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The Challenges of the EU's Policy of Non-recognition and Engagement

The EU has a strategic interest in eliminating white spots or black holes on the map of its immediate neighborhood¹. The Russia-Georgia war of 2008 called for the need of urgent action and gave the push to a wake-up of the EU. Guided by the vision that being firm on principle one should be pragmatic in practice², the EU started a thorough consideration of a new policy to address the consequences of the war and a new reality established on the ground. Subsequently, in December 2009 the Political and Security Committee supported the “EU’s policy of non-recognition and engagement for Abkhazia and South Ossetia” authored by the EU Special Representative for the Crisis in Georgia. Although classified³ and never officially communicated with the Government of Georgia, the main parameters of this policy have frequently been channeled through various means that makes its fundamental principles well-known.

The adoption of the EU policy practically coincided with the introduction of the new policy of the Government of Georgia towards the occupied territories – Engagement Through Cooperation and the Action Plan for Engagement⁴. Similarly guided by the need for pragmatism and engagement, as a sovereign actor, Georgia elaborated own policy towards its regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia thus establishing a clear vision and keymechanisms for peaceful reintegration of these territories and their populations into Georgia’s constitutional ambit⁵. The EU has welcomed Georgia’s policy as an important tool for reconciliation⁶.

Since the goals and priorities of the EU policy do not fully coincide with those of any parties⁷, this paper aims to examine the main principles of the EU’s non-recognition and engagement policy and their correlation with the strategic aims and principles of Georgia’s engagement agenda.

a) Non-recognition

Non-recognition of a self-proclaimed independence of Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia is a foremost pillar of the EU policy that shapes the whole vision and approach towards these entities. The firm position and commitment of the EU on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia lies at the heart of the EU-Georgia partnership that within the years advanced to the stage of signature of an Association Agreement, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) and to the possible introduction of visa-free regime.

¹ Perspectives for engagement, dialogue and cooperation to address the consequences of the war between Russia and Georgia: a forward looking approach, Presentation by the Special Representative for the South Caucasus, Peter Semneby, to the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Paris, 17 January 2011 (hereinafter Peter Semneby)

² Id.; Sabine Fisher, The EU’s non-recognition and engagement policy towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia, European Institute for Security Studies, Brussels, 1-2 December 2010 (hereinafter Sabine Fisher, EU’s policy)

³ IskraKirova, Public Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution: Russia, Georgia and the EU in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, Paper 7, 2012 (hereinafter IskraKirova)

⁴ State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation, Government of Georgia Order N107, 27 January 2010; Action Plan for Engagement, Government of Georgia Order N885, 3 July 2010 (hereinafter State Strategy and Action Plan)

⁵ Id.

⁶ Statement by the spokesperson of HR Catherine Ashton on the adoption of the Georgian Action Plan for Engagement for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, A 128/10, Brussels, 8 July 2010; European Parliament Resolution “on Negotiations of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement” 17 November, 2011; Council of the European Union, Council Conclusions on the South Caucasus, 3149th Foreign Affairs Council meeting, Brussels, 27 February 2012

⁷ Sabine Fisher, EU’s policy

The continued support for Georgia's internationally recognized borders turned into the acknowledgment of the fact of Russian occupation of its territories. The European Parliament has strongly condemned "the unacceptable and disproportionate military action by Russia and its deep incursion into Georgia, which violates international law" and underlined "that there is no legitimate reason for Russia to invade Georgia, to occupy parts of it and to threaten to override the government of a democratic country."⁸ The further statements and EP resolutions have strengthened the suit⁹.

The primacy of territorial integrity principle brings the EU and Georgia's policies together. The unwavering support for non-recognition policy and the continued reiteration of its firm position appears crucial for Georgia, since in a situation when due to the position of Russian Federation the UN Security Council will never be able to adopt a resolution calling on all member states not to recognize the illegal entities of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, similar to one adopted with regard to Northern Cyprus¹⁰, and an implemented paycheck diplomacy of Russian Federation (although generally perceived as failed¹¹) opting for the legitimization of these entities¹², the threat for such recognition remains on the agenda.

While the non-recognition course is never questioned by any parties, one should keep in mind that non-recognition per se implies that places don't exist in international relations, i.e. the territories failed to achieve international recognition¹³. In this regard, there are no exaggerated expectations on any side, however it is openly stated that the achievement of maybe not "internationally recognized independence but an enhanced level of self-sustainability and political maneuverability"¹⁴ as well as of de-facto, rather than de jure cooperation with the external world enabling to actively develop the "statehood", inter alia through establishing economic ties¹⁵ would be an important goal for the Russian Federation and their backed "authorities" in the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.

In this regard the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in Namibia case is noteworthy since the ICJ identified those relations which were incompatible with the determination of illegality of administration, such as entering into treaty relations, invoking and applying already existing treaty relations, exchanging diplomatic or consular missions and entering into economic relations, in other words any acts or dealing that could "imply a recognition" that the situation was legal¹⁶. Hereby, the ICJ introduced the concept that non-recognition may not per se refer to only diplomatic non-recognition.

⁸ European Parliament Resolution "On the situation in Georgia", September 3, 2008

⁹ José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, Statement, November 17, 2010; European Parliament Resolution "On the EU-Russia summit", June 9, 2011; European Parliament Resolution "On an EU Strategy for the Black Sea", January 20, 2011; European Parliament Resolution "on Negotiations of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement" 17 November, 2011

¹⁰ UNSC, The Situation in Cyprus, Resolution 550, 11 May 1984

¹¹ Id.; Giorgi Badridze, Russia should understand that the Cold War is over, *THE INDEPENDENT*, February 20, 2012; Archil Gegeshidze, The sustainability of the policy of non-recognition of Abkhazia, *International Alert*, March 2011

¹² *Luke Coffey, Georgia and Russia – The Occupation Too Many Have Forgotten, HERITAGE FOUNDATION, May 31, 2012; Anton Doroshev, Russia Sent Aid to Nauru, Nicaragua After Ossetia's Recognition, BLOOMBERG, May 16, 2012; Sept 2012 – Russians ready to land, PACIFIC ISLANDS NEWS, May 16, 2012; Tim Hume, Why are a South Pacific island and a former Soviet state so cosy?, THE INDEPENDENT, 14 February 2012*

¹³ Nina Caspersen & Antje Herrberg, Engaging unrecognized states in conflict resolution: An opportunity or challenge for the EU?, December 2010 (hereinafter Nina Caspersen & Antje Herrberg)

¹⁴ Irakli Khintba, The EU and the Conflicts in the Eastern Neighborhood: The Case of Abkhazia, Heinrich Boll Stiftung, September 26, 2010 (hereinafter Irakli Khintba)

¹⁵ Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Interfax news agency, Moscow, 24 December 2010

¹⁶ Legal Consequences for States of the Continued Presence of South-Africa in Namibia notwithstanding Security Council Resolution 276 (1970), ICJ Reports (1971)

In such ambit, it should not surprise anyone that Georgia sees the pursuit of non-recognition policy not only through the prism of international recognition vis a vis international law, but through such elements of engagement as contacts with de-facto authorities, documents for travelling outside the occupied territories, economic ties and cooperation, capacity building, etc. that could potentially directly or indirectly contribute to the mentioned aims of de-facto legitimization and therefore in a situation where even the minimum threat for the de jure recognition persists, prepare the basis for this to happen in future. This fear of Georgia that such elements of international engagement might lead down to a slippery slope¹⁷ is understood, especially when some may argue that at some point engagement increases the prospects for these entities to survive and thereby reduces their incentives to compromise¹⁸.

Despite the existing fears, Georgia has openly demonstrated its willingness to engage and fully supports the international engagement with its regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia. However, the attitude and vision of the EU and Georgia towards the above mentioned elements of engagement might vary. These elements are separately considered below.

b) Contacts with de-facto authorities

With the aim to increase leverage and footprint in the region of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, the EU has an interest in contacts with de-facto authorities of these entities and in stepping up of a structured dialogue that would enable the civil society representatives from these regions to freely engage with the EU¹⁹. This EU policy stands on the belief that certain number of actors within these entities, including de facto leadership and civil society members, are becoming more aware of Russia's impact and real intentions and thus fear that this will ultimately have negative repercussions on their "sovereignty"²⁰. Therefore, they have an interest in closer cooperation with external actors, such as the EU, especially when the latter tries and is advised to pursue the policy of a neutral actor²¹.

It has been stated that, though not overtly manifested, Abkhazians have a will to be open towards European influence and values, however, the exclusion of any interaction with their "official bodies" leads to the lack of credibility on the Abkhaz side²². Thus if this element of the EU engagement policy is implemented and if, together with the neutrality, the engagement would serve as a source for the modernization of Abkhazia, that would make the EU strategy more acceptable²³. The idea behind the readiness of Abkhaz leadership to develop contacts with the EU is easy to reveal especially when they are also advised that this would increase their chances of gaining recognition by the EU or by individual EU member states, as well as in case the democratization process develops within an entity and conforms with international standards, the West will be forced to recognize this process and participate in it²⁴. Direct contacts with the EU would also enable them to be seen not as Russian satellites but as political actors²⁵.

Not surprisingly the willingness to develop contacts with the EU is in no way connected to allowing such EU engagement within the region that would in reality be the most efficient tool for conflict resolution-the EUMM is denied the access inside the occupied territories, the activities of international organizations are not

¹⁷ IskraKirova

¹⁸ Nina Caspersen& Antje Herrberg

¹⁹ Sabine Fisher, EU's policy

²⁰ Id.

²¹ Thomas de Waal, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Spotlight on Georgia, Foreign Policy Center, 2009; IrakliKhintba

²² IrakliKhintba

²³ Id.

²⁴ NadezhdaVenediktova, The West's policy of non-recognition of Abkhazia's independence: consequences and prospects, International Alert, March 2011 (hereinafter NadezhdaVenediktova)

²⁵ Сергей Маркедонов, Вовлечь нельзя признать, 15.07.2010 (hereinafter Сергей Маркедонов)

allowed inside the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and in Abkhazia region they were mostly restricted to Gali²⁶, thus signaling the latter that their presence inside the whole region is not welcomed.

The EU's soft power is frequently challenged because of the inability of its member states to establish a principled and united position in the relationship with Russia²⁷. The policy of non-recognition and engagement can also be criticized because of the lack of adequate consideration and even ignoring of Russia's role over the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia. In this regard the EU sees its position only through the prism of continuing to insist that Russia complies with its international obligations, in particular with the full implementation of the Sarkozy-Medvedev ceasefire agreement, including the withdrawal of Russian troops to pre-war positions²⁸ - the requirement in which the EU has not achieved any progress so far²⁹ and will hardly achieve in the nearest future. Therefore, the EU started to elaborate its new policy and plan the future steps taking into consideration the existing status quo and de-facto accepting the fact that at this stage there cannot be done much other than putting an effort to increase its footprint.

In the context of rapidly advanced EU-Georgia approximation process and having in mind the signed Association Agreement, it is important for Georgia that the residents of the occupied territories living under the Russian propaganda³⁰ without the proper access to Georgian information resources, became fully aware of the benefits and opportunities that are attached to the EU as such and in particular to the EU-Georgia approximation process. In this regard, the increase of awareness about the EU inside these regions is a strategic interest as well³¹. However, the ways and mechanisms for this increase may vary and this is especially true with regard to the contacts with de-facto authorities. In a situation of the total political, economic and military control exercised by Russia³², any real change of priorities for the de-facto leaderships would question their own financial and even physical welfare. The latter also stipulates their willingness to maintain the contacts with the EU representatives only in case any chance of legitimization is seen. That is why it was also clearly stated that the openness towards the EU and strengthening of the EU's role couldn't be achieved at the expense of infringing or somehow prejudicing Russian interests³³.

In such situation it would be difficult to question the position of Georgia which does not object to informal, low-level contacts of the representatives of the EU with de-facto authorities that aim to observe the situation on the ground and monitor the implementation of EU's mainly humanitarian projects and initiatives inside Abkhazia region, however, considers the development of any structured dialogue between the two, especially without the direct involvement of Georgian side, as a threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity that can potentially have an adverse impact on the EU's non-recognition policy itself. On its side, the Georgian engagement policy mainly focuses on engagement with the populations of occupied territories, offering various opportunities, establishing mechanisms and creating incentives for people-to-people contacts and confidence building³⁴. Although this policy does not exclude and at this stage proactively suggests the communication with authorities in control inside the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia sees the role of the EU rather in supporting

²⁶ Council of Europe Secretary-General Consolidated Report on the conflict in Georgia, April 2013-September 2013, SG/Inf (2013) 38

²⁷ IskraKirova

²⁸ Peter Semneby

²⁹ IskraKirova

³⁰ Nadezhda Venediktova

³¹ The Communication and Information Strategy of the EU issues for 2014-2017, Government Decree N1237, 6 September 2013

³² International Crisis Group, Abkhazia: Deepening Dependence, Europe Report N202, 26 February 2010; Flemming Splidsboel, Russian power and the South Ossetian conflict, Royal Danish Defense College, 2009

³³ Natella Akaba and Irakli Khintba, Transformation of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict: rethinking the paradigm, 14 February 2011

³⁴ State Strategy and Action Plan for Engagement

Georgia's sovereign incentives and assisting in their implementation rather than in implementing a parallel engagement without paying a due respect to Georgia's strategic interests.

c) Capacity building

Another element of the EU's engagement policy refers to the implementation of not only humanitarian and primary needs based projects inside the occupied regions, but the engagement in such fields as economy, infrastructure rehabilitation, combating organized crime, etc., although with a strong emphasis on avoiding the politicization of such assistance³⁵.

This attitude is acceptable to de-facto leadership³⁶ as democratization and building of economy, without regard to Georgia, is considered as a means for supporting the state-building³⁷. Not surprisingly on their visit to Abkhazia region the representatives of the EU and the UN were urged for the change of the format of the assistance and were requested to provide the aid in the building and rehabilitation of roads, electricity, sewage and other community systems, provision of agricultural and community, as well as infrastructure building techniques³⁸.

The potential for the delivery of such assistance is naturally cautiously observed by Georgia since despite a strong will for de-politicization, the selected fields themselves do not leave much space for flexibility. This is especially true with regard to economic engagement that is directly linked with the recognition and legitimization of a number of elements that are integral parts of economic activity. The EU had to itself acknowledge this reality when with a purpose of avoiding any illicit trade it has linked the application of the DCFTA in relation to Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia with the restoration of the effective control over them³⁹. On the other hand, there is also the Law of Georgia on Occupied Territories operational, which due to the fact that Georgia is deprived of the possibility to exercise effective control over its territories, makes any economic activities inside these regions illegal if not conducted in accordance with Georgian legislation⁴⁰. In this regard the case of Northern Cyprus is also noteworthy when the European Court of Justice ruled that the EU member-states could no longer accept movement and phyto-sanitary certificates from TRNC authorities and that these certificates could only be issued by authorities from the Republic of Cyprus, as well as TRNC postage stamps were proclaimed "illegal and of no validity"⁴¹.

Some regard that Abkhazia region compared to Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia has a potential for building a "state" and capacity for self-governance and therefore it should try to pursue democratization and capacity-building agenda⁴² that, as indicated above⁴³, would assist their future recognition. In this situation the implementation of any economic engagement with Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South

³⁵ Sabine Fisher, EU's policy

³⁶ «Важно, что сигналы руководства Абхазии были услышаны», - Ираклий Хинтба, *Apsnypress*, 28.06.2013, <http://apsnypress.info/news/9398.html>; Политика Евросоюза в отношении к Абхазии стала несколько меняться, *Apsnypress*, 25.05.2010, <http://apsnypress.info/news/855.html>

³⁷ Irakli Khintba; Nadezhda Venediktova

³⁸ Постоянный координатор UNDP в Грузии провёл встречу с лидером абхазского режима, 12.12.2013, <http://abkhazeti.info/abkhazia/2013/1386891136.php>

³⁹ Text of the initialed EU-Georgia Association Agreement, Title VIII, Article 426

⁴⁰ The Law of Georgia on Occupied Territories, N431-II, 23 October 2008, Article 6

⁴¹ Scott Pegg, *De facto States in the International System*, Institute of International Relations, The University of British Columbia, 1998

⁴² Сергей Маркедонов; Alexander Cooley & Lincoln A. Mitchell, *Engagement without recognition: A new strategy toward Abkhazia and Eurasia's unrecognized states*, *The Washington Quarterly*, 22 September 2010 (hereinafter Alexander Cooley & Lincoln A. Mitchell)

⁴³ See footnote 37

Ossetia and capacity-building of the latter without paying due regard to Georgia would contain serious threats of legitimization of any illegal entities or institutions within these territories.

d) Travel documents

To combat the isolation of the occupied territories and enable the engagement, EU's non-recognition and engagement policy envisages the need for pursuing smart policy on granting visas to inhabitants of Abkhazia region and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia as this may also increase the sympathy towards the EU⁴⁴.

In Georgia's context the right to freedom of movement, to which the de facto leaderships often refer⁴⁵, is irreversibly linked with illegal Russian "passportization" conducted within the occupied territories. The vast majority of persons residing in these territories possess either an Abkhazian/Ossetian passport, which directly involves actual symbol and practical aspect of "sovereignty"⁴⁶, and/or a Russian one issued by the latter's Embassies in Sokhumi and Tskhinvali. In this regard the report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (commonly known as Tagliavini Report) put straightforward that "the mass conferral of Russian citizenship to Georgian nationals and the provision of passports on a massive scale on Georgian territory, including its breakaway provinces, without the consent of the Georgian Government runs against the principles of good neighbourliness and constitutes an open challenge to Georgian sovereignty and an interference in the internal affairs of Georgia."⁴⁷ Hereby, naturally the absolute majority of countries refuse to grant visas to persons holding such illegal passports⁴⁸.

In search for a neutral solution and provision of alternative opportunities for travel, Georgia introduced a Status Neutral Travel Document (SNTD) called as an important step forward in Georgia's engagement strategy and a de-isolation option⁴⁹. Moreover, the issuance of appropriate documents facilitating the enjoyment of human rights, including the freedom of movement, has been stated as a duty of a sovereign state and thus through introducing the SNTD Georgia acted as a responsible, flexible, sensitive and pragmatic manner consistent with international law and practice⁵⁰. The document was designed in a way that its holder is acknowledged as a person whose nationality is not identified, i.e. the document is neutral with regard to the nationality and contains no state symbols⁵¹. The SNTD has been recognized by 12 countries so far including US and 9 EU member states (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Bulgaria, US, Japan and Israel).

⁴⁴ Sabine Fisher, EU's policy

⁴⁵ МИД Абхазии считает «бегом против времени» то, что Грузия продолжает настаивать на закрытии граждан Абхазии от международного общения, Apsnypress, 16.01.2014, <http://apsnypress.info/news/11022.html>; Политика Евросоюза в отношении к Абхазии стала несколько меняться, Apsnypress, 25.05.2010, <http://apsnypress.info/news/855.html>; Премьер-министр встретился с делегацией Евросоюза, Apsnypress, 22.04.2010, <http://apsnypress.info/news/432.html>; Nadezhda Venediktova

⁴⁶ Alexander Cooley & Lincoln A. Mitchell

⁴⁷ IFFMCG report, Volume I, September 2009

⁴⁸ Максим Гвинджия: Международное сообщество пытается изолировать Абхазию, лишая наших граждан права на свободное передвижение, Apsnypress, 18.06.2010, <http://apsnypress.info/news/1010.html>; Чешское консульство отказало студентам из Абхазии в учебной визе, Apsnypress, 15.01.2014, <http://apsnypress.info/news/11016.html>; Посольство Латвии в России отказало в визах команде КВН «Нарты из Абхазии», Apsnypress, 1.08.2011, <http://apsnypress.info/policy/3820.html>; Абхазским танцорам отказали во въездной визе в Польшу, Apsnypress, 13.06.2013, <http://apsnypress.info/news/9252.html>

⁴⁹ Implementation of the European Neighborhood Policy in Georgia, Progress in 2011 and recommendations for action, SWD(2012) 114, Brussels 15.5.2012

⁵⁰ Rainer Hoffmann, John Packer & Antje Herrberg, Comparative Study on Status Neutral Travel Documents, European Forum for International Mediation and Dialogue e.V., July 2011

⁵¹ Bill on Neutral Travel Documents Passed with Final Reading, Civil Georgia, 1 July 2011, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=23693>

Obviously the further recognition of the document by Western European countries would make it more operational and demanded.

Despite some options and alternatives offered, de-facto authorities in the region of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia show little flexibility when it comes to finding compromise solutions to travelling issue⁵². Various suggestions were rejected outright and the SNTD has been disapproved⁵³ as a Georgian initiative and engagement strategy instrument. The position of Georgia to strongly oppose any attempts of legitimization of either Abkhazian/Ossetian or illegal Russian passports is perfectly understandable, as consistent with international law, even for those who despite this acknowledgment still continue to urge for allowing Abkhazians and Ossetians to travel with illegal documents⁵⁴. Granting of visas in such passports would undermine the EU's non-recognition policy as well. Hereby, it is important for Georgia and the EU to pursue the firm policy of preventing the legitimization of illegal travel documents and at the same time maintain close cooperation on jointly suggesting the neutral solutions, inter alia the SNTD, as a means for enjoying the freedom of movement.

Conclusion

The main goal of the EU's non-recognition and engagement policy is to increase the footprint in Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia currently occupied and effectively controlled by Russia. Through the means of contacts, provision of various assistance, potential suggestion of educational and other opportunities, the policy aims to increase EU's visibility and show the alternative to Russian influence. However, over the several years after the launch of the EU's strategy little impact can be observed on the ground and the policy's content remains unclear⁵⁵. On one side this is conditioned by the restrictive Russian policy conducted in occupied territories and the position of the de-facto leaderships which try to link every possible engagement with the prospects of legitimization and the engagement policy of Georgia, on the other, which tries to eliminate such legitimization risks and sees the EU primarily as the strategic partner in the implementation of its own engagement policy.

After all, the EU, despite its efforts, cannot be seen as a neutral mediator as the fundamental pillar for its policy is non-recognition and this is what makes it a fellow of Georgia's engagement strategy. These two are also common in the aims of designing mechanisms for de-isolation of occupied territories, increasing the awareness about the EU inside the respective regions and providing various social, economic, educational and other opportunities to the residents of these territories. However, the fear of being rejected makes the EU keener to put a blind eye on a partnership with Georgia when offering the mentioned opportunities, while the strategic interest of Georgia rests in showing to its regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia that EU and Georgia are becoming synonyms, that Georgia is practically the EU, it moves to the EU with a rapid speed and therefore all the benefits and opportunities that may bestem from the relationships with the EU cannot be achieved without paying a due regard to Georgia and agreeing on its relevant participation. Hereby, it is important that the EU engagement does not come on unconditional basis and without reciprocal concessions⁵⁶ as well as without thoroughly assessing and discussing all the threats that may be attached to the implementation of some elements of the EU policy considered above.

⁵² Sabine Fisher, *How to Engage with Abkhazia?*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, November 2010; *Абхазия предлагает Евросоюзу признать абхазские загранпаспорта*, Apsnypress, 8.02.2012, <http://apsnypress.info/news/5382.html>; IskraKirova

⁵³ Id.; Sokhumi, *Tskhinvali Snub Planned Neutral Travel Documents*, Civil Georgia, 16 April 2011, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=23353>

⁵⁴ Alexander Cooley & Lincoln A. Mitchell

⁵⁵ IskraKirova

⁵⁶ Id.

At this stage, when the political leverage of Russia cannot be disregarded, it is important for the EU and Georgia to target bottom-up venues for conflict transformation which remain open and freer from the constraints of regional and international politics and focus on people, facilitate dialogue, confront misperceptions and bridge narratives⁵⁷. Engagement with the ordinary residents of occupied territories, supporting and assisting the latter in their efforts for a better life, counting on their pragmatism and willingness in this regard, and at the same time continuing endeavors to ensure the compliance of all the parties with international obligations could be the key elements of both EU's and Georgia's engagement policies that in medium or long term perspectives might bring tangible results.

⁵⁷ Id.