuellen Dynamiken in der Region - die Konflikte können allein durch erhöhte Verteidigungsausgaben und Sanktionen gegen Russland nicht wirksam bewältigt werden. Vielmehr erfordert die Transformation langwieriger Konflikte ein umfassendes Spektrum ziviler Konfliktbearbeitungs- und Friedensförderungsinstrumente, die an die lokalen Bedingungen und Dynamiken angepasst sind. In Bezug auf die langwierigen Konflikte in der östlichen Nachbarschaft der EU könnten die gegenwärtigen Unsicherheiten in der Region, die durch Russlands Krieg gegen die Ukraine noch verschärft werden, allerdings nicht nur Risiken, sondern auch Chancen für ein verstärktes und effektives Engagement Deutschlands bergen.

Deutschland und die EU sollten den langwierigen Konflikten in der östlichen Nachbarschaft nun Priorität einräumen: Erstens kann Berlin so dazu beitragen, künftige massive Menschenrechtsverletzungen, Kriegsverbrechen und Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit zu verhindern. Zweitens kann ein stärkeres Engagement weitere Instabilität, die zu erheblichen politischen und wirtschaftlichen Belastungen führen würde, abzuwenden. Drittens macht eine Stärkung der kulturellen und wirtschaftlichen Zugehörigkeit der östlichen Nachbarschaft zu Europa eine Auseinandersetzung mit diesen Konflikten zwingend erforderlich. Viertens ist die Eindämmung Russlands und der militärischen und politischen Bedrohungen, die das Land für das Völkerrecht und eine stabile internationale Ordnung darstellt, im Eigeninteresse Deutschlands und der EU und entspricht den Werten, für die sie einstehen. Die Folgen von Untätigkeit, wie sie in der Ukraine zu beobachten war, sind übermäßig kostspielig. Die Wiederholung eines solchen Szenarios sollte unbedingt verhindert werden.

Wichtigste Erkenntnisse

Rolle Deutschlands: Deutschland ist ein wichtiger Geber in den Bereichen humanitäre Hilfe, Stabilisierung, Mediation und zivilgesellschaftliche Friedensförderung. Während Deutschland sein Engagement in Zeiten akuter Krisen oft verstärkt hat, wie etwa in Georgien 2008 und der Ukraine 2014/15, fehlte dem Ansatz eine strategische Vision.

Humanitäre Hilfe: Deutschland hat eine führende Rolle in der humanitären Hilfe übernommen, insbesondere nach der russischen Invasion in der Ukraine im Jahr 2022. Allerdings mangelte es oft an Inklusivität.

Stabilisierung: Stabilisierungsmaßnahmen, wie die Unterstützung Deutschlands für GSVP-Missionen der EU, haben zur menschlichen Sicherheit beigetragen, konnten jedoch erneute Gewalteskalationen in den Konfliktgebieten nicht verhindern.

Mediation: Deutschland beteiligt sich aktiv an Mediationsprozessen, insbesondere in der Ukraine und der Republik Moldau, allerdings mit begrenztem Erfolg. Zum Teil kann der mangelnde Erfolg durch das Fehlen geeigneter Anreize und Druck, um Friedensengagement seitens der Konfliktparteien zu stärken, erklärt werden.

Entwicklungszusammenarbeit: Die deutsche Entwicklungszusammenarbeit hat sich im Allgemeinen nicht auf konfliktbezogene Aspekte konzentriert und damit Möglichkeiten zur Friedensförderung verpasst. Darüber hinaus engagiert sich die deutsche Entwicklungszusammenarbeit nur in sehr begrenztem Umfang in den Konfliktgebieten selbst.

Zivilgesellschaftliche Friedensförderung: Zivilgesellschaftliche Akteur*innen haben mit Unterstützung deutscher öffentlicher Mittel wertvolle Verbindungen über Konfliktgrenzen hinweg geschaffen und gepflegt. Sie stehen aber vor Herausforderungen wie dem Mangel an langfristiger Finanzierung und politischer Unterstützung sowie einer übermäßigen Bürokratisierung in einzelnen Förderinstrumenten.

Empfehlungen

Strategische Vision: Deutschland sollte eine umfassende Strategie zur zivilen Konfliktbewältigung und Friedensförderung in der Region entwickeln, die auf einer gründlichen Konfliktanalyse und strategischer Vorausschau sowie konfliktspezifischen Roadmaps basiert. Wichtige kurz- bis mittelfristige Ziele sollten darin bestehen, das Prinzip der Nichtanwendung von Gewalt zu verankern, glaubwürdige multilaterale Umsetzungs- und Durchsetzungsmechanismen zu etablieren, die Lebensbedingungen der vom Konflikt betroffenen Bevölkerungsgruppen auf allen Seiten zu verbessern und ihre Isolation zu überwinden.

Bessere Koordination und Ressourcenallokation: Es besteht Bedarf an einer besseren Koordination zwischen den deutschen Akteur*innen der Konfliktbearbeitung und Friedensförderung sowie zwischen den verschiedenen Instrumenten. Dies erfordert politische Unterstützung und eine angemessene Personalausstattung in den Botschaften.

Unterstützung der zivilgesellschaftlichen Friedensförderung: Damit die Zivilgesellschaft ihr Friedenspotenzial weiter steigern kann, sind eine längerfristige und institutionelle Finanzierung sowie Bürokratieabbau erforderlich. Darüber hinaus sollten der Fokus auf Konfliktbearbeitung und Friedensförderung im Rahmen bestehender zivilgesellschaftlicher Förderprogramme wie dem ÖPR-Programm verstärkt und andere Programme wie der Zivile Friedensdienst auf Georgien, Armenien und die Republik Moldau ausgedehnt werden, basierend auf einer möglichen Ausweitung der Entsendeorganisationen.

Entwicklung für den Frieden: Entwicklungszusammenarbeit sollte stärker hinsichtlich ihres friedensfördernden Potenzials betrachtet und entsprechend gestaltet werden. Projekte der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit könnten dann an laufende Mediationsverfahren gekoppelt werden und Anreize setzen. In manchen Fällen könnten Konditionalitäten diese Prozesse unterstützen, deren Einhaltung würde jedoch politische Rückendeckung Deutschlands, der EU und der Verantwortlichen vor Ort erfordern. Entwicklungszusammenarbeit könnte zudem dazu eingesetzt werden, die Isolation der Konfliktgebiete und ihre wirtschaftliche Abhängigkeit von Russland zu verringern.

Substanziellere und inklusivere Mediation: Deutschland sollte eine aktivere Mediationsrolle übernehmen, die sowohl positive als auch, wenn nötig, negative Anreize nutzt. Durch die Formulierung von für beide Seiten vorteilhaften Zielen statt bloßer Festlegung von „Prinzipien“ und durch den verstärkten Einsatz technischer Arbeitsgruppen innerhalb von Mediationsformaten könnten die Erfolgsaussichten verbessert werden. Mediationsbemühungen sollten integrativer werden und wo möglich lokale Konfliktakteure und Akteur*innen der Zivilgesellschaft einbeziehen. Bestehende Vermittlungsformate, die nicht mehr funktionsfähig oder relevant sind, sollten kreativ neu gedacht werden.

Perspektiven der EU-Integration nutzen: Deutschland sollte das Instrument der EU-Integration nutzen, um Konfliktbearbeitung und Frieden in der Region zu fördern. Wo sinnvoll und praktikabel könnte die Integration mit Schritten bei der Konfliktbewältigung verknüpft werden. Deutschland und die EU sollten außerdem darauf hinwirken, das Image der EU in den Konfliktgebieten durch die Bereitstellung konkreter Verbesserungen für breite Bevölkerungsschichten zu verbessern.

Gelegenheitsfenster nutzen: Deutschland sollte die aktuellen geopolitischen Veränderungen, insbesondere die Schwächung Russlands, nutzen, um sich proaktiver in der Region zu engagieren. Abhängigkeiten von Moskau zu verringern könnte im Interesse einiger lokaler Konfliktakteur*innen liegen. Deutschland und die EU sollten attraktive Entwicklungsangebote machen, aber auch alternative Mediations- und Sicherheitsbereitstellung in Betracht ziehen. Um zukünftige Chancen und Risiken zu erkennen und zu antizipieren, ist es wichtig, Frühwarn- und Krisenreaktionsmechanismen weiterzuentwickeln und dabei Forschung und Analysen von Thinktanks, Universitäten und der Zivilgesellschaft stärker einzubeziehen.

1. Introduction

The German government has long been contributing to civilian conflict management and peacebuilding efforts in protracted conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, that is, in Georgia/Abkhazia, Georgia/South Ossetia, Armenia/Nagorno-Karabakh/Azerbaijan, Moldova/Transnistria and (more recently) in Ukraine/Donbas/Crimea.[1] It has done so in various bilateral and multilateral formats. Containing violence or even promoting peace, however, has been an arduous task, and, at first glance, a seemingly fruitless endeavour. Against this backdrop, the study at hand critically reviews Germany's role in civilian conflict management and peacebuilding in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood.

We aim to identify the main trends during the last 20 years and reflect on both past successes and failures as well as on challenges and opportunities ahead. Guided by the overarching research interest in **how Germany can perform a more effective role in civilian conflict management and peacebuilding in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine**, this study aims to answer the following questions:

- Which approaches and instruments has Germany supported to promote conflict management and peacebuilding and what have been the results?
- How do the changed realities in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood affect the conditions for civilian conflict management and peacebuilding?
- What lessons can be drawn for future German and European engagement in the region's protracted conflicts?

The protracted conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood have had far-reaching consequences for local and regional security. They raise significant humanitarian concerns and are among the main obstacles to the peaceful and prosperous development of the respective regions (Caspersen and Herrberg 2010: 9). Despite the often-used term "frozen conflict" (Bebler 2015, Orttung and Walker 2015), the conflicts themselves are by no means static (Fischer 2016, Sasse 2016). Their intensity - as well as the level of mediation - has varied considerably over time. Thus, even if actual fighting has subsided, the conflicts are highly dynamic. While the conflict in Moldova/Transnistria may stand out for its overall lack of violence in the past three decades, the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 as well as the escalations/war in case of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in 2016, 2020 and 2022[2] have evidenced how quickly large-scale warfare can reignite, defying labelling these conflicts as "frozen." Rather, over the past decade, the prospects for their peaceful resolution have continuously weakened and large-scale violence and the threat of it has once again become a defining feature of conflict dynamics in the region.

A crucial role in all the protracted conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood is played by Russia. Russia is at once a party to the conflict, a patron and a self-interested conflict manager (Fischer 2016: 9). Moscow's policies and actions throughout the past thirty years have been guided, and increasingly aggressively pursued, by its interests in spheres of influence, status, power projection and preservation as well as by (perceived) security concerns (Malyarenko and Wolff 2022). Russia's transformation into an increasingly revisionist power is particularly evident in Ukraine. Through the annexation of Crimea and its war in Donbas since 2014, Russia has for the first time not only supported, but initiated a secessionist conflict, which makes Ukraine a special case (Fischer 2016). In February 2022, Russia used the pretext of secessionist conflict to justify the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and to question the right of the country to a sovereign, independent existence.

1 See below for an explanation of why the case of Ukraine is particular.

2 This study was completed before Azerbaijan's military offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023, which became another case in point for the potential for large-scale escalation and violence.

In particular after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and installation of proxy regimes in Donbas, the protracted conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood became part of sharply deteriorating relations between Russia and the West. Moscow's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 was the ultimate demonstration that existing approaches to civilian conflict management were inadequate in the case of Ukraine. However, the track record of international conflict management and peacebuilding in the other protracted conflicts has been poor as well (Relitz and Biermann 2017, Wolff 2021a). These observations raise more fundamental questions that go beyond the case of Ukraine.

Until 24 February 2022, the cornerstone of Germany's approach towards the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood had been a focus on Russia and the assumed importance for the stability of the European security order of managing relations with Moscow by means of dialogue and engagement (Adler 2022, Davies 2023, Meister and Jilge 2023, Schloegel 2022, Speck 2022, Urban 2022). This also reflected Berlin's conception of its role as a civilian conflict management actor with regard to the protracted conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. Germany saw itself as a bridgebuilder and mediator, keeping some equidistance to the adversaries and taking the supposedly legitimate interests of Russia into account. However, multiple analysts have argued that Germany's policy towards Russia indirectly encouraged Russia's aggression rather than that it contributed to conflict resolution (Davies 2023, Zeit Online 2022). Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, exposing the true extent of the Kremlin's neo-imperialist foreign and security policy, even more urgently raises the question whether Germany's past approach was based on false assumptions from the outset.

While Germany led EU crisis management efforts in response to the Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas after 2014 and has ever since been essential in preserving the Western consensus on sanctions against Russia (Fix 2018, Wright 2018), it was only after Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 that a more substantial policy shift occurred — not only with respect to German policy towards Russia, but also in the approach to security and defence policy more broadly (Blumenau 2022). Berlin and its allies revived the Cold War emphasis on deterrence and containment.

The increasing need to respond to Russian aggression and in particular the proclaimed *Zeitenwende* (turning point) in German foreign and security policy have come with significant financial implications, too: Between 2017 and 2022, given the need for defense modernisation and NATO's 2% spending target, German military spending increased from about 37 to 50 billion EUR annually, with a special budget of an additional 100 billion EUR starting in 2022 (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2022). In contrast, at least according to the draft federal budget for 2024, the support for crisis prevention, stabilisation, and peacebuilding at the Federal Foreign Office (AA) as well as for development cooperation by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) could be cut drastically. The AA budget for humanitarian aid could be reduced by almost one billion euros, which would be 36% less than in the 2023 budget. Likewise, the BMZ 2024 budget for crisis management and reconstruction could be cut by 22% compared to the 2023 budget (World Food Programme 2023). Overall, even though questions about the implementation of Berlin's proclaimed Zeitenwende persist (Helferich 2023), the new dominant understanding in Germany's foreign policy community discourse affords defence and military capabilities much more space (Bunde 2022). While improved instruments to respond to and shape opportunities for civilian conflict management will be retained, the likely spending cuts signal that civilian conflict management and peacebuilding might in fact be deprioritised in future.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine also negatively impacted multilateral forums for engagement in civilian conflict management. Designed as a forum for institutionalised dialogue between Russia and Western countries, Russia's war has almost paralysed the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which has become even more dysfunctional. lt runs a serious risk of having to further operate on an extemporary budget, of having no chairpersonship and of having to cope with unfilled leadership positions. The OSCE's decline also has serious implications for existing conflict settlement

formats in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, such as the Geneva International Discussions on Georgia, the 5+2 process for Moldova and the Minsk Group for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The latter, however, had already been seriously damaged when it was sidelined in the Russia-mediated ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the autumn of 2020. Given the fact that the OSCE has, with the exception of the 1995 Gagauzia conflict settlement, no track record of actual conflict settlement, the question arises as to whether the OSCE's formats are suitable for conflict settlement, whether a return to them would even be desirable and what, if any, the alternatives would be.

The context for civilian conflict management in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood is primarily shaped by the interests and attitudes of the main conflict parties towards conflict settlement and by the degree of Russian influence and control. The impact of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on opportunities for civilian conflict management and peacebuilding in Armenia/Nagorno-Karabakh/Azerbaijan, Georgia/Abkhazia, Georgia/South Ossetia and Moldova/Transnistria is manifold, not fully predictable and differs significantly between cases. In the OSCE context, for example, the fact that dialogue with Russia is almost completely impossible for the time being ("no business as usual") further reduces opportunities for civilian conflict management. This makes the situation extremely difficult for conflict-ridden countries that are pressed to take sides with either Russia or the West.

Nonetheless, deprioritising civilian conflict management and peacebuilding would not be an appropriate answer to the current dynamics in the region. Russia's war against Ukraine has added both additional complexity and uncertainty to the conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. The recurrent violent incidents in case of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, including the Azerbaijani attack on Armenia in September 2022 and Azerbaijan's blockade of the Lachin corridor between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, the ever-looming threat of a spill-over of the fighting in Ukraine into Moldova/Transnistria and the, merited or not, discussions around a possible escalation between Georgia and Abkhazia, not to mention another Russian attack on Georgia, are examples of a wider (in-)security complex that cannot be managed, let alone be brought to a sustainable transformation, by increased defence spending and sanctions against Russia alone. Instead, a thorough review and reflection on Germany's past efforts in civilian conflict management and peacebuilding and meaningful future contributions in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood is needed not only to respond effectively to current insecurities, but also, in fact, identify certain windows of opportunities.

1.1 Protracted Conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood

While we seek to refrain from simplifying or setting aside the other unresolved conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, the conflicts over Donbas and Crimea and in particular the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine stand out. In the case of Crimea, Russia annexed the sovereign territory of Ukraine; in the case of Donbas, Russia initiated a military conflict, partially exploiting and fuelling existing internal struggles. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, starting on 24 February 2022, is a case of an (increasingly internationalised) inter-state war. The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has an interstate dimension as well but differs significantly, first of all as regards the level of violence. The conflicts over Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh can be classified as protracted conflicts, which constitute the context for international conflict management and peacebuilding.

Protracted conflicts, sometimes also called enduring rivalries (Broers 2015), are characterised by temporary cessations of violence while a fundamental, long-lasting solution is lacking. Periods of low intensity conflict often alternate with escalations of violence. They are linked to intangible needs such as national identity, recognition or ethnicity, while antagonistic perceptions and zero-sum-game-thinking prevail (Colaresi and Thompson 2002, Relitz and Biermann 2017). The conflict parties rely on asymmetric power endowments and are usually reluctant to engage in conflict resolution. Over the years, conflict

divides in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood have been solidified as a "new normal", and polarised divisions across and within societies have been institutionalised, often to an extent that genuine desire by the conflict parties to achieve a sustainable compromise seems lacking, adding to their intractability (Bar-Tal 1998, Lehti et al. 2020).

In protracted conflicts, which are usually marked by inequalities of power and status as well as hatred and fear vis-à-vis the opponent both on the political and societal levels, the logic of "high fences – good neighbours" often seems to be the only possible outcome. In conflicts about self-determination and territorial integrity the positions of both sides tend to be incompatible: both sides perceive the object of the conflict, the affiliation of a territory, as indivisible (Kriesberg 2005, 2019, Zartman 2005). Notwithstanding the international community's preference for preserving the territorial integrity of recognised states, empirical evidence from around the world demonstrates that it is unlikely that negotiations lead to the peaceful reintegration of established breakaway regions. Out of 25 historical cases since 1945, only four have been peacefully reintegrated and another three widely recognised. Most entities are either militarily reintegrated or exist in the long term as a (de facto) state with severely limited international recognition (Relitz 2019: 314-16). If peaceful reintegration is highly unlikely as is de jure recognition of the de facto states, mitigating the costs of separation and non-recognition, improving the relations between the conflict-affected communities and limiting security risks seem to be the only tangible goals.

The unresolved territorial conflicts involving Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh as well as Transnistria have roots that go back a long way, but they all escalated in the late 1980s, early 1990s. They all are multi-dimensional and include disputes over political orders, contested ethno-nationalist politics of identity, discriminatory language policies, distributional conflicts and about control over spheres of influence (Lynch 2004). The conflicts radicalised in the antagonism between national self-determination of ethnic and linguistic groups and territorial integrity of the internationally recognised successor states of the Soviet Union. In the last 30 years, all conflicts passed through a phase of open violence followed by relative stability, with sometimes strong resurgence of open hostilities and even warfare.

The protracted conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood have developed a chronic, intergenerational character through socialisation in the affected communities and are identity-defining, which has led to segregation and stereotyping of the other (de Waal and von Twickel 2019, Fischer 2016, Relitz 2022: 4). Additionally, salient actors on both sides of the divide often favour the continuation of the struggle. Thus, even if a political settlement is possibly achieved, local communities may not be ready to support its implementation. Preparing people for peace and dealing with the social traumas in all the affected societies are some of the main tasks, which, however, few local stakeholders or authorities have tackled seriously in the last 30 years (Conciliation Resources 2019). Despite the commonalities between the protracted conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, it is essential to also highlight idiosyncrasies. These relate to the issues at dispute, the level of violence, the legal situation of the entities and their internal sovereignty, the policies of the state affected by secession and the existing negotiation formats.

Russia plays a critical part in all of the protracted conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, while the concrete effects of its engagement and its very role have varied across cases and in time (Fischer 2016, Sasse 2016, see also below). A common feature here has long been the ambiguity of Russia's actions, which simultaneously has been a party to the conflict, a patron and a self-interested conflict manager. Russia has increasingly used its position in the conflicts to further its own security and power interests and to exert influence on and in Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine. For a long time, Russia has operated as a reactive power that used the conflicts to prevent the further rapprochement of these states with the West and (where intended) their integration in NATO and EU. The

unresolved conflicts have provided the Kremlin with multiple options for escalation and de-escalation, which increased its leverage vis-à-vis the conflict parties and outside actors. In this context, the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 and the war in Donbas in 2014 represent key junctures, demonstrating that Russia is willing to use military force and hybrid warfare to secure its position. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 represents a further radicalisation of Russian policy and actions and fully revealed the Kremlin's great power ambition.

It would be misleading to view all conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood solely through the prism of inter-ethnic conflict or as Russian proxy conflicts. Similarly, fixating only on the Russia-West antagonism without exploring the local and national conflict levels would lead to simplified assessments (Malyarenko and Wolff 2019, Broers 2015). Rather, the protracted conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood are complex and dynamic multi-level systems that extend from the local to the national, bilateral, regional and international levels, the boundaries of which are fluid. It is these structures and dynamics that simultaneously define the framework for international conflict management (Relitz 2022).

As Laurence Broers has pointed out, there is a "real ambiguity over what the relevant conflict is, which is the conflict that needs to be resolved, and who, ultimately, is responsible" (Broers 2014: 279). For example, the conflicts over Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh have been conflicts over national self-determination versus territorial integrity. Over time, however, the impact of the Georgian-Russian and Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict dimensions has grown considerably. Beyond that, the confrontation between Russia and Western states impacts upon the conflicts in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. In most cases, multiple external actors are present, whose significance varies over time (Sasse 2016). These external actors also shape how the local conflict parties deal with specific challenges, such as the integration of IDPs and the social, economic and political participation of minority communities. A fundamental challenge for civilian conflict management and peacebuilding is to deal with the individual conflict levels in a targeted and integrated way. Comprehensive and interconnected approaches are needed to achieve progress. For international actors to identify their scope of action, it is necessary to reflect on their place in the particular conflict system.

1.2 The Geopolitical Environment and Key Player Configurations

The geopolitical environment of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood is best described as one of multiple, inter-connected conflicts and complex fault lines where intra-regional antagonisms intersect with the interests of external players (Malyarenko and Wolff 2019). The conflicts' international dimensions manifest themselves in different forms of external support to the local conflict parties: from direct military, material, technical and financial supply lines to the political and diplomatic backing of presumptive allies, be they incumbent governments or their challengers. This has taken the form of competitive influence-seeking, predominantly by rival great or regional powers – foremost Russia and Western states and institutions (Beyer and Wolff 2016). This geopolitical conflict has increasingly come to dominate local conflicts since the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, Russia's first invasion of Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and has, since the full-scale invasion in February 2022 become an important dimension of the conflicts in the region.

Since the early 1990s, Russia has been managing the conflicts, ensuring, for the most part, its own control over the region, simultaneously preventing, however, any progress towards sustainable conflict resolution (Wolff 2021a). Over time, this created powerful coalitions with an interest in maintaining the status quo. Russia aimed to use the leverage created through these conflicts to ensure that the affected states do not leave Moscow's self-proclaimed zone of influence, while local actors benefited materially from a range of (ever-increasing illicit) activities (see, for example, Chamberlain-Creanga

and Allin 2010). Governments of the affected states found it convenient not to have to make the painful concessions and compromises that would have been required for a peaceful settlement (Beyer and Wolff 2016).

The dynamics in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood are shaped significantly by Russia's interests on the one side and the EU, NATO and US on the other side. The interests of China and Turkey, other important players in the region, do not neatly fit into a simple binary Russia-West geopolitical and geo-economic configuration. To date, China's presence in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood has primarily been an economic one, albeit with political ramifications (Wolff 2021b). While Beijing has an overarching interest in stability across the region, China, like Russia, is wary of a Western-dominated liberal order and seeks to align itself with Russia — the so-called unlimited partnership (Scobell and Swanström 2022) — against its trade relations with the EU in the context of worsening relations with the United States (Bayok and Wolff 2022, Charap et al. 2017, Kendall-Taylor and Shullman 2021, Lin 2023). China remains one of Russia's key supporters although its support has fallen short of an official recognition of the illegal annexations of Ukrainian territory since 2014. Crucially, for the course of the war to date, as well as the post-war European and global security order that will emerge, China is leveraging its relationship with Russia and Europe in ways that will establish it firmly as key player in future Euro-Asian and Euro-Atlantic security arrangements, as is already evident in China's position paper on Russia's all-out war in Ukraine (Wolff 2023a).

Turkey takes a similarly ambivalent position, simultaneously challenging EU influence in the Eastern Neighbourhood and mediating between Ukraine and Russia (Aydın-Düzgit and Noutcheva 2022, Bardakçı 2021, Cheterian 2023). Turkey is a member of NATO; however, it has also maintained close relations with the Russia-China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, where it became an official dialogue partner after a protracted 5-year ratification process in 2017, and the BRICS, in which Ankara has had a stated interest since 2013. Beyond the war in Ukraine, this ongoing geopolitical repositioning of Turkey is additionally significant with respect to the situation in the South Caucasus where the country has made serious inroads to Russia's hegemony since the 2020 Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (Hedlund 2021).

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has served as a conflict observer and manager in the region. This has been evident in the Mission to Moldova and the associated 5+2 conflict settlement process, which has been contributing to containing it and gradually improving the status quo (Douglas and Wolff 2023). By contrast, already since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, and even more so since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the OSCE has ceased to function effectively as a forum for managing the hostile relationship between Russia and the West, which, in turn, has diminished its role, including in the South Caucasus and in Ukraine (Friesendorf and Wolff 2022, Hill 2022). Yet, despite being simultaneously paralysed and consumed by the war in Ukraine, the OSCE has, so far, survived as an organisation, indicating that both Russia and the West, and above all the countries in between, are reluctant to give up on a unique institution that has made a significant contribution to European security and stability for almost half a century. Russia has made life difficult for the OSCE by violating the organisation's fundamental principles and blocking or delaying major decisions on budgets, missions and key positions (Liechtenstein 2022). The fact that Moscow has not walked from the OSCE (yet) also means that there remain channels of communication and potentially dialogue on aspects of civilian conflict management in the EU's Eastern Neigbourhood beyond the war in Ukraine. For example, Russia eventually agreed to extend the mandate of the OSCE Mission in Moldova until the end of 2023 after months of delay and after only accepting a six-month extension in December 2022 as opposed to the customary 12 months (Douglas and Wolff 2023). Even if the 5+2 settlement process for the conflict in Moldova/Transnistria is currently dysfunctional (as we detail below), Russia's approach to the extension of the mission also signals that Moscow still sees a certain value, and leverage, in its continued involvement in the OSCE.

Western actors, for the most part, lacked both a meaningful strategy of engagement with and in the conflicts of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood and the interest and capacity to develop one. While the United States and the United Kingdom traditionally invested more in developing security and defence relationships with both eastern European EU and NATO members and countries in the EU's Eastern Partnership, this was a rather more neglected aspect of German and EU policy towards the region (Gressel and Popescu 2020). Overall, however, as long as the conflicts or their consequences did not spill over to EU territory, they remained relatively low on the Western agenda. This does not mean that there were no Western or Western-supported efforts to stabilise conflict environments, mediate between the parties and mitigate the consequences of unresolved conflicts through humanitarian and development aid. What our analysis does, however, reveal is that many of these efforts were half-hearted, not well-coordinated and accorded Russian interests a degree of legitimacy that was unwarranted.

1.3 Germany's Approach to Civilian Conflict Management and Peacebuilding in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood

Pre-dating the *Zeitenwende* triggered by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the subsequent first-ever German *National Security Strategy* (Federal Government 2023, Scholz 2023), Germany's approach to civilian conflict management and peacebuilding was first formulated comprehensively in the *Action Plan for Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding* of 2004. It stressed the nexus between peace, security and development, with a particular emphasis on human rights, social and political participation, gender equality, social cohesion and the rule of law (Federal Government of Germany 2017). Germany's approach was further complemented by the 2016 *White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr* (Federal Government of Germany 2016), the 2017 *Guidelines on Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace* (Federal Government of Germany 2017) and the 15th Development Policy Report of the Federal Government of Germany, entitled *Development Policy as Future-Oriented Peace Policy* (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development 2017).

These documents constitute the basic framework for the German Federal Government's engagement in civilian conflict management and peacebuilding. In 2019, moreover, inter-ministerial strategies on the rule of law promotion, transitional justice and security sector reform were adopted (Federal Government 2019a, b, c). This was followed by the Federal Foreign Office's (2022) *Shaping Stabilization - Foreign and Security Policy Concept for an Integrated Action for Peace.* According to these documents, the German approach prioritises (structural) prevention over crisis management. In its recent National Security Strategy, the Federal Government (2023) reiterates its commitment "to the primacy of preventing crises" and notes the centrality of development policy to sustainable security policy, again with a focus on "prevention by playing a part in establishing and strengthening autonomous conflict-management structures" (40, 43). Moreover, Germany's approach to civilian conflict management and peacebuilding has recently been complemented by the *Guidelines for Feminist Foreign Policy* (2023) and the Development Ministry's strategy on *Feminist Development Policy* (2023), both of which stress the need for women and marginalised groups to be involved in matters of peace and conflict.

The 2017 *Guidelines* identify five complementary fields of action with several goals in each of them which reflect the emphasis on structural conflict and violence prevention. However, they also note the importance of stabilisation in conflict and post-conflict contexts. With a focus on the short-term, stabilisation complements structural prevention with the aim of restoring security and initiating the transition away from economies of war and violence, including through diplomatic negotiations and high-level mediation efforts. Importantly, the *Guidelines* and Germany's approach towards civilian

conflict management and peacebuilding as a whole evolved against the backdrop of fragile statehood and intra-state conflicts; wars of aggression and inter-state conflicts were not the main focus.

In the past, relations with the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood were viewed by Berlin, on the one hand, through the EU and, on the other hand, through the prism of relations with Moscow. Germany continues to grapple with its own history as a perpetrator of massive violence in the region and struggled, until February 2022, to position itself unambiguously against Russian aggression and occupation in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood.[3] Instead, Germany approached the region as one among many EU member states, implementing the European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership, but without exhibiting a particularly keen or proactive interest in shaping or further developing it, including during the German EU Council Presidency in the first half of 2020 (Schiffers 2021). The one notable exception to this is Germany's engagement on the conflict in Moldova/Transnistria, which we detail below specifically with reference to the Meseberg process (2010-12) and the German OSCE Chairpersonship-in-Office (CiO) in 2016.

This has not changed with the new National Security Strategy either, beyond a general commitment to the "European peace project" which is meant to be strengthened by "further develop[ing] the European Union in a way that enables it to preserve its security and independence effectively for future generations in the face of external challenges" and a reference to potential Ukrainian, Moldovan and Georgian EU membership (Federal Government 2023: 37). Thus, the political framework for German involvement in the region remains underspecified and tends to be sporadic and driven by short-term responses to escalations of violence, such as the war between Russia and Georgia in 2008 and the Russian annexation of Crimea and occupation of parts of Donbas by Russia in 2014/15 (Böttger 2021, Meister 2010, Sarjveladze 2021).

1.4 Overview of the Study

Though laudable, the commitment by successive Federal Governments to working through multilateral institutions, notably the EU and NATO, and the OSCE as well, has deeply entrenched the lack of vision and strategy in Germany to civilian conflict management and peacebuilding in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. In the aftermath of the Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, however, a window of opportunity exists to consider how Germany can perform a more effective role.

To facilitate such a debate, we take stock of past German contributions to civilian conflict management and peacebuilding in the region, with a focus on the conflicts in the South Caucasus (Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh), Moldova (Transnistria) and Ukraine (primarily the Russian-occupied areas of Donbas). We detail German bilateral and multilateral (EU, OSCE) efforts in conflict-related humanitarian assistance (chapter 2), stabilisation (chapter 3), mediation (chapter 4), development cooperation (chapter 5) and civil society peacebuilding (chapter 6). We then return to the question of what the changed realities for the German contribution to civilian conflict management and peacebuilding in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood are and assess these specifically for Moldova and the countries of the South Caucasus (chapter 7). Finally, we draw conclusions and provide a number of recommendations to provide impulses for the further development and integration of Germany's approaches to civilian conflict management and peacebuilding in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood (chapter 8).

3 See, for example, the 2017 Bundestag debate on the motion *Germany's historical responsibility vis-a-vis Ukraine* (Deutscher Bundestag 2017a, 23860-23868). See also Melnyk (2017) and Klein (2022).

1.5 A Note on Methodology

We used standard qualitative methods, including desk research, semi-structured interviews and direct and participant observation. In our desk research, we drew on academic literature, OSCE, EU and government sources, as well as a variety of secondary sources and international and local online media. We conducted twenty semi-structured interviews with government and international officials as well as civil society representatives and experts from Germany, international capitals and the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood specifically for this study. Moreover, we were able to use data from interviews and focus groups conducted in the context of other projects that we carried out individually over some two decades of research in and on the region.

Much of our analysis in the following has been informed by this long-standing academic and policy engagement in and on the region which has given us unique insights both from a distance and close-up from living in or spending extended periods of time in the region. Going back over more than two decades, we have individually and collectively had the benefit of witnessing first-hand some of the momentous changes that have engulfed the countries of the region while being able to observe, and analyse, the responses to them by German policy makers and their counterparts in the EU, NATO and OSCE and their respective member and participating States.

While this has put us in a unique position to offer the following analysis, it also enables to clearly identify the limitations of such an endeavour. What we offer below is a broad assessment of German civilian conflict management and peacebuilding efforts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, but not one that can claim to be comprehensive. We illustrate our analysis with examples from across the countries of the region, but because Germany and its multilateral partners have had changing priorities over time and because of uneven accessibility of data sources, including key interlocutors, we did not strive for a detailed and systematic comparative analysis across space and time. Rather, our approach was to identify the important themes that were and are relevant to German civilian conflict management and peacebuilding efforts and then to offer evidence on the basis of country and conflict-specific case studies.

Each of the chapters was initially drafted by one of us individually. The chapter drafts and a first full draft were subsequently reviewed by all, comments and observations were logged in a 'live' online document, and we discussed individual drafts in regular online meetings. The finalised draft then benefitted from the comments of two reviewers from the Advisory Board and we completed the study in its present form on that basis.

Terminology used throughout this study, including to denote places and entities, follows common practice in the respective academic literature. The choice of terminology does not in any way imply a statement or claim under international law, such as on legal status or boundary/border issues. Status and related questions are explicitly not addressed by this study. Thus, when we write about the secessionist entities and related bureaucracy, we often use the notion "de facto" to differentiate from de jure positions but not necessarily inverted commas (i.e., de facto Minister instead of de facto "Minister") for the sake of readability. We generally opted for denoting the protracted conflicts in their narrower constellations (i.e., Abkhazia/Georgia, South Ossetia/Georgia) unless we explicitly refer to other dimensions, fully aware that these conflicts are part of multi-scale conflict constellations, such as explicated above.

2. Conflict-Related Humanitarian Assistance: Lack of Inclusivity

Over the course of the last decades, Germany has established itself as one of the most important providers of humanitarian aid in conflict-affected countries, targeting in particular Africa and the Middle East. The leading ministry in this field is the Federal Foreign Office. Since 2016, Germany has significantly increased its humanitarian commitment (Kurtzer et al. 2021). For instance, in 2020, it was the second biggest global bilateral contributor to humanitarian assistance.

When it comes to the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, since 2014, German humanitarian aid has been predominantly focussed on Ukraine, with the German government having contributed considerable financial resources to mitigating humanitarian emergencies in the country's east. In the period from the end of January to the end of November 2022 alone, Germany provided EUR 2 billion in bilateral humanitarian aid. This places Germany clearly at the forefront of the European comparison, ahead of Austria (0.6 billion), the United Kingdom (0.4 billion), Norway (0.3 billion), Poland (0.2 billion) and France (0.14 billion), surpassed only by the United States (10 billion) (Al Jazeera 2022). Moreover, whereas many countries have allocated funds to Ukraine since 24 February 2022, Germany also provided large-scale humanitarian assistance throughout the years preceding the full-scale Russian invasion. Among others, Germany has played a leading role in providing funding for the Ukraine Humanitarian Response Plan since 2014.

In this context, the German government supports the humanitarian activities of German and international CSOs and international organisations. In particular, organisations such as the Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund, Caritas, Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, Malteser and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have received funding. For instance, between 2019 and 2021, Germany provided EUR 12.3 million to support the ICRC's work in Ukraine and its humanitarian efforts for assisting civilians in Donetsk and Luhansk, among others, through ensuring access to safe drinking water, health care, food, products of personal hygiene and trauma treatment (Federal Foreign Office 2020a). In addition, international organisations such as the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization as well as international CSOs such as the HALO Trust and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining have been supported. In total, Germany supported Ukraine with humanitarian assistance amounting to approximately EUR 150 million from 2014 until the beginning of 2022 (Deutschland.de 2022).

Given the massive humanitarian challenges in the wake of the war and after, it will be even more important in the future to support Ukrainian implementing and relief organisations. Since February 2022, a large number of decentralised initiatives have developed that can provide humanitarian aid (Nelles and Nelles 2022). Aid by local civil society can be designed to be needs-based and cost-efficient.[4]

Georgia came into focus of German humanitarian aid after the Russo-Georgian war of 2008. In January 2009, the German Technical Cooperation agency was tasked with building houses to provide accommodation for 1,300 internally displaced persons (Federal Foreign Office 2009). From August 2008 to 29 January 2009, the Federal Foreign Office pledged, overall, EUR 2.05 million for humanitarian assistance in Georgia (including mine clearance), alongside more than EUR 10.5 million for conflict management (Reliefweb 2009). In October 2009, the Federal Foreign Office reported having provided an additional EUR 1.7 million for basic equipment and furniture for newly built houses, as well as for efforts to integrate IDPs within their new living environment (Federal Foreign Office 2009).

4 Interview with local civil society stakeholder.

With respect to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, after the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, the ICRC was one of the few international organisations with access to the disputed areas. Germany has funded the ICRC's emergency assistance from October 2020 onward with EUR 2 million, supporting the organisation in providing shelter and emergency relief for the victims of the war (Federal Foreign Office 2020b). The focus of German humanitarian aid since the war has been to support internally displaced persons and conflict-affected persons along the line of contact (Auswärtiges Amt 2022: 59).

One fundamental problem for humanitarian aid is access to conflict zones. In Ukraine, the greatest humanitarian need prior to the invasion was in proximity to the "line of contact", especially in areas not controlled by the Ukrainian government. Elderly and sick people, children and women were particularly affected (Auswärtiges Amt 2022: 58). In the case of eastern Ukraine, for example, humanitarian access to areas not controlled by the government in Kyiv was largely restricted for years. This has had a drastic impact on the living conditions and on the perception of international actors and the central government among the local population. Access restrictions can be imposed by all parties to the conflict and differ depending on the case and the security situation. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, for example, the government in Baku has drastically restricted access for international actors for years, arguing that access via Armenian controlled territory unduly legitimises the Armenian position. Tbilisi was much more open to humanitarian aid for Abkhazia and South Ossetia with access across the Administrative Boundary Lines (ABLs), including for local residents, for the most parts not entirely blocked.

It is particularly important that humanitarian aid is distributed in a conflict-sensitive way, so that it does not deepen tensions between groups or create new ones, as can be seen in the example of the EU's engagement in Abkhazia, which created additional frictions between the ethnic Georgian and the ethnic Abkhaz population. The EU initiated smaller humanitarian projects for people affected by the conflicts as early as 1997. The scope of activities gradually broadened from humanitarian assistance to post-conflict rehabilitation, such as "the construction of permanent housing, rebuilding houses, schools, hospitals, drinking water supply and irrigation systems," and "mine and unexploded ordnance clearance" (EEAS 2010: 1). In 2008, the EU provided EUR 2 million of funding for shelter rehabilitation, food security and income generation areas populated by ethnic Georgians, implemented by the Danish Refugee Council and Première Urgence (EEAS 2010: 5). Likewise, the focus within the EU Delegation's Economic Rehabilitation Programme for Georgia/Abkhazia was on the districts in the southeast of Abkhazia. Between 2006-2008, it allocated nearly EUR 2 million to UNDP to improve electricity supply, public health and food security in Gal/i, Ochamchire/a, Tkvercheli/Tkuarchal, and Zugdidi.

In 2006, the EU started to extend its rehabilitation programmes to regions of Abkhazia other than the ethnic Georgian-populated Gal/i. Through the Decentralised Cooperation Project, the EU Delegation funded small activities of international CSOs like the Danish Refugee Council and Action Against Hunger for economic rehabilitation in western Abkhazia. Although these projects were relatively small in size, with under EUR 100,000 each, they represented a qualitative extension of EU-funded activities in Abkhazia (EEAS 2010). In the humanitarian response, energy infrastructure played a central role. Rehabilitating the Enguri power plant, jointly operated by the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, has been at the core of the EU's humanitarian support to Abkhazia. As of the end of 2018, the EU's total financial contribution to its rehabilitation amounted to EUR 23.3 million of direct financial support (EEAS 2018). Despite the central role of the hydropower plant in Abkhazia's energy supply, resentment arose in Abkhazia due to what was perceived as a biased EU focus on those parts of Abkhazia inhabited by ethnic Georgians. The EU's strong focus on reconstruction in the Gal/i district thus deepened existing cleavages within Abkhazia between the ethnic Georgian population and members of other ethnicities, especially Abkhaz (Relitz 2022).

Humanitarian assistance should be as inclusive and conflict-sensitive as possible. It is important to make support accessible for all those affected by destruction, particularly in protracted conflicts with low levels of violence. Otherwise, conflict patterns may intensify and new distributional conflicts may be created. Moreover, the reputation of aid providers among disadvantaged groups can be damaged, which can also have negative repercussions on the scope for action with regard to other instruments of civilian conflict management and peacebuilding. When implementing humanitarian operations, it is also important to involve local humanitarian and civil society actors and stakeholders. In this way, aid can often be provided in a more targeted and cost-effective way and donors can simultaneously strengthen local civil structures.

3. Stabilisation and EU Common Security and Defence Policy: Hitting Their Limits

According to the crisis prevention *Guidelines*, stabilisation measures are meant to establish a secure environment, improve living conditions and promote alternatives to economies of war and violence (Federal Government of Germany 2017). The actual purpose of stabilisation is often not so much transforming the status quo, but rather preventing further deterioration. One of the tacit assumptions is that stabilisation should facilitate, in the long term at least, the exit of multilateral and bilateral donors from operations that are costly in financial terms and often pose significant risks to the lives of personnel deployed.

In practice, stabilisation is often heavily focussed on physical security as is evident from the vast majority of mandates of UN, EU and NATO stabilisation missions, especially after 2000 (Herbert 2013). The focus on security favours a state-centric approach, which assumes that "a strong, effective state is the solution to the major risks facing countries and societies" in need of external intervention (Day and Hunt 2020: 2) and is prevalent in the approaches of all major Western donors (Gotts et al. 2022: 11-13). At its worst, stabilisation "shifts the focus away from the root causes of conflict and development deficits, while enabling weak and corrupt governance, marginalization, exclusion, and lack of social cohesion" (Fluri 2020: 61). This is particularly problematic if stabilisation is embraced by donors as "a time-limited and low-cost engagement" (Gotts et al. 2022: 37) which, in turn, is driven more by the domestic politics of donors than the needs of fragile, conflict-affected societies.[5] Notably, the *Guidelines* acknowledge that for stabilisation to achieve its goals, a comprehensive approach is required that flexibly combines diplomatic, developmental and security measures, including, if necessary, military activities (Federal Government of Germany 2017: 69).

A core component of this integrated approach is security sector reform and governance (SSR/G), which is aimed at improving human security (Center for International Peace Operations 2015: 1). Germany has been crucial in supporting such missions led by all the multilateral actors — the UN, the EU, NATO and the OSCE — while it has also worked bilaterally with partner governments. As the 2019 inter-ministerial strategy on SSR notes, support of civil society actors, promoting human rights and facilitating political dialogue on reform are critical SSR measures that contribute to stabilisation in the context of armed conflicts (Federal Government of Germany 2019b, 13). German contributions are focussed on training and advice, implemented through the secondment of civilian and military experts. Germany tends to be among the top contributors to stabilisation efforts in terms of personnel and project funding across relevant multilateral efforts (especially the EU, but also for the UN and the OSCE) (Smit 2019).

Implementing a comprehensive approach has long been highlighted as one of the key challenges, especially the coordination of multiple donors. Nonetheless, Germany has remained a major contributor to international stabilisation efforts. Recent data from the United Nations (2022) indicate that between 2020-2021, Germany contributed 6.1% of the UN peacekeeping budget (the fourth largest contribution behind the United States, China and Japan). Germany also contributed 11% of the OSCE budget (the second largest after the United States) (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 2022: 106). It seconded 167 civilian staff to various peace and humanitarian missions, as well as 57 police officers (both as of December 2022) and more than 1,780 military personnel (as of January 2023) (Center for International Peace Operations 2023: 7). Among civilian secondments, the largest contributions 2021 were made to the OSCE SMM in Ukraine (44), the EUMM in Georgia (33), the EUAM in Ukraine (11) and the OSCE Secretariat in Vienna (9). These secondments were possible due to funding increases for the relevant budget by EUR 6.5 million in the German federal budget of 2021, which represents a 25% increase compared to preceding financial year.

5 As the US Department of State (2018) makes clear in the US Stabilization Assistance Review, "there is no public appetite to repeat the large-scale reconstruction efforts of the past" (Department of State 2018, 2).

Sustained financial commitments are among the German strengths. However, stabilisation efforts often have been spread widely and thinly across a multitude of projects and different sectors with little, if any, focus on the conflict as such.[6] Stabilisation is often considered as a precondition to peaceful and democratic development in fragile countries, which, in turn, tends to lead to assumptions that projects and programmes focussed on youth employment, economic (and macro-financial) stability and democratisation have direct and positive consequences for conflict reduction and crisis prevention. Arguably, this excessive developmentalisation of stabilisation is as unhelpful as a sole focus on (hard) security.[7] The former underestimates the importance of security as a baseline for any subsequent development, while the latter overestimates the capacity (and interest) of local actors to engage in meaningful, and above all inclusive, development once security has been established. A more balanced approach between the two would necessitate the longer-term involvement of bilateral and multilateral donors providing both security and development. As EU experiences in the Western Balkans indicate, however, even such an approach is no guarantee for successful conflict transformation, although it can 'pacify' conflicts over long periods of time (Kartsonaki and Wolff 2023).

3.1 Ukraine: German Stabilisation Contributions To and Through the OSCE and EU

Since the beginning of the crisis in and around Ukraine in 2014, the country has been the main focus of German bilateral stabilisation efforts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. In light of the armed conflict in Donbas, support for Ukraine increased almost tenfold between 2013 and 2017 (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development 2017). Economic stabilisation was at the heart of many projects, including reconstruction of physical infrastructure and support for people displaced by the conflict and social infrastructure rehabilitation in Ukraine, including in the context of IDP integration.[8] A multi-phase project with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on improving availability of, and access to, water along the frontline in Donbas exemplifies cooperation with a UN agency. Germany also contributed EUR 50 million to the World Bank's multi-donor trust fund for Ukraine.[9] Overall, Germany was perceived as a key contributor to stabilisation efforts in Ukraine (Ivashchenko-Stadnik et al. 2018).

Stabilisation efforts, however, seem to overestimate the conflict-mitigating impact of individual reforms. Decentralisation is a case in point, support of which became closely linked to the implementation of the Minsk accords. Provisions in the February 2015 Minsk agreement required constitutional reforms in favour not just of decentralisation but for a special status of Russian-occupied territories ("certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions"). This linked concessions to pro-Russian forces and their backers from Russia to an otherwise beneficial reform of the highly centralised Ukrainian public

6 Interview with German governmental stakeholder and German officials seconded to/working for the OSCE, Council of Europe and EU.

7 For example, the BMZ initiated a "Sonderinitiative zur Stabilisierung und Entwicklung in Nordafrika, Nahost" in 2014 which explicitly assumes that peaceful democratic development is predicated upon people's perception of opportunities for "employment, peace, democracy, and participation" and on that basis identifies four focus areas: youth employment, economic stabilisation, democratisation and stabilisation of neighbouring countries. See Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (2023).

8 For example, "Förderung der sozialen Infrastruktur" (USIF V, Phase 1 and Phase 2), https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/ipfz/Projektdatenbank/F%C3%B6rderung-der-sozialen-Infrastruktur-USIF-V-Phase-1-31720.htm and https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/ipfz/Projektdatenbank/F%C3%B6rderung-der-sozialen-Infrastruktur-USIF-V-Phase-2-35746.htm, as well as the follow-on project "Wiederaufbau im Osten der Ukraine" (USIF VI), https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/ipfz/Projektdatenbank/Wiederaufbau-im-Osten-der-Ukraine-USIF-VI-34007.htm. Funding for these programmes was around EUR 100 million. In addition, there was a separate IDP Resilience Programme, funded with EUR 200 million by the German government; see https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/ipfz/Projektdatenbank/Programm-zur-Steigerung-der-Resilienz-von-Binnenvertriebenen-IDP-Resilience-Programme-55683.htm.

9 See various projects on "Verbesserung der Wasserversorgung an der Kontaktlinie", https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/ipfz/Projektdatenbank/UNICEF-Verbesserung-der-Wasserversorgung-an-der-Kontaktlinie-Donetzk-39434.htm, https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/ipfz/Projektdatenbank/Phase-V-Verbesserung-der-dezentralen-Wasserversorgung-an-der-Kontaktlinie-Teil-d-Programms-37223.htm, https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/ipfz/Projektdatenbank/Beteiligung-am-Weltbank-Multi-Donor-Trust-Fund-PEACE-Ukraine-56076.htm.

administration. Since such concessions became ever more unpalatable, the link also hampered decentralisation reform. Moreover, while there is evidence that decentralised states are generally less prone to violent conflict (Neudorfer et al. 2020), decentralisation is not a panacea (Wolff et al. 2019) and can foster corruption (Neudorfer and Neudorfer 2015). Although Germany's, the EU's and the OSCE's stabilisation efforts were ultimately limited in their success, some lessons should be learned. The OSCE had to fulfil multiple, and at times contradictory, roles in an increasingly polarised national, regional and global context (Härtel et al. 2020). From 2014 to 2022, the SMM was undoubtedly the most significant stabilisation project that Germany supported. Within the OSCE context, there was, moreover, the Project Coordinator for Ukraine, and since 1 November 2022, a new OSCE project, the Support Programme for Ukraine (SPU), financed entirely from extra-budgetary contributions. In addition, Germany also supported EU engagement with Ukraine and the country's European integration, including through the EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine, established in July 2014) and the more recent EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine, established in October 2022). A third EU Mission, the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM, established in November 2005) is physically located in Ukraine but responds primarily to some of the challenges arising from the Transnistrian conflict in Moldova.

Due to its close relations with Russia, Germany was considered by some to be a "spoiler" although it was "simultaneously seen as one of the main donors and key cooperation partners for Ukraine in the EU" (Axyonova et al. 2018) and can be considered as "instrumental in shaping a joint response to the conflict in Ukraine" (Litra et al. 2017) and maintaining EU unity on sanctions against Russia.[10] Germany also functioned as coordinator across the different civilian conflict management organisations and mechanisms.

The OSCE Project Coordinator for Ukraine

The Project Coordinator for Ukraine (PCU) was established in 1999 as the successor to the OSCE Mission in Ukraine, which had been in the country since 1994. It was given a broad mandate across all three dimensions of the OSCE (the politico-military, the economic and environmental and the human) and allowed for cooperation with both governmental and non-governmental actors. In the years since 2014, the Project Coordinator became critical for crisis management. Its staff grew to over 100, and the last unified budget amounted to more than EUR 3.6 million. In addition, many projects were funded through extra-budgetary contributions. In 2014, the long-established presence of the PCU in Ukraine was a major factor in enabling the rapid deployment of the SMM (Neukirch 2014, Peško 2016, Verba 2016).

The funding provided by Germany to the PCU simultaneously illustrates both the breadth of support and its unfocussed nature, which reflects the fuzziness of "stabilisation". Indicative examples of projects run by the PCU that were partly or wholly funded by Germany include roundtables on sustainable water management, a study tour on human trafficking, legal reform projects, a chemical safety workshop, etc. The work of the PCU fundamentally changed as a result of the escalation of the crisis in and around Ukraine from late 2013 onwards (Axyonova and Gawrich 2018, Verba 2016). Arguably, the very presence of the PCU in Ukraine in late 2013 generated early warning signs of a broader escalation that could have stimulated the OSCE to engage in preventative diplomacy — an opportunity that was missed, partly, because Ukraine served as the CiO at the time and the government of Viktor Yanukovych was generally unwilling to acknowledge the severity of the rapidly evolving crisis (Tanner 2015).

Thus, the PCU was left with using the relative flexibility of its mandate to contribute to some of the subsequent international stabilisation efforts. For example, work on mine clearance and the removal of old stockpiles of ammunitions dating back to the Second World War had established technical

10 Interview with senior German government official.

knowledge and capacity to be utilised for projects in the context of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, where the PCU cooperated closely with the SMM and other international partners (Verba 2016).

Long-standing German support for the PCU, thus, also strengthened the SMM — from deployment through to various aspects of project implementation in the years after 2014. While this may not have been foreseeable at the time of the establishment of the PCU, it underlines the importance of long-term, and wide-ranging, stabilisation efforts for their ability to create capacity on the ground and strengthen links with local partners that enhance donor credibility and contribute to their ability to effect strategic change.

The Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (SMM)

Three days after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Malyarenko and Wolff 2014), the OSCE Permanent Council decided to deploy a Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine (Permanent Council of the OSCE 2014). The mission existed for eight years until the end of March 2022 when Russia refused to extend its mandate after its ull-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February. The SMM was the OSCE's largest-ever monitoring mission, with a budget and personnel equivalent to roughly two-thirds of the entire OSCE budget by the time it was discontinued.[11]

The OSCE SMM's original mandate specified as its main goals contributing to "reducing tensions and fostering peace, stability and security; and to monitoring and supporting the implementation of all OSCE principles and commitments". These aims were to be achieved through seven tasks the mission was given: gathering information on the security situation and reporting on incidents; monitoring as well as supporting human rights and fundamental freedoms; establishing contact with different actors on the ground; facilitating dialogue to reduce tensions; as well as co-ordinating with and supporting the work of the OSCE executive structures (Permanent Council of the OSCE 2014).

The mission was clearly not able to fulfil one of its primary goals, namely to "reduc[e] tensions and foster[ing] peace, stability and security". The mission's ability was gradually and intentionally diminished by the conflict parties, especially Russian and pro-Russian forces in the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, who restricted access for monitors (Härtel et al. 2020, Haug 2016, Kemp 2016). However, the technical innovations to monitoring that the SMM introduced were able to overcome some of the impediments suffered by the SMM (Peško 2016, Giardullo and Stodilka 2021, Verjee 2022), and contributed to mitigating the personal risks to observers.[12]

The sequence of events on the ground in the first few months of 2014, and the speed at which they unfolded, left no room for the OSCE to become active in preventing the further escalation of the conflict, especially in eastern Ukraine, where Russian and Russian-backed proxy forces gradually established the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics and consolidated their territorial control over them by February 2015 (Hopman 2015, 2016). In 2014 and after, the OSCE was primarily used to manage the crisis in and around Ukraine, which, given the polarisation inside the organisation and in the broader geopolitical context, was a difficult, and ultimately, futile undertaking, despite the fact that the SMM overall contributed to conflict containment (Dubský and Havlová 2019, Guliyev and Gawrich 2021, Härtel et al. 2020).

11 According to the final PC Decision extending the mission's mandate, its budget was almost EUR 110 million and it had a personnel envelope of up to 1,550 people (compared to a total OSCE budget of EUR 138 million and approximately 2,300 employees) (Permanent Council of the OSCE 2021). The next-largest OSCE mission, the Kosovo Verification Mission in 1998-99, had an agreed personnel envelope of up to 2,000 staff but by the time the mission was withdrawn in March 1999, only 1,300 of them had been deployed (Bellamy and Griffin 2002).

12 Despite its tasks, the SMM was not a peacekeeping operation, its observers were unarmed, and they depended entirely on the cooperation of the conflict parties, security was precarious from the start, and, according to Alexander Hug, the Deputy Chief Monitor of the OSCE SMM in 2014, "[s]ecurity is the main parameter that determines our work" (quoted in Liechtenstein, 2014, see also Haug 2016, Mackiewicz 2018, Tanner 2018).

The SMM not only provided daily reports on ceasefire violations (and other violations of the Minsk accords), it also contributed to awareness of the wider impact of the conflict on civilians and public services on both sides of the frontlines.[13] These reports led to more targeted stabilisation projects in government-controlled areas of Donbas and beyond, especially in relation to IDPs as well as more gender-sensitive programming.[14] At the same time, the SMM could only partially fulfil its goals due to the deficient backing by major countries in the OSCE; given its mandate, the SMM could only implement policies, but not develop them. Violations of the ceasefire had therefore no consequences.

The EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform Ukraine (EUAM)

As the crisis in Ukraine escalated in March 2014, the Council of the European Union (2014a) decided that "[i]n the absence of an agreement in the coming days on a credible OSCE mission, the EU will draw up an EU mission." As this OSCE monitoring mission, however, materialised (see above), EU thinking consolidated around an advisory mission, and the Foreign Affairs Council meeting in April confirmed Member States' readiness "to assist Ukraine in the field of civilian security sector reform, support of police and rule of law" (Council of the European Union 2014b). An expert mission was deployed to Kyiv three days later and developed a crisis management concept, a revised version of which was adopted on 17 June 2014 (EEAS 2014) and formed the basis for a Council Decision on 22 July 2014 to deploy the European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) for Civilian Security Sector Reform in Ukraine (Council of the European Union 2014c).

The mission's mandate was to "mentor and advise relevant Ukrainian bodies in the elaboration of renewed security strategies and in the consequent implementation of relevant comprehensive and cohesive reform efforts" (Council of the European Union 2014c). As such, the EUAM provided civilian security institutions in Ukraine, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Police and the National Anti-Corruption Bureau, with financial and technical support (Ivashchenko-Stadnik et al. 2018).

The EEAS crisis management concept highlighted the mission's mandate: "[t]he EU strategic objective is to create the conditions that would allow a stabilised security situation, re-establishment of the primacy of the rule of law and enhancement of Ukrainian authorities' capacity to ensure adequate and democratic governance of institutions in charge of internal security" (EEAS 2014). Increasing the resilience of Ukraine's security forces was supposed to contribute to the country's overall resilience and to restore public trust in state institutions (Nováky 2015, Wolczuk and Žeruolis 2018). The broader societal will and capability to resist the Russian invasion of 2022, compared to 2014/15, could be partially ascribed to the mission, too (Friesendorf 2016, 2019, Larsen 2021, Shea and Jaroszewicz 2021).

The EUAM got off to a slow start. It started deployment in December 2014 and was initially seen as lacking a coherent vision and being insufficiently responsive to local needs (Lebrun 2018, Zarembo 2017). EUAM's mandate was not related to the conflict in Donbas but focussed on security sector reform in Ukraine (Council of the European Union 2014c, also Axyonova and Gawrich 2018). This created an (initial) mismatch between what Ukraine expected (an EU monitoring mission at the frontlines in Donbas and Crimea) and what the EU offered (Ivashchenko-Stadnik et al. 2018, Zarembo 2017). Nonetheless, 72 draft laws were developed by the Ukrainian parliament with EUAM assistance, 27 strategic government documents were approved on the basis of EUAM Advice, and the mission facilitated the training of over 30,000 personnel since 2015. Overall, while the EUAM offers a good example of how the EU, and with it, Germany, can combine short- and long-term crisis management and balance state-building,

13 The SMM published a series of thematic reports available at https://www.osce.org/special-monitoring-mission-to-ukraine/156571.

14 Communication from former senior SMM member. Also, Mackiewicz (2018) notes the close cooperation of the SMM with international organisations and CSOs specialising in particular humanitarian issues that the mission monitors and provides information on, such as UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council. See also Neukirch (2015).

development and humanitarian agendas (Ivashchenko-Stadnik et al. 2018, Rabinovych 2019), it also underscores the fact that activity as such is no guarantee for positive impact. Especially when there is a lack of context-sensitive application of otherwise standardised EU responses, internationalised stabilisation efforts are unlikely to be either effective or efficient. The EUAM offers important lessons here about the importance not only of a careful initial and joint local-international conflict and context analysis but also of the need for ongoing evaluation and, if necessary, adjustment. This requires investment in requisite capacity both locally and internationally.

3.2 Moldova: Stabilisation Through Confidence Building

Confidence-building measures (CBMs) are an essential element of stabilisation processes and critical for conflict settlement (Douglas and Wolff 2023, Kemoklidze and Wolff 2019). Constructive and productive negotiations in the Transnistrian settlement process have always been dependent on the state of relations between Russia and the West. When this relationship was still reasonably constructive in the first decade of the 2000s, implementing CBMs, including in the security arena, proved possible.

After the war in Georgia in 2008, CBMs more or less disappeared from the agenda. Their brief, albeit inconclusive revival during the so-called Meseberg process between 2010 and 2012, however, is instructive for a better understanding of the German approach to the conflict in Moldova/Transnistria more generally. This process had its origins in a memorandum issued by then Russian president Dmitry Medvedev and German chancellor Angela Merkel after their summit in Meseberg in June 2010. This memorandum, while more broadly focussed on the establishment of a ministerial-level EU-Russia Political and Security Committee, elevated the conflict in Moldova/Transnistria on the European security agenda when the memorandum noted that "the EU and Russia will cooperate in particular towards a resolution of the Transnistria conflict with a view to achieve tangible progress within the established 5+2 format" (Merkel and Medvedev 2010).[15]

Within 18 months of the memorandum's publication, official negotiations within the 5+2 format resumed. Encouraged by the memorandum, the German government facilitated a conference for the conflict parties in Bad Reichenhall in early September 2011, which became the blueprint for subsequent annual meetings (the so-called Bavaria conference). Although not directly involved in the settlement process, the German government thus played an instrumental role in the revival of direct negotiations in 2011/12. Following a first round of talks in Vilnius on 30 November and 1 December under the Lithuanian CiO, another round of meetings occurred in February and April 2012 under the Irish CiO. At the latter, agreement was reached on the principles and agenda for further negotiations.

The positive momentum achieved, however, proved unsustainable following the re-election of Vladimir Putin as president of Russia, and it took several more years before CBMs would resurface, specifically in the economic arena. This happened despite the deteriorating relationship between Russia and the West after Moscow's annexation of Crimea and proxy-occupation of parts of the Donbas.[16]

This kind of confidence-building, however, is slow. The slow pace and significant external assistance with which it has been achieved reflect a persistent volatility. Building confidence requires careful

15 The only currently publicly accessible version of the memorandum is the Russian version archived at kremlin.ru. The authors have an English language version in their possession, from which the quote is taken.

16 For further details on the mediation dimension of the process, see below.

management, including of expectations. This became evident in 2019, when the process stalled, and the sides failed to agree on the final Bratislava Protocol after three years of substantial headway.[17]

Crucially, the lack of progress towards a settlement has long been understood to reflect the absence of political will and interest for compromise on both sides of the conflict divide.[18] This is not to say that even in the presence of such political will in Chisinau and Tiraspol a settlement in the 5+2 format would have been possible before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, given the effective veto that Russia had. This indicates the potential and limitations of confidence-building measures.

From a German perspective, Moldova has always been relatively high on the agenda of both the Federal Foreign Ministry and the Chancellery.[19] Germany made a long-term secondment between 2013 and 2015 of a senior advisor to then Moldovan prime minister Yuri Leanca, and the same expert, with deep insights into the Moldovan political system and the Transnistrian conflict, now serves as one of the EU high-level advisors to Moldovan President Maia Sandu. Between 2018 and 2022, a senior German diplomat also served as head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, having been previously deputy head of mission between 2008 and 2011 and a senior advisor to the German CiO between September 2015 and December 2016. In addition, Germany has contributed financially to many confidence-building measures, including through extra-budgetary OSCE funds.[20] This created the credibility and leverage to nudge the conflict parties, especially the Moldovan government, towards concessions and compromises in the context of the Berlin+ process. These 'lower-end' successes, while short of an actual conflict settlement, contributed significantly to stability.

3.3 Georgia: The European Monitoring Mission (EUMM)

The European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM) was established in the aftermath of the 2008 military conflict between Georgia and Russia as a result of the EU-mediated Six-Point Agreement that brought an end to the August War (Official Journal of the European Union 2008). The unarmed mission was mandated to support stabilisation of the security situation in the country. Based on its mandate, the EUMM seeks to prevent a resumption of hostilities, restore safe and normal living conditions for the populations in Tbilisi-controlled territory, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, monitor the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and inform as well as contribute to EU policies regarding the conflicts and the wider region as part of the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). Moreover, the EUMM aims to foster confidence among the conflict parties (Fischer 2009, Freire and Simao 2013, Noutcheva 2018: 13). Since October 2008, it has been monitoring the situation on the ground and reporting on any incidents that could potentially escalate the conflicts.

Germany is significantly involved in the EUMM in terms of personnel. With Ambassador Hansjörg Haber a German diplomat served as first Head of Mission; as of January 2023 Berlin seconds 33 (up from 10 in 2019) out of the total 253 international monitors (EUMM 2023). The majority of EUMM monitors are seconded by EU Member States and salaries are paid by their home countries, while the EUMM contributes a per diem. Consequently, EU Member States decide, in line with their foreign policy agenda, if and to what extent they contribute to the mission's staff. Currently Germany deploys by far the most monitors

17 Throughout the Slovak CiO period, efforts were made to advance the Berlin+ /Package of Eight confidence-building agenda that was launched under the German CiO in 2016 and resulted in the 2017 Vienna Protocol. Communication from senior OSCE official, January 2020. For more details on this, see the section on mediation where we detail developments over the last decade.

18 This has been a dominant theme in interviews with participants and observers of the 5+2 process for the past decade.

19 Interview with senior EU advisor, November 2022; Interview with senior German government official.

20 Interview with German diplomat based in Vienna; interview with senior German government official. Examples include projects on consolidating the OSCE mediation support capacity in the missions in Ukraine, the Balkans and Moldova and on inter-ethnic dialogue in Moldova in 2018 and 2019.

to the EUMM, followed by Sweden (Figure 1). The stark increase in German staff to the EUMM may not necessarily reflect a changed priority in German foreign policy, however, as many of them are former staff of the dissolved SMM in Ukraine who needed new positions and had relevant expertise. Nonetheless, throughout the past years, Germany has increasingly placed personnel in management positions in the EUMM.[21]

Figure 1: EUMM monitors by nationality in 2023 (Source: https://eumm.eu/en/about_eumm/facts_and_figures)

In order to track security incidents along the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the EUMM's staff works in Tbilisi as well as three field offices in Gori, Mtskheta and Zugdidi. Although its mandate includes Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the EUMM has no access to either of them. From the Abkhazian and South Ossetian perspective, the mission's mandate only includes the territory of Georgia, which they no longer see themselves a part of; they consequently deny the EUMM access. As a result, the mission is restricted to solely monitoring the ABL on territory that is controlled by Tbilisi. Developments in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are indirectly tracked by the mission through the European Union Satellite Centre in Spain, analysis of open data and interviews with the local population along the ABL.[22] Nonetheless, the EUMM is not in a position to effectively monitor adherence to the 2008 Russo-Georgian ceasefire agreement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, particularly in regard to the placement of heavy Russian armament along the ABL.

According to an interviewed senior expert, the EUMM's monitoring activities could be carried out by a little over fifty people. In his view, the over two hundred monitors are more of a message to Russia than an operational necessity.[23] Another interviewee similarly noted that the mismatch between size and actual tasks and responsibilities is striking.[24] Arguably, the repeated extension of the EUMM's mandate as well as keeping the size of the mission are also a political signal to Tbilisi, particularly from the EU's Eastern European Member States, intended to demonstrate resolve and solidarity (Relitz 2022).

21 Interview with international governmental representative.
22 Interview with international governmental representative.
23 Interview with international governmental representative.
24 Interview with international governmental representative.

In addition to its monitoring and reporting functions, the EUMM has engaged in security and confidence-building operations. Since May 2009, a hotline between all key security actors has been operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The hotline connects the Georgian State Security Service, Russian border guards, Abkhazian and South Ossetian border guards and two EUMM hotline holders.[25] Thus, it creates a communication channel for addressing a variety of issues such as security-related concerns, border control operations, medical crossings of the ABL, detentions and criminal activities or even the uncontrolled movement of farm animals. For instance, in 2018, the hotline was used almost two thousand times. In addition, the EUMM uses the hotline to address mission-related security questions and concerns with the authorities in Sukhum/i and Tskhinval/i. It is also one of the few direct lines of communication with the latter (Relitz 2022). The hotline thus contributes to dispute resolution and confidence building by defusing tensions and improving life on both sides of the Administrative Boundary Line (EEAS 2018).

The other key instrument of the EUMM to promote security and confidence between the conflict parties is the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM). The IPRM meetings for Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been one of the very few tangible results of the Geneva International Discussions (GID) (Macharishvili, Basilia & Samkharadze 2017, 29-36). In February 2009, all sides agreed to these regular meetings, which have long been carried out in Gal/i for Abkhazia and in Ergneti at the ABL between Georgia and South Ossetia.[26] Initiated in May 2009, the IPRM meetings in South Ossetia are facilitated jointly by the EUMM and the OSCE, with the participation of Georgian, South Ossetian and Russian officials.[27] The IPRM sessions in Gal/i, which began in July 2009, are led by the United Nations, with participation of the EUMM, Georgian, Abkhazian and Russian officials. Thus, IPRM meetings provide opportunities for all parties along the ABLs to engage in direct, in-person discussion of security-related concerns. Each party may set topics on the agenda. Typically these include the crossing of animals or people crossing for medical purposes, incidents of criminal activity across the ABL, “illegal” crossings as well as the follow-up of hotline calls.[28]

The continuity of IPRM meetings differs in the cases of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Since June 2018, the IPRM meetings in Abkhazia have been suspended due to strong disagreement on the agenda between the Georgian and Abkhazian (as well as Russian) stakeholders (OC Media 2018). Although the disagreement at that time may not be the core of this dispute anymore, no return to the working modus has been achieved. The Abkhazian authorities seem to no longer value these sessions and rather prefer to utilise the EUMM hotline to communicate with the EUMM and Georgian officials.[29] As a result, the EUMM has no possibility to exchange with local authorities and security stakeholders in person - something that the IPRM provided. By contrast, the IPRM meetings in Ergneti continue to take place on a regular basis, ensuring direct exchange with all officials. The opportunities that these meetings provide for informal discussions on the sidelines should not be underestimated, as these can have a confidence-building effect between security actors on all sides of the divide. Primarily, though, the IPRM are a mechanism aimed at stabilising the security situation at the ABLs.

25 Interview with international governmental representative.

26 The IPRM meetings for South Ossetia have been initially held in the village of Dvani at the ABL.

27 The IPRM meetings in Ergneti are attended by (1) the Georgian State Security Service, the Georgian Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality and other government officials; (2) the South Ossetian KGB Border Guard Service, the de facto Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Prosecutor’s Office and other de facto governmental officials; (3) the Russian FSB Border Guard Service; (4) the EUMM Head of Mission, Head of Operations, the EUMM hotline holder, political advisers and other EU officials; and (5) the OSCE Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the South Caucasus, policy officers and other OSCE officials (EUMM 2018: 3).

28 Interview with international governmental representative.

29 Interview with international governmental representative.

Though more than 15 years have passed since the August War, the IPRMs have not brought the parties closer to a conflict settlement.[30] Such an assessment may be extended to the EUMM itself. As Piranishvili (2022) writes, it "has not achieved any degree of conflict transformation and tangible results in confidence building" (12); it also "failed to have a positive impact on improving the living conditions of people in and around the conflict regions and protecting their security" (12f.).

The EUMM's limited role is clearly a result of its narrow mandate that does not aim to tackle the root causes of the conflict and prevents it from taking on a more active role. Only in 2016, the EUMM launched a distinct confidence-building and dialogue support programme. Although rather small with an annual budget of EUR 100,000, the programme has added a new dimension to the mission's activities. The programme can also be interpreted as the EUMM's attempt to slightly extend its access to Abkhazia – for example it has been used to train Abkhazian journalists in Europe (Relitz 2022).[31] However, compared to the mission's overall annual budget of well over EUR 20 million, the share of these activities is marginal. Similar to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, the EUMM hardly invests in confidence building, which seems to be a key limitation or weakness of CSDP missions, especially when compared to the relatively more successful stabilisation efforts in Moldova.

In summary, while being by far the most significant element of the EU's civilian conflict management activities in Georgia, the EUMM's performance has thus far been mixed. In particular with regards to its aim of contributing to confidence building, its practical impact has been rather minimal. The EUMM has been a platform for information sharing and early warning among all essential players on the ground, but its restricted access and minor conflict management possibilities seem to scarcely justify its size. Therefore, 15 years after the EUMM's initial deployment, it seems that the time has come to re-evaluate the mission. On the one hand, this can mean searching for ways to expand the mandate and activities of the mission so that it can have a real impact on the conflict management process. On the other hand, it can mean redistributing to mechanisms that might have a greater effect in terms of conflict management.

Stabilisation efforts have been key to conflict management in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. Yet their overall effectiveness must be questioned. In Georgia, the presence of the EUMM has arguably had a positive psychological and political effect. Whether the absence of further escalation after 2008 is primarily due to the presence of the civilian, unarmed mission or rather reflects the fact that Russia achieved its goals in Georgia in the August 2008 war is unclear. The presence of the UN and OSCE in Georgia prior to the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, as well as the fate of the OSCE SMM in Ukraine would suggest that a deterrence effect of the missions is, at best, very limited. In a much less violent context, however, stabilising an existing status quo does appear within the realm of possibilities, as, for instance, OSCE efforts in Moldova demonstrate. This was possible not only because of the lower levels of violence but also because of the more skilful and hence more successful utilisation of mediation as a tool for civilian conflict management and peacebuilding, which we explore in more detail in the next chapter.

30 Interview with international governmental representative.

31 Interview with international governmental representative.

4. Mediation: Difficult Starting Conditions, Few Results

German engagement in mediation in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood has principally taken four forms to date. First, direct engagement, as in the case of the Meseberg Process in Moldova/Transnistria or the Normandy Format in Russia/Ukraine, where Germany has been directly involved as a mediator, normally in close cooperation with other partners such as the EU or OSCE. Second, support of existing mediation efforts by other actors, such as the hosting of the Bavaria Conference, a pre-pandemic regular annual gathering in the context of the OSCE/5+2 mediation efforts in the Transnistrian settlement process. Third, Germany has been an active supporter of multilateral engagement, for example of the UN's Mediation Support Unit and the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre's Mediation Support Team. Fourth, there has been an emphasis on capacity building (Auswärtiges Amt 2019: 4-5).

Mediation was found to be the dominant form by which intra-state conflicts are terminated, but mediated agreements also frequently suffer breakdowns (Kartsonaki et al. 2021). This does not mean that mediation is a futile undertaking or that military victory leads to more sustainable peace (Beardsley 2008), let alone more inclusive societies (Svensson 2009). Nor does this mean that mediated negotiation processes are inferior to those in which no mediation occurs; on the contrary, strong evidence exists that international, and especially UN but also EU, mediation plays an important role in securing sustainable agreements (Papagianni 2010). It does, however, underscore the limitations of mediation, especially if conflict parties do not negotiate in good faith or renege on commitments made.

Negotiation formats across the protracted conflicts in Moldova, Georgia and Armenia/Azerbaijan, and previously those in relation to Ukraine, have been negatively affected not only by the difficult and often highly disturbed relations of the conflict parties themselves, but also due to the deteriorating relationships of their respective external supporters who often simultaneously serve as mediators of negotiations and as potential guarantors of a future settlement. The negotiation formats across the conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood lack accurately defined conflict parties and tangible progress. The degree to which there have been mediated negotiations and the extent to which these have led to a more stable and secure situation vary, however.

4.1 Georgia: Sporadic Bilateral and Modest Long-Term Multilateral Engagement

Germany has long been involved in managing the unresolved conflicts in Georgia. A distinction can be made between its bilateral engagement and its contribution to EU mediation efforts after 2008. While Germany was active in the Georgian/Abkhazian and to a lesser extent in the Georgian/South Ossetian context early on in the UN Group "Friends of Georgia", which in 1997 became the "Friends of the Secretary-General for Georgia" together with France, Russia and the United States, its engagement, not unlike that of other Western European countries, was still limited (Boden 2018: 71).

The initiatives taken by the then UNOMIG (United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia) Head and German diplomat Dieter Boden from 1999 until 2001 and later of then German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier in the run-up to the conflict escalation in 2008, however, are noteworthy. In 1999, at the request of the UN Group of Friends, Dieter Boden spearheaded a political initiative to settle the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia. Ambassador Boden was heavily involved in high-level discussions with the "Friends" and with the Georgian and Abkhazian leadership. The negotiations on the "Basic Principles on the Division of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi," also known as the Boden Plan or Boden Document, ran until December 2001 and produced an eight-paragraph paper. While neither contending party was actively involved in the writing process, Germany and the United States were tasked with persuading Tbilisi to endorse the idea, while Moscow did the same with regard to Sukhum/i (Francis 2011: 149). The Boden Plan envisaged a political solution with Abkhazia as an

independent region inside Georgia, with the option of future federalisation (Wheatley 2010: 218-219). The idea did not specify the details of such an arrangement, but it was intended to kick off political negotiations to resolve the conflict. However, neither party was willing to compromise, and the idea was ultimately rejected by both.

In the run-up to the 2008 conflict escalation, then German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier launched another political push to resolve the Georgian-Abkhazian dispute. Steinmeier met with then Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, Abkhazian de facto President Sergej Bagapsh and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in July of that year. Steinmeier's meeting with Bagapsh in Gal/i was the first and only visit by a German minister to Abkhazia. The German initiative envisioned a three-stage process: first, a declaration on the mutual non-use of force between Georgia and Abkhazia, and the gradual return of the IDPs; second, a comprehensive infrastructure rehabilitation and economic reconstruction programme for Abkhazia and neighbouring regions of Tbilisi-controlled territory; and third, settling the political status question of Abkhazia.

In light of the rising tensions in 2008, the plan aimed to start a direct political dialogue between Tbilisi and Sukhum/i on the settlement of the conflict (Mchedlishvili 2008). However, the initiative was swiftly rejected or assessed as unrealistic by all relevant stakeholders (Dudek 2008). The Georgian leadership feared that signing the non-use of force agreement would be tantamount to recognising Abkhazia, a position it holds to this day, and therefore sought to establish in advance that Abkhazia would remain within Georgia. The Abkhazian leadership, on the other hand, considered the return of all 250,000 Georgian IDPs as a threat to Abkhazia's de facto independence and security, a position that has not changed to this day. In light of the conflict escalation in South Ossetia and the Russo-Georgian war in August 2008, the German initiative was quickly dropped (Relitz 2022).

At that time, in the EU context, and even though still modest, Germany seemingly had taken the lead in engaging with the conflict in Georgia, while France has primarily focussed on Armenia/Azerbaijan. A particular exception was the Sarkozy initiative to end the Russian-Georgian war.[32] The reputation of German actors on both sides of the divide has been relatively high due to the historically strong political relations with Georgia,[33] and the Abkhazians' still existing affinity with Germany and the former German Democratic Republic.[34] Germany's Russia policy, which long sought to achieve a "balance", further strengthened the positive perception of Germany and German actors in Abkhazia, in contrast to, for example, British actors, who were viewed increasingly critically.[35]

In Tbilisi-controlled territory, Berlin's, together with Paris, objections to granting the country a Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest ended up tarnishing Germany's image. With regard to the handling of the August war of 2008, moreover, Germany was attested to espousing a policy that was aimed at not estranging Moscow and that, in contrast to the British and French's "political-strategic" orientation, was rooted in economic considerations, also with respect to Russia (Larsen 2012: 109-10). Analyses of Germany's handling of the 2008 war point out that Berlin quickly basically returned to its pre-war approach and outlook (only slightly adjusted) and that also, after 2008, it viewed cooperation with Russia as indispensable and in fact necessary for solving European

32 Interview with international civil society stakeholder.

33 Germany has close and historically rooted relations with Georgia, which go back over two hundred years to the immigration of Swabian farmers beginning in 1817. Germany was also the first country in the European Community to recognise the independence of Georgia on 23 March 1992 and to open an embassy in Tbilisi.

34 Interview with local civil society stakeholder.

35 Interview with international civil society stakeholder.

security challenges.[36] As Eberle and Handl argue: "[T]he emphasis was not on containing but regaining [italics as in original] Russia as a partner and a constituent element of a cooperative security order, and policy remained essentially unchanged" (Eberle/Handl 2020: 51, see also Siddi 2018: 42-44). In any case, German involvement remained rather scant and sporadic, as the conflict was not high on the list of priorities. Since 2008, Germany has played a rather indirect role in the Georgian conflicts; its central objectives have been the promotion of civil society dialogue between Georgia and Abkhazia and the development of educational opportunities in Abkhazia. In light of the increasing engagement of DAAD and GIZ, the focus on Abkhazia at the German Embassy in Tbilisi expanded around 2020/21, resulting in a first visit by a staff member and a planned visit by the ambassador. The latter had to be cancelled, however, and with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the momentum fizzled out again.[37] Direct engagement with Abkhazian de facto authorities is virtually non-existent. While the political relevance of Georgia in Germany has increased with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, political attention and conflict-focussed capacities at the German Foreign Office and at the embassy remain limited. There has been no strategic approach to German conflict-related engagement in Georgia and little human resources in the embassy to coordinate, steer or shape conflict-related engagement.[38]

However, Germany invests significant human resources in international, above all, European endeavours. The main instrument in Georgia is the European Union Special Representative for the European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia (EUSR). At the beginning of July 2003, the EU appointed an EUSR for the South Caucasus with the mandate "to prevent conflicts in the region, to assist in the resolution of conflicts, and to prepare the return of peace" (Official Journal of the European Union 2003). In 2006, the EUSR's mandate was expanded to include "contributing" to conflict resolution (Axyonova and Gawrich 2018: 12). With the extended mandate, the EU started to seek a more prominent role in the South Caucasus (Popescu 2007: 16). One of the main tasks of the EUSR since 2008 has been to serve as one of the co-chairs of the Geneva International Discussions, the political format used to address the conflicts in Georgia. In July 2014, German diplomat Herbert Salber was appointed as EUSR.[39] Although the position of the Special Representative changes frequently, personnel stability at the working level is one of the resources of the EUSR. At the time of writing, not only the Chief of Cabinet in Brussels but also the political advisors in Tbilisi and Yerevan are German nationals.

The EUSR plays a key role in the mediation process as one of the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions (GID). Since 2008, the GID are the sole mediation mechanism for the conflicts around Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Until then, the UN and OSCE, respectively, had overseen settlement processes which were, however, highly unproductive. Based on the Six-Point Agreement of 12 August 2008, the GID are chaired by three international organisations that either led the conflict resolution before 2008 (the UN and the OSCE) or became increasingly important in that regard after 2008 (the EU) to fulfil the final point of the 2008 ceasefire agreement, namely to open "international discussions on the modalities of security and stability in Abkhazia and South Ossetia".[40]

From the beginning, the question of the status of the participants has been a core political issue at the GID. Even fifteen years after its launch, the meetings are convened in an informal setting, behind closed

36 In contrast to Berlin and Paris, Washington had supported Tbilisi in its endeavour to receive a MAP at the Bucharest Summit. After the August War and in particular with the new Obama administration that took office in early 2009, relations between Washington and Tbilisi were somewhat tuned down, including their de-personalisation, while at the same time the USA announced a 'reset' in its relations with Russia (Smolnik 2020).

37 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.

38 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.

39 His term was overshadowed by public and political outrage over a statement he made during a visit to South Ossetia in May 2017. Salber was quoted by the South Ossetian press service as congratulating Anatoly Bibilov, the de facto president, on the "recent elections" that he won and "the very important post" he now occupied (Fuller 2017). Despite various statements on his commitment to and support for the territorial integrity of Georgia, he ultimately stepped down in August of that year.

40 Author's translation based on the French-language version of the Six-Point Plan. The two Russian-language versions talk about "international discussions on the modalities of lasting security in South Ossetia and Abkhazia."

doors, where each person participates in his or her personal capacity, without official delegations or even nameplates around the table (Bergmann 2020). Despite the informal character of the talks, both Abkhazians and Georgians are represented by high-ranking officials. After initial attempts to hold formal plenary meetings failed, the GID's work is now conducted within two working groups. Working Group 1 deals with security-related questions like the non-use of force and confidence-building measures and Working Group 2 addresses humanitarian questions like the return of IDPs, human rights and humanitarian aid.

While there has been minimal progress on a few humanitarian issues over the years in the Geneva negotiations, there is not even the pretence of a conflict settlement process. The implementation plan for the Medvedev-Sarkozy Six-Point Agreement of 12 August 2008 establishes as the scope of the Geneva International Discussions merely "arrangements to ensure security and stability in the region; the issue of refugees and displaced persons on the basis of the internationally recognised principles and post-conflict settlement practice; any other subject, by mutual agreement of the parties." In general, there is very little engagement between the parties during the talks. More essential and dynamic are the preparatory talks of the co-chairs in Tbilisi, Sukhum/i, Tskhinval/i and Moscow. Most of the content work is done during these meetings or on the margins of the GID in informal meetings, workshops and dinners.[41] In sum, the GID has provided the sole formal and vital informal formats for political exchange between the conflict parties, although with very few tangible results.

4.2 Germany's Steering Role in the Slow but Pragmatic Mediation in Moldova[42]

In Transnistria, the general lack of progress towards a settlement must not be taken as a lack of effort, including from Germany. Numerous plans and strategies were elaborated, especially during the first decade after the war (Wolff 2011). Even during periods of high tensions, communications between the two sides never broke down completely but were always maintained at least informally. Over the past decade, however, there has been a noticeable turn from efforts at conflict settlements towards stabilisation of the status quo in the context of the 5+2 settlement process.[43] This has manifested itself in a focus on so-called confidence-building measures, tackling issues that have improved the functioning of the current arrangements without moving the conflict itself closer to a settlement.

Nonetheless, the Transnistrian case offers vital lessons on when mediation efforts are likely to succeed. Notable mediation successes include the agreement on the agenda and on principles and procedures of the 5+2 talks in April 2012 under the Irish CiO, the inclusion of Transnistria into the EU-Moldova Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) as of 1 January 2016, the Berlin Protocol of June 2016 negotiated under the German CiO and the 'Package of Eight'/Berlin+ process that began in 2017 during the Austrian CiO. The question is what accounts for these relative successes? The answer lies in the autonomy that the parties have had in negotiations. A lack of autonomy, or diminishing will to use it, accounts for the absence of agreements and their implementation from 2019 onwards. From the perspective of external actors such as Germany, the OSCE or the EU, autonomy can be created and conflict parties can be encouraged (by both incentives and pressure) to make use of it.

41 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.

42 In the following section, we draw on Douglas and Wolff (2023) and Wolff (2021a), albeit with significant updates, to reflect the changing situation since the beginning of Russia's all-out war against Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

43 The format consists of the two conflict parties plus the OSCE, Russia and Ukraine as mediators and guarantors of a settlement. The EU and the United States were added as observers (+2) to the existing five-sided format in 2005. The mediators/guarantors and observers previously met separately in the so-called 3+2 format. Bilateral meetings between the chief negotiators of the two sides are commonly called 1+1 meetings.

While the initial momentum created by the 2012 agreement on the agenda and on principles and procedures of the 5+2 talks had already begun to fizzle out in the course of the Ukrainian Chairperson-in-Office in 2013, the Serbian-Swiss double CiO of the OSCE for 2014-15 soon ran completely out of steam. A formal session in Vienna at the end of February 2014 resulted in an agreement on freedom of movement but was the last such meeting to take place for more than two years. The principal reason for this was the escalation of the crisis in and around Ukraine from late 2013 onwards. Russia's annexation of Crimea in the spring of 2014 and the subsequent war in Donbas increased tensions throughout the OSCE region and in the organisation itself, in effect suspending the 5+2 negotiation format.[44]

The stalemate changed in the context of the EU-facilitated and mediated negotiations on the application of the EU-Moldova DCFTA to Transnistria at the end of 2015 in Germany. During negotiations at the annual Bavaria conference between the EU, Chisinau and Tiraspol, a deal was struck under which the Moldovan government assured Brussels of its ability, and willingness, to enforce agreed rules for goods and services originating in Transnistria (de Waal 2016). This prevented an economic collapse in Transnistria which had, in trade terms, become increasingly dependent on the EU market and could not afford being cut off from it at the end of the two-year transition period to the full application of the DCFTA. Neither could Moscow risk a severe economic crisis in Transnistria, lacking both the resources and the access to deal with it. This created a window of opportunity for a 'fix' that served local interests in Tiraspol and Chisinau without upsetting the larger balance of power between their respective external backers. Authorities in Tiraspol, in particular, used the space created to carve out a deal in direct discussions with EU Commission officials, which Russia tacitly accepted and did not subsequently undermine.[45]

After a two-year hiatus in the formal 5+2 process, the OSCE's German CiO managed to convene a meeting of all participants in Berlin in June 2016. During the meeting, the sides agreed on a new approach that would focus on clearly defined areas in which agreements were to be achieved and that any agreement would need to specify concrete implementation measures. The Berlin Agreement on this new approach, subsequently reiterated at the annual Bavaria conference, also specified the areas of education (apostilisation), transportation (vehicle licence plates), telecommunications, ecology (natural resource management in the basin of the River Dniester/Nistru) and pending criminal cases as priority areas in which further confidence building was important. Of these, only an agreement on ecology was finalised and implemented in 2016, but the other issues were mostly successfully addressed in the following years. The format signalled the potential for problem-solving in the formal 5+2 negotiation process, albeit in a volatile context.

These developments were possible because they built on the positive momentum created by the DCFTA negotiations between Brussels and Chisinau the previous December. As anticipated at the time, the economic situation in Transnistria stabilised. In particular, Russian influence in Transnistria was not undermined, thus reducing the incentives for Russia to sabotage the deal or curb Transnistrians' confidence in more constructive engagement with their counterparts on the right bank. The latter, in turn, also were under a mix of pressure and incentives from the German CiO, and the EU, to approach negotiations with Tiraspol with a more open mind.[46] The long-standing German engagement with and on Moldova, including through the annual Bavaria conference and the earlier Meseberg process, also provided credible assurances to Chisinau about Berlin's lasting commitment to a settlement that would not undermine Moldovan sovereignty and preserve a functioning Moldovan state.[47]

44 Interview with senior EU advisor; Interview with senior German government official; interview with senior Council of Europe official.

45 Interview with senior EEAS official; phone interview with DG Trade official; phone interview with senior official in the EU Delegation to Moldova; interview with official in UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office. See also, Kemoklidze and Wolff 2019.

46 Interview with senior Moldovan negotiator.

47 Interview with German government advisor; interview with senior German government official; interview with former senior OSCE official.

The 2017 OSCE Austrian Chairpersonship from the beginning put emphasis on both the full implementation of the unresolved issues of the June 2016 Berlin Agreement and the inclusion of other issues that had remained unresolved for a long time. The commitment, and ability, of the sides to work out technical solutions and eventually muster the requisite political will to realise them paved the way for the Austrian Chairpersonship in 2017 to another major breakthrough, namely the re-opening of the Gura Bicului-Bychok bridge after 26 years. In addition, in the course of the Austrian OSCE Chairpersonship, agreements were concluded on apostilisation, on telecommunications, on Latin Script schools and on the use of the Dubasari farmlands. The parties firmly committed themselves to progress on the implementation of these agreements in the so-called Vienna Protocol of 28 November 2017.

This change had largely to do with the fact that by the end of 2016 the political situation in both Chisinau and Tiraspol had turned in favour of Moscow — the Socialist and long-time Moscow ally Igor Dodon had defeated pro-Western Maia Sandu in Moldova's presidential elections and Vadim Krasnoselski had won the de facto presidency in Transndiestria for Obnovlenie, the political party closely affiliated with the Sheriff business conglomerate. This enhanced Moscow's influence on both sides of the river Dniester but also diminished the extent to which negotiations in the 5+2 process needed to be too closely managed. In fact, all the actors in the 5+2 process shared an interest in further strengthening the existing status quo which, in turn, created the space for the constructive and successful negotiations conducted in 2017.

Further progress was more modest in 2018 under the Italian OSCE Chairpersonship and stalled completely after 2019, partially because of renewed political instability in Moldova and partially because of the global pandemic in 2020-21. The change in the presidency, and subsequently government, in Chisinau in the same period, the escalating crisis in and around Ukraine in the course of 2021, and eventually the full-scale Russian invasion of February 2022 have led to the 5+2 process falling back into dormancy — no further official meetings have taken place since October 2019. Since then, the Special Representative for the Transnistrian Settlement Process, Thomas Mayr-Harting, has conducted several shuttle diplomacy trips to the region. Similarly, the Swedish and Polish CiOs visited during their respective periods in office. The last joint visit of the 3+2 (OSCE, Russia, Ukraine plus Chisinau and Tiraspol) dates back to June 2021 but was equally unable to resolve the broader impasse in the 5+2 process (the former plus the EU and the US).

For more than a decade now, and arguably for another decade before then, confidence building has been a constant feature within an otherwise inconclusive settlement process so far. This has also been facilitated by the flexibility of the 5+2 format which functions in some ways also as an umbrella for formal and informal 1+1 talks (between the respective chief negotiators of Chişinău and Tiraspol), for discussions among the 3+2 and for several more technical working groups co-chaired by deputy ministers from Moldova and their de-facto counterparts from Tiraspol. This has meant that while talks often reach deadlock at the highest political level, technical discussions continued and prepared the ground for political decisions that can be made whenever there is a window of opportunity, such as with the gradual, albeit still incomplete, implementation of the so-called Berlin+ agreement or the successful 2015 negotiations to extend the application of the EU-Moldova DCFTA to the Transnistrian region.

4.3 The Limits of Mediation Between Armenia and Azerbaijan

Regarding the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, mediation of conflict settlement negotiations has long been fruitless (Cutler 2021, Hopman 2015). The status quo here was characterised by especially high volatility and virtually no prospects of sustainable stabilisation, let alone progress towards a negotiated settlement. The mediated settlement process has been almost entirely driven externally, that is, prior to 2020 by the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group and especially by Russia, and more recently by the EU and US on the one and Russia on the other hand (Wolff 2021a). In all cases, the discussions have been conducted mostly at the highest political levels with the involvements of the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments, but without the necessary inclusion of societal stakeholders. Created in 1992, the Minsk Group, where Germany has been a permanent member, and since 1997 in particular through its three co-chairs the USA, France and Russia, was the key external actor in the realm of conflict mediation, at least until the war of 2020. A 1995 mandate, based on a decision at the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe Budapest Summit, tasked the co-chairs "to provide an appropriate framework for conflict resolution in the way of assuring the negotiation process; to obtain conclusion by the Parties of an agreement on the cessation of armed conflict in order to permit the convening of the Minsk Conference; and to promote the peace process by deploying OSCE multinational peacekeeping forces". In particular the two latter aspects, however, the Minsk Group failed to achieve: neither did the Minsk Conference as such materialise, nor was an OSCE peacekeeping mission dispatched, even though the OSCE High Level Planning Group (HLPG) had been planning for such eventuality since the 1990s (Broers 2021a).[48]

While Germany, along with Belarus, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Turkey as well as Armenia and Azerbaijan, has been one of the permanent members of the Minsk Group, it has not stood out with own initiatives but backed the efforts of the co-chairs. This seemed to not have been much different when Germany chaired the OSCE in 2016 - a year that in April saw the then most serious escalation of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh since the ceasefire of 1994, although the "decisive reaction" by the OSCE, including the German CiO and its Special Representative Gernot Erler "as well as the Minsk Group Co-Chairs, especially Russia," contributed to containing the violence (Schuster 2017, own translation). Similarly, Germany's Special Representative for the CiO credits mediation and diplomacy for preventing a further destabilisation and for facilitating a cessation of hostilities. However, he also concedes that proposals worked out by the Chairpersonship in the escalation's aftermath, aimed at broadening the monitoring capacities of the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office for the conflict and at investigating ceasefire violations, were not picked up or followed up on (Erler 2018: 27).[49]

Preoccupied with the conflict in and around Ukraine already at that time, it seemed there was limited appetite and capacity in Germany to take on another intractable conflict. As summarised by Wolff (2021a: 5),

"[a]nother telling peculiarity of the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations is that all conceivable options, in terms of both the substance and the process of a settlement, have already been put on the table at some point. Yet they were all ultimately rejected by one of the two sides – or by both. The Package Plan, the Step by Step (or phased) approach, the Common State plan, a Land Swap proposal, and the Madrid Principles (or so-called "Basic Principles") have all suffered the same fate over the past two decades. To be sure, the Madrid Principles, which represent a combination of more or less compatible

48 De Waal (2010) points out that the institutional basis of the OSCE mediation process still largely reflects its origins, designed during the fighting of the early 1990s.

49 Based in the South Caucasus, the "Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office on the conflict dealt with by the Minsk Conference" has headed a very small team that was carrying out limited, pre-announced inspections at the line of contact. Polish diplomat Andrzej Kasprzyk has been staffing this position since 1997, that is, basically since when it was established.

preferences contained in the earlier Package Plan and phased approach, are formally still on the table. Yet there has been little progress towards an agreement since they were first suggested by the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group."

The Minsk Group has essentially been dormant for over a decade (Broers 2021a, 2021b, Remler et al. 2020).

Analyses of OSCE mediation in the Armenian-Azerbaijani context have converged in their negative assessments: "After almost three decades of the mediation process, the role of the NK Minsk Group is viewed largely as a mediation failure" (Guliyev & Gawrich 2021: 570). Such negative judgement of the Minsk Group came also to be widely shared in Azerbaijan, where the OSCE mediation efforts from an Azerbaijani perspective were rather seen as prolonging an unfavourable status quo and the occupation of de jure Azerbaijani territory that prevented the return of IDPs (Shiriyev 2016). Neither side was willing to retreat from maximalist positions. Already before 2020, the different expressed views of OSCE mediation efforts may also be seen as part of a game of shirking, or of blaming, where the conflict parties criticised the Minsk Group for failing to deliver (from an Azerbaijani perspective to leverage the earlier victorious Armenian side into concessions), while the mediators explained lack of progress with a lack of political will on part of the conflict parties (Remler et al. 2020: 89-90).[50] Germany's Special Representative for the 2016 OSCE Chairpersonship, too, wrapped up with regard to OSCE conflict resolution efforts during Germany's chairing of the organisation: "Without the clear political will of all sides in the conflict, there can be no solutions." (Erler 2018: 28).

When the conflict again escalated into war in late September 2020, Germany has largely continued its approach of providing (verbal) support to the efforts of the Minsk Group which in essence has meant its co-chair format and without taking on a more active position of its own (Deutscher Bundestag 2020).[51] The co-chair countries, however, by that time, were deeply divided, not least over Russia's aggression against Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. The ceasefire agreement of 10 November 2020, which ultimately halted hostilities, was brokered by Moscow alone, separate from the co-chair format. This in effect reflects a longer development where Russia was afforded a de facto elevated position among the co-chair trio (Górecki 2020: 54). While for long, working relations between the co-chairs were commonly argued to defy the geopolitical rift between Russia and the West, it may be questioned to what extent their interests indeed converged. Broers (2021a) speaks of a "simulacrum of cooperation" that had developed (258). The peacekeepers ultimately deployed to the conflict area as part of the 10 November agreement are unilaterally Russian - counteracting three decades of work of the OSCE HLPG.

To the extent Berlin did engage in the context of the 2020 war, beyond calling on both parties to cease hostilities and jointly with the other EU Member States supporting the EU's approach and positions, for example, bringing the issue on the UN agenda, it provided humanitarian assistance: it urged the conflict parties to allow for its access and provided important financial support to the ICRC in its additional expenses due to increased war-time needs. Moreover, Germany covered EUR 190,000 of a EUR 200,000 joint project of the German and Armenian Red Cross (Deutscher Bundestag 2020).

After the 2020 war and ceasefire agreement, realistic prospects of a negotiated, sustainable settlement remain slim at best. The OSCE Minsk Group, while formally still in place, has been frequently dismissed by Baku, which after 2020 has argued that for Azerbaijan the Minsk Group basically ceased to exist

50 With regard to the poor performance of the Minsk Group, Laurence Broers (2021a) points to the liberal roots of the Minsk Group's approach reflecting the unipolar order at the beginning of the 1990s, which increasingly came at odds with illiberal approaches to conflict management as well as an increasing geopolitisation due to the rise of multi-polarity.

51 See for example: Erklärungen des Auswärtigen Amts in der Regierungspressekonferenz vom 30.9.2020, https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/regierungspressekonferenz/2400010.

(cf . Mammadli 2022).[52] At least at present, this pronounced lack of legitimacy by one of the direct conflict parties, together with the deep discord between Moscow and Western capitals makes it difficult to see the OSCE Minsk Group taking on new significance as main mediator in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, in particular in the foreseeable future. EU efforts, together with the US, to mediate an agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as described in Chapter 7, constitute perhaps the most promising pathway towards such an outcome (Conciliation Resources 2022, Lewis 2023), but they remain hampered by regular violent incidents along the line of contact and steadily increasing pressure by Azerbaijan on Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, such as the recent blockade of the Lachin corridor (Amnesty International 2023). At the same time, these obstacles indicate the limited leverage that EU mediators have or use in this conflict (RFE/RL's 2023); they at least offered few incentives to change behaviour.

4.4 Ukraine: the Limits of Multilateral and Multi-Format Mediation

Between 2014 and 2022, the conflict in Ukraine's Donbas region, despite the differences outlined above, shared several features with the other protracted conflicts, including regarding the structure of its mediated negotiation formats. Local-level mediation (involving the Trilateral Contact Group and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission) was complemented by the parallel existence of a second negotiation platform, the so-called Normandy Format, which brought together Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany.[53] In the early years of the war in Donbas, French and German mediation of the negotiations proved critical in achieving the two Minsk Agreements of September 2014 (with an additional implementation protocol) and February 2015. The SMM was tasked with monitoring the implementation of security-related provisions in the agreements, effectively an extension of its original mandate.

After February 2015, further meetings of the four countries' leaders or their advisors were held on a semi-regular basis, but without any notable breakthrough regarding the stalled implementation of the Minsk II Accords. The last meeting of the Normandy Quartet at the highest level took place at Paris in December 2019 without any tangible results, and between then and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, discussions on another such meeting proved largely fruitless. Since February 2022, the Normandy Format has been dormant and there appears to be no prospects for its revival.

As in the other cases, local mediation efforts did not result in substantive progress in the negotiations, which was limited, if not absent. While there were several successful prisoner exchanges, freedom of movement across the contact line had become more rather than less constrained, and there was no material progress whatsoever towards implementation of the Minsk II Accords of February 2015. Above all, no withdrawal of illegal armed groups and military equipment as well as of fighters and mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine (Minsk I) and no disarmament of all illegal groups (Minsk II) occurred.

The Trilateral Contact Group seemed to have achieved an apparent breakthrough in July 2020 when negotiators concluded an agreement on additional measures to strengthen the existing ceasefire deal. However, the situation along the line of contact remained highly volatile until February 2022 when the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine began.

52 For developments after the ceasefire of 2020, consult chapter 7.1 Armenia/Azerbaijan/Nagorno-Karabakh: Chances for Peace under Pressure?

53 In addition, there were also, for a time, parallel US-Russia talks that included the crisis in Ukraine but extended beyond it, for example to the situation in Syria. See, for example, Hedenskog (2018), Kostanyan and Meister (2016).

The OSCE (like the EU) was not directly involved in negotiations of the Normandy Format, thus leaving it in a position of implementing, rather than shaping, whatever emerged from these negotiations and was deemed as fitting in the flexible mandate of the SMM. Germany has played a coordinating role between the OSCE (and its participating States), the EU (and its Member States) and the Normandy Format/Trilateral Contact Group. This coordination of the various political and military dimensions of stabilisation efforts in Ukraine was important to avoid a fragmentation of separate and discrete processes of international crisis management — the Normandy Format, the OSCE SMM, the Trilateral Contact Group, Western sanctions against Russia, and the Russia-US communication channel (dealing with Syria and Ukraine). This was supplemented by assigning to the SMM the monitoring of the implementation of the Minsk Agreements and by making the SMM Chief Monitor the coordinator of the Working Group on Security Issues of the Trilateral Contact Group (Tagliavini 2015, Neukirch 2015, Tanner 2021).

The negotiation format to manage volatile ceasefires was the Trilateral Contact Group, which included Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE, while representatives of Luhansk and Donetsk were present in the working sub-groups. Similar to the 5+2 and the GID, these working groups dealt with security, political, economic and humanitarian issues. Within a year of the signing of the February 2015 Minsk Agreements, it must have become obvious that their implementation was not at the forefront of either party's mind, not even in the sense that a stable ceasefire was to be achieved.[54] Both parties to the conflict accused each other of violating the terms of the agreement (Druey et al. 2020). Renegotiating the accords could have been considered more seriously — after all, the entire negotiation process was, in effect, a series of ever more specific variations on the same theme: restoring Kyiv's control over Donbas and its border with Russia in exchange for a special status of the re-integrated territories (Malyarenko and Wolff 2018). This option could have been explored also in the context of broadening the Normandy Format, either by including the United States, or by including the EU and possibly the OSCE (Sammut and D'Urso 2015, Litra et al. 2017).[55]

While there was no renegotiation per se, the then German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier made a serious effort to breathe new life into the stalled implementation process with the so-called Steinmeier Formula, which was first discussed in October 2015. The Formula stipulated a special status for Russian-controlled territories of the Donbas and for holding local elections there without withdrawing Russian troops beforehand. Ukraine argued that the recognition of the elections by the OSCE would have turned the temporary status into a permanent one and fiercely resisted. Germany and France remained adamant that the Minsk agreements were the only 'show in town' (cf. Steinmeier 2016). While it is easy to criticise this approach, it is noteworthy that, after Volodymyr Zelenskiy was elected Ukrainian president, Kyiv recommitted to the implementation of 'Minsk' along the lines of a revised version of the Steinmeier Formula (Shandra 2019). There was a significant decrease in ceasefire violations after 2019, indicating that there was a potential window of opportunity for further stabilisation on the basis of a German diplomatic effort. However, it is important to acknowledge as well that this would most likely have implied achieving stabilisation at a significant cost to Ukraine: Russian interests, if they existed at all, were related to the expectation that through implementing the Minsk agreement, Moscow would gain a long-term, if not permanent foothold in Ukraine that could be used as leverage against future EU and NATO enlargement.

54 Throughout the time of its existence, the SMM reported daily violations of the ceasefire, with staggering annual totals: 316,397 in 2016; 401,336 in 2017; 312,544 in 2018; 299,633 in 2019; 137,767 in 2020; and 93,902 in 2021. See OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (2022).

55 By contrast, Rojansky (2016) argued that "Washington's formal entry into the Normandy process would do little by itself to address the deep deficit of trust between the sides."

Implementation of the Minsk Agreements overall was lacking, yet, the SMM has contributed to stabilisation during its eight-year existence. These limited and often local successes include support for the humanitarian efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross (e.g., negotiating access) and its own humanitarian efforts, e.g., local ceasefires for the repair of gas, water and electricity infrastructure, freedom of movement of the local population across frontlines and prisoner exchanges (Peško 2016, Mackiewicz 2018, Tagliavini 2015, Kemp 2017, see also OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine 2017, 2021). The establishment of the working groups in the context of the Trilateral Contact Group has facilitated some of these successes and also enabled follow-up initiatives, such as the deployment of a French and German expert team to assist the working group on economic links across the frontline (Tagliavini 2015, Haug 2016, Neukirch 2015). This once again underscores the importance of separating technical and political issues, at least to the extent that technical solutions can be considered beyond often highly polarised political settings and contribute to alleviating urgent humanitarian crises that would otherwise lead to further destabilisation.

4.5 Learning from Successes?

While the focus on mediation in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood is often on its ultimate failure to bring about sustainable settlements, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge its significance. As has been demonstrated in this section, mediation has contributed to conflict management in the region, preventing and containing individual incidents. While (protracted) mediation thus clearly has a role to play in managing the status quo, this is not a long-term solution, as the breakdown of such arrangements in the South Caucasus after 2008 in Georgia and 2016 and in particular 2020 over Nagorno-Karabakh only too vividly illustrates. Nor can mediation establish a stable status quo, let alone facilitate movement beyond it, where conflict parties are unwilling to do so, as has been the case with the Minsk agreements on the Donbas.

Three lessons about the role of mediation in conflict settlement itself are pertinent. First, it is important to be more realistic about what mediation can accomplish in light of particular limitations of negotiation formats. If breakthroughs towards comprehensive negotiated settlements are unlikely for a time, mediation efforts can and should be directed at stabilisation, including in particular an improvement of the often-dire humanitarian situation of the populations most immediately affected by the conflict. This can only be achieved within the context of functioning channels of communication, which in turn depends on identifying issues which the parties are willing to engage on. Germany's long-standing support of the settlement process for the conflict in Moldova/Transnistria clearly underlines this.

Second, it is important to assess whether existing negotiation formats have the potential to enable the parties and the mediators to move beyond narrow issues towards achieving an actual settlement. After decades of fruitless mediation during which stabilisation has been the closest outcome resembling success, and even that with only a patchy and ultimately unsustainable track record, the question is whether or not existing formats have rather become part of not only what caused these conflicts to become protracted, but also contributed to their re-escalation.

Third, the answer to this question may well be that new mediation formats need to be considered for disentangling the different dimensions of the conflicts - local/ethnic, bilateral and regional/geopolitical. Existing mediation formats do not adequately reflect this complexity. Where possible, efforts should be made to include all central actors and potential spoilers, including representatives from secessionist regions or breakaway territories. Otherwise, peace settlements may not be sustainable because there is a risk of increasing marginalisation of local communities and a steadily growing influence of Russia as principal patron, as the cases of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Donbas, Transnistria and potentially Nagorno-Karabakh demonstrate.

This shift away from existing mediation formats in the region may be what is required to revive any prospects of negotiated conflict settlements, but it also constitutes a danger in that a proliferation of such formats increases the likelihood of "mediator shopping", the creation of parallel negotiation processes, and a further drain on already limited resources and capacity for effective mediation. In the prolonged unwillingness of conflict parties to engage meaningfully with each other, Germany should also consider suspending its support for mediation efforts rather than continuing to provide "cover" for bad-faith negotiations and ultimately absolve the conflict parties from their responsibility in any settlement process.

5. Development Cooperation: Little Focus on the Conflicts

Development cooperation is an instrument that does not primarily serve conflict management and the promotion of friendly relations. However, it includes specific approaches that can both mitigate the negative consequences of unresolved conflicts as well as create conditions and frameworks for peacebuilding. Development work can be a tangible leverage to change the calculations of the actors on the ground and to create concrete and significant incentives, which mediation can only hardly achieve. The far greater resources and longer project and programme cycles than in classical peacebuilding, for example, may provide favourable conditions for this. In this chapter, we examine the extent to which civilian conflict management and peacebuilding are considered in German and EU development cooperation. Two dimensions of conflict-related development cooperation can be distinguished here: Firstly, development cooperation with recognised central governments, where Germany pursues typical bilateral cooperation. The focus countries here are Georgia and Ukraine, which are by far the most important German partner countries in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. Secondly, we examine conflict-related development cooperation in non-recognised entities or conflict zones. This area is much more complex and comes with many challenges, such as legal status and access to territory. So far, Germany has hardly been involved bilaterally in this area. However, some key findings on its feasibility and specifics can be derived from the EU's multilateral development cooperation in Abkhazia, which is examined in the chapter by way of example.

5.1 German Bilateral Development Cooperation with Central Governments: Georgia and Ukraine

Conflict transformation and peacebuilding play a subordinate role in German development cooperation. This is evident in the priority areas of the BMZ and the thematic fields of activity of the GIZ projects supported.[56] For instance, from 2001 to 2021, the BMZ's Caucasus Initiative focussed on three areas: (1) democracy, local governance and rule of law; (2) sustainable economic development; and (3) environment and climate change. The conflicts in the region did not play a major role, even if one could argue that the regional dimension of the Caucasus Initiative may have contributed to cross-national exchange. However, in practice, this framework was pursued with little emphasis on regional dialogue, civilian conflict management or peacebuilding.[57]

Likewise, there is also no conflict-related focus in the new bilateral development agenda with Georgia. The overarching BMZ focus areas in Georgia are 1) sustainable economic development, training and employment and 2) climate and energy, just transition. In addition, some work is done on good governance and environment/biodiversity. The GIZ (respectively its predecessor GTZ, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) has been working in Georgia since 1992, at the time of writing relying on 26 international and 92 national employees and three integrated experts. As of 2022, it implements 16 projects with a total budget of EUR 121 million. Out of these, a total of EUR 400,000 has been directly allocated to the Georgian national Peace Fund for a Better Future, with funding from the German Foreign Ministry's crisis prevention and conflict management budget line.[58] The Peace Fund supports small-scale economic activities between Georgia and Abkhazia with mini-grants since 2019, so far with very mixed results. Even though initial partnerships with Abkhazian businesses have been supported,[59] the

56 The BMZ is the lead ministry for German development cooperation, but the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protections are also active in this field. The central agency responsible for the implementation of German development cooperation is the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

57 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.

58 See https://www.giz.de/projektdaten/region/4/countries/GE.

59 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.

vast majority of funds go to Georgian businesses in Gal/i and thus have little dialogue effect.[60] In order to apply for the fund, individuals need either a Georgian identification card/passport or have to obtain a personal number through registration at the Georgian Public Service Development Agency.[61] Although the second option is also intended for non-Georgian residents, this process is seen by many Abkhaz as implying recognition of Georgian sovereignty over Abkhazia, something they regard as unacceptable.

Even though the conflicts are not a priority on the official German development agenda, they are not completely disregarded in German development cooperation in the South Caucasus. A focal point here is on vulnerable groups, particularly within the framework of the regional project Economic and Social Participation of Vulnerable Displaced and Local Population in the South Caucasus (EPIC), which has been funded by the BMZ between 2017-2024 in the range of about EUR 13 million. The project contributes to the social and political inclusion of vulnerable groups in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Even though the focus of the project is not on conflict resolution but on mitigating conflict-related vulnerabilities, it could potentially indirectly support a more peaceful future. The project's regional exchange also largely avoids the conflict-related issues but assures a minimum of exchange and cooperation to counter the segregation trends between the three countries. Still, there is no focus on peacebuilding in the project implementation.[62]

After the termination of the BMZ Caucasus Initiative, the priorities for bilateral development cooperation with Armenia have not yet been declared officially (Schiffers and Smolnik 2022). Azerbaijan is no longer part of bilateral cooperation and will only be included in regional projects. Thus, Azerbaijan is the only country considered in this study that is not a BMZ transformation partner. This decision is based on the one hand on the country's own resources and on the other hand is related to its autocratic system.[63] However, a new regional project with Armenia and Azerbaijan is currently reviewed that aims to strengthen local development, social cohesion and mental health in areas affected by the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, with a particular focus on women as agents of peace. The project is intended to run until 2027 in cooperation with UNHCR in both countries.[64] Despite this, Georgia and Ukraine are by far the priority countries for German development cooperation in the Eastern Neighbourhood.

Regarding the volume of German development cooperation, Ukraine is by far the most important partner country, and its role will certainly become even more prominent in the future. The GIZ has been working in Ukraine, which is the biggest recipient of German development cooperation in the Eastern Neighbourhood, since 1993. At the time of writing, the GIZ implements 38 projects with a total volume of EUR 383 million. Since 2014, a total of EUR 758 million has been spent on bilateral development cooperation, with most of the projects implemented through GIZ and KfW. In total, Germany has provided Ukraine with more than EUR 1.8 billion in support since the Maidan revolution. Support for Ukraine's decentralisation reform is a key focus of German development cooperation. Since 2015, GIZ has been supporting this area with a EUR 122 million project financed by the EU and some EU Member States. Although the project is implemented only in government-controlled areas, it does have a conflict-related impact. First, Ukraine's high degree of centralisation continues to be an aspect of conflict: before Russia's full-scale invasion, distributional struggles between regional elites and the central government took place regularly. Decentralisation has been key here to address these cleavages. Second, since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the decentralised administrative structures and competencies of mayors and administrative staff have been used to organise humanitarian aid, non-violent resistance

60 Interview with local civil society and interview with international governmental stakeholder.

61 See https://peacefundbf.org/en/Useful%20information.

62 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.

63 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.

64 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.

and support for the Ukrainian army at the local level. This had a significant influence on the course of the war.[65]

Another conflict-related focus of German development cooperation in Ukraine is on fostering economic participation of vulnerable groups including IDPs (EUR 6 million, 2020-2024). In direct response to the war since 2022, significant support measures for Ukraine have been initiated within the framework of development cooperation. Already in August 2022, for example, a project on Improving Civil Protection in Municipal Partnerships with Ukraine (EUR 5 million for 7 months) was launched as part of the BMZ's initiative to remedy the consequences of the Russian war of aggression.[66]

5.2 Development Cooperation in Conflict Zones: Lessons from Abkhazia and Transnistria

German development cooperation is barely active in the disputed territories, with a few exceptions. Within the framework of GIZ's EPIC project described above, a pilot project of the Danish Refugee Council was supported with BMZ funds. The component aims to promote the social and economic integration of disadvantaged groups, especially youth and women, in various districts of Abkhazia. The component is relatively small in financial terms, but significant for two reasons. First, the pilot project marked an expansion of German development cooperation to the territory not under the control of Tbilisi, a significant step with potential impact on the whole region, which could also increase the German impact. Second, the activities in Abkhazia are also implemented in regions that are not inhabited by ethnic Georgians, but by Abkhazians and Armenians in western Abkhazia, which has received less support than eastern Abkhazia, inhabited by ethnic Georgians.

This pilot was supposed to be the building block for a much more comprehensive project in Abkhazia. In 2023, the GIZ project "Towards Inclusive and Empowered Societies" was supposed to operate in Georgia/Abkhazia. However, in reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the BMZ decided not to support any further activities in Abkhazia. While the BMZ has not invested much yet and no infrastructure built up in Abkhazia,[67] the decision could in theory be revoked when the political environment transforms or the BMZ comes to a different assessment.

The EU's experience in Abkhazia shows that it is possible, albeit challenging, to use development cooperation for conflict management and peacebuilding. In 2015, the EU decided to open the European Neighbourhood Instrument for development activities to complement its existing diplomatic and humanitarian initiatives in Abkhazia, including on socioeconomic development at the community level and strengthening social and economic inclusion. Its central pillar is the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Regional Development (ENPARD). Within its second phase, the EU financed a larger development project within Abkhazia for the first time, which also targeted areas outside the Gal/i district. The project "Pilot Rural Development Measures in Abkhazia" was implemented from 2016 onwards by UNDP. Its overall budget was EUR 5 million, with a contribution of EUR 4 million from the EU. The project was part of the ENPARD II programme to Georgia, which had a total budget of EUR 50 million for the period of 2016-19. The pilot project's main objective was to "improve employment and living conditions in rural areas of Abkhazia through the gradual adoption of a rural development approach based on the diversification of the rural economy" (ENPARD 2015: 16). Tensions and sensitivities between Tbilisi and Sukhum/i relating to status issues posed a risk for the implementation of the project

65 Interview with local civil society stakeholder.

66 See https://www.giz.de/projektdaten/region/4/countries/UA.

67 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.

and could have resulted in severe restrictions or complete cancellation. Thus, "continuous political contacts and mediation between the Georgian government and de-facto authorities in Abkhazia" were needed to secure a conflict-sensitive implementation of the project (ENPARD 2015: 7). The example shows that conflict-related development cooperation in disputed territory requires a high degree of political commitment and perseverance to mitigate the concerns of both sides and to overcome resistance. In the following programme phase, ENPARD III, the EU continued to fund rural development in Abkhazia. Between 2018-22, it funded the project "Expansion of Rural Development Measures in Abkhazia" with EUR 4 million out of an overall budget of EUR 77.5 million for Georgia (ENPARD 2019).

The expansion of development cooperation to the whole territory of Abkhazia met a central demand of the Abkhazian leadership. At the same time, the EU secured and expanded its access to Abkhazia.[68] However, this was only achieved through UNDP, which implements and directly manages the ENPARD programme in Abkhazia. This situation, which is unusual for EU financing, is possible because Abkhazia is defined as a crisis context within the EU (ENPARD 2015, 16). Direct management through UNDP is a significant benefit for the implementation of the project because UNDP is viewed as being more neutral within Abkhazia and can operate more flexibly than the EU Delegation.[69] However, this model limits the visibility of the EU in Abkhazia.[70] Secondly, whereas Georgia has received direct budgetary support of EUR 27 million under ENPARD II and EUR 44.5 million under ENPARD III, similar measures are not taken in Abkhazia. This approach is in line with the EU principles of engagement and non-recognition (ENPARD 2016: 4), which make direct financial support to the Abkhazia's budget impossible. In addition to the difficult legal and political situation, the low level of administrative control over project implementation is also a difficult hurdle (ENPARD 2015: 12). This difficulty was also identified by the German GIZ, whose limited activities could hardly be effectively monitored due to limited access to Abkhazia.[71]

The second pillar of EU development assistance in Abkhazia is vocational education and training (VET). In 2017, the EU launched the initiative "Skills Development and Matching for Labour Market Needs" for Georgia, with a total EU funding of roughly EUR 49 million until 2020, including EUR 3.75 million to specifically improve VET in Abkhazia. A pilot project for vocational training in Abkhazia is implemented by the Danish Refugee Council and Action Against Hunger. But the bulk of the funds (EUR 2.75 million) again went to UNDP, which implements the project on the ground together with UNICEF (ENI Georgia 2017). Although many EU development projects in Abkhazia include training that aims to build confidence between Abkhaz and Georgian stakeholders, the peacebuilding dimension of these projects is limited (Relitz 2022).

Development cooperation can serve to build confidence between conflict parties by facilitating cooperation on practical issues, as an example from Moldova/Transnistria shows, where the GIZ implemented the OSCE-facilitated project "Inter-Communal Water Management Along the Dniester". The project aimed to further environmental and economic cooperation across the divide and included joint monitoring of environmental protection measures and joint capacity building in water management. It also improved the management of water supply and sanitation services.[72]

However, such confidence building projects also have faced challenges to utilize their peacebuilding potential, which are related to status conditionality and the visibility of international actors (Relitz 2019). In particular, it is important to note that whether or not there can be positive spill-over effects from such confidence-building projects to an actual conflict settlement process "is ultimately

68 Interview with international governmental stakeholder.
69 Interview with international governmental stakeholder.
70 Interview with international governmental stakeholder.
71 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.
72 See https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/42103.html.

a question of political will which is often lacking" as the cases of Abkhazia and Transnistria only too vividly demonstrate (Kemoklidze and Wolff 2020: 326, see also Remler 2016, Wolff et al. 2017).

In conclusion, it can be said that Germany is one of the key actors in development cooperation in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. However, conflict management and peacebuilding are not central to the German development agenda there. German development cooperation addresses conflict-related aspects mostly indirectly, e.g., through the social and economic integration of IPDs and refugees. While peacebuilding aspects may play a role in the political planning phase of projects, there is little conflict management and peacebuilding focus in the development practice. In order to utilise the leverage of development policy on the conflict parties and to exploit its peacebuilding potential, it is essential to strengthen the development-peacebuilding nexus and to mainstream peace into all development activities.

The analysis above has demonstrated that the conflict regions are largely excluded from German development cooperation. The GIZ has made first steps to work in Abkhazia and planned a significant new engagement in the near future. However, these plans were put on hold following Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine. This is a regrettable step, because the less German and Western engagement, the more the Russian influence, detrimental to sustainable peacebuilding, increases.[73] Diversifying development opportunities and decreasing dependencies could have a positive impact in cases such as Transnistria and Abkhazia. This is already being done in the context of EU development cooperation, as the analysis of EU engagement illustrates. However, the interventions are not sufficient to bring about change at the systemic level. In the future, more positive impulses may be generated under the auspices of a meaningful and strategic combination of development cooperation, peacekeeping and mediation.

73 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.

6. Civil Society Peacebuilding: Supported but Marginal

In its bilateral civil society support in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, civilian conflict management and peacebuilding are an important element of the German agenda, albeit one among several. The central institutional actors here are the Federal Foreign Office (AA) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The AA supports civil society actors in conflict transformation and peacebuilding in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood primarily through the programmes *Expanding Cooperation with Civil Society in the Eastern Partnership Countries and Russia* (OEPR) and the zivik funding programme implemented by the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa). In addition, various AA departments provide direct financial support to individual projects. The BMZ, among others, provides funding for the country and regional offices of the German political foundations that are present in the region work on the protracted conflicts as well.

6.1 German Bilateral Support Programmes

OEPR - broad focus on the EU's Eastern Neigbourhood but not on the conflicts

The OEPR programme was established in 2014, as a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with the aim of enabling civil society organisations (CSOs) to support ongoing transformation processes in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia. The instrument also aims at durable civil society cooperation structures between stakeholders from Germany and these countries. The instrument pursues four central thematic priorities: (1) strengthening pluralism; (2) promoting the discussion of values; (3) opening prospects for the future; and (4) fostering dialogue and understanding.[74] Yet, the OEPR programme is only partially designed to promote civil society peacebuilding. This is also illustrated by the fact that dialogue promotion and conflict transformation is the smallest of the four funding priorities.[75]

Overall, the financial resources of the OEPR programme for the seven programme countries are at a moderate but increasing level. Its funding grew from EUR 4.75 million in 2014 to EUR 13.45 million in 2017[76] to over 20 million annually in 2022.[77] However, while funding has grown in recent years, the programme's staffing has not. This has led to problems in processing applications, supervising projects and evaluating measures.[78] Moreover, there are long delays in the approval and transfer of project funds, which means that civil society actors either have to make massive financial advance payments or the implementation periods are effectively limited to the second half of each year. This leads to significant problems in the sustainable planning and implementation of measures, especially for smaller organisations.[79]

By far the largest share of funding is earmarked for projects with Ukrainian partners. In 2014, EUR 3.1 million out of EUR 4.75 million, and in 2017, EUR 6.3 million out of EUR 13.4 million was allocated to projects with a focus on Ukraine. Russia was in second place with EUR 2.3 million in 2017.[80] This prioritisation continued after 2017, with an increasing focus on Georgia, which became the third largest beneficiary country. In recent years, Ukraine has gained even more significance here. At the same time, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine poses enormous challenges for civil society engagement in Russia.[81]

74 See https://civilsocietycooperation.net/about-the-programme/
75 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.
76 Data based on Deutscher Bundestag 2017b: 21
77 See https://civilsocietycooperation.net/about-the-programme/; and interview with German governmental stakeholder.
78 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.
79 Interview with German civil society stakeholder.
80 Deutscher Bundestag 2017: 21.
81 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.

For the OEPR programme, therefore, a clear focus on the Russian-Ukrainian and intra-Ukrainian conflict context can be noted. In Georgia, on average, 15-20 projects have been implemented in the OEPR programme annually, but only a few in the field of conflict transformation, mainly by Corridors and by Act for Transformation.[82] This has been consistent with the low level of Berlin's political interest and engagement in the South Caucasus in recent years. Political relevance of and interest in Georgia has only increased since the Ukraine war and Armenia and Azerbaijan have risen on the political agenda only since the war in 2020.

The OEPR programme seeks to involve a broad range of stakeholders in its design and implementation. Project selection is made jointly by the OEPR team, the country divisions in the AA and the respective embassies. Likewise, a diverse range of civil society actors in Germany and the project region is involved in the implementation. As a result, the programme implemented over 1100 projects by the end of 2020.[83] At the same time, it appears that funding is distributed based on a watering can approach, lacking coherence and coordination. The individual measures are not coordinated with each other and hardly any synergies are explored between the implementing organisations. A stronger interlocking of measures and projects would likely allow to achieve better synergies and greater impact.[84] Possible approaches would be conflict- and region-related exchange formats between implementers, embassies and the OEPR to promote transparency and networking and to identify political priorities.

Such coordination would also require a political strategy toward the conflicts and steering from the Federal Foreign Office, which does not seem to exist currently. At least when it comes to the South Caucasus, a strategy for German involvement in the protracted conflicts, beyond providing funds, mostly to civil society, appears to be lacking.[85] Moreover, at the embassy level, human resources to coordinate, steer or shape civil society engagement are insufficient.[86] Consequently, there is little to no political support provided to the CSO work, meaning that some potential impact is lost.

In addition to the lack of strategy and political backing, the OEPR funding mechanism poses a further challenge to civil society peacebuilding. One central challenge of the OEPR programme is the exclusive focus on project funding and the very short funding periods. In addition to project funding, institutional funding would be urgently needed to increase the capacity to act and the effectiveness of the civil society actors.[87] Especially peacebuilding requires sustainable structures that can hardly be built up through short-term projects. This negatively affects all German CSOs active in peacebuilding within the OEPR programme, such as the aforementioned Act for Transformation, Corridors, Austausch e.V. (formerly German-Russian Exchange), OWEN, CRISP and Libereco. This problem is exacerbated by the short project duration timeframe, which forces implementers to invest many resources in the application and reporting phase instead of in their core task of peacebuilding.[88] More possibilities for multi-year projects and institutional funding would be crucial to enable implementers to work sustainably - which also includes developing staff, partnerships and processes - with less focus on the short-term economic survival. Although this is difficult due to German budget and grants legislation, it is essential for effective civil society conflict management and peacebuilding.

82 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.
83 See https://civilsocietycooperation.net/about-the-programme/
84 Interview with German civil society stakeholder.
85 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.
86 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.
87 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.
88 Interview with German civil society stakeholder.

Zivik – conflict-specific but bureaucratic little focus on the Eastern Neighbourhood

The Foreign Office also funds the zivik programme, established in 2007 and operated by the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, which aims to support civil society actors worldwide in preventing crises and transforming conflicts. Zivik is a global programme with no particular focus on the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. It currently has three funding priorities, one with a regional focus on Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan and Tunisia, and the remaining two with a thematic focus on democratisation and peacebuilding respectively.[89] Since 2007, almost 90 projects with a total funding of about EUR 9 million have been implemented in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. Here, too, Ukraine is the main focus of funding, with EUR 3.3 million for projects in the country and an additional EUR 0.3 million for joint Ukraine/Russian projects. The second largest funding target has been Georgia with EUR 2.3 million, followed by Armenia with EUR 1.2 million. Significantly less funding has been used for peacebuilding efforts in Moldova (EUR 0.5 million) and Azerbaijan (EUR 0.2 million). As in the OEPR programme, the very low level of direct engagement in Azerbaijan is explained by the precarious situation for local non-governmental organisations, the barely developed independent civil society sector and the strongly authoritarian structures in the country.[90]

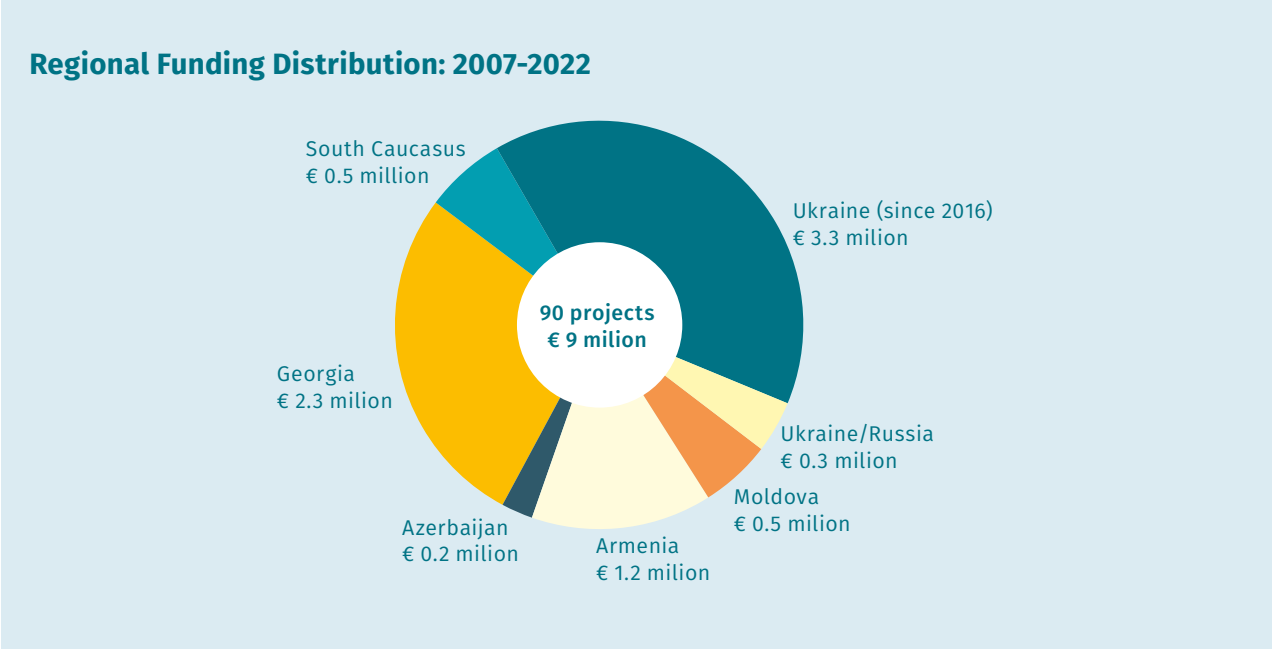

Figure 2: zivik Funding Distribution in the Eastern Neighbourhood (Data provided by zivik)

In contrast to the OEPR programme, the focus of zivik is not on promoting civil society cooperation between German and local partners. For Georgia, the main German actors receiving funding were Berghof Foundation, supported several times between 2007 and 2018, and the Arbeiter Samariter Bund (2012-2015). For Ukraine, the main German actors were ChildFund Deutschland and AMICA. For Moldova, the main beneficiaries were the German Hilfswerk International on support for democratic development and the Finnish Crisis Management Initiative. Finally, in the Armenian/Azerbaijani context, OWEN has been the only recently supported German CSO. The vast majority of project funds are allocated to local CSOs, which is a clear priority of the instrument.[91]

89 https://www.ifa.de/foerderungen/zivik/#c554

90 Interviews with German governmental and civil society stakeholders.

91 Interview with German civil society stakeholder.

Another significant difference between the OEPR programme and zivik are the administrative challenges for the implementing organisations. The zivik programme in particular is perceived as very bureaucratic due to comprehensive reporting and application procedures, which make it difficult to reconcile the administrative burden with the actual project work.[92] There seems to be a need for adjustment in order not to paralyse the content-related work through disproportionate bureaucracy, especially with the mostly relatively small project volumes. The balancing act between low-friction implementation of the projects and monitoring the use of public funds is certainly not an easy one, but implementers would like to see more trust on the part of the programme.[93]

Civil Peace Service: substantial engagement but only in Ukraine

The Civil Peace Service (CPS), located between development cooperation and civil society conflict management, implemented in close cooperation between the state and civil society. The CPS consortium consist of nine organisations of which six send civil peace experts to more than 60 countries. Among the countries of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, however, the programme operates exclusively in Ukraine. The programme is carried out in Ukraine by GIZ, Forum ZFD and Kurve Wustrow and is funded by the BMZ with around EUR 10 million per year.[94] These organisations are sending experts for peace work and dialogue promotion to Ukrainian partner organisations and provide project funding. The cooperation includes state and civil society actors in the partner country and aims to promote non-violent conflict transformation and to make a contribution towards managing conflict-related social challenges. One of the key projects since 2017 sought to build peace education measures to support overcoming social polarisation in Eastern Ukraine. This project, implemented in the oblasts Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhya, worked with state institutions and civil society to develop and implement peace-education approaches in schools.[95] Since the full-scale invasion, the CPS focus seems to have been on supporting partner organisations, especially in emergency aid for internally displaced persons and their integration in host regions. As the CPS works predominantly at the societal micro level, it plausibly contributed to the enormous cohesion and resilience of the Ukrainian population which is of strategic importance.

Overall, the CPS appears to be a suitable instrument for promoting civil society initiatives within the framework of development cooperation and for providing a long-term funding perspective. However, the exclusion of Moldova and the entire South Caucasus is questionable. Especially in smaller countries, civil society development cooperation can achieve more significant changes than in larger and highly centralised countries like Ukraine.[96] Consequently, a CPS extension to countries such as Georgia, Armenia and Moldova would be promising.

Direct support from other Foreign Office departments and political foundations

In addition to OEPR and zivik, individual regional divisions of the Federal Foreign Office and the Directorate General for Crisis Prevention, Stabilisation, Peacebuilding and Humanitarian Assistance directly finance civil society measures in the region. For example, MitOst, the German Adult Education Association, the Berlin Center for Integrative Mediation, Austausch e.V., European Exchange and OWEN have received significant funding in the area of peacebuilding in Ukraine.[97] In the South Caucasus, the Berghof Foundation is the most prominent example for such direct support from the AA.

92 Interview with German civil society stakeholder.
93 Interview with local civil society stakeholder.
94 Interview with German civil society stakeholder.
95 See https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/61270.html.
96 Interview with German civil society stakeholder.
97 Deutscher Bundestag 2017: 21.

Some of the German political foundations are also active in the field of peacebuilding: in Ukraine, the Konrad Adenauer, Heinrich Böll and Friedrich Naumann Foundation are particularly noteworthy.[98] In Georgia, the Heinrich Böll Foundation was directly engaged in the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue until 2008; since then, it hosted several Berlin meetings of the Limehouse Platform, a dialogue process led by the British CSO Conciliation Resources. The German political foundations also provide a variety of training courses and smaller projects in the field of civil society peacebuilding in the South Caucasus, although with limited visibility.[99] The same is true for their engagement in Moldova, where the primary focus of activities is not on civilian conflict management and peacebuilding either, although there is support for CSOs registered in both Chisinau and Tiraspol.[100] In addition to these smaller activities, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation has become significantly more active in the area of dialogue promotion since 2020, most notably as the implementer of the first component of the EU4Dialogue project.

6.2 EU4Dialogue: Regional EU Instrument with Significant German Role

EU4Dialogue strives to foster an environment for dialogue and people-to-people contact in the South Caucasus and the Republic of Moldova, including the conflict region. The programme is directly managed by the EU Commission through the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, runs from 2020 to 2025, and stands out for its geographical scope. It consists of three components, two of which are managed by German institutions. Component 1, "Supporting understanding between conflict parties", consist of a consortium that is led by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and has a budget of EUR 3 million. In the regional format of EU4Dialogue, this component's primary goal is not to initiate new conflict-specific dialogue processes, for which there are other EU instruments. Rather, this approach offers the opportunity to work on specific topics and ideas that have emerged or been developed within the regional dialogue.[101] On the one hand, the component implements its own dialogue processes for different groups of experts, such as historians, women leaders, water and energy experts and young changemakers. On the other hand, the resources of Component 1 are available for ad hoc initiatives of the EUSR to react quickly to possible changes and needs in the conflict contexts, especially in the South Caucasus.[102]

In contrast, EU4Dialogue Component 3, led by the DAAD with the strong involvement of the Goethe Institute, aims at improving exchanges between the conflict parties through education and culture. Component 3 has a budget of EUR 3 million, planned measures in the areas "of schools, higher education and culture include study trips for pupils and students to EU countries, online language courses for teachers, summer schools, guest lectureships, artist residencies and training courses in the areas of cultural management, pedagogy, cultural heritage, theatre and film."[103] Accordingly, in this component, educational, research and art exchanges are to be used as mechanisms for promoting dialogue. Originally, a focus on Abkhazia was planned, also in an effort to diversify educational opportunities there, but implementation, particularly of educational measures, has lagged behind. This also has to do with the lack of consent from local national governments and de facto authorities, which makes the implementation of measures considerably more difficult.[104]

98 Interview with German civil society stakeholder.
99 Interview with local civil society stakeholder.
100 Interview with German government official.
101 Interview with German civil society stakeholder.
102 Interview with international governmental stakeholder.
103 See https://eu4georgia.eu/projects/eu-project-page/?id=1577.
104 Interview with local civil society stakeholder.

The largest component by far, Component 2, is implemented by UNDP. It has a budget of EUR 9 million and "aims to build a durable foundation for conflict transformation by improving socio-economic conditions and human security for conflict-affected communities".[105] It tries to involve new stakeholders in community-led projects with possible dialogue components as well as to take up initiatives from Components 1 and 3. This interlocking, which is not insignificant for the overall design of EU4Dialogue, has so far failed because the Component has not been approved by the governments in Yerevan and Baku and nearly all activities have been implemented in Georgia to date.[106]

6.3 Impact, Challenges and Needs of German Civil Society Peacebuilding

German engagement has contributed significantly to connecting civil society actors across lines of conflict. A large number of peace activists have been supported and informal and formal connections have been created. Despite the often very difficult conflict contexts, civil society cooperation and information exchange thus persisted despite policies of (self-)isolation by the political elites. As a side effect, active civil society structures in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood have been strengthened, promoting the democratic development of local societies.

Still, creating positive spillover effects to wider parts of the societies and the conflict management process in a narrower remains a significant callenge. This is also the case when civil society engagement itself neglects conflict management and peacebuilding. In the case of the EU-Moldova Civil Society Platform, for example, the two most recent Joint Declarations make no mention of the Transnistrian conflict at all (EU-Moldova Civil Society Platform 2022, 2023). The EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Moldova for the period 2021-2027, similarly, does not include the management or settlement of the Transnistrian conflict among its three priorities (European Union n.d.). When it comes to German support for civil society peacebuilding, there is clearly support for civil society as such, but less so for specific peacebuilding initiatives by civil society actors.

Civil society peacebuilding, despite its undeniable achievements, has not been able to induce significant positive dynamics in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood (Relitz 2022). It has neither been able to impact the overall political situation, nor to alter perceptions of political actors on all sides of the divide, which have little interest in viable and mutually acceptable conflict management. Some have even observed a "decline in the quality of civil peacebuilding" where the most successful initiatives have long passed (Sotieva and Schofield 2021: 83). However, it must also be critically acknowledged that the resources - financial, human and political - that are used to support civil society measures are marginal compared to the resources used by other actors for perpetuating the status quo.[107]

Nonetheless, to be more effective, peacebuilders should focus more on producing tangible results for conflict affected societies, in order to counter dialogue fatigue and to strengthen their credibility in the wider societies. Such results can be improving living conditions on both sides of the divide, reducing isolation and discrimination of communities, or initiating practical cooperation on issues of mutual importance. It is also imperative to diversify peacebuilding processes to not engage only the "usual suspects". After 30 years, it is essential to expand the narrow "peacebuilder bubble" and to include both the younger generation and larger segments of society (Sotieva and Schofield 2021, Lewis 2023).

105 See https://euneighbourseast.eu/projects/eu-project-page/?id=1576&fbclid=IwAR3mAPjOttB6Z2JaSmMK8VDY9JvC2wA6tXB1oHrmb7A_3o2a7z_xo0qlpTw.

106 Interview with international governmental stakeholder.

107 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.

Moreover, to increase local ownership, the strong dependency on outside agendas and funding needs to be mitigated. Unfortunately, local governments' support for civil society initiatives is very limited or follows agendas that have little to do with peacebuilding. But international donors, too, need to make adjustments here and to better include local stakeholders in strategic processes (Relitz 2022).

For the German funding instruments, the analysis here revealed four specific challenges. First, there appears to be no strategy on how to promote conflict transformation processes with civil society initiatives in a sustainable and structured way. In view of the diversity of conflict contexts, it appears difficult to develop an overarching strategy for the whole region, but there is none for individual conflicts either. As a result, the engagement appears to be less strategic and effective. In this case, it can be useful to at least focus on specific issues or flagship initiatives, which can then be addressed in a coordinated manner to achieve significant change.[108] One such example could be an ambitious regional education initiative with a dedicated peace and conflict focus.

Secondly, striving for a stronger interlinkage between civil society and political engagement is essential. This applies both to German actors and to local partners. Without the strategic involvement of institutional and state actors, sustainable change is hardly feasible, which is a central challenge for civil society conflict transformation in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood.[109] While acknowledging that Berlin's attention might be bound by other crises or regions, sustainable change needs political commitment and support. A closer exchange between the German embassies and civil society would therefore be desirable, but this would also require corresponding personnel resources.

Thirdly, in order to support sustainable and systemic change, it is necessary for civil society to be able to work strategically on the serious challenges in the long term. However, this is precisely one of the key challenges facing German civil society actors. The short funding periods of OEPR and zivik make it difficult for implementing organisations to work on a problem area strategically and in the long run. On the contrary, the funding system pushes actors to think in very short-term project cycles and not to focus on long-term change, which should be the essence of conflict transformation and dialogue approaches. In order to address these problems, long-term and institutional funding instruments are needed to enable more ambitious initiatives and to further increase the organisational capacities of the implementing organisations.

Fourthly, it's important to use the existing organisational capacities effectively and not to hamper them with excessive bureaucracy. In the case of the zivik programme in particular, the bureaucratic procedures seem out of touch with project realities, which constrains the work of civil society actors. The criticism from the field does not only refer to a specific funding instrument but to the paralysing effect of German grants and budget law in general. In order to make civil society practice more effective, especially in conflict contexts, both the legal framework should be critically examined for practicability and the existing framework should be used as flexibly as possible. In this way, the capabilities, resources and contacts of German civil society actors could be used even more effectively for civil society conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

108 Interview with German governmental stakeholder.

109 Interview with German civil society stakeholder.

7. Changed Realities in the Eastern Neighbourhood: Scope for Engagement Post-2022

Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine since February 2022 constituted a watershed that had far-reaching security, political, economic and social ramifications for the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood as a whole. Unsurprisingly, the war and its consequences have affected the protracted conflicts in Moldova/Transnistria and the South Caucasus. Most notably, the war has changed and is changing attitudes towards Russia as well as its (perceived) role as a regional security actor, albeit in multifaceted ways. As argued in a Conciliation Resources discussion paper (2022), the war has "depleted both Russia's capacities as a military power and, as importantly, its reputation as a security patron to states and communities in the South Caucasus, and Eurasia at large" (4). Moreover, it seems Russia's war on Ukraine has strengthened a "state-centric interpretive framework depicting all unrecognised or partially recognised republics as artificial instruments of other states' coercive diplomacy and homogenising all of the region's conflicts as instances of occupation" (7). Despite these developments, in some cases, and with the clear exception of Ukraine, the uncertainties and its consequences generated by the war may also offer opportunities for new engagement in civilian conflict management and peacebuilding and new initiatives in areas such as cross-divide trade, communication and mobility.[110]

7.1 Armenia/Azerbaijan/Nagorno-Karabakh: Chances for Peace under Pressure?[111]

The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict has perhaps experienced the greatest changes. Although these shifts have accelerated since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, they had been initiated by the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020. Following this escalation of military hostilities and repeated flare-ups in violence ever since, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has become structurally both more similar and dissimilar to the other conflicts in the South Caucasus and between Moldova and Trans-nistria. Since the ceasefire agreement of November 2020, Russia has a military presence on the ground in the conflict areas and the Lachin corridor, the land connection between Armenia and those parts of Nagorno-Karabakh that post-2020 continued to be populated and de facto administered by ethnic Armenians (Wittkowsky 2021, International Crisis Group 2023). While in the context of the 2020 war, Russia had still managed to preserve its dominant role as primus inter pares among the Minsk Group Co-Chairs but also against (ultimately futile) Turkish attempts to create a new separate negotiation format, its position as dominant external security actor in the South Caucasus has since significantly weakened. While Moscow has continued to host talks between the Armenian and Azerbaijani sides, since December 2021 the EU has taken a significantly more prominent role as a mediator between Armenia and Azerbaijan and was complemented in its efforts by re-energised engagement of the United States.

Arguably, despite the tense situation, several windows of opportunity have opened up for Germany to increase its engagement in civilian conflict management and peacebuilding – Armenia's cautious distancing from Russia and readiness for compromise in the context of Azerbaijan's coercive bargaining, the EU's greater role in mediation and security provision and Germany's and the EU's increasing linkage with and potential leverage in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Seasoned observers attest that a peace agreement is closer than ever, although fundamental differences remain and relations between Baku and Yerevan "are nevertheless extremely vulnerable, above all to renewed violence in Nagorno-Karabakh or across the Armenia-Azerbaijan state border" (Conciliation Resources 2022). Indeed, the outlined current windows of opportunity are frail and thus prone to quickly close unless their utilisation is supported by respective external (EU and US) engagement.

110 Interview with local civil society stakeholder.

111 As noted above, this study was completed before Azerbaijan's military offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023.

Since 2022, Armenia has increasingly turned towards the West for support in the conflict, which increases the role and involvement of Washington D.C. and Brussels. Many Armenians have come to perceive Russia, Armenia's formal ally, as not ready to provide substantial support to their country even when Azerbaijan attacks its internationally recognised borders, as happened in September 2022 (Fabbro 2022, Deen et al. 2023: 52-53). In Armenia, this has led to massive disappointment with Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) (Ghulinyan-Gertz 2022). While the Pashinyan government is increasingly distancing the country from Russia, these steps are carefully balanced due to persisting economic and military dependencies. Azerbaijan is playing a balancing game as well, having signed cooperation agreements with both Ukraine and Russia shortly before the war, providing humanitarian support to Ukraine but at the same time not having taken a clear stance against the Russian aggression in international fora, as abstentions or absences in respective UN General Assembly votes indicate. After 2020, both Armenia and Azerbaijan seem to have (at least intermittently) converged on the idea of terminating Russia's "peacekeeping" mission in the conflict area, at the latest when its current mandate ends in 2025. However, their reasons and alternative scenarios differ substantially, with Baku seeing no need in a mission at all and Yerevan arguing for an international mechanism instead, all the while a substantial push to replace the Russian mission by an internationally mandated one seems lacking.

Due to declining Armenian trust in Russia, an opportunity for the EU- and US-facilitated talks has emerged. The former has facilitated talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan since December 2021 (Dumoulin 2022, Stronski 2022, International Crisis Group 2022b). This process has seen some intermittent success, such as when both countries' leaders agreed in Brussels to work towards a peace treaty at the end of August 2022 (RFE/RL 2022), and serious setbacks, such as when renewed large-scale violence erupted only two weeks later (de Waal 2022). Given the ambivalent results, especially until October 2022, many in Armenia perceived they had been left behind by the West since the 2020 War, whereas Ukraine received large-scale support (Schiffers and Smolnik 2022).[112]

Following discussions between Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Presidents Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Emmanuel Macron of France as well as EU Council President Charles Michel at the first European Political Community summit in Prague on 6 October 2022, the EU deployed 40 temporary civilian monitors along the Armenian side of the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. To allow for a speedy deployment, it drew personnel from the EU Monitoring Mission to Georgia. The short-term EU Monitoring Capacity to Armenia (EUMCAP) took up its work on 20 October 2022 and came to a close in December that year, in accordance with the decision taken in Prague. EUMCAP's two central tasks were to support stabilising the situation and to better equip the EU to contribute to the activities of the established border commissions (European External Action Service 2022).

In January 2023, acting upon a request from Armenia, the Council of the European Union authorised the establishment of a two-year civilian European Union Mission in Armenia (EUMA) (EU Mission in Armenia 2023). The mission's objective is to contribute to stability in the border regions of Armenia, build confidence on the ground and ensure an environment conducive to the EU's efforts to normalise relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The mission will eventually consist of up to 100 unarmed monitors. As EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell stated: "The establishment of an EU Mission in Armenia launches a new phase in the EU's engagement in the South Caucasus. The EU will continue to support de-escalation efforts and is committed to work closely with both sides towards the ultimate goal of sustainable peace in the region" (Council of the European Union 2023). The EUMA can be seen as a turning point in EU-Armenia relations, and Germany is prominently involved by deploying Markus Ritter as the first Head of Mission. EUMA is particularly noteworthy also because Russia had proposed the deployment of a CSTO observer mission to the Armenian-Azerbaijani border

112 Interview with German civil society stakeholder.

during the CSTO summit in Yerevan on 23 November 2022. However, Armenia rejected this offer in favour of the EUMA (Poghosyan 2023).

It is not yet clear whether the EUMA can significantly contribute to stability. Both Azerbaijan and Russia have criticised its deployment, at times sharply, and it lacks access to Azerbajiani territory (Negi/Pietz 2023). Baku has no interest in internationalising the border at a time when it clearly has military supremacy and sees the use of force as a legitimate means of conflict resolution. Moreover, it fears that Yerevan will use the EUMA's presence to stall the peace process as it might reduce some of the pressure applied by Baku. Azerbaijan has emphasised to EU officials at different levels that the participation of the EU in Armenia via a mission must not serve as a pretext for Armenia to avoid fulfilling promises made (Krikorian 2023). Moscow likewise presents significant opposition to the EUMA. The Russian Foreign Ministry criticised it as a threat to the implementation of the trilateral agreement that ended the Second Nagorno-Karabakh war and as an instrument that would increase geopolitical tensions in the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2023).

The increased EU engagement suggests that Germany, too, as one of the most influential Member States and particularly in light of its self-declared values-based and Feminist Foreign Policy (Federal Foreign Office 2023), should play a stronger role in civilian conflict management and peacebuilding with regard to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. In 2023, Germany indeed has become more active. In February, the Munich Security Conference facilitated a discussion between Azerbaijani President Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan. In June 2023, Chancellor Scholz for the first time joined the meeting format of European Council President Charles Michel, Azerbaijani President Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan and French President Emmanuel Macron at the European Political Community summit in Moldova. Germany's participation may certainly hold the potential to positively contribute to the process, yet it remains to be seen to what extent Berlin is ready to engage and put its political weight in the process on a more continuous basis and stay involved also through periods of stagnation, all the more given the vast array of security issues German foreign policy is faced with.

A major unresolved question revolves around the issue of security guarantees for the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, should the region get back under Azerbaijani control and especially if Azerbaijan and/or Armenia refuse to prolong the Russian "peacekeeping" mission beyond 2025 (Deen et al. 2023: 58-60). This question has become particularly acute since December 2022, when the Azerbaijani side started its blockade of the Lachin corridor, causing a humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh (Górecki and Strachota 2023). Many, in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh but also beyond, fear that the blockade amounts to a policy of ethnic cleansing, arguing that Azerbaijan aims at forcing the Armenian population to leave the territories, which would add yet another layer to the history of forced displacement in the region (Stoeber 2023). There is a major risk that if the peace talks fail, "Azerbaijan may be tempted to take what it can by force" (International Crisis Group 2023: 9).

Whereas prior to the Velvet Revolution in Armenia in 2018, several high-level officials in Yerevan had roots in the separatist entity, the latter's influence over Yerevan's position and affairs has significantly diminished. There have been a few Track 2 and Track 3 initiatives launched by the European Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI), the European External Action Service and under the framework of EU4Peace in 2021/22, yet stakeholders from Nagorno-Karabakh feel increasingly sidelined.[113] In particular, the so-called "Brussels track" of the peace process focusses primarily on the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict dimension and hardly includes the issue of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians. Arguably, the EU and Germany could at least potentially play a role in the provision of security guarantees if this was supported by both Baku and Yerevan, although political commitments are far

113 Interview with international civil society representative.

more realistic than any type of institutionalised guarantees. In any case, a substantial discussion on such possible future engagement has so far not been initiated, neither in Berlin nor Brussels.

Although the 2020 war had massively further destroyed what little trust there was between the conflict parties, including the respective peacebuilders' communities and within peacebuilding formats supported by international donors (Conciliation Resources 2022: 14), limited opportunities for increased exchange and societal peacebuilding are re-emerging. Voices for a just peace remain active not only in Armenia but also in Azerbaijan, where, at least periodically, Baku's military threats and incursions have provoked criticism (Aghayev 2022). Other initiatives have focussed on regional connectivity,[114] which "emerged as a key focus for potential peacebuilding in the South Caucasus" (Conciliation Resources 2022: 4). However, connectivity should not be simplistically understood as merely relating to transit routes (Broers 2023), and new infrastructure projects across the divides should only be implemented with the engagement of the publics and civil society (Lewis 2023). If Germany, bilaterally and within the EU, brought its political and economic clout to the table, to support both critical peace activists and a conflict-sensitive connectivity agenda, it could potentially explore this as a window of opportunity for peace in the region. Here, too, though, a carefully designed approach is needed that builds on related analyses and steers clear of potential pitfalls, such as replicating or even deepening existing dividing lines by assuming by default win-win-scenarios, excluding stakeholders (in particular also affected societies) or overlooking conflicts of objectives (Broers 2023, Smolnik 2023).

Following the EU's example, promising increased aid to Armenia after the 2020 war (Avetisyan 2021), Germany has also become more active in Armenia bilaterally, adding Armenia to its list of bilateral development partners. This step has increased Germany's access and clout in Yerevan. The EU has also become more active towards Azerbaijan, signing a memorandum with Baku in July 2022, under which from 2027 Azerbaijan vows to deliver to Europe at least 20 billion cubic meters of fossil gas annually (Muradov 2022). Moreover, in December 2022, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Hungary and Romania signed an agreement to build a submarine electricity cable on the bottom of the Black Sea, funded by the EU with EUR 2.3 billion (Civil.ge 2022a). While Azerbaijan itself is seeking foreign investments (Stoeber 2023), whether its increasing economic and infrastructure ties to the EU will increase the EU's leverage remains to be seen, as the EU's need for additional energy resources is self-evident to all parties. Moreover, the EU-Azerbaijan gas memorandum damaged the EU's credibility among peacebuilders and democratic civil society on both sides.[115] The critical lessons learned from the absence of using conditionality in energy cooperation between Russia and Germany may be revisited here. In light of Germany's self-declared value-based and Feminist Foreign Policy, Berlin would be well-advised to ensure that values are not forgotten in the EU's policy towards Azerbaijan, not least of all including in the interest of conflict management and peacebuilding.

7.2 Georgia/Abkhazia/South Ossetia: A Second Front vs. Engagement and De-Isolation

Russia's all-out war in Ukraine since 2022 has also had profound impact on Georgia/Abkhazia/South Ossetia. It has resulted in increasing societal tensions in Georgia due to the influx of a large number of Russian émigrés, an ambiguous Georgian foreign policy and fears of further military conflict – especially another Russian attack on Georgia or escalations between Georgia-Abkhazia or Georgia-South Ossetia. Nonetheless, opportunities to support those on all sides of the conflict divides who position

114 For instance, a project by Restart Initiative (2023) and the Hertie School of Governance convened expert dialogues focussed on transport, water, energy and markets and skill-building, funded by the EU, UK, Germany and the US.

115 Interview with international governmental stakeholder.

themselves pro peace and democracy exist. Moreover, it is important to increase reflections on how Georgia's EU integration can be used in the interest of peace and to prevent its possible negative repercussion on the conflicts.

Primarily due to the influx of Russian refugees and migrants, the Georgian economy has grown sharply, by over 10% in 2022 (National Statistics Office of Georgia 2023). Trade turnover with Russia increased by 51.7% in 2022 (GRASS Fact Check 2023). Moreover, Georgian-Russian economic ties were significantly strengthened by the increase in Russian remittances, in this case, salary transfers by Russians who relocated to Georgia to Georgian bank accounts (Avdaliani 2023). On the other hand, the influx of wealthier Russians and Belarusians creates new economic vulnerabilities and distributional conflicts in urban areas of Georgia with exponentially rising rents and land prices. Moreover, large segments of the Georgian population view the arrivals with great suspicion. In a March/April 2023 representative poll, almost 80% of Georgians expressed opposition to Russians entering Georgia visa-free, purchasing property or registering businesses (International Republican Institute 2023). Russians are overwhelmingly seen as occupiers and aggressors, and the fear of infiltration of their own society by Russians loyal to the regime is widespread. The changing demographic situation presents both conflict-related threats and opportunities. Distributional conflicts, widespread resentment, and lack of social integration of Russian migrants can lead to new cleavages and tensions with the Georgian majority in the short and medium term. On the other hand, also many Russian opposition members and critical voices have emigrated to Georgia. These actors might be a long-term resource for dealing with the Russian-Georgian conflict, to which Germany could also contribute.

While the Georgian government has condemned Russia's war of aggression and has persistently aligned with the West in international votes related to the war (for instance, within the UN), the rhetoric of the ruling Georgian Dream party has been ambiguous and partially cooperative towards Russia (Kakachia and Lebanidze 2023, Lebanidze and Kakachia 2022). In spring 2023, the ruling parliamentary group adopted in first reading a draft "foreign agent" law, which reminded most observers of the equivalent Russian law and repression of civil society there. The law would have seriously impaired the work of CSOs in the country, including those working in the field of peacebuilding. When large protests over the law erupted and it was eventually withdrawn, Russian propagandists indirectly warned Georgians not to overthrow the government, reminding them about the annexation of Crimea following Ukraine's Maidan revolution (Kintsurashvili 2023). After the foreign agent initiative failed, Russian President Putin rescinded the Russian ban of direct flights to Tbilisi, imposed in 2019. The Georgian government seemed to embrace the move for economic reasons, although it caused popular protest and frictions with the European Union and its US partners (New York Times 2023). As a result of these ambiguous policies, in a representative poll published in April 2023, 25% of the Georgian population describe the government's foreign policy as pro-Russian, 20% as more pro-Russian than pro-Western, 21% as more pro-Western than pro-Russian and only 17% as pro-Western; all this while the goal of Euro-Atlantic integration is enshrined in Georgia's constitution (International Republican Institute 2023).

Vulnerability and fears regarding the Georgian conflicts have increased on all sides. First, Russia's full-scale invasion fuelled fears among the Georgian population that Russia might attack Georgia once again and painful memories of 2008 recurred (Lomsadze 2022). Second, the withdrawal of substantial Russian military equipment and personnel from Abkhazia and South Ossetia to support Russia's war in Ukraine is fuelling insecurity and fears in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Many in Abkhazia and South Ossetia fear that a significant weakening of Russia could motivate Georgia to escalate the conflict militarily. Moreover, some are afraid that what is perceived as a current thaw between Moscow and Tbilisi could result in a bargain between the two over the future of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Abkhazia put its military forces on high alert (JAMnews 2023a). A week later, a Youtube video that allegedly had Georgians fighting in Ukraine call for retaking

Abkhazia and South Ossetia by force went viral on social media (Wesolowsky 2022). Shortly after, an advisor to Ukrainian President Zelensky in April 2022 similarly claimed that Russia's war in Ukraine is a "historic opportunity to retake Abkhazia and South Ossetia" (Gabritchidze 2022). The de facto authorities of Abkhazia and the Georgian government even exhibited rare agreement when both sides repeatedly warned of the danger of a "second front" in Georgia (Eurasianet 2022).

While these stories made headlines and raised fears among the populations of a Georgian military escalation towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia, both the Georgian government and society have continued to position themselves in favour of peaceful conflict resolution and attitudes seem to have become more compromise-oriented in the past years (Sichinava 2020, Gabritchidze 2022). For instance, in a representative poll conducted in 2021, 95% of young adults in Tbilisi-controlled territory had stated that the conflicts should be resolved by negotiation and not by force (Caucasus Research Resource Center 2021). Moreover, following the large-scale sanctions on Russia, the breakaway territories eased some of the restrictions on trade and movement. In summer 2022, South Ossetia partially reopened crossing points to Georgia-controlled territory, allowing residents to bring products from Tbilisi-controlled territory into South Ossetia and increasing engagement (Komakhia 2023). Moreover, small-scale trade across the Georgian-Abkhaz ABL has been partially legalised; as a result of the Western sanctions on Russia and difficulties to import certain products from Russia, Sukhum/i partially lifted an embargo on imports from Georgia (JAMnews 2023b, Komakhia 2023). Arguably, these societal and economic developments could be used more strategically by Germany and the EU to promote stability and peace.

Unsurprisingly, the Geneva International Discussions (GID) were affected by Russia's war on Ukraine as well. The 56th round of the GID was postponed from March to October 2022 and the 57th round from February to April 2023 by the Co-chairs, in order to protect the process from further politisation in light of the war against Ukraine. These unilateral decisions where heavily criticised by the Abkhazian, South Ossetian and Russian authorities.[116] In return, planned trips by the Co-chairs to Abkhazia and Moscow in February 2023 were cancelled by the de facto authorities (Civil.ge 2023a). The 58th round of the GID eventually took place in July 2023 (Civil.ge 2023b). While the future of the GID is uncertain, and it is often criticised for a lack of results, according to Conciliation Resources (2022), "all acknowledge that if the GID ceases to operate it will be extremely difficult to recreate a space where this range of different stakeholders can come together" (8).

Georgia's civil society has sent contradictory signals towards the breakaway territories. In September 2022, on the occasion of the 29th anniversary of the fall of Sukhum/i, some of Georgia's most knowledgeable and prominent peacebuilding activists published a statement calling for a new peace building and conflict transformation process in Georgia, based on human rights and honest dialogue (Social Justice Center 2022). The statement criticised both the government for its insufficient efforts towards conflict transformation and its instrumentalisation of the conflict for its own political goals and the opposition for trying to capitalise on the traumas of the population. Unfortunately, the public visibility and social and political influence of such initiatives are low, which is a fundamental challenge for Georgian peace activists.[117] During the same period, Georgian opposition parties and other societal actors, in the context of the discussions around labelling Russia's crimes in Ukraine as genocide, launched a campaign to recognise also the crimes committed against ethnic Georgians in Sukhum/i as genocide, which raised concerns of political instrumentalisation (Gutbrod 2022). Moreover, as Conciliation Resources (2022) put it, "explicit framing in Georgia of Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2022 as a sequence that began with Russian aggression against the Georgian population in Abkhazia in 1992-93 leaves little room for more nuanced discussion and denies the Abkhazians agency" (14). In general, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has reinforced the dominant Georgian narrative that the conflicts

116 Interview with international governmental stakeholder.

117 Interview with local civil society stakeholder.

over Abkhazia and South Ossetia are solely conflicts between Georgia and Russia. Lastly, during the protests against the foreign agent law in Tbilisi, a video in which Georgians chant "Sukhumi" and "Tskhinvali" further increased threat perceptions in the breakaway territories (Eurasianet 2022).

Also developments that at first seem unrelated to the conflicts could nonetheless potentially significantly shift conflict dynamics. In March 2022, together with Ukraine and Moldova, Georgia applied for EU membership. While Ukraine and Moldova obtained candidate status, Georgia only received a "European perspective", with candidate status being conditioned on the fulfilment of 12 priorities. At first glance, Georgia's EU integration process might seem wholly beneficial to civilian cconflict management and peacebuilding. However, it should not be forgotten that the EU is not regarded positively in Abkhazia, due to a perceived lack of engagement and a pro-Georgian policy from Brussels; Russian propaganda might play its role here, too. At the same time, EU integration could provide an opportunity; in the Serbia-Kosovo conflict, for instance, the EU has played a mediating role and linked the normalisation of relations to progress in integration.[118] Any such moves in the Georgian conflicts, for instance, to link progress in EU integration to an agreement on the non-use of force, however, should be well thought-through and made with caution in order not to deepen the divides even more.

In addition to the problems with and lack of German and EU funding in Abkhazia described in previous chapters, recent political developments and decisions have further diminished the EU's reputation in Abkhazia and increased isolation. Specifically, previous ways of supporting Abkhazian CSOs and activists financially have become almost impossible due to the sanctions on Russian banks, which also operate in Abkhazia (Conciliation Resources 2022: 15). Moreover, the EU Council's decision in December 2022 not to provide visas to Russian passport holders resident in Abkhazia and South Ossetia made it even harder for peacebuilders, but especially "ordinary people", to travel to the EU (Council of the European Union 2022, Piranishvili 2022). In Abkhazia, such policies of isolation are perceived as double standards not in line with a human-centred approach. Moreover, as Sotieva and Schofield (2021) argue, "physical isolation creates mental isolation" - "the longer the societies remain in such a state, the more difficult it will be to engage them, even on issues which they agree might be useful" (86). German and/or European policy focussed on civilian conflict management and peacebuilding would seek to address these opportunities and challenges, in the interest of engagement instead of isolation, which in practice leaves Abkhazia with no options besides Russia.

Internal developments in Abkhazia have been turbulent as well, impacting on peacebuilding possibilities, relations with Russia and potential opportunities for Western engagement. The operating space for civil society and especially for peacebuilders and international engagement has deteriorated, especially since the appointment of Inal Ardzinba, who was professionally socialised in the Russian Presidential Administration, as de facto foreign minister. A potential "foreign agent" law has been discussed for years, though it has not been adopted. Still, Abkhazian civil society activists have faced increasing pressure (Freedom House 2023), in particular those who have been critical of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and those who have participated in peacebuilding activities with Georgian participants (Civil.ge 2022b, JAMnews 2022). Nonetheless, Abkhazians are increasingly vocal about their concern that Russia could fully swallow any agency left, and protests against the increasing Russian influence, most notably against the construction of apartments and a potential influx of Russian residents and against the transfer of a state datcha in Pitsunda to Russia have become frequent, especially among youth (Civil.ge 2023c, OC Media 2023). At the same time, it is clear that if the war continues, Russia will not be able to continue its extensive funding schemes for Abkhazia (Tania 2022), and Abkhazia will need to accelerate its economic development which will require new resources – a potential entry point for other international actors.

118 Notably, the Serbia-Kosovo conflict differs significantly from the Georgian conflicts, in that a majority of EU Member States have recognised Kosovo as an independent state and established diplomatic relations with Pristina.

7.3 Moldova: The Continuing Relevance of Confidence-Building and Confidence-Maintaining Measures

Russia's all-out war in Ukraine has impacted Moldova in numerous ways, some of them positive and others more negative. Many of the country's long-standing problems have been further exacerbated, including through intensifying Russian destabilisation attempts (Deen and Zweers 2022, Groza 2023). This has not only affected the prospects of maintaining stability in relation to the Transnistrian conflict, but also fundamentally changed the prospects for its settlement.

One of the most striking effects of the war has been the influx of refugees from Ukraine. According to data from UNHCR, by 15 July 2023, almost 900,000 Ukrainians had crossed the border from Ukraine into Moldova since 24 February 2022 — a number that is equivalent to more than a third of the country's resident population (excluding Transnistria). Of these, currently more than 110,000 remain, including almost 50,000 children. This has resulted in unprecedented fiscal burdens, only partially compensated by international aid, including some USD 100 million of support from UNHCR.

Moreover, the war has also created additional pressure on the country's already fragile social infrastructure. Rising prices for electricity and gas, entirely dependent on Russian natural gas deliveries via existing pipelines through Ukraine, have been the primary contributors to soaring inflation above 30%. Exports of agricultural goods and medicines to Russia have fallen sharply, as have remittances from Russia, adding further to the country's economic woes with at best moderate economic growth expected in 2023 after a sharp contraction in gross domestic product in 2022 (International Monetary Fund 2023).

As a result, the country's pro-Western presidency and government have been under pressure from public protests since late summer 2022, demanding a reversal of the EU accession course. While these protests are supported by Russia and pro-Russian elements inside and outside Moldova, they also reflect persistently high levels of poverty, inequality and a deep divide in the country over its geopolitical orientation. With respect to Transnistria, the absence of a permanent settlement has meant that Moscow has been able to preserve a significant level of leverage that it continues to use to destabilise Moldova and to increase uncertainty about the role of Transnistria in the Kremlin's war planning (Wolff 2023b).

This uncertainty has also raised doubts regarding the stability of the regime in Transnistria itself. In late April of 2022, several attacks against government buildings and infrastructure occurred in Transnistria, most likely provocations by Russian special forces. In March 2023, there were reports of an alleged Ukrainian plot to assassinate Transnistria's leader, Vadim Krasnoselsky. In July 2023, the leader of the main opposition party, Oleg Khorzhan, was murdered at his home (Nescutu 2023). The unprecedented level of instability Moldova and Transnistria have experienced as a result of Russia's all-out war in Ukraine make the experiences of mediation in the Transnistrian conflict nevertheless worth reflecting on.

First, while the current leaders on both sides are more inclined towards Brussels (as they were in the context of the DCFTA negotiations in 2015) and not towards a substantially weakened Russia, the Kremlin, as noted above, retains potentially significant disruptive power in Transnistria and Moldova. This cannot, however, mask the fact that Moscow's leverage overall has diminished, and its veto power over a conflict settlement may no longer exist. Transnistria could generally be seen as a prime example of how mediation can at least contribute to stabilisation. Yet, developments in the conflict since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 similarly indicate the limitations of stabilisation-focussed mediation in several ways.

Second, while this creates a potential window of opportunity for facilitating renewed rapprochement between Chisinau and Tiraspol, it will not in and of itself pave the way for proper status negotiations outside the 5+2, let alone lead to their successful conclusion. For that to happen, actual formats need to be created and sustained in which the two sides can constructively engage with international support — both for the purposes of preventing any escalation and for beginning to engage meaningfully on an actual settlement process. This could, for example, take the form of an additional working group within the Moldova Support Conference framework, which is led by Germany, France and Romania, has the support of a further 33 countries, and involves multiple international organisations, such as the EU, UNDP and the World Bank.

Third, a window of opportunity — not for conflict settlement, but for preparing for it — thus exists at the moment precisely because of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Stabilisation-focussed mediation can potentially keep this opportunity open, but it can do little to encourage the sides to embrace it, because neither Chisinau nor Tiraspol are ready for a settlement, and both sides are holding out in order to reassess their relative power in negotiations after the war in Ukraine has ended. The Moldovan side, expecting a Ukrainian and Western victory, sees its chances improving for a settlement that would simply extend the application of the Moldovan system to Transnistria, akin to German unification in 1990.

Such a scenario is a highly unwelcome prospect for Transnistrians, who have never been part of the independent Moldovan state and where an entire generation has now grown up in a separate entity that is run by a criminal and corrupt political-economic elite, survives only on the basis of an economic model that is equally dependent on Russian gas as it is on access to the EU market, and has been subjected, for decades, to Russian propaganda.

The prospect of EU membership is a major factor that will shape the developments around the Transnistrian conflict settlement process in the years to come. While not an explicit condition of accession, it is unlikely that Moldova would be allowed to join the Union like Cyprus did, that is, without full sovereign control of its entire internationally recognised territory. This will make a sustainable settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, at some point, a priority for the country. At present, however, very limited capacity is devoted to the issue within the Moldovan government, already overstretched by the combined demands of managing a country in a deep socio-economic crisis and preparing for the start of accession negotiations with the EU (de Waal 2023). At best, therefore, the current forced break in settlement negotiations since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is a blessing in disguise that needs to be taken advantage of in order to also bolster the capacity of Moldova's institutions to formulate and implement a credible strategy for a settlement of the conflict.

The prospects of this happening, however, are not overly promising. The mandate of the new EU Partnership Mission does not cover the Transnistrian conflict, and the EU Delegation in Chisinau works primarily with and through the OSCE to support what is left of the settlement process. This approach, however, is problematic in two ways. First, it perpetuates an EU approach to the Transnistrian conflict that is anything but strategic, but has, and successfully so, always been focussed on the stabilisation of the status quo. While this may have been beneficial overall in the past, it is not a long-term option in a context of future EU accession. Second, it also creates vulnerabilities in relation to the future of the OSCE and its mission in Moldova, which has become a political football within the OSCE and whose mandate was only renewed at the very last minute on 30 June and only for a period of six, rather than the usual 12 months (Liechtenstein 2023).

7.4 The Changing Role of the OSCE

Linked to the conflict in and around Ukraine, from 2014 on the OSCE had (again) received increased attention as an inclusive, multilateral actor dedicated to security and stability in Europe that was still providing a platform for dialogue across divides amid a difficult geopolitical environment. As such it was also perceived during Germany's 2016 Chairpersonship of the organisation. With Russia's large-scale invasion of the entire territory of Ukraine in February 2022, however, the organisation's challenges to live up to its tasks and mandates came ever more to the forefront and the OSCE was attested to be in deep crisis, basically acting in "survival mode" (International Crisis Group 2022a, Mattelaer 2022, Hill 2022).

Russia's war against Ukraine has violated the Helsinki Final Act, the OSCE's very foundation. One of the organisation's central tenets, cooperative security, has, for the foreseeable future, been profoundly undermined. Finding consensus, a hallmark of the organisation, has been further hampered, if not in many instances become impossible. First and foremost, this has affected the OSCE's activities with direct relation to Russia's war and Ukraine, with the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, the Border Observer Mission and the organisation's project coordinator in Ukraine forced to terminate their work due to Russia's obstructionism. Even though most of the OSCE field missions' mandates were extended in late 2022, the mission to Moldova, with its conflict resolution focus, received extension only for another half and not the usual one year, that is only until 30 June 2023, when it was renewed for another six months at the very last moment. What is more, participating states have not been able to agree on a unified budget after 2021, which has translated into the OSCE still precariously operating on a workaround of monthly allocations based on the last adopted 2021 budget – a construct the organisation will probably have to rely on in 2024 as well.

Two major challenges for the operational functioning of the organisation might still lie ahead, though: First, at the end of 2023, the OSCE's entire leadership, including the position of General Secretary – currently held by German diplomat Helga Schmid whose candidacy in 2020 was perceived as showing Germany's dedication to the organisation – is up for renewal. Secondly, the participating states could not until now agree on who shall chair the organisation in 2024 when North Macedonia's term expires at the end of 2023. Both these major decisions, too, require consensus.

In addition to the procedural questions and operational limitations associated with finding a consensus in a climate of deep geopolitical crisis, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has arguably brought to the surface further challenges to the performance of the organisation ever more clearly, including in the realm of civilian conflict management and peacebuilding. Already before 2022, the contestation of the liberal order had challenged the OSCE. Key principles of the organisation, such as the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and the 1990 Charter of Paris, have been contested among its participating states. Liberal norm contestation as well as counter-norm entrepreneurship in the OSCE area, the latter going beyond a questioning of liberal norms' meaning and scope of application but involving advocacy and promulgation of alternative normative frameworks, has signified the very challenging environment for multilateralism (Lewis 2022, Greminger 2021).

Beyond the immediate geopolitical crisis linked to the war against Ukraine, therefore, further solidifying diverging normative understandings, including on approaches to conflict management and peacebuilding, what David Lewis has referred to as "Pax Rossica" (Lewis 2022, Gharji 2021), not only pose challenges to finding consensus in the first place, but also might trickle down and affect the implementation of OSCE field activities themselves, that is, the OSCE's footprint on the ground.

Against the backdrop of these developments, it seems already a success if the OSCE is able to continue ongoing activities. Civilian conflict management and peacebuilding activities in the EU's Eastern

Neighbourhood, as illustrated above, have certainly been negatively affected by the war, but not irreversibly derailed - except for, probably, the OSCE Minsk Group and its co-chair format, although its dormancy is linked more closely to Armenia-Azerbaijan relations. It is even more difficult to see the OSCE significantly expanding its activities or initiating and taking up new tasks in the foreseeable future other than through projects where consensus is not needed. These are in particular Chair events, that are directly organised under the aegis of the OSCE Chairpersonship country or projects based on voluntary extra-budgetary financing by individual participating states, such as is the case with the OSCE Support Programme for Ukraine that was launched in November 2022.[119] Such an approach is also supported by Berlin, with the German Federal Foreign Ministry contributing EUR 2.5 million to the Programme. Seasoned observers of the OSCE have argued that the OSCE is too bulky an organisation to at some point directly mediate between Moscow and Kyiv (Hill 2022).

Also in the other conflict theatres in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood the OSCE seems to be losing ground as the go-to conflict management organisation. Thus, not least given that Azerbaijan considers the OSCE Minsk Group no longer relevant and in fact obsolete, the OSCE at least at present and visibly has retreated as leading mediation format for the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, if not "visibly disintegrated" (Conciliation Resources 2022: 4). As mentioned above, with the EU having stepped up its engagement there, Germany's position seems to have evolved as well, from communicating its support to the Minsk Group to actively backing the so-called "Brussels track" of the peace process between Yerevan and Baku. In Germany's first ever National Security Strategy, published in summer 2023, the OSCE features only marginally.

119 See https://www.osce.org/support-programme-for-ukraine.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine makes it impossible to deny that war has again become a reality in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. Unlike in the case of the Russo-Georgian war of 2008, the Russian annexation of Crimea and occupation of parts of Donbas since 2014 or the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, war can no longer be explained away as an isolated incident. Nor can the policy failures of the past be glossed over without a fundamental rethink and change of approach.

Across the region, there is little doubt that no matter how or when the war in Ukraine ends, Russia will remain a major threat to the security and stability of states and societies. Yet, as Russia focuses its resources on Ukraine, the current instability poses significant threats to peace in the region at large, but also provides some opportunities for civilian conflict management and peacebuilding.

The protracted conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood go back decades. Secessionist movements, mobilised during the collapse of the Soviet Union, could not have been sustained without Russian support. At the same time, Russian-negotiated ceasefire agreements in the conflicts between Georgia and Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia, Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh and Moldova and Transnistria brought the initial fighting after the Soviet collapse to an end. These deals, done in the Yeltsin era, however, also secured Russian influence and provided the foundation for the more aggressive foreign policies of Russia in the Eastern Neighbourhood in the Putin era. As a result, Russia has simultaneously been a participant in negotiations, party to the conflicts and a patron of the secessionist territories.[120] Above all, Russia has pursued its own imperial impulses and great power interests, to the detriment of the countries in the region and beyond.

The "local" parties, that is, parent state and breakaway territory, have themselves displayed very little commitment to finding a peaceful solution and have instead maintained maximalist positions. This applies not only to political elites but also to broad sections of the populations. Decades of lack of progress have created entrenched interests on all sides - at best, for the maintenance of the status quo, at worst, for its violent upending, but never for a sustainable, peaceful resolution to these conflicts.

The reasons why Germany and the EU should prioritise the conflicts in the Eastern Neighbourhood are at least fourfold: first, the prevention of mass atrocities, of war crimes and crimes against humanity; second, the political and economic costs of the continuing war in Ukraine and instability and potentially the resumption of violence in Moldova/Transnistria and the South Caucasus for Germany, 'frontier states' (including the Baltic states, Poland and Romania, as well as Slovakia, Hungary and Finland) and ultimately the EU as a whole; third, the cultural and economic belonging of the Eastern Neighbourhood to Europe; and fourth, the need to contest and contain aggressive, expansionist autocracies, first of all Russia and the military and political threat it poses to international law is in Germany's and the EU's self-interest and aligned with the values for which they stand. The price for inaction, for merely simulating conflict management, has been exorbitant in the case of Ukraine. A repetition of this scenario should be avoided at all costs.

In the past, Germany demonstrated a willingness and ability to engage at the highest level only in times of urgent, imminent crises, for example, in Georgia in 2008 or in Ukraine in 2014/15, or when extraordinary opportunities presented themselves, as in the context of the Meseberg process in 2010-2012. Otherwise, Berlin preferred to delegate the responsibility for conflict management to the OSCE or to diplomats without agenda-setting power. Often, mere commenting on events and an alleged lack of opportunities or entry points seemed to substitute actual policy.

120 In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia, relying on security guarantees from Russia, long fulfilled the role of patron state; with the stationing of Russian "peacekeepers", however, Russia's significance as a direct patron for the entity increased substantially.

However, as this study demonstrates, Germany has been a major, if not the most important bilateral actor and donor in civilian conflict management and peacebuilding in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood – through humanitarian assistance, stabilisation, mediation, development cooperation and support for civil society peacebuilding. Besides Germany's bilateral engagement, it has often acted through the European Union – financially or politically – and the OSCE. While this engagement has not contributed to a settlement of any of the protracted conflicts or the prevention of their escalation, Germany is nonetheless comparatively well-placed to engage more. Its own experience in coping with the division of Germany provides an important lesson: if you cannot turn back time, work on a modus vivendi that mitigates the deep divides on an individual level and keeps options for future generations open.

Conflict related Humanitarian Assistance: Lack of Inclusivity

Humanitarian aid has been a central component of Germany's conflict-related engagement at least since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014. Germany has taken a leading role here, especially after Russia launched its full-scale war of aggression in 2022. However, humanitarian assistance still lacks inclusivity. For instance, as discussed in chapter 2, humanitarian aid in Abkhazia has been focused on the ethnic Georgian population, which has been viewed critically in Abkhazia. The example of Ukraine prior to 2022, moreover, highlights the importance of access, as humanitarian access and access for human rights defenders to areas not controlled by the Ukrainian government was restricted for years. Inclusivity is essential to reach the most vulnerable people and to limit unintended consequences, such as the reinforcement of cleavages and the emergence of new distribution conflicts at the local level. Inclusivity also refers to the need for involvement of local actors in programming and implementation, in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of assistance while strengthening local civil society structures and capacity.

Stabilisation and EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP): Hitting Its Limits

Stabilisation measures, that is, the preservation of communication channels and preventing a deterioration of the status quo, may increase security. However, a mere administration of the status quo has failed to prevent the re-escalation of violence between Russia and Georgia in 2008 and between Russia and Ukraine since 2014.[121] Where so called stabilisation has succeeded - in relation to Transnistria - it has also decreased incentives for moving beyond the status quo. Prevention of deterioration is therefore necessary, but not sufficient.

Germany has been a major actor in stabilisation efforts, providing, among others, comprehensive financial and personnel resources to OSCE field activities and EU CSDP missions. While this engagement has merit, it often has little direct impact on conflict management and peacebuilding. In some cases, it even perpetuated conflicts, erroneously suggesting that the situation is "somewhat stable" and thereby decreasing the perceived urgency for finding a sustainable settlement. The idea of freezing a conflict is an illusion.

Mediation: Difficult Starting Conditions, Few Results

Germany has been active bilaterally mainly in conflict mediation with regard to Ukraine and Moldova and far less strategically and more selectively in Georgia before the Russo-Georgian war in 2008. In the first two cases, Berlin played a leading role in the Minsk (Ukraine) and Berlin+ (Moldova) processes. A transformative agenda was nonetheless missing. Instead, outdated formulas were repeated long past their use-by date.

121 Stabilisation efforts of a similar scale were not implemented in the context of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The literature provides evidence that international mediation, especially by the UN, but also the EU, can secure sustainable agreements, although mediated settlements also frequently fail. However, the conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood have key obstacles to mediation in common. All cases are multi-level conflicts, consisting of internationalised secessionist conflicts, bilateral conflicts, and a geopolitical dimension. Germany and the EU were interested in conflict prevention but offered limited incentives for the parties to the conflict to change their preferences and approaches. For example, offering a tangible EU membership perspective or other rewards was never explicitly tied to engagement with the de facto authorities in the secessionist entities, thus missing potential opportunities for conflict management and peacebuilding.

The conflict dimensions are dynamic, that is, changing over time, and intertwined. Consequently, a multitude of actors and interests are involved. Disagreements about who should be considered a conflict party and thus sit at the table and whether stakeholders are involved in "good faith" have been present in all the protracted conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. While Russia has usually had a seat at the table, portraying itself as a mediator instead of a conflict party, non-state actors on all sides were mostly excluded from negotiations. Existing mediation formats have often merely simulated negotiations and been largely ineffective in facilitating comprehensive settlements, a tendency that has been reinforced by rising international tensions due to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Development Cooperation: Little Focus on the Conflicts

Ukraine and Georgia have been the most important partner countries for German development cooperation in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. Even though the range of programmes, mostly managed by GIZ, is broad, conflict-related aspects have only played a marginal role. The few projects that have addressed these aspects have done so indirectly, for instance, by fostering the social and economic integration of IDPs and refugees. Even if peacebuilding ambitions may play a role in the political planning phase, their impact on development practice has been marginal. Moreover, German development cooperation has only to a very limited extent engaged with the breakaway territories. EU-funded development cooperation has started to move in that direction, but encounters resistance from governments; less in the case of Moldova/Transnistria, more in the case of Georgia/Abkhazia.

Civil Society Peacebuilding: Supported but Marginal(ised)

In all protracted conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, civil society actors have built and maintained valuable connections across conflict divides. German CSOs and foundations have been among the most active external donors and implementing organisations in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The German government has supported these actors mainly through the OEPR and zivik programmes, as well as through the Civil Peace Service and the German Political Foundations. However, a lack of strategy and vision on the part of government institutions on how the German civil society engagement can contribute to peacebuilding, deficient coordination of civil society and political engagement, the lack of long-term and institutional funding and finally the bureaucratisation of individual funding lines have presented substantial obstacles to achieving lasting impact.

Financial, human and political resources used to support civil society initiatives are miniscule compared to those used by conflict actors for entrenching the status quo. Civil society peacebuilding clearly plays a subordinate role in the priorities of international actors, especially in comparison to development cooperation, stabilisation measures and the security sector.

Dwindling social and political support for peacebuilding processes and actors has been one of the key challenges. Since civil society peacebuilding often has little public visibility or large-scale immediate results, the credibility of the actors involved decreases the longer the conflict remains unresolved.

Interventions working with actors outside narrow peacebuilding circles and generating more tangible results for wider parts of the conflict-affected societies, for example, in the areas of healthcare, education, or development, have remained rare and small-scale.

Recommendations

Germany's foreign policy makers must be aware that managing the status quo is at best a temporary measure to avoid a resumption of violence. The perpetuation of the protracted conflicts creates path dependencies and well-entrenched behavioural patterns among the actors, which can result in illusions of stability. But any weakening or strengthening of a party to a conflict – such as Russia's weakening due to its full-scale invasion of Ukraine – opens new opportunities and an adjustment of actor strategies. These "windows of opportunity" are utilised by those interested and capable of radically changing the status quo. When the West is disinterested or perceived as such, this can turn into a contributing factor for the resumption of violence. Russia's all-out war in Ukraine and the continuing violence in and around Nagorno-Karabakh should serve as a reminder that the current policy – at times significant involvement, but without a strategic vision about tangible outcomes – cannot sustainably stabilise the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood.

The first recommendation thus holds that Germany needs to develop a strategy for civilian conflict management and peacebuilding in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood that reflects both the specifics of the conflicts and Germany's own values and interests, but also the linkages and German leverage. Hence, the study highlights the need for strategising, based on thorough conflict analysis, including an untangling of the different conflict dimensions and potential opportunities on each dimension and strategic foresight. Ultimately, Germany needs to spell out its interests, priorities, and concrete goals with regard to civilian conflict management and peacebuilding in the region. Such a strategy should be complemented by implementation road maps and accompanied by comprehensive, regular and independent scientific evaluation (prospective, process- and impact evaluation). Germany needs to define tangible and measurable goals and operationalise, implement and evaluate them together with its partners and the parties to the conflict.

The most important short- to mid-term goal should be **entrenching the principle of non-use of force and establishing credible multilateral enforcement mechanisms to deal with violations**. While monitoring is helpful, it has limits when it comes to deterring future aggression. In addition to monitoring, thus, Germany, together with its partners, should constantly reinforce the pre-eminence of non-violence, threaten any would-be violators with a viable set of robust sanctions and reward cooperation. Threats and incentives need to be specific, concrete and credible to be effective.

A second important short- to mid-term goal should be to **improve the living conditions for the conflict-affected population on all sides and to work on overcoming isolation.** This should involve improving mobility across the divides and in the direction of the EU, enhancing crossing points and other infrastructure, increasing trade and economic relations, setting up financial transaction mechanisms, advancing communication, disaster relief, health policy and educational exchange. Such initiatives can be implemented using various instruments, including political and diplomatic, humanitarian, developmental and societal. From the perspective of human security and peace, the ideal scenario would be a successive opening of conflict lines for people-to-people interactions. Working on these two goals can facilitate confidence-building and, in the long-term, even conflict-transformation based on outcome-oriented cooperation.

In order to address these problems, the **development of a regional approach as well as conflict-specific strategies, reflecting local characteristic and specific entry points, is necessary**. Such a combined approach would enable strategic and sustainable work and a focus on local needs and opportunities.

It would also create a framework for the meaningful coordination of the various instruments and measures.

The second recommendation is to increase significantly the coordination between German conflict management and peacebuilding instruments and actors. A stronger integration of political, developmental and civil society activities is necessary to avoid contradictory actions, to promote synergies and to increase further the efficiency and effectiveness of German actors. Such an approach would also require **significant political backing from the top as well as adequate staffing in the embassies.** Currently, the necessary coordination between the different levels of engagement, the exchange with implementing organisations, the political support of peacebuilding measures and the exchange with local actors are not a given. Establishing a regionally-based conflict adviser for the South Caucasus and for Ukraine/Moldova at the Foreign Office could create synergies and increase the effectiveness of state- and non-state initiatives.

The third recommendation emphasises the need to foster civil society peacebuilding in times of war and uncertainties and to strengthen it in a targeted manner. The subordinate role of civil society conflict management and peacebuilding, especially in comparison with development cooperation and stabilisation, is problematic as it marginalises key actors. The shrinking social and political support for peacebuilding is particularly concerning. For civil society to increase its peacebuilding potential, more long-term as well as core funding and a decrease in bureaucracy are needed. This would allow civil society actors to plan their work more for the long term, which is necessary to enhance effectiveness in the context of protracted conflicts. Moreover, it would be beneficial to increase the focus on conflict management and peacebuilding within existing civil society support programmes. This is especially true for the OEPR programme, where peace has been the lowest funding priority so far. Furthermore, we suggest an extension of the Civil Peace Service to Georgia, Armenia and Moldova and a potential enlargement of the circle of sending organisations, based on open competition, past achievements and expected outcomes.

Fourth, 'development for peace' should be a guiding formula and be implemented by strengthening the development-peacebuilding nexus. Development projects should be linked to improvements for the peaceful coexistence of people in and around the contested territories and provide incentives for mediation and, eventually, conflict settlement. Most people affected by the conflict expect tangible improvements of their lives and living conditions. Any bus line or border crossing point opened holds the potential to contribute to peacebuilding. That way, instead of avoiding the conflicts, development cooperation could complement civil society peacebuilding and vice versa, generating synergies. Importantly, German and EU development cooperation possesses the economic and financial muscle that civil society initiatives lack. It could demonstrate a peace dividend and thereby increase the motivation of conflict parties to commit to sustainable conflict resolution. However, this would require for development cooperation to be linked to conflict-specific conditionality, compliance with which would require political buy-in from Germany, the EU and local authorities. Development cooperation could thus decrease the isolation of the conflict zones and their economic dependence on Russia.

Fifth, Germany should assume a more active mediation role that uses incentives and, when necessary, pressure. Previous and ongoing mediation formats in the region have been characterised by little progress or even failure. International mediators cannot be held responsible if the conflict parties do not show sufficient willingness to settle and compromise. However, by defining mutually beneficial goals instead of merely fixing "principles," they can improve chances of success. Agenda-setting power goes beyond keeping equidistance to the parties of the conflict; it entails envisioning potential gains that could change behavioural incentives and supporting "peace constituencies" that could "sell" agreements to the sceptics. At the same time, conditionalities, and in case of a deterioration of relations also sanctions, can be used to generate more commitment to peace. Germany has been often

hiding behind others under the guise of multilateralism, rather than deploying its significant political and economic power for agenda setting, as a provider of fora, as a funder, a facilitator and ultimately a mediator.

Mediation should become more inclusive and involve local conflict actors and civil society stakeholders. Although controversial, where possible and appropriate, Germany should encourage direct dialogue between the de-facto authorities and governments of the "parent states". If advances towards comprehensive agreements are unlikely for the foreseeable future, mediation efforts should focus on an improvement in the humanitarian conditions of the communities most directly impacted by the conflict. In this instance, identifying issues of mutual interest that the parties are willing to engage on is crucial. Should opportunities arise, as is currently the case between Armenia and Azerbaijan, it is crucial to act swiftly, decisively and, as much as possible, in coordination with Germany's partners and other stakeholders. Experience demonstrates that these openings for genuine mediation rarely occur and can quickly disappear again.

More inclusive mediation can also be achieved by **expanding the use of technical working groups** that focus on specific, non- (or less) political issues of more immediate and concrete benefit to local populations. Such efforts could be coordinated with humanitarian and development initiatives and actors. They may initially be more of an ad-hoc nature as dictated by need or opportunity but could gradually be regularised. As the example of Moldova/Transnistria illustrates, such working groups provide formats of interaction, confidence-building and communication with a high degree of resilience. They also contribute to the consolidation of networks of interlocutors. Facilitators or supporters of such working groups and related activities, however, should bear in mind that technical issues, too, may easily become politicised or securitised. It would thus be important to frequently check for conflicting objectives and allow for flexible adaptation.

Moreover, the set of international actors involved and formats dealing with the protracted conflicts should be reassessed. Fora that have not delivered for years should be discarded, if alternatives are on the horizon. Turkey should be encouraged to pursue a constructive peace agenda in conjunction with the EU. Ultimately, opportunities could be explored to involve Turkey in the Geneva International Discussions regarding Abkhazia. Similarly, EU-led mediation efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan would benefit from constructive Turkish involvement. The effectiveness of any such development, however, would also depend on how clearly a vision of peace for the South Caucasus Germany and its partners can develop and how this will fit into an overall strategic approach to this region.

There is a need to facilitate confidence building not only among the conflict parties on the ground but also among external stakeholders. Existing formats like the Minsk Group, the 3+2 or the GID may no longer be functional in their established format (i.e., with Russian participation), but they still involve other important stakeholders and/or could be re-constituted. The key purpose of such efforts would be to consolidate and enhance resource coordination, joint agenda setting and commonality of purpose among external stakeholders in each of the conflict situations with a view towards creating a more conducive regional and global geopolitical environment for conflict management and peacebuilding. Given its own resources, interests and status (including in the EU, NATO and the OSCE as well as in bilateral relations with other key actors), Germany could take a leading role in initiating and shaping such a reconfiguration.

The sixth recommendation is to utilise the EU integration perspectives for peacebuilding. The European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership were originally designed as a means to keep aspiring EU members out of the EU while opening opportunities for export and for free trade. The Eastern Partnership countries were not considered for a "European Perspective" due to Russia's claim for spheres of influence, their democratic deficits and unresolved conflicts. However, after Russia's

full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the EU can no longer afford to keep the Eastern Neighbourhood "out in the cold", otherwise the space will be left to increasing influence by Russia, China and possibly Turkey and Iran, with destabilising consequences.

EU integration in itself will not resolve the conflicts. Germany and the EU should try to improve the image of the EU in the breakaway territories through the provision of tangible benefits to the wider population. For the Georgian-Abkhaz context, one such possibility could be to enhance student mobility from Abkhazia to Germany and the EU, something that the UK has already achieved with its Chevening Scholarships. Moreover, **Germany and the EU should aim to link EU integration processes to progress in conflict management and peacebuilding**. In particular in the currently highly volatile geopolitical and security environment, for Tbilisi-controlled territory but also Abkhazia, Berlin's **external communication should be sensitive to individual conflict settings and dynamics.** Equating the events and structures in Donbas to Abkhazia and South Ossetia undermines German and EU credibility in the conflict regions. Moreover, while the impact of the potential expansion of the DCFTA to Abkhazia often tended to be overrated in the past, the disruptions and re-configuration of supply lines in the context of the Russian invasion may offer new opportunities.

With respect to Moldova, developing a conflict settlement strategy that reflects the country's EU accession priorities will be critical. This will require careful synchronisation of reforms in Moldova with continuing engagement with Transnistria. The current approach to the conflict settlement process, primarily based on confidence-building measures, will need to be rethought: the conflict parties, with support from Germany and other Western partners, need to find ways to move beyond the status quo. Drawing on its own experiences with unification and on the negotiations over the application of the DCFTA to Transnistria, Germany should continue both its direct engagement with Chisinau and its support through the EU and OSCE. Germany should take a more active coordinating role across agendas, formats and institutions. This could include the appointment of an EU Special Representative for Moldova, specifically tasked with facilitating coordination between the so far parallel accession and conflict settlement processes, especially when actual accession negotiations open. This could ensure that a **conflict settlement perspective is duly reflected in the negotiation of each accession chapter and contribute to developing a strategic communication strategy that can consolidate and expand pro-accession and pro-peace constituencies** on both banks of the Nistru.

Seventh, Germany should use the current window of opportunity related to Russia's involvement in Ukraine for increased engagement in the protracted conflicts. Russia's power projection capabilities are significantly weakened as a result of the war. This offers opportunities for outreach to the authorities and populations, in particular in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia but also Armenia, that is, where Russian influence had been strong. This might (at least in some cases) positively contribute to Germany's and the EU's clout. Increased cooperation could be in their interest, too, in order to reduce their potentially dangerous dependence on Moscow. Germany and the EU should make attractive development offers, but also consider alternative mediation and security provision, as has been started to a limited extent with the EU's and Germanys involvement in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, where, moreover, credible alternatives to Russia as a pretentious "peacekeeper" should be explored. Reducing or replacing the role of Russia, however, could only be achieved with a further weakening of Russia and a willingness and ability to commit own resources, including military and police forces for robust peacekeeping. Any such strategy needs to be developed and implemented with great care and a judicious consideration of the high levels of anxiety among populations in and near the conflict zones.

It is important to identify and anticipate such windows of opportunity as well as the risks associated with them at an early stage. In order to achieve this, early warning and crisis response mechanisms need to be strengthened and further developed. Especially Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated that research by think tanks or universities and hands-on analysis from civil society should inform institutional knowledge production on developments in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Moreover, intelligence fusion and regular situation reports, including joint scenario development with planning staff in the Foreign Office and the Ministries of Defence, Development and Interior are needed and should be mandated.

These recommendations can only provide a starting point for the revision of Germany's approach to conflict management and peacebuilding in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. However, based on the examples we have scrutinised, the scope for action is by far not exhausted. Often, further investments would not require additional funding but a stronger political stance, diplomatic initiatives, a coherent strategy, serious evaluation and impact-oriented staffing. If Germany adjusted its foreign policy based on the recommendations provided above, it would bring itself closer to the ambitions declared in key policy documents such as the new National Security Strategy, the Guidelines "Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace" and to its self-image as a global peace actor.

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The Advisory Board brings together civil society and academic expertise on crisis prevention and peacebuilding and advises the German government on these topics. It is appointed for four years and comprises 20 experts from academia, foundations and civil society organisations. It supports the implementation of the Guidelines "Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace" adopted by the German government in 2017. The Advisory Board fosters constant exchange between the Federal Government and civil society. It publishes positions on overarching strategic questions. In addition, it develops contributions on pertinent issues. Further information on the Advisory Board, as well as its publications, can be found at: https://beirat-zivile-krisenpraevention.org

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