



In partnership with NGOs in Consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations



<https://eume.upf.org>



<https://ciridecosoc.ch/>



<https://recovi.org/>

Nelson Mandela International Day Proceedings

Theme: “The Role of Youth in Peacebuilding in Eastern Europe’s South Caucasus - Ambassadors for Peace Training”

18th-19th of July 2025

*Sokhumi State University,
Tbilisi, Georgia*

Project Overview

International Nelson Mandela Day 2025 in Georgia was organized under the academic and diplomatic auspices of Mariam Bregvadze (UN ECOSOC NGO Representative & Delegate) and Lika Chimchiuri (Assistant to the Rector of Sokhumi State University, UN ECOSOC NGO Representative & Delegate), in partnership with UN ECOSOC NGOs, the Universal Peace Federation, CIRID (Centre Indépendant de Recherches et d'Initiatives pour le Dialogue), and RECOVI (Réveil Communautaire d'Assistance aux Victimes), Tbilisi, Friday 18 July. The event was realized with the generous support and valuable assistance of Prof. Dr. H.E. Amb. Zurab Khonelidze, President of the Georgian Academy of Educational Sciences and Rector of Sokhumi State University.

The two-day seminar's theme was: "Nelson Mandela International Day - The Role of Youth in Peacebuilding in Eastern Europe's South Caucasus", from Friday the 18th to Sunday the 19th of July 2025 at Sokhumi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia.

Inspired by the United Nations General Assembly's Resolution of 24th of September 2018, which established the Nelson Mandela Decade of Peace (2019-2028)¹, partner organizations and academic institutions have drowned on Mandela's legacy to engage young people in an intergenerational participatory training program focused on best practices in conflict transformation. The Opening Day served as both a celebration of Nelson Mandela's life and legacy and as the official launch of the *Ambassadors for Peace* training program in the Southern Caucasus Region. This event offered a moment of cultural exchange among participants and organizers, featuring discussions on Mandela's impact and the distribution of booklets highlighting his legacy.

¹ The Nelson Mandela International Decade of Peace's official United Nations' website:
https://www.un.org/en/events/mandeladay/decade_of_peace.shtml

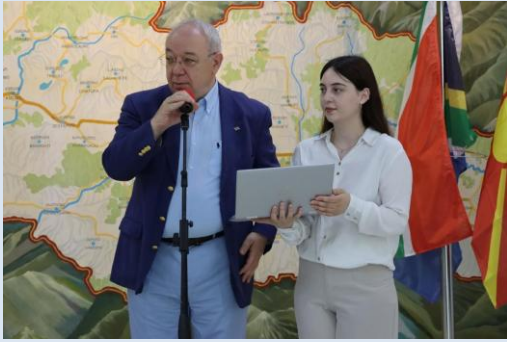
Contents

1. The Georgian Paradigm of Peace by Zurab Khonelidze	6
2. Review of the South Caucasus Conflicts by George Nickolaishvili	11
3. South Caucasus – 2025: Global Challenges and New Opportunities for Conflict Resolution by Paata Zakareishvili	19
4. International Community’s Involvement in Conflict Resolution Efforts (Abkhazia) by Malkhaz Kakabadze.....	30
5. The World Peace Process & Its Georgian Paradigm by Nugzar B. Ruhadze	38
6. Managing of the diversity as a Soft Power Asset in the Western Balkans by Rubin Zemon	43
7. PARABLES AND PARADIGM SHIFTS: NAVIGATING COMPLEXITIES IN A CHAORDIC AGE by Jody Jensen	59
8. Secrecy, Security, Candour, Trust, Cooperation, Solidarity by Ferenc Miszlivetz	73
9. Science Diplomacy and Youth by Veronika Wittman	84
10. From Mandela to the Georgian Paradigm of Peace: Building Bridges Between Africa and the Caucasus by Joel M. Hakizimana	95
11. Messages of Hope: From Mandela’s Legacy to the LoveForce Movement by Carl Gustav Bjertnes	98

Redactors:

Lika Chimchiuri - United Nations Representative of the ECOSOC NGO *CIRID*; Assistant to the Rector and Invited Lecturer at Sokhumi State University; LL.B., LL.M., Ph.D. student in Law at Caucasus International University Tbilisi, Georgia; member - scholar of the Cyber Jurisprudence International Initiative (CyJurII).

Mariam Bregvadze - United Nations Representative of the ECOSOC NGO *RECOVI* (*Awakening for Community Assistance to Victims*) and ECOSOC NGO *CEDAC* (*Centre d'Encadrement et Développement des Anciens Combattants*); Ph.D. Student in Political Science at Caucasus International University, Master of Diplomacy and International Politics, Tbilisi, Georgia.



Prof. Dr. Zurab Khonelidze is the Rector of Sokhumi State University (SSU) in Tbilisi and the President of the Georgian Academy of Educational Sciences. He holds the diplomatic rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and has played a significant role in shaping Georgian diplomacy and educational reforms.

Khonelidze’s diplomatic career includes service as Georgia’s senior representative to the Commonwealth of Independent States and as head of Georgia’s diplomatic mission in Belarus

since 1997. He has consistently worked to strengthen international academic and diplomatic ties, meeting with ambassadors from Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, China, and other countries to develop cooperative educational projects.

He is the author of the concept of “University Diplomacy,” which positions universities as active actors in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. His book, *The Georgian Paradigm of Peace*, outlines this innovative approach, emphasizing the role of education and research as neutral platforms for Track II diplomacy.

Contact: zurabkhonelidze@gmail.com

The Georgian Paradigm of Peace

Introduction

The university, as a locus of education and scholarship, has always transcended the mere function of conferring academic degrees. Historically, it has been a decisive factor in shaping political, social, and cultural processes. *University Diplomacy* thus implies the broadening of the university's mission: alongside teaching and research, the university becomes a platform for conflict resolution and the promotion of peace.

This idea is not merely theoretical. It is grounded in Georgia's centuries long experience, where education and diplomacy frequently converged, and educational centers often fulfilled a peace building function.

Georgian Educational Tradition and Diplomacy

Georgia's history abounds with examples where education and diplomacy were intertwined. The Phasis Academy, medieval monasteries, the school founded by Peter the Iberian, and other centers served not only as institutions of knowledge, but also as mediators in political relations.

Georgian Christian philosophy articulated three cardinal principles: freedom, tolerance, and cultural identity. These values underpinned both the Georgian educational system and national statehood. Christian education and philosophy were directed toward the pursuit of peace ensuring survival, unity, and the continuity of the nation.

Numerous ecclesiastical and monastic schools functioned not only as spiritual institutions but also as educational and diplomatic hubs. They disseminated knowledge, cultivated intellectual leaders, and simultaneously facilitated dialogue both within the country and beyond its borders.

University Diplomacy - A New Form of Diplomacy

In the contemporary world, marked by globalization and rapidly shifting challenges, traditional diplomacy is often insufficient. It is precisely in this context that the need for *University Diplomacy* emerges.

The university possesses a unique set of resources: Academic freedom enabling impartial and open dialogue; Youth diversity the most vital, critical, and forward looking segment of society; Scholarship ensuring argumentation grounded in evidence and rational analysis.

University Diplomacy differs from *Science Diplomacy*. Whereas the latter focuses primarily on applying scientific achievements to resolve international issues, University Diplomacy is broader: it unites the university, diplomacy, and youth in shaping policies of peace.

In Georgia, this concept acquires particular symbolic weight through Sokhumi State University. As a "displaced university," it occupies a unique position: under the conditions of academic freedom, it can serve

as a central platform for dialogue on Georgian–Abkhaz and Georgian–Ossetian conflicts. In this sense, University Diplomacy takes on a truly practical dimension.

Learning Peace

Peace cannot be achieved through force. It begins with a transformation of consciousness, through education, and through the engagement of a new generation. University Diplomacy entails educating young people not only in academic disciplines but also in the philosophy of peace.

This involves: cultivating critical thinking, embracing diversity, acquiring skills for the peaceful regulation of conflicts.

“Learning peace” means that universities must prepare a new generation capable not only of professional excellence but also of supporting peace policies. In this framework, the purpose of education is societal transformation shifting from a conflict ridden condition toward a space where dialogue and cooperation prevail over confrontation.

University Diplomacy thus constitutes a response to the challenges facing Georgia and the broader region. It combines the free academic space with the experience of diplomacy, forging a new format in which youth and scholarship become central actors of peace.

For Georgia, this is not merely a theoretical construct but a practical opportunity: through the joint force of education and diplomacy, the country may find a pathway to national unity, peaceful conflict resolution, and stable regional development.

Thirty years of statehood have demonstrated that Georgia’s security and development cannot be secured solely through military strength or tactical political maneuvering. In the twenty first century, when international relations are reshaped instantly and global power centers exert influence even over small states, Georgia must reassess and rearticulate its mission.

Situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, between East and West, Georgia holds a unique position: to serve as a bridge between civilizations. Yet this geographic advantage is coupled with challenges, as powerful external actors continuously project their competing interests, often aggravating local conflicts.

Georgia’s choice is not isolation, but regional cooperation founded on education, culture, and economic integration.

The South Caucasus - A Geopolitical Space

The South Caucasus represents a coherent yet diverse region. It comprises three independent states Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia while to the north lie the constituent republics of the Russian Federation, which also influence the entire region.

The aspiration for unity in the South Caucasus has deep historical roots, yet its realization has

repeatedly failed due to the clashing interests of major powers, which impede the establishment of sustainable stability.

Georgia's particular role derives from its geographic and cultural position. Historically, Georgia has connected East and West. This bridging function should constitute the cornerstone of the country's modern policy: Georgia must become the organizing hub of regional cooperation.

Toward a New Format of Regional Cooperation

Peace and stability in the region require the establishment of a new cooperative format, based on three pillars:

1. Equal partnership among the three sovereign states Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia.
2. Active involvement of the United States and the European Union, serving as guarantors and balancing actors.
3. Civilizational unity, whereby common values integrate diverse ethnic groups.

Absent such a format, any "platform" whether locally generated or externally imposed will remain incomplete. Georgia's choice must therefore be to promote a model where every party perceives tangible benefits and where sovereignty remains inviolable.

Georgia's Function - A Bridge Between East and West

Georgia is not merely a transit corridor. Its function is far more profound: Economically and commercially it hosts vital energy and transport projects; Culturally it embodies the synthesis of Western and Eastern traditions; Academically its universities and research centers can serve as platforms for regional cooperation.

Georgia has the potential to become the very space where states, ethnicities, and religions converge around shared interests. This is not an abstract vision; it reflects the country's historical role, validated through centuries of survival and continuity.

Challenges and Risks

If regional cooperation fails to materialize in an appropriate format, Georgia and its neighbors face grave risks: Restriction of sovereignty, should states lose the ability to exercise free political choice; Risk of legitimizing occupation, whereby de occupation is replaced by consolidation of the status quo; Emergence of new dividing lines, in addition to existing *de jure* and *de facto* borders.

Georgia's choice, therefore, cannot be the passive acceptance of ill defined platforms. It must instead champion initiatives that safeguard sovereignty and unity.

Conclusion

Georgia's future will be determined not by isolation, but by cooperation. Within the South Caucasus, its role must be defined by its unique capacity to serve as a bridge between East and West. "Georgia's Choice" is not merely a political doctrine but a strategic vision, predicated upon: the equal participation of the region's states, the substantive involvement of the United States and the European Union, and the deployment of universities and education as platforms of peace. The realization of this vision will enable Georgia to emerge as a predictable, stable, and developing state, with security grounded in education, culture, and regional cooperation. The **Georgian Paradigm of Peace** proposes two fundamental dimensions: *University Diplomacy* the synthesis of education and diplomacy as a novel instrument of peace. *Georgia's Choice* regional cooperation and the country's function as a bridge between East and West. Together, these dimensions generate a new narrative in which Georgia is no longer perceived as a state beset solely by problems, but as a space of peace, dialogue, and cooperation.

References:

- Fedoroff, Nina V. "Science Diplomacy in the 21st Century." *Cell* 136, no. 1 (2009): 1–3.
- Jaspers, Karl. *Die Idee der Universität*. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer, 1961.
- Khonelidze, Zurab. "New 'Soft Power' for Sustainable Peace Building." In *2nd International Black Sea Journal Social Sciences Symposium: Proceedings*, 61–65. Giresun, Turkey, 2019.
- National Academies. *U.S. and International Perspectives on Global Science Policy and Science Diplomacy: Report of a Workshop*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2011.
- Nicolson, Harold. *Diplomacy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950.
- Pedersen, Olaf. *The First Universities: Studium Generale and the Origins of University Education in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Readings, Bill. *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Satow, Ernest. *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice*. 4th ed. London: Longmans, 1957.



H.E. Mr. George Nikolaishvili - retired senior diplomat, former Ambassador of Georgia to the Republic of Cuba, with more than 25 years of working experience within the MFA of Georgia, in the fields of International Organizations, Conflict resolutions and General political issues, former member of the OSCE missions to Moldova, Tajikistan and Kosovo.

Expert for multilateral diplomacy and peace building issues.

Contact: geonick57@yahoo.com

Review of the South Caucasus Conflicts

Introduction

In recent years the developments in the Middle East and in Ukraine pushed the political situation in the South Caucasus to the periphery of the international agenda. However, despite the reduced spotlight provided by experts and diplomats, this region continues to hold strategic importance.

The Caucasus is a unique bridge between Europe and Asia. This region is extremely important from the energy security standpoint. The Caucasus neighbors the Middle East, and some of the countries of the region share a border with Iran and Turkey who were key players in the Syrian conflict. It also constitutes a part of a larger Black Sea region where the two competing integration strategies clash (European Union and Eurasian Economic Union). Both Russia and the European Union (the latter went through a series of expansions in the 1990s and 2000s) view the South Caucasus region as its “close neighbor.” Russia’s situation in this regard is even more important since the North Caucasus, the territory of which is bigger than Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan together, is part of the Russian Federation.

Even though experts dealing with the post-soviet spaces currently pay less attention to the region due to ongoing military confrontation in Donbas (Southeast of Ukraine), the conflicts in the Caucasus still remain relevant. Neither of the conflicts can be considered resolved if the concept of resolution implies an encompassing compromise among all the parties involved.

1. Geographical background

The Caucasus region is located between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, encompassing Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and parts of Russia. It is mainly mountainous and plays a key geographical role as a link between Europe and Asia. Since ancient times, the Caucasus has had an unparalleled ethnic and cultural variety, with more than fifty distinct ethnic groups – speaking more than twenty-eight different languages and writing in four different alphabets.



2. Historical background

The Caucasus region has a long and complicated history, with invasions by numerous peoples such as Persians, Byzantines, Scythians, Alani, Huns, Khazars, Arabs, Seljuq Turks, and Mongols, as well as distant contacts with the Mediterranean world. The most relevant external actor, however, remains Russia, with a long history of involvement in the region – going as far back as the 16th century. Russia's control has been challenged since then and between 1817 and 1863 it has conducted the Caucasian War against coalitions of local tribes. From the Caucasian War until the present, there has been a tradition of military opposition to Russian sovereignty. Modern ethnic nationalism arose in a tsarist-controlled Caucasus, with local identities shaped by Russia's status as a cause of discontent. Under the context of the 1917 Russian Revolutions, the peoples of the Caucasus undertook futile attempts to construct separate republics, and there were numerous local uprisings in defiance of Soviet control during the 1920s and 1930s. The Red Army conquered the three newly constituted sovereign republics of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan in 1921.

During the Soviet Union's control, ethnic homelands in the Caucasus were gerrymandered to suit Moscow's divide-and-rule strategy. Stalin, in fact, pursued a policy of constructing geographical divisions whose borders did not correspond to ethnic realities, frequently combining competing ethnic groups under a single governmental entity. The intention was that of drawing borders that would raise tensions to facilitate Moscow's control. When this proved insufficient, the Soviet government resorted to large-scale population transfers, such as when Stalin deported vast numbers of North Caucasians, certain groups of Abkhazian region and s.c. Turkish Meskhetians from the south of Georgia to Central Asia during WWII.

3. Post-Soviet Disputes and Crisis

The dissolution of the Soviet Union did not deliver on the promise of a new peaceful beginning. Boris Yeltsin's Russia fought the First Chechen War between 1994 and 1996 in an attempt to suppress the rebellion in the Russian North Caucasus, with disastrous repercussions. Russia had greater success in the Second Chechen War (1999-2009), but armed opposition in the region has not been extinguished. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's demise, Armenia and Azerbaijan fought a war over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, while Georgia lost control of the rebellious regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, resulting in protracted or "frozen" conflicts that have yet to be resolved. When the Georgian administration attempted to retake control of South Ossetia in 2008, Russia replied with a catastrophic invasion that seemed to achieve its aims.

3.1 Nagorno-Karabakh



One of the most contentious ethno-territorial issues in the South Caucasus is the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia. For Armenians, who have historically been the demographic majority in Nagorno-Karabakh, the region was one of the few parts of medieval Armenia where they enjoyed significant independence from outside powers. By the late nineteenth century, however, the region had also become a key focus of a developing ethnic Azerbaijani cultural and political nationalism. During Tsarist control, the region was economically linked to other provinces that now comprise the republic of Azerbaijan, rather than to other Armenian-inhabited territories. The socio-economic factors of this dispute were crucial in its first stage. Despite living in a largely mountainous region, the people of Nagorno-Karabakh had a slightly greater degree of social and economic development than the rest of Azerbaijan. However, the region's Armenians were aware that life was even better in neighboring Armenia – thus becoming dissatisfied – believing that their lower standard of living was the result of the Azerbaijani government's deliberate policies, which controlled their development and economy. In 1988 the region's legislature passed a resolution to join the Republic of Armenia, but tensions and fights were still kept under control during the Soviet rule. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 though, Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence and war between Armenia and Azerbaijan for control of the region began. After thousands of deaths and Armenia's dominance, a cease-fire was reached in 1994 with the intervention of Russia. This brought a state of a de-facto independence of the region, despite its economic dependence on Armenia. This however didn't prevent tensions to remain present over the years, with casualties from both sides. In 2020, a second war broke out following months of cross-border raids. The war continued even when efforts for peace talks were made by the United Nations, the United States and Russia. After several of these tentative fail and six weeks of war, Russia successfully mediated an agreement backed by Russian peacekeepers. Armenia only retained a part of Karabakh while Azerbaijan recaptured most of the land it had lost two decades earlier. In addition, the deal

established the Lachin corridor, a narrow strip of land that would act as a transit route between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh and be under the observation of Russian forces.

In September 2023, Azerbaijan began a new offensive, launching drones and missiles toward Stepanakert, the provincial capital. This marked the beginning of the third war fought for control of the province – a war which lasted one day. The president of Karabakh declared that its army was outnumbered by Azerbaijani forces and that it was forced to submit and consent to the dissolution and complete disarmament of its armed forces, by which point Azerbaijan had caused at least 200 deaths and numerous injuries. Russia mediated a ceasefire which took effect on September 20. In contrast to 2020, during the most recent offensive, Armenia's armed forces made no attempt to protect the area, partly due to fear of additional aggression from Azerbaijan. There has been a significant departure of ethnic Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh following the triumph of Azerbaijan.

Additional info on NK before 2020:

The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh is the most dangerous. November 2017 marked the tenth year since the “Madrid Principles,” which stipulate the main provisions of the peace settlement, were developed. In July 2009 the updated version of the “basic principles” was published and the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group (Russia, USA, and France) urged the conflicting parties to reach an agreement by following the implementation of these principles. However, during all this time the sides did not take even the minimum steps to implement the considerations proposed by the mediators to Baku and Yerevan. Thus, the updated “Madrid Principles” remain a “rhetorical figure,” rather than a functioning algorithm for achieving peace.

It would be wrong to characterize the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict as “frozen.” Every year, the number of violent incidents along the “contact line” increases. In April 2016, the most significant violation of the ceasefire regime since the indefinite Armistice Agreement (May 12, 1994) entered into force was registered. Lower scale military clashes happened in February, May, June, July, and October 2017 (OSCE 2018).

Tensions also exist along the internationally recognized Armenian-Azerbaijani border, which is outside of Nagorno-Karabakh’s “contact line.” Violent incidents routinely happen along that border as well. Since June 2018, information on the so-called “Nakhichevan operation” has been widely circulated. Azerbaijan refers to it as “the liberation of 11K hectares of land,” although the details led to contradictory assessments and interpretations in Baku and Yerevan. In the summer of 2018, the number of incidents on the border of the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan and Armenia also increased. This area, while less famous than the Nagorno-Karabakh “contact line,” nevertheless harbors even more risks.

Nagorno-Karabakh is not recognized as an independent state and the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan has not yet been questioned. Even if Baku launches military operations, direct military interference by any third party is highly unlikely (although there is no doubt about full diplomatic pressure from all sides). The situation can be very different with the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, which is not viewed as a disputed territory. In the case of an open confrontation between Baku and Yerevan, interference by the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), where Armenia holds membership, is rather inevitable. As a member of this integration structure, Armenia can rely on the help of Russia and other partners. However, there are significant issues regarding the unity among the CSTO members especially considering Kazakhstan’s and Belarus’ highly developed relations with Azerbaijan (including the military-technical ties). At the same time, the unfolding of a negative scenario around Nakhichevan can raise collisions inside the Eurasian

integration projects that are actively supported by Moscow.

After the “velvet revolution” in Armenia, the negotiation process that already was not particularly effective, entered a stage of complete “stagnation.” The Armenian government’s positions represented by Nikol Pashinyan became more rigid. Statements on the necessity of involving the leadership of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) in the negotiations were made. Also, in fact, a precondition for returning to the negotiation table was set: Baku’s complete rejection of “military rhetoric.” Moreover, the negotiation process was labeled as “not an end in itself”. Even though after the “velvet revolution” the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan met twice, the meeting of the heads of the states of the two countries is unlikely before the parliamentary elections in Armenia.

3.2 South Ossetia and Abkhazia



South Ossetia and Abkhazia's desire for independence stems from ethnic conflicts that resulted from not only the history of the Caucasus and its richness and differences of cultures, but also from the policies previously discussed that were followed by the Soviet Union. The Abkhaz consider themselves ethnically separate from the Georgians and claim kinship with the Circassians – a group of Turkic people who were forcibly evacuated to the Ottoman Empire by the Russians following the Crimean War. The Abkhaz feel even more cut off from the rest of the Georgian people, who are predominantly Christians, because they converted to Islam during the Ottoman era in the 17th and 18th centuries. For these reasons, the Abkhaz formally declared their independence from Georgia in 1990, however the Georgian leadership later revoked this statement causing massive protests in Tbilisi sparked by separatists in the Abkhaz region. Moscow sent Russian troops in response to these demonstrations, meanwhile Georgia moved its soldiers to the breakaway territory in 1992, sparking fierce combat.

The Ossetian, on the other hand, are of Iranian origins. Despite the fact that in North Ossetia people are predominantly Christian and in the South there is a majority of Muslim, the two regions pursued a unified state following the Bolshevik revolution. However, Stalin separated them into the Autonomous Region of North Ossetia, which is part

of Russia, and the Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia, which is part of Georgia, in 1922, in accordance with the divide and rule strategies of the Soviet Union. South Ossetians once again declared their wish to join North Ossetia in 1988 – making a declaration in part in response to the growing wave of Georgian nationalism – to which the Georgian Parliament responded by eliminating South Ossetia's autonomy. After Georgia gained its independence in 1991, there was a significant exodus of South Ossetians into North Ossetia as a result of verbal disagreements that eventually escalated into deadly violence on both sides. In 1992, following three years of intermittent hostilities, Russia, South Ossetia, and Georgia concluded a ceasefire deal that resulted in the installation of a three-way peacekeeping force.

Politically, South Ossetia and Abkhazia emerged as de facto states albeit somewhat weak ones, even prior to the August 2008 Georgian-Russian War. Over the course of the last years, this process has been propelled by both organized crime and individual political goals, with both continuing to be heavily reliant on Russia on a political, economic, and military level.

Tensions never ceased and in the following years Russia's deepening of ties with South Ossetia angered Georgia, while Moscow was not pleased by Tbilisi's desire to join the EU and NATO. In 2008, both were accusing the other of a military build-up by the summer. The latter ended with a five-days war; Georgia launched a coordinated air and ground campaign against Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia. Subsequently, under the guise of assisting its nationals, since many Ossetians possess Russian passports, Russian tanks moved into South Ossetia. In a matter of days, Russia had taken charge, driven the Georgians from South Ossetia, and even launched an attack on the Tbilisi suburbs. The Russo-Georgian war – was provoked by Russia, as found by a European Union's report which also condemned the disproportionality of Russia's response – resulted in 800 deaths and the recognition by Russia of independence to both regions.

Additional info on above mentioned conflicts:

Compared to Nagorno-Karabakh the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia was and still remains calmer. The conflicts in this part of the Caucasus region are more in line with the definition of “frozen” ones. While there are no violent incidents, detentions and arrests of the representatives of one of the conflicting parties by law enforcement representatives of the other party, unfortunately, became a usual practice.

With Russia's recognition in 2008, Abkhazia and South Ossetia also acquired its military-political guarantees and social-economical support. Despite the official rhetoric of re-establishment of the territorial integrity as the country's most important national priority, Georgia is not attempting a military solution to re-establish its jurisdiction over Sukhumi and Tskhinvali. At the same time, border demarcation on the part of South Ossetia that is supported by Moscow (known as “borderization”) raises concerns in Tbilisi and in the West regarding Russia's advancement on the territory of Georgia proper. Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's choice toward the Russian Federation strengthens Tbilisi's ties with the US, NATO, and EU. The government led by the “Georgian Dream” not only did not revisit the pro-Western vector of policies adopted during Saakashvili period but also defined it more clearly. It was this government that initiated and later signed the Association Agreement with the European Union. In addition, in February 2017 Georgian citizens obtained a right for visa-free short-term travel to Schengen countries. Even though Tbilisi was not granted a NATO membership action plan (MAP), in September 2014 it received a substantial package of “enhanced partnership” with the North Atlantic Alliance.

4. Current Geopolitical Dynamics

The three South Caucasus governments were already getting closer to many of the political and economic power centers of the eastern Mediterranean and Persian Gulf than they were to Moscow and the Ukrainian war accelerated this ongoing process. Turkey is the second-most popular destination for migrant laborers from the Caucasus, including Armenia, behind Russia. Diaspora communities, especially in Mediterranean coastal states, indicate historical ties between the Middle East and the Caucasus. A significant minority of people from the North and South Caucasus, primarily Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Circassians, and Ossetians, reside in Turkey. Given the wide-ranging geopolitical tensions, Baku has long been wary of Iranian covert actions. Today, Azerbaijan has a variety of diplomatic, commercial, and security relations with Israel and Turkey, two of Iran's main adversaries. Where it had previously established military and political hegemony, Russia's attention on the war in Ukraine and its consequent forced passivity in the South Caucasus have left a security vacuum.

Out of all the regions of the former Soviet Union, only the Caucasus has neighboring countries that do not have diplomatic relations with each other, namely between Armenia and Azerbaijan and Russia and Georgia. Armenia does not have diplomatic relations with Turkey as well. Armenia's both borders (with Azerbaijan and Turkey) are closed. At the same time, the implementation of the regional Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project (the railway linked Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey) increased Armenia's isolation even more. Moreover, Nakhichevan remains Azerbaijan's exclave that is only accessible via air routes or through the territories of Iran and Turkey.

Conclusion and Consequences:

The history of the Caucasus is one of a mixture of cultures, either enriching the region or causing disputes. From the dissolution of the Soviet Union to the present-day separatist movements have further fueled these tensions. The unresolved nature of these conflicts continues to pose challenges for stability and – more than ever under a threat after the Ukrainian war, with more external actors playing crucial roles and endogenous power struggles further exacerbating the present tensions, making it crucial for the international community to engage in efforts to address these longstanding issues and promote dialogue and reconciliation among the different ethnic and national groups. And finally, to underline: The conflicts have resulted in significant loss of life, displacement of populations, and long-lasting instability. The conflicts have also had a negative impact on the region's economy, environment, and social fabric.

The Caucasus region continues to be a volatile area with a complex web of interconnected conflicts. Understanding the historical context, underlying factors, and recent developments is crucial for addressing the challenges facing the region and working towards lasting peace and stability.

Thus, resolution of the conflicts in the Caucasus is important due to the following three factors. First, the settlement of status and border disputes will significantly enhance regional predictability, security, and stability. Second, positive dynamic in the South Caucasus will contribute to the convergence of the positions of the three Eurasian “giants”: Russia, Turkey, and Iran. Third, it will lead to a reduced confrontation level between Russia and the West (at least in one of the directions).



Mr. Paata Zakareishvili is a Georgian political analyst, academic, and former State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia, serving in this position from 2012 to 2016.

His career has been dedicated to conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and civic integration, with a particular focus on the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts.

Zakareishvili graduated from Kazan State University and the Tbilisi Ecclesiastical Academy in 1993. Before assuming the ministerial position, he held various government and civil society roles, including Deputy Head of the Penitentiary Department of Georgia (2000–2001) and Member of the Tbilisi City Council (2002–2006).

From 2009 to 2012, Zakareishvili served as the head of the Institute for the Study of Nationalism and Conflict in Tbilisi.

Over the course of his career, Zakareishvili has been a key figure in Track II diplomacy and peacebuilding initiatives. He coordinated numerous Georgian–Abkhazian dialogue processes, working with international organizations and academic institutions such as Conciliation Resources (London) and the University of California, Irvine.

Paata Zakareishvili was also involved in the “Schlaining Process,” which brought together representatives of conflicting parties for informal negotiations. His approach was grounded in fostering trust and creating long-term reconciliation strategies.

South Caucasus – 2025: Global Challenges and New Opportunities for Conflict Resolution

Introduction

The South Caucasus has historically been one of the world's most contested geopolitical spaces, lying at the intersection of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have each experienced significant upheavals since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, with their domestic trajectories deeply influenced by competing global powers. Regional conflicts, particularly those involving Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, have shaped not only the security environment but also the political and cultural identities of these states.

By 2025, the geopolitical order of the South Caucasus has entered a period of accelerated transformation. Turkey has reasserted itself as a dominant actor, Russia's traditional influence has weakened, and Western institutions such as the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) have deepened their engagement. At the same time, China has pursued its Belt and Road Initiative, while Iran has faced diminished capacity to project influence. These global shifts are mirrored in domestic developments: Azerbaijan has consolidated military and diplomatic advantages, Armenia has undergone a fragile democratic transformation, and Georgia has faced criticism for its geopolitical passivity.

This evolving context presents both challenges and opportunities. While instability remains a constant risk, the weakening of old power structures and the emergence of new alliances create space for creative approaches to conflict resolution. For Georgia in particular, the European integration agenda, coupled with constructive engagement with neighbors, could provide new frameworks for addressing protracted conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The following analysis explores the regional dynamics of 2025, examining the roles of Turkey, Russia, Western actors, Iran, China, and the South Caucasus states themselves. It concludes with strategic recommendations for Georgia, highlighting opportunities for peacebuilding and reconciliation in an era of shifting global balances.

1. Turkey's Role and Growing Influence in the Region

Since the early 2020s, Turkey has emerged as the most assertive external actor in the South Caucasus. Its role has been especially visible since the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020, during which Ankara provided decisive political, military, and technological support to Azerbaijan. The war marked not only a turning point in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict but also a broader realignment of regional power structures.

As a NATO member, Turkey leverages its alliance ties while simultaneously pursuing an independent regional agenda. Its active re-engagement in the South Caucasus after years of relative detachment underscores its ambition to become a Eurasian power broker. Turkey's influence is not limited to its immediate

neighborhood; its expanding footprint in Central Asia, the Black Sea, and even Africa reflects a grand strategy that seeks to elevate Ankara's position as a global middle power (Cornell 2021).

In the South Caucasus, Turkey's NATO membership enhances its leverage, particularly by providing an implicit security umbrella for Azerbaijan. Although Article 5 does not formally extend to Baku, the perception of Turkish backing rooted in shared cultural, linguistic, and historical ties has increased Azerbaijan's confidence on the regional stage.

The Ankara-Baku alliance has become one of the defining features of regional geopolitics. The phrase "one nation, two states" captures the depth of this partnership, which extends across the military, economic, and energy sectors. The opening of new transportation corridors, including those envisioned in the Zangezur region, reflects joint strategic objectives: securing regional trade routes, marginalizing Armenia, and reducing Russia's ability to control transit flows.

The coordination between Turkey and Azerbaijan also has broader implications. It aims, in part, at displacing Russia as the traditional hegemon of the South Caucasus. By deepening cooperation with Georgia and Central Asian states, Ankara and Baku envision an integrated Turkic corridor stretching from the Caspian Sea to Europe. This vision aligns with the Organization of Turkic States, which Turkey has sought to strengthen as a platform for regional identity and influence.

Turkey's reassertion is not confined to the Caucasus. In Central Asia, Ankara has cultivated close ties with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, positioning itself as a bridge between the Turkic-speaking world and Europe. In the Black Sea region, Turkey's naval and economic presence has grown, especially following the weakening of Russian naval dominance after 2022. In Africa, Ankara has built military bases and trade relations, demonstrating its capacity to act as a global rather than merely regional power.

Turkey's growing influence has complex consequences for the region's conflicts. On the one hand, Ankara's close alliance with Baku reduces its credibility as a neutral mediator in the Armenia-Azerbaijan dispute. Its involvement tends to reinforce Azerbaijan's maximalist positions rather than encouraging compromise. On the other hand, Turkey's increased engagement creates leverage over processes that were previously monopolized by Russia. This could provide new opportunities for multilateral conflict resolution frameworks involving the EU and US, particularly if Ankara perceives long-term stability as beneficial for its economic and security interests.

For Georgia, Turkey represents both a challenge and an opportunity. While deepening ties with Ankara could help counterbalance Russia, overreliance on Turkey may undermine Tbilisi's ability to present itself as a neutral actor in regional disputes. A careful balancing act is therefore required, leveraging Turkish cooperation while maintaining independence in conflict resolution strategies.

2. Russia's Weakening Position

For nearly two centuries, Russia has considered the South Caucasus to be part of its privileged sphere of influence. Since the imperial expansion of the nineteenth century, Moscow has exerted military, political, and cultural dominance over Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia retained influence primarily through its role as a security guarantor and through the stationing of military forces in Armenia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.

By 2025, however, this dominance has been seriously undermined. The most significant symbolic event occurred in 2024, when Russia voluntarily withdrew its troops from Azerbaijan. This unprecedented step reflected Moscow's diminished capacity to sustain costly overseas deployments while simultaneously managing domestic instability and its prolonged conflict in Ukraine. The withdrawal signaled to regional actors that Russia could no longer dictate terms unilaterally.

Russia's weakening position stems from several interrelated factors. First, the economic consequences of Western sanctions, imposed in response to its aggression against Ukraine, have eroded Moscow's financial ability to project power. Second, its military overstretch particularly the loss of manpower and equipment has forced difficult choices about where to concentrate resources. The South Caucasus, while important, has been deprioritized relative to Ukraine and the Arctic.

Third, Russia faces a crisis of legitimacy in the region. Whereas it once presented itself as a neutral arbiter, it is now widely perceived as a partisan actor supporting separatist authorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, pressuring Armenia to maintain loyalty, and obstructing Western engagement. These actions have alienated local populations and undermined trust.

Armenia has historically been Russia's closest ally in the South Caucasus, bound through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and heavy dependence on Russian military bases. However, the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (2020) and subsequent Azerbaijani advances revealed the limitations of Russian protection. Despite Armenia's appeals, Moscow failed to intervene decisively to prevent territorial losses.

By 2025, Yerevan's disillusionment has deepened. The Armenian government increasingly seeks closer ties with the EU and US while distancing itself from the CSTO. Russia, in turn, has considered destabilizing Armenia's domestic politics to reassert influence. This tension has further strained Moscow's position, as Armenia explores reconciliation with Turkey and integration into Western frameworks.

Russia's decline opens both risks and opportunities. On one hand, its reduced ability to enforce "frozen conflicts" creates potential space for alternative peace initiatives led by the EU, US, or regional actors. On the other hand, Moscow may adopt a spoiler role, using hybrid tactics to destabilize governments or obstruct agreements that weaken its influence.

For Georgia, Russia's weakening position presents a strategic window. If Moscow can no longer sustain military dominance, Tbilisi may gain leverage to pursue agreements with Abkhaz and Ossetian counterparts

under international auspices. However, this requires proactive diplomacy; otherwise, Russia's retreat could simply create a vacuum exploited by other powers in unpredictable ways.

3. Western Involvement: The EU and the US

The gradual retreat of Russian power has been matched by a growing Western presence in the South Caucasus. By 2025, both the European Union and the United States have deepened their institutional engagement, offering new opportunities for stability, democratization, and conflict resolution.

The EU has steadily built its presence in the region through trade, investment, and political dialogue. Its Eastern Partnership initiative has created frameworks for cooperation with Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. While the outcomes have varied, the EU has become an indispensable actor in regional development.

Significantly, the EU has established permanent institutional representation not only in Georgia but also in Armenia, reflecting its commitment to long-term engagement. In 2024, Brussels and Washington jointly hosted a high-level summit with Armenia, signaling Western support for Yerevan's democratic aspirations and efforts to reduce dependence on Russia.

The EU also plays a role in peacekeeping and monitoring. Its Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM) remains the only international presence along the lines of separation with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Expanding such roles to Armenia and Azerbaijan could further embed the EU as a guarantor of stability.

The United States has also increased its visibility in the region. Washington views the South Caucasus as strategically significant for three reasons:

1. Its location along energy transit routes between the Caspian and Europe.
2. Its role as a buffer between Russia, Iran, and Turkey.
3. Its potential contribution to the broader policy of containing Russian aggression.

The US has supported security cooperation with Georgia, democracy assistance in Armenia, and energy projects with Azerbaijan. While Washington does not have the same economic leverage as Brussels, its security guarantees and diplomatic weight remain influential.

Western involvement opens avenues for multilateral approaches to conflict resolution that were previously blocked by Russia's dominance. By combining the EU's institutional capacity with the US's strategic power, the West can provide both carrots (economic integration, security partnerships) and sticks (diplomatic pressure, sanctions) to encourage constructive engagement.

In Armenia-Azerbaijan relations, Western actors can help mediate confidence-building measures and support humanitarian cooperation. In Georgia, they can strengthen calls for Russia to comply with the 2008 ceasefire agreement and provide frameworks for non-use-of-force commitments with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Despite their growing presence, Western actors face limitations. The EU's cautious consensus-based decision-making slows its ability to respond to crises, while the US is often distracted by global priorities beyond the Caucasus. Moreover, Western engagement risks provoking countermeasures by Russia, which may exploit ethnic tensions or disinformation to undermine pro-Western governments.

Nevertheless, the combined Western presence in 2025 represents a qualitative shift: for the first time since independence, South Caucasus states can realistically envision conflict resolution strategies that do not rely on Moscow's approval.

4. The Role of Iran and China

Historically, Iran has played a significant role in the South Caucasus due to its geographic proximity, cultural ties, and shared religious heritage with parts of the region. Iran borders both Armenia and Azerbaijan, giving it strategic interest in the balance of power. However, by 2025, Iran's influence has diminished significantly.

The primary factor behind this decline is Iran's domestic economic crisis, exacerbated by persistent sanctions and political isolation. Its limited financial capacity reduces its ability to project soft power or invest in infrastructure projects in the South Caucasus. Additionally, Iran's support for Armenia during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has alienated Azerbaijan, which views Tehran with suspicion. Relations have been further strained by Baku's partnership with Israel, Iran's primary regional adversary.

Moreover, Iran's attempts to promote itself as a mediator in regional conflicts have found little resonance. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan view Tehran as either partial or too weak to enforce agreements. Georgia, meanwhile, is wary of engaging too closely with Iran due to its Euro-Atlantic aspirations and Western sanctions regimes.

Thus, while Iran retains some rhetorical influence framing itself as a defender of regional stability its practical ability to shape events in the South Caucasus is minimal.

China's role in the South Caucasus has been far more significant than Iran's, though it remains largely economic rather than political. Beijing's involvement is primarily tied to its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which envisions the region as a transit corridor linking China to Europe. Through investments in infrastructure, transport, and energy, China has sought to secure routes that bypass Russia and strengthen connectivity with European markets.

However, China's engagement is deliberately cautious. Unlike Turkey or Russia, Beijing avoids entangling itself in the region's political disputes. It maintains relations with all three South Caucasus states, offering economic incentives without demanding ideological alignment. This pragmatic approach ensures that China remains a welcomed partner but not a polarizing force.

China's cautiousness also reflects its strategic priorities. The South Caucasus is not at the top of Beijing's global agenda, and China prefers to avoid direct confrontation with Russia or the West over influence in the region. Instead, it focuses on long-term economic integration, gradually embedding itself into the infrastructure and trade networks of the South Caucasus.

Iran's decline and China's cautiousness create a dual effect. On one hand, the absence of strong Iranian involvement reduces the complexity of external meddling, allowing Western and regional actors greater room to maneuver. On the other hand, China's refusal to engage politically limits its role as a conflict mediator. While Beijing may support peace indirectly through infrastructure development and trade, it does not contribute actively to dialogue processes.

For Georgia, the key lies in leveraging Chinese investment without political dependency, ensuring that economic ties complement rather than undermine its Western integration goals. The same logic applies to Armenia and Azerbaijan, which see Chinese trade as beneficial but recognize that Beijing cannot replace Western or regional security guarantees.

5. Azerbaijan's Advantage

Among the three South Caucasus states, Azerbaijan has emerged as the most powerful actor by 2025. Its combination of military success, energy wealth, and strategic alliances has elevated Baku to a leadership position in regional affairs.

The turning point for Azerbaijan was the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, which decisively shifted the balance of power with Armenia. Backed by Turkish drones, advisors, and military technology, Azerbaijan reclaimed significant territories that had been under Armenian control for nearly three decades. This victory not only transformed the geopolitical map but also reshaped the regional psychology, positioning Baku as a confident and assertive state.

Since then, Azerbaijan has consolidated its military advantage. Its defense sector has expanded through partnerships with Turkey and Israel, while its armed forces have continued to modernize. Diplomatically, Azerbaijan has skillfully leveraged its position to strengthen ties with both Western states and regional powers. Baku presents itself as a reliable partner in energy and security, earning recognition that Armenia cannot easily match.

Azerbaijan's vast oil and gas reserves remain its greatest source of influence. As Europe seeks to diversify away from Russian energy dependence, Azerbaijan has become a crucial supplier through the Southern Gas Corridor. This infrastructure links Caspian gas fields to European markets via Georgia and Turkey, providing Baku with both revenue and political leverage.

The geopolitical significance of Azerbaijani energy has grown particularly after 2022, as the European Union sought to mitigate the impact of sanctions on Russia. This has elevated Baku's status from a regional

to a continental energy player. It also enables Azerbaijan to resist Western pressure on issues such as democratic reform, knowing that its resources are indispensable.

Unlike Georgia, Azerbaijan does not aspire to NATO or EU membership. Its leadership values strategic autonomy, balancing relations between Turkey, Russia, the EU, and the US. This allows Baku to maximize flexibility while avoiding entanglements in Western conditionality.

At the same time, Azerbaijan remains a firm partner of Turkey, aligning its strategic goals with Ankara's broader regional ambitions. This partnership ensures that Baku can resist Russian coercion and maintain dominance over Armenia.

Despite its advantages, Azerbaijan has not yet secured a comprehensive peace agreement with Armenia. Negotiations remain stalled over issues such as border demarcation, the status of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the opening of regional transportation corridors. Baku insists on terms that maximize its sovereignty, while Yerevan seeks guarantees for Armenian communities.

This unresolved conflict continues to pose risks for stability. While Azerbaijan's military superiority makes renewed war less costly for Baku, it also heightens the risk of overconfidence. Without a durable peace settlement, the region remains vulnerable to flare-ups that could draw in external powers.

Azerbaijan's advantage complicates efforts at balanced mediation. International actors must grapple with the reality that Baku holds most of the cards, reducing Armenia's leverage and limiting space for compromise. For conflict resolution to succeed, external mediators must persuade Azerbaijan that long-term stability and integration serve its interests better than unilateral dominance.

For Georgia, Azerbaijan's strength offers both opportunities and constraints. On one hand, Baku's energy corridors reinforce Georgia's role as a vital transit hub. On the other hand, Georgia must carefully manage its relations to avoid becoming overly dependent on Azerbaijan's strategic agenda.

6. Armenia's Democratic Transformation and Risks

Armenia stands out in the South Caucasus as the state most visibly undergoing a democratic transformation. Since the 2018 "Velvet Revolution," led by Nikol Pashinyan, Armenia has embraced reforms aimed at strengthening transparency, accountability, and civic participation. By 2025, despite setbacks and pressures, Armenia remains the most democratic of the three South Caucasus republics.

Armenia's leadership has pursued closer ties with the European Union and the United States, seeking integration into Western institutions. Civil society organizations have played an active role in supporting reforms in judiciary independence, media freedom, and anti-corruption measures. For many Armenians, democratization is not only a domestic project but also a means of reducing dependency on Russia and expanding international partnerships.

Yet democratization comes with risks. Russia, wary of losing influence in its traditional sphere, perceives Armenia's Western orientation as a threat. Moscow retains significant levers of influence, including

its military base in Gyumri, control over energy supplies, and entrenched intelligence networks. By 2025, there are credible fears that Russia may attempt to destabilize Armenia politically either by supporting opposition forces, amplifying disinformation, or even provoking unrest.

Armenia's democratic shift also affects its relations with Turkey. For decades, the Armenia-Turkey border has remained closed, primarily due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, with Yerevan increasingly distancing itself from Moscow, it has begun to explore cautious normalization with Ankara. While this process is fragile, it carries the potential to reduce isolation and integrate Armenia more fully into regional frameworks.

Armenia's democratization presents a paradox. On one hand, democratic legitimacy strengthens its moral authority in negotiations and builds Western support. On the other, its relative weakness compared to Azerbaijan and its vulnerability to Russian interference limit its bargaining power. Unless Western actors provide tangible security guarantees, Armenia risks being squeezed between a dominant Azerbaijan and a hostile Russia.

7. Georgia's Passivity and International Perception

Georgia has historically presented itself as the South Caucasus state most committed to Euro-Atlantic integration. Since the Rose Revolution of 2003, Tbilisi has pursued NATO membership, EU association agreements, and strong ties with the United States. However, by 2025, Georgia's foreign policy has been criticized as passive and ambiguous, raising questions about its strategic direction.

Despite its geopolitical advantages a location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, control over critical energy transit routes, and relatively stable institutions Georgia has refrained from proactive engagement in regional diplomacy. Instead, its government has often been perceived as aligning with Russian interests by default, whether through inaction or hesitation.

This passivity has drawn concern in Western capitals. Observers note that Georgia risks squandering its status as a reliable partner if it fails to articulate a clear, consistent strategy. The perception of drift undermines its credibility at a time when opportunities for conflict resolution and integration are more tangible than in previous decades.

Georgia's international image is also shaped by its internal polarization. Political battles between the ruling party and opposition have consumed much of the national agenda, leaving little energy for foreign policy innovation. Civil society continues to advocate for a Western trajectory, but without strong governmental leadership, Georgia risks falling behind Armenia and Azerbaijan in shaping the region's future.

For conflict resolution, Georgia's passivity is particularly damaging. While Tbilisi could play a central role in initiating dialogue with Abkhaz and Ossetian counterparts, its lack of initiative reduces confidence on all sides. International actors, too, hesitate to invest in Georgian-led processes when the government does not

demonstrate clear commitment. To reclaim its role, Georgia must reassert itself as a regional leader rather than a passive bystander.

8. A New Strategy for Conflict Resolution in Georgia

Despite recent passivity, Georgia retains significant opportunities to develop a new strategy for conflict resolution in 2025. The evolving geopolitical context marked by Russia's decline, Turkey's rise, and Western engagement creates space for innovative approaches that could reshape the prospects for peace.

Four Strategic Steps that Georgia should prioritize:

1. **Demand Russia's compliance with the 2008 ceasefire agreement.** Russia's continued military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia violates the terms of the EU-mediated ceasefire. By placing this demand at the center of its diplomacy, Georgia can align with international law and mobilize Western support.
2. **Expand EU involvement with peacekeeping functions.** The EU Monitoring Mission has been critical in maintaining stability along separation lines. Expanding its mandate to include peacekeeping would enhance Georgia's security and reduce reliance on Russian-controlled processes.
3. **Initiate non-use-of-force agreements with Sukhumi and Tskhinvali.** By committing to peaceful dialogue and formalizing these commitments, Georgia can build trust with Abkhaz and Ossetian societies, signaling that security, not coercion, is its priority.
4. **Deepen security cooperation with Turkey.** As Russia weakens, Turkish support could provide Georgia with the necessary deterrence. However, this partnership must be balanced with EU and US frameworks to prevent overdependence on Ankara.

Beyond these four steps, Georgia must articulate a comprehensive vision of reconciliation. This includes investing in confidence-building measures, supporting humanitarian initiatives, and fostering cultural and educational exchanges with Abkhaz and Ossetian communities. Long-term peace requires more than state-to-state negotiations; it demands genuine societal engagement.

Georgia's ability to pursue this strategy depends on domestic political will and Western commitment. If successfully implemented, it could position Tbilisi as a model of constructive conflict resolution in the post-Soviet space. If neglected, Georgia risks entrenching the status quo, allowing external powers to dictate the terms of its territorial disputes.

Conclusion

By 2025, the South Caucasus stands at a crossroads. The decline of Russian influence, the rise of Turkey, and the deepening engagement of the EU and US have transformed the region's strategic landscape. At the same time, China's cautious economic involvement and Iran's diminished role highlight the uneven distribution of external power. Within the region, Azerbaijan's military and economic strength, Armenia's democratic transformation, and Georgia's uncertain trajectory each shape the dynamics of conflict and cooperation.

These shifts create both risks and opportunities. Without careful management, unresolved conflicts could flare into violence, destabilizing the region and undermining global security. Yet if regional states and international partners act strategically, the current moment could serve as a turning point—opening pathways to peace, reconciliation, and integration.

For Georgia in particular, the challenge is urgent. Its passivity has weakened its standing, but the geopolitical environment now offers a rare window to advance conflict resolution. By demanding Russia's compliance, expanding EU peacekeeping, pursuing non-use-of-force agreements, and deepening ties with Turkey, Georgia can seize this moment to redefine its role.

The story of the South Caucasus in 2025 is thus one of flux. The erosion of old hierarchies and the emergence of new alignments create uncertainty, but also unprecedented potential. Whether this potential is realized depends on the capacity of states, societies, and international actors to prioritize dialogue, trust, and long-term stability over short-term advantage. If they succeed, the South Caucasus may yet move from being a zone of perpetual conflict to a region of genuine reconciliation and opportunity.

Bibliography

Cornell, Svante E. *The International Politics of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict: The Original "Frozen Conflict" and European Security*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War*. Rev. ed. New York: New York University Press, 2013.

European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM). *Annual Report 2024*. Brussels: European External Action Service, 2024.

International Crisis Group. *Improving Prospects for Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh*. Report No. 264. Brussels: ICG, 2023.

Zakareishvili, Paata. *South Caucasus – 2025: Global Challenges and New Opportunities for Conflict Resolution*. Nelson Mandela International Day Speech, Tbilisi, July 18, 2025.



H.E. Mr. Malkhaz Kakabadze is a senior Georgian diplomat and public servant who has played a prominent role in Georgia's foreign relations and conflict resolution efforts since the late 1990s.

Mr. Kakabadze served as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Georgia to the Russian Federation from 1998 to 2000, during which he actively engaged in negotiations related to regional security.

In November 1998, he personally signed the agreement facilitating the

closure of Russian border guard military bases and the withdrawal of their forces from Georgia.

From 2000 to 2004, Mr. Kakabadze held the position of Minister for Special Assignments on Conflict Resolution. In this capacity, he led post-conflict rehabilitation projects in the Tskhinvali region, coordinated with international bodies such as the OSCE, and helped advance agreements concerning economic restoration and return of displaced persons.

Contact: kakabadze@bluewin.ch

International Community's Involvement in Conflict Resolution Efforts (Abkhazia)

Introduction

The conflict in Abkhazia remains one of the most tragic and complex chapters in Georgia's modern history. What began in the early 1990s as a political confrontation soon escalated into a violent war, claiming thousands of lives, displacing hundreds of thousands of people, and leaving behind a deeply divided society. Although Georgian–Abkhaz relations had historically been marked more by coexistence than hostility, the roots of the conflict can be traced back to the imperial and Soviet eras, when external interventions shaped local dynamics and territorial integrity was repeatedly undermined. Since the outbreak of war in 1992, the international community—including the United Nations, the OSCE, the CIS, and major powers such as Russia, the United States, and European states—has sought to mediate peace, deploy observers and peacekeepers, and encourage dialogue between the sides. Yet, despite these extensive efforts, the peace process has faced persistent obstacles, with little progress achieved in key areas such as the safe return of internally displaced persons, long-term security guarantees, and political settlement.

International Community's Involvement

Every ethnic conflict is in a way a Greek tragedy. All the sides have their truth. But in our case is just one truth --that no cases of ethnic confrontation between Abkhaz and Georgians have ever been known throughout the history of Georgian statehood. All controversies never went beyond the limits of occasional skirmishes, which were common all over the world during the period of feudal fragmentation. The roots of the conflict go back to the association of the Georgian principalities with the Russian Empire, when Abkhazs were expatriated from Abkhazia to Turkey against their will during the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-78 and the Tsarist government violated the territorial integrity of Georgia, in particular, Abkhazia, which was the part of the Kutaisi Province (western Georgia) by isolating the area of the Gagra (northern Abkhazia) from the Sukhumi Region and formally joining it to the Sochi district of the Black Sea "Gubernia", pursuant to the Emperor's order of December 25, 1904.

Unfortunately, In Abkhazia, Georgia, in the beginning of 90th of the last century took place tragedy - a confrontation, taking away thousands of lives, divided society, the families, interrupted related and friendly relations.

The history of the peace process, which, was under the auspices of the UN, with active involvement of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), so called "Group of Friends of the Secretary General of the UN," which includes: France, Germany,

UK, USA, Russia (4 permanent members of the Security Council), and Russian peacekeepers under the umbrella of CIS, have become deeply engaged in seeking to advance the settlement of the region's conflicts.

Let's try to analyze it: According to the very first Moscow agreement (Attachment 1) under the mediation of the Russian Federation's President Yeltsin from the 3rd September of 1992, sides appealed to the United Nations with request to be involved in the conflict and in November 1992 was opened United Nations Interim Office in Tbilisi. In December 1992 the Head of State of Georgia requested that the Abkhaz conflict should be placed on the agenda of the Security Council and that the Security Council may wish to adopt a resolution which, could provide for the sending of a United Nations peace-keeping force to Abkhazia.

In May 1993, the Secretary-General appointed Swiss diplomat, ambassador Bruner as his special Envoy who visited Georgia including Abkhazia and Moscow.

That time The Russian side strongly endorsed the idea of an urgent deployment of UNMOs there. While UNOMIG was still in the early stages of deployment, the cease-fire broke down on 16 September, when Abkhaz forces, with armed support from outside Abkhazia, launched attacks on Sokhumi and Ochamchira.

The SC discussed this issue on the meeting and reaffirmed its strong condemnation of the grave violation by the Abkhaz side of the Cease-fire Agreement of 27 July 1993. Called on all States to prevent the provision from their territories or by persons under their jurisdiction of all assistance, other than humanitarian assistance, to the Abkhaz side and in particular to prevent the supply of any weapons and munitions. It should be noted, that from the very beginning Security Council in its resolutions concentrates attention on some very important issues: among them territorial integrity and return of displaced people.

Peace-Keeping operation

The Parties continued to favor the deployment in the conflict zone of UN peacekeeping forces or other forces authorized by the United Nations. They expressed their mutual consent to the use of a Russian military contingent as part of such forces.

The Georgian side wanted a peace-keeping force to be generally deployed in Abkhazia with a mandate that would require it to guarantee the security of refugees returning to their homes, including the use of force, if necessary, against persons who threaten their security. The Abkhaz side would accept a force only if it was deployed along the Inguri River, which was the line of confrontation. The Abkhaz side refused to permit deployment elsewhere and would not accept the presence of any international civilian police to assist the local authorities in dealing with returnees.

Concluding that there was little realistic prospect of agreement on a United Nations peace-keeping force in the necessary timescale and deciding in these circumstances to authorize the Russian Federation and its partners in CIS to deploy immediately in Abkhazia a non-United Nations force,

Very soon agreement on a Cease-fire and Separation of Forces was signed by parties on the 14th of May

1994 in Moscow (Attachment 5), later known as “Moscow Agreement”. In accordance with this agreement the sides firmly observed the cease-fire on land, in the sea and in the air and refrained from all military actions against each other.

On June 9, 1994, the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation «On the Participation of the Russia in the Peace-Keeping Operation in the Abkhazian-Georgian Conflict Zone» was signed.

It should be noted that this Decree “was born” before the Decisions of the Security Council of the UN (21.07.94) and Council of the Heads of States of the CIS (22.08.94)?!

According to Russian analyst Mityaev, “the decision approving the presence of Russian peace-keeping forces in the region of conflict was made only on July 21, 1994. The decision was adopted under a strong pressure on the part of Russia. As reported in the foreign mass media, Vorontsov, a representative of Russia in the UN Security Council, said that otherwise Russia would not give its consent to station peace-keeping units of the USA in Haiti.

The continued deadlock in the Peace Process made international community to search for the new forms of the negotiations and in January the Secretary-General decided to invite senior representatives of the Group of Friends to an informal brainstorming session, which recommended that the Georgian and Abkhaz sides work within the format of Coordinating council in parallel on economic issues, the return of internally displaced persons and refugees and political and security issues. To this end, they proposed the establishment of three task forces, in which the parties, representatives of the Group of Friends and external experts could participate under United Nations chairmanship. Abkhaz side rejected participation in the task forces as recommended by the Geneva meeting.

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

Commonwealth of Independent States was established in December 1991, Georgia did not join it, but following a meeting with Russian President Boris Yeltsin in Moscow Shevardnadze declared that CIS membership was "the last chance to save the country" and in October 1993 Georgian applied for the membership of the Russian-dominated CIS. But the process did not bring any result. In April 1999 was decided to establish the Operative Working Group comprising of representatives of member-states interested in the comprehensive settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia. Unfortunately, the work of this Group showed unhidden obstructive position of Russia.

Peace-makers or trouble-makers

A few words about Russian peace-keepers. In the opinion of the Georgian public, they were direct participants in the fighting operations of 1992-1993 against the governmental Georgian troops. Though formally they were stationed in the conflict zone in conformity with the resolution of the Council of the Heads of the

States and under the CIS flag.

Peace-keepers were enlisted mainly from the Russian contingent. Despite formal requests both from the CIS and from Russia itself, some countries had no wish to be engaged in the peace-keeping operation, while others (Ukraine, Moldova, and Turkmenistan) could not take part in peace-keeping operations either because of their internal legislative acts or without the mandate from the UNO.

And Russian peace-keepers act in conformity with the Russian legislation, instructions and orders of the defense ministry of the Russian Federation and were actually, under the guidance of the defense minister of Russia. There is a long list of the violations of the peace-keepers.

Russia has played a contradictory role. It has acted (often simultaneously) as both, peacemaker and troublemaker.

OCSE

Georgia is a member of the CSCE (OSCE) since the summer of 1992

The decision on the establishment of the Mission of CSCE was taken and it started to work on 3 December 1992. The Mission operates throughout Georgia from the Headquarters established in Tbilisi.

The Mission followed events in Abkhazia, but it did not monitor Peacekeeping Forces in the conflict zone, nor the observance of the ceasefire agreement.

The most important progress was made on the CSCE Budapest summit, when was expressed the deep concern over “ethnic cleansing”, the massive expulsion of people, predominantly Georgian, from their living areas and the deaths of large numbers of innocent civilians. The same approach was reached on the Lisbon Summit of the OCSE.

Particular importance had Decisions of 1999 November Istanbul OCSE Summit (16-17 November 1999). Georgia and the Russian Federation agreed, that the Russian Federation would withdraw two of its four military bases in Georgia by 1 July 2001, including the base at Gudauta, in Abkhazia.

After 2000 the next-in-turn summit of the heads of the states and governments, which is usually held every three years, was not held at all.

Friends of Secretary General of the UN on Georgia

(FOG -- France, Germany, United Kingdom, United States, Russia)

The group of the friends of the Secretary General of the UN on Georgia was actually created on the initiative of France end of the 1993, in order to facilitate the peace process. The Russian side accepted this movement as an attempt to counterbalance the predominant position of Russia in the mediation process. The Abkhazian side was not accepting the Group as a part of the Peace Process up to the mid of 1997.

In December 1999, the Government of Ukraine, which became a member of the Security Council on 1 January 2000, requested to take part in the work of FOG. But it participated in the meetings of the Friends only in New York, as far this was not accepted by Abkhaz side as well the willingness of Turkey, Japan, Italy and others in different times to join the Group.

By the end of 2001 the finalization, after two years of discussions, of the paper on the distribution of competences between Tbilisi and Sokhumi was a significant step forward. This paper enjoyed the support of all members of the Group of Friends and which were positive elements for launching the peace process between the sides.

The Abkhaz side raised a number of objections to the recommendations, in particular the inclusion of the political aspect in the third task force. The Abkhaz side continued to refuse to discuss the status issue and rejected the paper on competences.

European Union, Council of Europe, NATO

There is an increasing role of the involvement of the international organizations in the peaceful process of the conflict resolution. Issues related to the settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, were also discussed in international forums, including European Union(EU), the Council of Europe (CoE) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization(NATO).

Some EU member states have sent military observers to participate in the UNOMIG mission in Abkhazia.

There were a number of projects financed by the EU in the conflict areas, in particular in the Gali region. The most important was the project of European Union and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development on the rehabilitation of Inguri dam (located on the Georgian side of the ceasefire line) and the Inguri Hydroelectric Power station (on the Abkhaz side).

Issue of the conflict in Abkhazia occupies an important place in European Parliament which systematically considers it. For example, on 12 November 1996, on 17 July 1998 European Parliament strongly condemned the violent actions against the Georgian population in the Gali region in May 1998.

Council of Europe and Venice commission with co-chairmanship of the SRSG organized Pitsunda seminar on State-legal aspects of the settlement of the conflict, which gave the Georgian and Abkhaz sides the opportunity to argue their positions on issues including statehood and self-determination, in the presence of international legal experts. This initiative by the Council of Europe and its willingness to continue to work closely with the United Nations on this project was welcomed by both sides and decided to held the next seminar in Tbilisi, but later was rejected by the Abkhaz side.

UNOMIG facilitated a visit to Sokhumi by a team from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Additional impetus to these efforts was given by the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations,

who visited, together with Ms. Tagliavini, Tbilisi and Sokhumi. The Russian Federation, on 14 November, made another attempt to arrange a meeting in Moscow of representatives of the Group of Friends and the United Nations with the Abkhaz side to exchange views on the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict and the principles underlying the paper on competences. The meeting did not take place.

The Abkhaz side, in particular, refused to even enter into discussions on the principles on which negotiations should be based.

Return of refugees and IDPs

Issue of the return of refugees and IDPs were discussed on the meetings on the Confidence-Building Measures in Athens in October 1998, in Istanbul in June 1999 and in Yalta in April 2001. No movement in this direction.

Security issues

The situation in the conflict zone remained tense and unstable. There were frequent shooting incidents, mine blasts, robberies, killings, hijackings and subsequently robberies of the buses, abductions and counter-abductions, the series of hostage-taking incidents, which furthered escalation of the situation, exchanges of fire across the ceasefire line- and, in addition to small arms, rocket and grenade launchers were at times employed. Subversive activities continued, including the laying of mines, particularly in the lower Gali district.

Security assessment mission

On July 20, 2002, after a long break a session of working group II of the Coordination Council was held under the chairmanship of the UNHCR. The participants heard the reports on the realization of JAM recommendations on problems of security and came to an agreement that the improvement of the work of law-enforcing bodies is a priority task. They addressed a request to the UNOMIG to invite as soon as possible international experts in order to evaluate the situation in the security sphere and to work out respective recommendations to this effect. In accordance with this decision United Nations sent police assessment team to Gali and Zugdidi sectors. Civilian Police component- Abkhazian side agreed in written way and after refused.

Alongside with abovementioned obstacles it comes from the format of Peace Process itself, which goes under the chapter VI of the Charter of the UN: The parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice. The Security Council shall, when it deems necessary, call upon the parties to settle their dispute by such means. In the current situation Peace Process instead of the progress, mainly in the return of refugees and IDP's, easily becomes a hostage of desires of the sides.

So, very briefly in our case the current instruments do not allow to make any progress in the Peace Process if there is involved the interest of any permanent member of the Security Council of the UN and international community needs to make radical changes.

P.S. Some statistical information:

In 1886, in Abkhazia lived 34.806 Georgians (50.6%), 28.320 Abkhazians (41.5%), 2.149 Greeks (3.1 %), 1.216 Russians (1.8%), 1.090 Armenians (1.6%). Nearly the same proportion is shown by data on the Georgian and Abkhazian population in 1897: 44.882 Georgians and 39.600 Abkhazians. The same data – 51.300 Georgians and 46.400 Abkhazians – are given for 1902 in the List on Religious Faiths prepared by Russian officials. According to the census of 1989, the demographic situation was as follows: Georgians – 239.872 (45.7%), Abkhazians – 93.267 (17.8%), Armenians – 76.541 (14.6%), Russians – 74.914 (14.3%), Greeks – 14.664 (2.8%).

Now let us try to analyze the dynamics of the population composition and growth. From 1886 to 1989 the Russian population in Abkhazia grew nearly 62 times (from 1.216 to 74.914), the Armenian population more than 70 times (from 1.090 to 76.541). Why should one wonder against this background that the Georgian population on its native land grew 7 times.

Bibliography

Saparov, Arsène. *From Conflict to Autonomy in the Caucasus: The Soviet Union and the Making of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh.* Routledge, 2015.

Lynch, Dov. *The Conflict in Abkhazia: Dilemmas in Russian Peacekeeping Policy.* Discussion Paper 77, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998.

Trier, Tom; Hedvig Lohm; David Szakonyi (eds.). *Under Siege: Inter-ethnic Relations in Abkhazia.* Hurst Publishers, 2009.

Cornell, Svante E. *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus.* Curzon, 2001.

Souleimanov, Emil. *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict: Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia Wars Reconsidered.* SpringerLink, 2013.

Cheterian, Vicken. *War and Peace in the Caucasus: Ethnic Conflict and the New Geopolitics.* Columbia University Press, 2009.

Sönmez, Metin; Hewitt, George B. (Editor). *Abkhazia: 1992-2022: Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict & War.* Independently published / AbkhazWorld, 2022.



Prof. Dr. Nugzar B. Ruhadze is a distinguished Georgian educator, journalist, linguist, and former head of state protocol. He is currently serving as a professor at Sokhumi State University.

He combines extensive experience in pedagogy, international relations, media, and educational innovation.

Dr. Ruhadze holds a Doctor of Pedagogy degree and has more than

fifty years of teaching and professional experience across various countries. He is the author and creator of the Edducco - Eng Sound project, a phonetics training program for English learners, reflecting his deep expertise in language instruction.

He has a prolific background in journalism and media, credited with producing over 1,500 articles in English and delivering approximately 200 public speeches in major U.S. cities. His media presence extended to role as radio and television host, as well as correspondent for American television outlets.

His work has been featured in leading international media, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune*.

Contact: nugzarinio@gmail.com

The World Peace Process & Its Georgian Paradigm

Introduction

Peace has always been humanity's highest aspiration and yet its most fragile achievement. More than the absence of war, peace embodies justice, dignity, and the possibility of shared progress. When it fails, nations disintegrate, societies fracture, and individuals lose hope. Georgia knows this reality well. Having endured wars, divisions, and occupations, it has learned that peace is not inherited but built, defended, and renewed daily. Against this backdrop, Georgia's own approach the "Georgian Paradigm of Peace" offers a unique contribution to the global peace process. Rooted in dialogue, reconciliation, and cultural resilience, it demonstrates how even small nations can shape models of peacebuilding that resonate far beyond their borders.

The World Peace Process

It is a universally recognized truth that peace is the most valuable treasure humanity can possess. Peace is not merely the absence of war; it is the very foundation of human dignity, societal progress, and global harmony. Without peace, nations collapse, communities get fractured, and individual potential fades into despair. And yet, we often take peace for granted, until it is lost, until a shot is fired, a boundary crossed, or a family torn apart. But what if we could build a world where peace wasn't a temporary reprieve between conflicts, but a lasting reality?

Peace is not something we inherit automatically. It is something we must build, protect, and renew every single day. So, the question stands: Is lasting peace truly achievable? And if so, what responsibilities lie with us, as individuals, as communities, and as nations, to secure and sustain it?

Peace is never a given. It is a process, meticulously designed through diplomacy, intricate agreements, cautious optimism, and at times, painful compromise. It is shaped not only by treaties and documents but by trust, resilience, and shared values. Ceasefires, demilitarization, and formal negotiations are milestones, not endpoints. A signed document does not ensure peace. It merely opens the door to possibility. Implementation, transparency, and long-term commitment are what keep that door from closing.

It is also a process easily disrupted. The peace process is fragile, often at the mercy of power politics, economic inequality, and unresolved historical wounds. Political ambition, social inequality, and ideological rigidity can derail even the most well-meaning initiatives. Therefore, peace must be grounded in justice. Human rights must never be traded for convenience. Every peace agreement must include accountability mechanisms. Otherwise, we risk fostering peace in name only, without true reconciliation or healing.

We must remember that behind every diplomatic table are real human stories: families displaced, lives

lost, futures shattered. Without justice, peace is shallow. Without equality, peace is unfair. And without participation, peace is unsustainable.

True peacebuilding requires more than resolving conflict. It requires preventing it. Conflict prevention is not about reacting. It is about foreseeing, preparing, and defusing. This means strengthening institutions, ensuring social safety nets, and investing in education and dialogue.

One of the most powerful tools in the peacebuilder's toolkit is confidence-building. Trust is the oxygen of peace. Confidence-building measures, however small, can lay the foundation for open communication and mutual respect. These may include joint economic initiatives, youth exchange programs, shared media platforms, or community-level reconciliation efforts. These measures create safe spaces for dialogue and allow societies to move beyond mistrust.

Precautionary diplomacy, strategic demilitarization, and transparency in communication are also critical. When tensions rise, early intervention can mean the difference between dialogue and disaster. Conflict transformation, not just management, must be our goal.

The law-abiding and fairly operating society is what builds a firm foundation for peace process. Peace cannot flourish in environments of corruption, inequality, or oppression. Democratic values like fair elections, independent courts, an active civil society, are not luxuries for peaceful times. They are the very tools by which peace is sustained.

Georgian Paradigm

Education plays a vital role in this ecosystem. A generation taught to solve problems through listening, compromise, and collaboration will resist violence more than a generation taught to fear the other. Educational reform must include peace education, civic responsibility, and critical thinking. Media literacy is crucial too, so people can separate facts from manipulation.

And, this specific assumption is perfectly served by the Sokhumi State University, having introduced into its curriculum a new subject, called 'The University Diplomacy', created by professor Zurab Khonelidze, the author of the book, titled 'The Georgian Paradigm of Peace. I have been honored to teach this new and overly interesting course at this University, educating the nation's younger generation in matters of peace, its creation and maintenance via the diplomacy, entertained within the university network worldwide.

Hence, let us focus on Georgia. Ours is a country that has endured conflict, division, and occupation. But ours is also a country of strength, resilience, and deep yearning for unity. Georgia's peace process is not a theoretical framework. It is a living reality. It is the story of people who, despite loss and separation, choose dialogue over division and reconciliation over retaliation.

Our national peace process includes demilitarization, humanitarian access, and a long-term strategy for unity. It calls for the return of occupied territories and the re-establishment of trust between communities. It is

a process that requires patience, but also perseverance.

Government initiatives are critical, but peacebuilding must be a whole-society effort. Civil society, our educators, doctors, youth workers, artists, and community organizers, are essential players, mobilizing the grassroots energy, providing oversight, initiating reconciliation projects, and ensuring that peace is not only negotiated in capitals but lives in communities.

Peace is also cultural. Every society is shaped by its values, traditions, and identity. These can either nurture peace or hinder it. Cultural narratives that emphasize pride, resilience, and cooperation are powerful assets. But narratives of grievance, exclusion, or superiority can be dangerous.

In Georgia, we must use our cultural strengths not to divide, but to unite. We must embrace diversity within unity. This means respecting all communities, protecting minority rights, and promoting shared values. National identity should not be built on who we exclude, but on what we stand for.

Our government, though traditional in many respects, has taken commendable steps toward inclusivity and peace. This challenges the assumption that only progressive systems foster peace. It reminds us that ideology matters less than action. What matters is leadership, moral clarity, and the courage to act for the greater good.

The road to peace is never easy. It demands sacrifice, courage, and endless commitment. But it is the only road that leads to a future, worth having. Lasting peace is not merely the absence of war. It is the presence of justice. It is the triumph of cooperation over division, of empathy over hatred, of shared humanity over narrow interests.

Georgia is at a pivotal moment. We can retreat into fear and fragmentation, or we can step forward with boldness and hope. Let us commit to dialogue, to justice, and to the tireless work of building peace.

Let us tell the world: Georgia is not just a country with a complex past. It is a country with a courageous future. Let us become a beacon for peace in our region and beyond. Let our example inspire others to believe that peace is possible, not someday, but now.

Peace is not passive. It is not accidental. It is a decision; a decision we must make together.

Conclusion

Peace is never static; it is a continuous process that requires commitment, sacrifice, and the courage to prioritize dialogue over conflict. For Georgia, the path forward lies not only in reclaiming its territorial integrity but also in fostering trust, inclusivity, and reconciliation among its diverse communities. By integrating cultural values, civic participation, and innovative tools like “university diplomacy,” Georgia has the potential to turn its hard-won lessons into a beacon for others. The Georgian Paradigm of Peace reminds the international community that true peace is not simply the end of war—it is the presence of justice, cooperation, and human dignity. If nurtured with patience and vision, this paradigm can inspire other regions to believe that lasting peace is possible here and now.

Bibliography

Cheterian, V. (2009). *War and Peace in the Caucasus: Ethnic Conflict and the New Geopolitics*. Columbia University Press.

Cornell, S. E. (2001). *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus*. Routledge.

Khonelidze, Z. (2022). *The Georgian Paradigm of Peace*. Tbilisi: Sokhumi State University Press.

Lynch, D. (1998). *The Conflict in Abkhazia: Dilemmas in Russian "Peacekeeping" Policy*. Chatham House.

Trier, T., Lohm, H., & Szakonyi, D. (2009). *Under Siege: Inter-ethnic Relations in Abkhazia*. Hurst Publishers.



Prof. Dr. Rubin Zemon is an Ambassador for Peace. As an international scholar, Dr Zemon is specialized as an ethnologist and social-cultural anthropologist. He is the Director of the Center for Advanced Research, North Macedonia. He was a research associate at the Institute for Social and Humanistic Research "Euro-Balkan" in Skopje, and a university professor at the University "St. Apostle Paul" in Ohrid. Dr. Zemon was appointed Director of the Institute for Social and Humanistic Research at the Euro- Balkan University in Skopje. He is an expert for the Council of Europe and OSCE / ODIHR for various missions and projects related to national minorities and multiculturalism, in European countries, especially in South-Eastern Europe.

Prof. Rubin Zemon is a former Member of the Parliament of North Macedonia and a Special advisor for multicultural society and interculturalism to the Prime Minister of North Macedonia. Currently, he is a fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies Kőszeg, Hungary.

Contact: zemon.rubin@gmail.com

Managing of the diversity as a Soft Power Asset in the Western Balkans

Introduction

The management of diversity in the Balkans is crucial due to the region's complex history, ethnic composition, and ongoing processes of political and social transformation. The Balkans is home to a mosaic of ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural communities, many of which have historically coexisted but also experienced conflict, marginalization, and forced assimilation. The violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, ethnic wars of the 1990s, and authoritarian legacies left deep scars and mistrust among communities. Effective diversity management, therefore, is not only a social necessity but also a cornerstone for building sustainable peace, democratic governance, and regional stability.

One reason diversity management is vital is its role in preventing conflict recurrence. Societies that fail to recognize minority rights, ensure equal participation, or address past injustices risk fueling grievances that can undermine peace and security. By institutionalizing mechanisms of inclusion—such as power-sharing, protection of cultural rights, and anti-discrimination laws—states can foster trust and cooperation among different groups.

Secondly, diversity management contributes to democratic consolidation and European integration. Many Balkan countries aspire to join the European Union, where respect for minority rights and multicultural coexistence are key accession criteria. Promoting equality, dialogue, and intercultural understanding is thus both a domestic necessity and an international obligation.

Embracing diversity enhances social cohesion and economic development. Societies that value pluralism are better positioned to mobilize the creativity, skills, and perspectives of all their citizens. In the Balkans, where brain drain and social fragmentation remain challenges, inclusive policies can strengthen resilience, civic participation, and human capital.

The concepts of *Balkanization* and *multiculturalism* represent two contrasting dynamics that have shaped the modern history and politics of the Balkans. *Balkanization* refers to the fragmentation of a region into smaller, often hostile political entities, usually along ethnic or religious lines. This process, which gained prominence after the dissolution of the Ottoman and later Yugoslav empires, is associated with violent conflict, contested borders, and ethno-nationalist rivalries. In this sense, Balkanization has become a metaphor for division and disintegration, not only in Southeastern Europe but also in global political discourse.

By contrast, *multiculturalism* emphasizes coexistence, recognition, and respect for diversity within a shared political framework. Rather than fragmenting along ethnic or religious lines, multiculturalism seeks to create inclusive societies where different groups maintain their cultural identities while participating equally in public life. In the context of the Balkans, multiculturalism is especially relevant given the region's mosaic of ethnicities, languages, and faiths. However, translating this ideal into practice has often been difficult due to legacies of mistrust, exclusionary nationalisms, and weak institutional frameworks.

The tension between Balkanization and multiculturalism highlights the dual trajectories the region can take. When diversity is politicized through exclusive identities, societies risk fragmentation and instability. Yet when diversity is managed through dialogue, power-sharing, and respect for minority rights, multiculturalism can become a foundation for peace, democratic governance, and European integration. This is particularly significant for post-conflict societies such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Kosovo, where institutions are tasked with balancing ethnic representation and civic equality.

Ultimately, the challenge for the Balkans is to move beyond the destructive legacy of Balkanization and cultivate a model of multiculturalism that recognizes diversity as a strength rather than a threat. Doing so is essential for stability, reconciliation, and sustainable development in the region.

With this in mind, in this paper we will initially address the historical context of perceptions of the Balkanization, issues of identities, *Nation-State Formation*, *Ottoman Pluralism and the Millet System*, *Nationalism*, *Minority Issues and Population Exchanges* as well as the challenges of managing diversity, generally for all countries, without delving into elaborations within national frameworks.

1.1.The historical context of the Balkanization

The word Balkan in Western literature was first mentioned in 1490 in a memorandum that Pope Innocent VIII sent to the Italian humanist and diplomat Filippo Callimachus and was introduced into English by Frederick Calvert in 1767. In 1808, the German geographer Johann August Zeune, in the book “Gea. Versuch einer wissenschaftlichen Erdbeschreibung“², would introduce the name "Balkan peninsula" that separates it from the rest of Europe by "the long mountain range or Albanus, Skadar, the more rugged Hemeus, which in the northwest joins the Alps in the Istrian peninsula and in the east plunges into the Black Sea in two branches." With this description, Zeune supported the Renaissance paradigm of the existence of the “Canetna Mundi” mountain range from the Pyrenees to the Balkans (Stara Planina). In 1830, the French geographer Ami Boué made a precise description of the Balkan Mountains³, while in the mid-19th century the German author Theobald Fischer proposed the name *Southeast Europe*⁴. This explains why the geographical boundaries of this area are not clearly defined even today, and depending on the source, they cover the entire area of Southeast Europe or only the area from the Danube to the Aegean Sea, from which Greece is sometimes omitted.

The word "*Balkans*" came into widespread use in Europe in the first half of the 19th century, when the need for a specific definition of space first arose. Such a choice was made partly due to the fact that the Stara Planina (Balkans) mountain range in the first half of the 19th century became known as the scene of the Russo-Turkish wars and, this natural barrier constituted for a long time, until 1877, the last strategic line of defense of Istanbul. Before that, the area of the present-day Balkan Peninsula was divided between the Ottoman and

² https://books.google.mk/books/about/Gea_Versuch_einer_wissenschaftlichen_Erd.html?id=TMmZGYtEmwYC&redir_esc=y

³ http://www.albanianhistory.net/1836_Boue/index.html

⁴ https://www.berghahnbooks.com/downloads/OpenAccess/MishkovaEuropean/MishkovaEuropean_07.pdf

Habsburg Empires, and at that time this part of Europe was designated as part of the wider area of the "Orient", the "European part of Turkey", "Turkey in Europe", and sometimes the ancient name "**Haemus**". In the Ottoman Empire the European parts were called Rumelia, i.e. the Roman or Christian part of the empire.

The dominance of absolutist monarchies in Europe and the power of oriental empires in the 18th century, especially the Ottoman and Chinese, were the reasons why some European thinkers admired oriental societies. Later, the decline of these societies and European colonialism were accompanied by the contempt for "oriental despotisms", their stagnation and "a historical development", which have survived to this day in the circle of "orientalism" that Edward Said speaks of. Classicism in European culture, uprisings in Serbia, Wallachia and the the Greek independence movements in the first half of the 19th century attracted the attention of European national romantics, who sought the cradle of European civilization in the Balkans. Similar motives drove Romantic philhellenism in Europe, which influenced the support of Britain and France for the Greek insurgents, leading to independent Greece.

However, by the middle of the 19th century, Balkanophilia in European literature and politics gradually gave way to the Balkanophobia, and the entire region acquired the context of a "European powder keg". The national revolutions of the Balkan peoples created new states, whose ambitions were the cause of numerous ethnic and territorial disputes. The influence of the "belle époque" was also felt in the Balkans, through the development of cities and industry, and the newly created Balkan societies moved along the path of Europeanization. However, the aggravation of the "eastern crisis" after 1875, the interests of the great powers of that time, and the clashes of the new states in the Balkans, were the occasion for Bismarck to declare during the Congress of Berlin in 1878 that: *"the entire Balkans is worthless for the bones of a Pomeranian grenadier"*. He also said *"if war breaks out in Europe, the case will be a damned Balkan madness"*. In popular literature in Europe since that time, the Balkans became the subject of fiction as a mystical region ruled by dark forces and melodramatic despots. (Simic J. (ed .) :2017)

The Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 were the culmination of that process and encountered great reactions in Western opinion, such as the first report of the Carnegie Commission on the Balkans, the journalistic report of Leon Trotsky, etc. While Bismarck predicted that "if war breaks out in Europe it will be because of a Balkan madness", the "powder keg" exploded in June 1914 when the Austro-Hungarian crown prince Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo, setting in motion a chain of events that would lead to the outbreak of World War I and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1913 with the Bucharest agreement Ottoman Empire in the Balkans was dissolute, too.

In 1997, Marija Todorova, a professor at the University of Illinois in the USA, published her study "Imagining the Balkans", which caused much debate among academic, political, journalistic and other circles. Indeed, her study deals with inconsistent (but usually negative) images of the region in Western culture, as well as with the paradoxes of cultural reference and its assumptions. In it, she develops a theory of Balkanism or "nesting of Balkanisms", similar to Edward Said's "Orientalism" and Milica Bakić-Hayden's "Nested

Orientalism". On one occasion, Marija Todorova said about the book that *"The central idea of "Imagining the Balkans" is that there is a discourse, which we call Balkanism, which creates a stereotype about the Balkans, and politics is significantly and organically intertwined with this discourse. When faced with this idea, people may feel a little uncomfortable, especially on the political scene ... "*⁵. One of the prejudices and stereotypes related to the Balkans and Balkanisms is the relativism of the innocence of Western Europe and the shifting of responsibility to the Ottoman Empire (heritage) and to Turkey as the "on-duty culprit" for all the accusations and mistakes (Todorova M. 1997: 276) that occurred in the Balkans in the 20th century.

In fact, the most important term that derives from the word "Balkan" is *"Balkanization"*. This term, which is very often used in descriptions of the process of national fragmentation of former geographical and political units into new problematic nation-states, was actually not created in the *"longest century of the Empire"* when the Balkan nations step-by-step separated from the Ottoman Empire. The term *"Balkanization"* was introduced at the end of World War I, when only one Balkan state - Albania, was added to the already existing map of Balkan nations, created in the 19th century (Todorova M., 1997: 46). Various scholars and politicians used the term *"Balkanization"* after World War I as a process of fragmentation into small states with disrupted political relations, as was the case with the Balkans during the Balkan Wars. However, a deeper analysis of *"Balkanization"* occurred in 1921, by Paul Scoot Mower, European correspondent for the Chicago Daily News. Analyzing the political situation in Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia and Greece, he concluded that this region *"is now Balkanized"*. His justification for the term *"balkanization"* is that *"in the region of hopeless mixed races, the creation of links of small states with more or less backward populations, economically and financially weak, envious, with conspiratorial behavior, fearful, constant victims of manipulations by the power of the big ones, as well as the violent outpouring of their own passions"*. The element of foreign involvement in the internal affairs of small states is so aggressive that it motivated Michael Foucher in 1994 to define *"balkanization in the literal sense of the word as the constant involvement of foreign powers (Russia, Austria-Hungary, Germany, France and Great Britain) aimed at protecting or establishing their spheres of interest"* (Todorova M., 1997: 49).

The terms attributed to the "Balkans" reveal the process of creating the image of Europe by defining the "Other" as oriental, unpredictable, dangerous, chaotic, dirty, lazy, primitive, cruel, selfish, uncooperative, etc. (Muršić R. and Ezernik B., 2007: 7). On the other hand, historical evidence confirms the presence of tolerance, cooperation, hard work, ancient culture, civilizations, urbanization, classical philosophy, pre-industrial economic efficiency, etc. For centuries, the Balkan Peninsula was almost the only part of Europe with a tradition of tolerance towards people of different religions, ethnic origins and cultures. The Balkan peoples lived in a multicultural milieu long before it became modern in the West. In 1492, when the Sephardic Jews were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula by the Catholic Church, the Balkan Peninsula, which at that time was under the Ottoman Empire, was the tolerant place where the Jews found a new land to live. (Bembesa E.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Todorova

and Rodrigue A., 2002: 79-96)

The very use of the term “balkanization” for the numerous conflicts in Europe and the World in the 20th century is lucid. It is used as a synonym for complex conflicts involving numerous internal and external actors and that moral hysteria and moral “disgust” are often a pretext for “intervention of the civilized world” and “humanitarian intervention”, behind which strategic motives are sometimes hidden. The Balkans, since the emergence of this term at the beginning of the 19th century, have been a geopolitically marginal area, the stability of which depends less on the relations of the peoples and states living in it, than on the relations of neighboring powers. . For a large part of the Western public, the Balkans and Balkanization, both in the 19th century and the beginning of the 21st century, remained part of the constitutive myth of the West as a civilizational entity separate from the Orient, which begins at the border of Europe with the Balkans.

In the process of "liberalization" of the "enslaved peoples" in the 19th century, tolerance and peaceful coexistence were the first victims of the imposition of Western concepts such as liberal democracy, capitalism, the nation-state and the like. Nationalism, plans for the construction of a post-Ottoman empire and the constant redrawing of existing political borders in the Balkans became a process of "Balkanization". However, it seems that the Balkanization of the region is actually a result of Europeanization and Westernization. (Muršić R. and Ezernik B., 2007: 8).

1.2 Balkans's rich multicultural, intercultural and transcultural landscape as a comparative (dis)advantage

The current political map of the Balkans represents a triumph of the “nation-state” project and involvement in the processes of fragmentation, parallel to the processes of globalization and Europeanization. As Petar Atanasov says, it seems that cultural pluralism is not one of the winning categories in this political-historical competition. The winner is the political (and cultural) unity of small and medium-sized nation-states, for whose interests, in the past and today, the interests of more or less known and different ethnic and cultural groups are sacrificed. The main reason for the collapse of the SFR Yugoslavia was the “competition” between Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian nationalism. Of course Albania and Albanian nationalism is an important factor in the Balkans, too. Besides the nation-states, three recognized and one not fully - recognized, multicultural or civic states emerged – North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Kosovo. These four states are exceptions to the political matrix of the Balkans today. The future of the Balkans and these four states depends on two other contexts: the regional and the European. The regional context is not conducive to the civic concept and multicultural society, as it promotes the concept of nation-states with an ethnic connotation. On the other hand, European integration relaxes political and cultural groups, and cohabitation models are given a chance to succeed.

Diversity is an ancient reality of human life in a society in which different cultural groups cultivate their cultural traits and thereby manifest the differences between “us” and “others”. The “others” and “otherness” have been present since antiquity as elements of binary opposition with “I” and “myself” through which identities are formed. Namely, in ancient Greece, members of other ethnicities (all those who spoke a language other than Greek) were named by the inhabitants of the ancient polis as barbarians, i.e. “those who chatter”, i.e. speaking incomprehensible languages. Even members of the population outside the urban community are named as “foreigners”, as others (Džeparoski., 2007:11). However, regarding the hybridity of ancient Greece, Martin Bernal, in his epochal work *Black Athena*, will emphasize that “...like modern Greece, ancient Greece also received population and cultural influences from both the north and the south and that this hybridity, and not some hypothetical “purity”, made it the creative civilization it later became.” (Bernal, 2009: XVI).

At the beginning of the 18th century, when the Ottoman state underwent radical political changes, it largely retained the structure of its culmination under the rule of Suleiman the Magnificent. The Ottoman state was built on the concept of “holy war” to expand and defend Islam. Their paradigm was that the world was divided into two spheres, “dar-ul-islam” (sphere of Islam) and “dar-ul-harb” (sphere of warfare). The duty of any sultan was to extend the rule of Islam to as large a territory as possible. Although the point was made on religious war, the goal was not to abolish the “dar-ul-harb” or its people, but to conquer them for the sake of Islam. When territories and people were conquered, their acceptance of the Islamic faith was welcomed, although sometimes by force. Occupied peoples of different religions had a clearly defined position, under the leadership of their religious or secular leaders. Nevertheless, people were not equal! The non-Muslim population was paid additional taxes, had many special restrictions, and was in an inferior status.

The *second division* of people was according to their social position and function in the community. At the top were members of the ruling class of soldiers (asker), who held high administrative positions; then members of the “ulema” - the religious, educational, and legal government of the Empire. Also in this position were high representatives of the Christian community, as well as the patriarchs of the Orthodox Church. Under their control was the “raya” - the majority of the population. Ottoman society was organized in a difficult scheme of social strata, and movement between them was very difficult. At the very top of the state pyramid was the sultan, as an absolute ruler in the name of God (Allah). He was the only source of power and had the right to demand absolute obedience from his subjects; he had absolute control over their lives and property and he was the owner of state property (Jelavich, 1983: 45-46)

“*Millet*” is a term for confessional communities in the Ottoman Empire. It refers to the special legal courts dealing with “personal law” (Muslim Sharia, Christian canon law and Jewish Halacha laws) under which the communities were allowed to govern themselves according to their own system. After the reforms of the Ottoman “Tanzimat” (1839–76), the term was used for legally protected religious minority groups, similar to the way other countries use the word nation. The word Millet comes from the Arabic word “millah” and literally means “people”. The Millet system of Islamic law can be called an example of pre-modern religious

pluralism.

The so-called "millet" system of the Ottoman Empire began to change in the 19th century, gradually being replaced by nationalism and identity that transcended religion. Nationalism was indeed only a force among the intelligentsia, as well as the political and economic elite. But for the mass of people in the Empire, religion was still the basic self-identification. (McCarthy, 2001: 39). When a Greek national activist asked the people of Thessaloniki at the beginning of the 20th century about their ethnic (national) identity, whether they were "Romanoi" (Greeks) or "Vulgaroi" (Bulgarians), they looked confused! First they crossed themselves and then replied naively: "But we are Christians - what does "Romanoi" or "Vulgaroi" mean?" (Mazower, 2000: 67).

In practice, religious identification did not conflict with the ideals of nationalism. Radical intellectuals, who were not religious in their own right, were prepared to use religion as a unifying force, as long as it suited their purposes. Language was only the most obvious marker of a common nationality, not the primary definition. What was essential was a common "national" history. The important point was whether one believed there was a common ancestry, for no one could trace their ancestors beyond a limited number of generations, especially not in a region that had been invaded by the gene pools of so many conquerors. Individual members of the nation needed to be aware of their belonging and to want to be included in it. Intellectuals and politicians defined who the members of the nation were. Thus, the Pomaks, Torbesh, Gorani (Muslim communities speaking Slavic) were considered "Bulgarian-Mohammedans", "Serbian-Mohammedans", "Muslims with our blood" and other terms of identity, which were used during the national revival of the Christian population in the Balkan states, especially in Bulgaria and Serbia, which was created in intellectual circles, before the creation of nation-states. The Christian people of the Balkans began to understand the world with the language of nationalism, while their views towards Muslims remained within the domain of the same discourse between religious communities (Todorova, 2001: 260). On the other hand, since the Balkan Muslims were unable to adopt the national code and were practically excluded from the process of national consolidation and integration, they maintained the current conciseness, which presented an image of a "millet" mentality as an Ottoman legacy (Todorova, 2001: 261).

Nation and ethnicity proved to be the strongest glue in state-building in the 19th century, but also as a "déjà vu" in the last decade of the 20th century. People need a mobilizing factor, which makes them belong to large groups, communities, nations and other collectivities. The term nationalism describes loyalty to one's nation, pride in one's history and culture, the belief that its interests are of primary importance and the desire to achieve or maintain one's independence. Nationalism emerged as a political force in the late 18th century, sparked by the French Revolution, and since then the idea that nations have the right to form their own political states has shaped the map of the world as we know it today. In no country or time has a "nation" been anything other than a powerful shared idea and has never been more than an idea. A state can be defined by its laws or borders, ethnic groups can at least be understood statistically as part of a population that dances the same folk dances, eats the same traditional or ritual foods, speaks the same language and gathers together to engage in

these activities. The nation is different because it exists only in the minds of nationalists. The first nationalists spoke of "common blood", but this did not fit well with biological knowledge, although they continued to speak of their nations in quasi-genetic terms. The more common belief was that the nation was a spiritual reality - an indeterminate spiritual bond that made people in their souls human, whether they were French, German, Italian or otherwise. The writings and speeches of nationalists leave no doubt that they believed that nation was such a spiritual state, or perhaps a shared emotion. (McCarthy J, 2001: 38).

One of the most widely accepted definitions of the nation is that of Adam Smith, who defines it as "a named human population with a common historical territory, common myths and historical memories, a common mass public culture, a common economy, and common legal rights and obligations of all members" (Smith AD, 1991: 30).

Nation-states are products of a particular historical development in Europe, which was made possible by the introduction and rapid development of capitalism and the capitalist mode of production. European nation-states developed simultaneously with the formation of modern (ethno) nations of the 16th and 17th centuries. In this process, states have acquired an ethnic dimension and identity. The dominant ethnic communities in certain territories usually determine the ethnic identity of nation-states. States are understood as specific or even the only means and mechanisms that can ensure the realization of specific (national) interests of (ethno) nations. European states were established and are still considered to be nation states of certain nations - we could say "unitary nation-states". This concept can be explained with a simple equation: *State = nation = people*. (Žagar M., 2010: 172). Following these logics of nation-states, their populations believe that they are ethnically and culturally homogeneous entities. As a result, the myth of ethnic homogeneity was born, which reinforces the belief that the nation-state belongs to a certain (ethnic) nation.

The myth of ethnic homogeneity was a powerful force in building a common collective, ethnically based identity on the territory of a certain state. This myth is the basis for the political ideology of nationalism and is often exploited by nationalist movements and politicians. (Smith A.D., 1991: 194). However, *as is often the case with myths, the myth of ethnic homogeneity of nation-states does not correspond to reality*, and ethnic/cultural plurality has always been a reality in most territories and states. *Nationalism is exclusive and/or hegemonic and is usually hostile to others*.

For the achievement of cultural, religious and ethnic diversity in the Balkans, the national idea and nationalism were recipes for violation. Even the Austrian Foreign Minister in 1853 warned that "*the establishment of new states according to the borders of nationality is the most dangerous of all utopian schemes*" (Mazower M. 2000: 149). With the processes of creating nation-states, at the same time the issues of minorities (initially religious, but later ethnic or national) their status in the new nation-states, the protection of their religions, cultures and languages, as well as other social and political rights arose.

The new state borders of 1878 (Berlin Congress) and 1913 (after the Balkan Wars) became the basic criteria for defining collective identity. National identity was promoted as a major factor for group

identification, in contrast to the former religious collective categorization. National governments and administrations generally pursued restrictive policies of integration of the Muslim population and their participation in public life, due to superstitions about loyalty to the state, given that Muslims had lost the benefits they had enjoyed in the Ottoman Empire. National ideology imposed cultural identity by taking control of the economy and conventional collective images of families and local communities. The lack of a national strategy for the inclusion and integration of the Muslim population into the new societies and into the national “WE” or “OUR”, brought confusion related to the definitions of the Muslim population.

The most important segments in the formation of the collective identity of the nation-state are its *institutions, especially local administration, military service and mass education*. While in the Ottoman Empire, in settlements where Muslims who spoke Slavic languages lived or where there were mixed settlements with Muslim and Christian populations, the political elite and local leaders were mainly from the Muslim community, in the nation-states they were mainly Christians. This policy of “revenge” strengthened solidarity between Muslims of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds in the new nation-states.

In 1912, for the first time in the history of the region, states used military conflict to achieve long-term demographic goals. The large-scale violence and killings horrified investigative bodies: “The Turkish people fled from the Christians, the Bulgarians from the Greeks and Turks, the Greeks and Turks from the Bulgarians, the Albanians from the Serbs,” the Carnegie Commission noted in 1914. The measures used by the Greeks against the Macedonians, the Turks against the Christians, and the Serbs against the Albanians were not simply extermination or deportation, but an indirect method, which would ultimately lead to the same goal, towards religious conversion and assimilation. “Forced conversion, mass executions and the persecution of tens of thousands of refugees were the consequences of the attempt to rearrange the remaining Ottoman provinces in Europe according to the national principle. (Mazower, 2000:151). After the Balkan Wars, the states applied a new, less extreme method for resolving minority issues, the so-called “population exchange”. Namely, Greece and Turkey decided at the Congress of Lausanne that Greeks and Turks could no longer live together. After extensive negotiations, the forced population exchange was established in the terms of the agreement. The exchange officially began on May 1, 1924, although exchanges had occurred earlier. More than a million Orthodox Greeks were transported from Asia Minor to Greece, and 380 thousand Muslims left Greece and emigrated to Turkey. (McCarthy J. 2001: 160)

Under diplomatic pressure from the international community, the practice of “population exchange” was abandoned and the Balkan states were encouraged to sign and adopt the Treaties on Minority Rights, which were to be respected by the League of Nations. The protection of minorities was regulated by international treaties and documented, both within and outside the “League of Nations” as a central institution. The peace treaties were central documents in this context, serving as the basis for all other documents. In this context, it is worth mentioning the issue of the Treaty between Bulgaria and Greece in 1924 and Greece’s recognition of the existence of a “Bulgarian” minority on its territory. This caused a crisis in the traditionally good relations

between Greece and Serbia/Yugoslavia, which feared further reactions from the Bulgarian state that in the “Vardar Banovina” the majority of the population was “Bulgarian”. For this reason, after frequent criticism from the League of Nations that Greece was not protecting minority rights under the Treaties, Greece promised to provide instruction in the mother tongue in primary schools in areas with a significant Macedonian population. In 1925, Athens published a primer for schools, called the “Abecedar” in Latin letters, instead of Cyrillic. This primer was submitted to the League of Nations in order to show that Greece was acting in accordance with the commitments of the Treaty. (Rossos, 2008: 171).

The new system satisfied neither minorities nor majorities. The former found it clear that there was no body to listen to complaints, since the League of Nations lacked effective means of pressure and coercion. The majority resented treaties that loudly called for other states to be involved in their internal affairs. The Balkan states were practically free to treat their minorities as they pleased. Rapid territorial expansion meant that they imposed their government as a colonial power, sending policemen, teachers, and peasant colonists among people speaking different languages. Minority members were often discriminated against on property grounds and forced to speak a “new” national language in public, while their own language was to be used behind closed doors.

1.3 Risks of neglecting or politicizing the cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic or other diversity politics

People in the Balkans talk a lot about each other or against each other, but know little about each other. The less they know each other, the easier it is to mobilize against each other. Nationalist mythmakers, on all sides are doing everything they can to keep it that way. What is seen with the strong digitalization and the development of social networks, points to the systematic production of ignorance, ignorance, as well as the increase in hate speech, which makes it easier to manipulate emotions, and in politics emotions are important and cannot be excluded, nor ignored. Two things are essential: we must get to know the Balkan peoples, communities and cultures better and we must fight relentlessly against prejudices, stereotypes and myths about others.

Of course, the consolidation of the historical narrative and terminology, translated into a “politically correct consensual model” for all groups and identities in the Balkans, is one of the most important missions of all Balkan states, but also more broadly in neighboring countries and in Europe. The transition from national or local history to universal history, as a synthesis of all human events and periods in the Balkans and beyond, should be one of the strategic priorities of Balkan historiography (Tufan M. 2008: 789-799). The harmonization of the politically correct historical narrative and terminology towards national and other minorities and vulnerable categories in every political society in the Balkans is one of the pillars towards achieving the goal of universal history. At the same time, citizens should be enabled to open democratic debates about cultural differences in society, about recognizing the diversity of society, recognizing different

identities.. They should clarify which traditions and collective memories they want to preserve, which they want to break, what relationships they want to have with their history, with each other, towards the diverse society and how to continue.

The conscious subjective forces of the Balkan peoples and minorities face another challenge, calmly and in the spirit of tolerance and peace: to think about whether priority should be given to the *nation as an imaginary community and nationalism*, which in the Balkans easily turns into national-chauvinism, or *patriotism* and love for one's climate, the connection to the place in which a person is born, grows, develops, dies and is buried, a climate accepted with real diversity without myths of homogeneity and ethnic or national superiority. It is an important assumption and challenge for Balkan historiography.

Were the ethnic and religious conflicts in the Balkans, Balkanization, products of “ancient hatreds”, cause and/or consequence of the “clash of civilizations” and the great powers of the Balkans? The wars were terrible in the way they were fought, with the crimes committed and their consequences, but the Balkan wars were not much different from other civil and religious wars in Europe and the world.

The peace and stability of the Balkans, the border area between Western and Eastern Europe, between the Orient and the Occident, has always depended on the stability of the large neighboring geographical and political units. International agreements in the Balkans in the 19th and 20th centuries were, as a rule, the result of negotiations between the great powers (Congress of Berlin, Versailles, Yalta) or were concluded under their direct influence (London Conference, Bucharest Peace, Dayton Agreement). Even if the relations of the non-Balkan great powers were to deteriorate and lead to the violation of these agreements, there would be unrest and military clashes in the Balkans.

The modern processes of globalization, migration, hybridization, the process of international integration, as well as all kinds of touching, mixing or exclusion of different cultures, emphasize the need to think about multiculturalism as an idea or ideal for the harmonious coexistence of different cultural and ethnic groups within the framework of a plural society.

Canadian theorist and professor Will Kymlicka - a central figure in the theory of liberal multiculturalism about the impact of globalization on the emergence of multiculturalism emphasizes that "globalization has made the myth of a culturally homogeneous state even more unrealistic and has forced the majority in each state to become more open to pluralism and diversity". (Kymlicka, 2004: 3)

Instead of Conclusions

The Balkans is one of the most culturally diverse regions of Europe. The coexistence of Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim traditions; the historical presence of big number of communities and the fusion of Eastern and Western cultural legacies all form a unique mosaic. This heritage, often politicized and contested, can be reframed as **a soft power asset**:

- **Bosnia and Herzegovina** can leverage its Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Yugoslav legacies to promote itself as a crossroads of civilizations.
- **North Macedonia** presents itself as a model of interethnic power-sharing after the Ohrid Agreement (2001).
- **Albania and Kosovo** emphasize religious tolerance between Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox communities.
- **Balkan states** can highlight their multicultural cities—Belgrade, Sarajevo, Podgorica, Tirana, Skopje, Pristina, Banja Luka, Prizren, Korca, Bitola, Ohrid and many others—as hubs of cultural diplomacy.

When framed positively, this multicultural reality projects an image of **resilience, adaptability, and inclusiveness**—qualities that attract international recognition and support.

Multiculturalism strengthens the credibility of Balkan states within the **European Union’s normative framework**, which emphasizes minority rights, cultural diversity, and intercultural dialogue. Countries that demonstrate respect for diversity improve their chances for accession and deepen their legitimacy in Brussels and other European capitals.

At the regional level, multiculturalism can serve as a **bridge-building mechanism**. Initiatives such as cross-border cultural festivals, shared heritage projects, and interreligious dialogue foster cooperation beyond ethnic and national divisions. By promoting a common cultural heritage, Balkan states can transform their fragmented past into a shared platform for soft power.

The Balkans exports a wide range of cultural products—music, literature, cuisine, film, and sports—that reflect its multicultural environment. Serbian and Croatian film industries, Bosnian literature, Albanian contemporary art, and Balkan music festivals have gained global visibility. These outputs not only generate economic value but also create symbolic capital, shaping perceptions of the region as vibrant and creative.

Additionally, the **Balkan diaspora**, spread across Europe and North America, serves as an important channel of cultural diplomacy. Diaspora communities often function as cultural ambassadors, promoting Balkan traditions while contributing to host societies. If coordinated strategically, diasporas could enhance the region’s international reputation through business networks, cultural exchanges, and academic cooperation.

Despite its potential, multiculturalism in the Balkans remains fragile. Nationalist rhetoric, unresolved historical grievances, and weak institutional protections for minorities often undermine diversity. Xenophobia, discrimination, especially against Roma and Balkan Egyptians communities, and contested religious and linguistic rights hinder the credibility of states that wish to present themselves as multicultural. Moreover, external actors—such as Russia, Turkey, and the EU—sometimes instrumentalize diversity for geopolitical purposes, further complicating the picture.

If not managed inclusively, multiculturalism can be perceived as a source of division rather than strength. To be effective as soft power, it must be backed by **credible domestic policies** that ensure minority rights,

promote equal opportunities, and foster intercultural education.

The Balkans stands at the intersection of competing narratives: one of conflict and fragmentation, and another of coexistence and diversity. By embracing multiculturalism as a **strategic form of soft power**, the region can reshape its international image, enhance European integration, and foster long-term peace and cooperation. In an era of “runaway world” dynamics and “liquid modernity,” where identities and alliances are increasingly fluid, the Balkans has an opportunity to transform its multicultural legacy from a source of division into a **pillar of attraction, influence, and resilience**.

The **myth of ethnic homogeneity** has historically fueled exclusion and violence in the Balkans. In a globalized and Europeanizing world, such myths are increasingly untenable. The future stability of the region depends on replacing **Balkanization** with **multiculturalism**—anchored in inclusive institutions, civic patriotism, and regional cooperation. By embracing diversity as a strength, rather than a threat, the Balkans can finally move beyond cycles of fragmentation and conflict toward a durable peace grounded in pluralism and democracy.

Successful management of diversity at all levels is essential for long-term peace, stability, prosperity and the successful functioning of democracy in plural societies. Successful management of diversity requires formal and ongoing recognition and acceptance of all socially relevant differences, including culture, ethnicity, language, religion. Effective regulations, including strategies and policies of inclusion, integration, multiculturalism and interculturalism, as well as effective mechanisms to identify and address potential problems, crises and conflicts, are also necessary.

Recommendations

Issue: Nation-states in the Balkans have often been built on ethnic exclusivity, population exchanges, and myths of homogeneity.

Mitigation: National governments should replace exclusionary narratives with inclusive frameworks of citizenship and to adopt policies that recognize cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity as assets, not threats.

Issue: Competing national histories reinforce stereotypes, ignorance, and interethnic mistrust.

Mitigation: Developing of *shared history projects* and joint educational materials (similar to Franco-German textbooks) with aim to reduce nationalist myth-making and encouraging regional academic cooperation and EU-supported “inclusive memory politics.”

Issue: The millet system once allowed pluralism, but modern states replaced it with restrictive nationalist policies, leaving minorities marginalized

Mitigation: Governments should reinforce compliance with *international minority rights frameworks* (Framework Convention on National Minorities, EU Copenhagen Criteria). This includes guaranteeing education in minority languages, anti-discrimination protections, and proportional political participation.

Issue: Digitalization and social media amplify hate speech, stereotypes, and manipulation

Mitigation: Establishing of **regional monitoring mechanisms** for online hate speech, alongside civic education campaigns on media literacy and intercultural dialogue.

Issue: Nationalism in the Balkans often slips into chauvinism and exclusion.

Mitigation: Promoting **civic patriotism** (attachment to place, institutions, and democracy) as an alternative to ethnic nationalism. Policies should stress loyalty to constitutional order and shared democratic values rather than bloodline or ethnicity.

For multiculturalism to serve as soft power in the Balkans, governments and regional actors should:

1. **To implement national strategies** for Interculturalism and Social cohesion
2. **Promote Shared Narratives:** Move beyond exclusive national histories and highlight common cultural experiences.
3. **Institutionalize Diversity:** Strengthen legal and political frameworks protecting minority rights.
4. **Invest in Cultural Diplomacy:** Support regional film, art, and music projects that showcase multicultural heritage to global audiences.
5. **Engage the Diaspora:** Create structured programs to harness diaspora communities as cultural and economic bridges.
6. **Strengthen Interreligious Dialogue:** Use the region's pluralist religious heritage as a tool for peacebuilding and soft power projection.
7. **Preventing of the renewed Balkanization:** Move beyond ethnic exclusivity by institutionalizing minority rights, proportional representation, and multicultural governance. Recognize pluralism as a resource for resilience and development.

Bibliography

Atanasov, P. 2017. Macedonian Multiethnic Nodes: A Battle for One or Two Societies, Prosvetno delo, Skopje (original: Атанасов, П. 2017. Македонски мултиетнички јазли: Битка за едно или две општества, Просветно дело, Скопје)

Bembesa E. &Rodrigue A., 2002, Histoire des Juifs sephardes De Toleda a Salonique, Edition du Seuil..

Džeparoski I., (ed.), 2007, Aspects of Otherness: A Collection of Cultural Studies. Skopje: Euro-Balkan Press, Menora (original: Џепароски И., (ур.), 2007, Аспекти на другоста: Зборник по културологија. Скопје: Евро-Балкан Пресс, Менора)

Kymlicka, W. 1995. *Multicultural citizenship: A liberal theory of minority rights*. Oxford University Press.

Jelavich B., 1983, History of the Balkans- 18th and 19th Centuries, Volume 1, Cambridge University Press.

Mazower M. 2000, The Balkans- A short History, Widenfeld&Nicolson Book, UK

McCarthy J., 2001, The Ottoman Peoples and the End of Empire, Oxford University Press, New York

Mursic R. & Jezernik B, 2007, The Balkans in/and Europe, in: Jezerni k B., Mursic R and Bartulovic A. (ed.) Europe and its Other, Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana

Rossos A., 2008, Macedonia and the Macedonians: a history, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, Stanford, California

- Said, E. W. 2003. *Orientalism*. Penguin Modern Classics. London, England: Penguin Classics.
- Simic J. (ed .) 2017, *SPAJAJUĆI ISTOK I ZAPAD* Spomenica profesora Predraga Simića , priredila Jasminka Simić , Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu Beograd
- Smith A. D., 1991, *National Identity*, Penguin Books Ltd, London,
- Todora M. 1997, *Imaging the Balkans*, Oxford University Press, Inc. New York, USA,
- Tufan M. 2008, *Historiography - Harmonization of Historical Terminology*, in: *Institute of National History, Transitions in History and Culture, International Scientific Conference, Skopje, 789-799.* (original:Туфан М. 2008, Историографија- Усогласување на историската терминологија, во: Институт за национална историја, Транзициите во историјата и културата, меѓународна научна конференција, Скопје, 789-799.)
- Zemon, R. 2018, *Macedonian Salad: Managing of Virtual Reality among the Imagining of the Nation – State, Dreaming Multiculturalism and Developing Bi-Cutural Polices*, in: *Multiculturalism in Public Policies, Academic Network for Cooperation in South- East Europe, Institute for Social Sciences, Beograd, Institute for Ethnic Studies, Lubljana and Centre for International and Security Studies, Faculty of Political Studies, Zagreb*
- Žagar M., 2010, *Some Newer Trends in the Protection and (Special) Rights of Ethnic Minorities: European Context*; in *Minorities for Minorities, Center for Peace Studies, Zagreb*



Jody JENSEN - the Director of Transdisciplinary Research and Collaboration at iASK. She is a senior research fellow at HUN-REN Institute of Political Sciences. She was the Director of the MA Program in International Relations at the Corvinus University of Budapest, and International Studies MA Program at the University of Pannonia Kőszeg Campus where she was awarded a Jean Monet Chair in European Solidarity and Social Cohesion (ESSCO). She is the Director of International Relations at the Institute for Social and European Studies (ISES, a Jean Monet Centre of Excellence) which she helped to found. She served as the national and regional director of Ashoka: Innovators for the Public that supports social entrepreneurs. She teaches in Hungary and abroad. She works regularly for the European Commission. Her areas of research are prefigurative and subterranean politics, global inequalities and new social and political movements, particularly in East and Central Europe and the Balkans, and studies complexity as it translates to social phenomena and change.

Contact: jodypjensen@gmail.com

PARABLES AND PARADIGM SHIFTS: NAVIGATING COMPLEXITIES IN A CHAORDIC AGE

The Parable of the River and the Flame

In a world that was neither fully ordered nor entirely chaotic, a river flowed bordered by a flames. The River was old and deep. It carved out valleys, watered fields, and watched dynasties rise and fall. The Flame was young and brilliant, and also unpredictable. It leapt from tree to tree in forests, igniting passions, and lighting the paths of wandering peoples.

For a long time, the River and the Flame lived apart. The River found the Flame reckless. The Flame found the River slow. But the land around them was entering strange times that were not quite peaceful nor fully chaotic. The winds blew in many conflicting directions, and the geographic maps kept changing.

One day, a messenger arrived – a bird that flew from the mountain between the River and the Flame and landed where both the River and the Flame could hear it speak. The bird said, "The time has come you both to find a way to meet. The land is fracturing and old ways are changing. New forms must emerge, and without cooperation everything could fall into ruin."

The River said, "But the Flame would boil me. I move through time. The Flame only dances in moments." The Flame responded "The River would drown me. I want to leap and advance. The River just wants to drift and dawdle." The bird replied, "Then do not try to change each other, but create something new."

So the River and the Flame agreed to a fragile *détente* – an accord. They sent the Mist from the River, and Smoke from the Flame. These representatives came together and spoke in symbols and silences. From their meetings, clouds formed. The clouds gave rain that fed the forests, and the forests calmed the wind.

Although the River and the Flame could not fully touch their offspring called Steam, it rose above the land without conflict. It warmed cold hearts and drove old machines back into motion. In time, other elements took notice. The Stone learned to bend. The Wind began to listen. Even the Sun and Moon aligned more often. In chaordic times—when neither chaos nor order reigned—the River and the Flame taught the land a truth: That diplomacy is not about taming Fire or Flooding rivers, but about crafting Steam where neither could stand alone.

So in these turbulent times, true diplomacy arises not from forcing harmony, but from forging cooperation and coexistence—where tension becomes transformation.

The Chaordic Age Context

A chaordic system is one that blends chaos (creativity, unpredictability) with order (structure, stability). Today's global reality—climate crisis, rapid tech change, economic instability, political polarization—is chaordic: systems are destabilizing while new patterns are emerging.

There are many models for the rise and fall of civilizations, societies and economic models. I want to briefly introduce four approaches that may help us to understand the transition our world is experiencing and the impact it may have on our lives moving forward. These approaches include recognition of Karl Jasper's description of Axial Agesⁱ as "an interregnum between two ages of great [empire](#)" where old certainties have their validity and new ones are not yet ready.ⁱⁱ But the main approaches discussed are the development of World Systems theory articulated by Immanuel Wallerstein;ⁱⁱⁱ Thomas Kuhn and his development of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*;^{iv} Karl Polanyi's formulation of *The Great Transformation*^v; and Michael Schacker's *Global Awakening*. Jaspers, Wallerstein, and Polanyi worked in different intellectual traditions, but they all wrestled with the relationship between history, society, and meaning — just from very different angles. Kuhn and Schacker take a broad view of systemic change dependent on the transformation of systems under stress.

The term 'Axial Age' (Karl Jaspers) has reappeared in attempts to denote that people all over the world are struggling to find new meaning in the very new conditions of existence as a result of industrial, technical and communications revolutions. Existential needs for meaning and comfort now require, some believe, a new spiritual revolution (Karen Armstrong), or a global awakening (Michael Schacker) which envisions a paradigm shift from a mechanistic world view to a holistic world view.

In another vocabulary, we live in the time of structural crisis, systemic bifurcation and transition from one world system to another (Immanuel Wallerstein). Although we do not know what the new world system or structure will look like, as individuals and collectives we can have more impact at this time, because we are not under the constraints of the old or emerging new world system. Therefore, the age we live in is more open to human intervention and creativity.

Karl Polányi presented a set of interrelated and intertwined phenomena. With extraordinary prescience, he warned that crisis would come. He rejected the idea that the market is "self-regulating" and can correct itself and argued that there is nothing inevitable or "natural" about the way markets work. He emphasized that markets are always shaped by political decisions.

Michael Schacker^{vi} proposes that we are undergoing a major paradigm shift from the old mechanistic worldview to a new organic worldview, drawing on lessons from historical shifts like the Enlightenment and the American Revolution. He outlines recurring stages in such transitions, including the conservative backlash phase, an intensive phase, and a "flip point"—the moment the new paradigm fully emerges and overcomes the old paradigm. Schacker emphasizes that the mechanistic paradigm is now unraveling due to global crises like environmental degradation and social inequality. He offers a "blueprint" for constructive action—regeneration, systemic transformation, and individual engagement in creating an organic future.

Karl Jaspers In A Chaordic Age

Karl Jaspers is surprisingly relevant to a chaordic age, even though he was writing decades before the term existed. His work offers a deep-time, philosophical lens for understanding *why* turbulence often coincides with leaps in human consciousness.

Axial Age as a Precedent for Chaordic Transformation

Jaspers' wrote that around 800–200 BCE, multiple civilizations (China, India, the Middle East, Greece) experienced an Axial Age—a period of crisis, questioning, and spiritual creativity that birthed enduring moral and philosophical systems. In other words, an Axial Age is essentially a chaordic moment—the breakdown of old orders and the simultaneous creation of new meaning structures. Jaspers shows that this pattern has happened before and can be fruitful, not just destructive.

Meaning in the Midst of Disorder

Jaspers saw times of upheaval as existential openings—moments when humanity becomes more self-aware and reflective. In a chaordic age, where technological and ecological disruptions can overwhelm, his focus on *philosophical faith* and dialogue across cultures offers tools for maintaining purpose and dignity amid uncertainty.

Communication as a Bridge Between Chaos and Order

Jaspers emphasized communication and encounters between worldviews that expand mutual understanding without erasing difference. Chaordic systems thrive when diversity is not suppressed into rigid order, nor allowed to fragment into pure chaos. Jaspers' intercultural and interfaith dialogue is a model for managing complexity without forcing uniformity.

Moral Compass for Systemic Change

Where Polányi gives an *economic* compass and Schacker offers a *paradigm* roadmap, Jaspers provides an *existential* and *ethical* compass—reminding us that no matter how turbulent the system, the ultimate question is: what does it mean to be human in this moment? In a chaordic era, where old moral anchors dissolve, Jaspers' insistence on shared humanity and transcendent values keeps the transformation from becoming purely technical or power-driven.

This matters today because it shows that chaos-to-order transitions are not new—they can yield cultural revolutions that last millennia. It provides a perspective on cultural humility that encourages cross-cultural learning as a stabilizing force in global turbulence. It provides the core for existential resilience by offering ways to face uncertainty without succumbing to fear or nihilism. In short, Jaspers tells us: The chaos is not the end; it may be the doorway to a new civilizational consciousness—if we meet it with dialogue, reflection, and moral courage. While Jaspers studies humanity's civilizational turning points; Kuhn studies *disciplinary* turning points. Jaspers discusses meaning and morality in history, while Kuhn outlines the mechanics of conceptual change in science.

Thomas Kuhn and *The Structure Of Scientific Revolutions* in the Contemporary Context

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* Thomas Kuhn revolutionized how we understand science itself. Rather than viewing scientific progress as a steady, cumulative acquisition of knowledge, Kuhn introduced the concept of *paradigm shifts*—fundamental, disruptive changes in scientific frameworks. This theory reframed science not as purely objective but as shaped by historical, psychological, and sociological forces. In today's context—an era defined by rapid technological change, complex global crises, and increasing skepticism toward science—Kuhn's ideas remain profoundly relevant. They help us understand not only how science changes but also how those changes are perceived, resisted, and institutionalized.

Paradigm Shifts and Contemporary Scientific Revolutions

Kuhn writes that science proceeds through alternating phases of "normal science" and revolutionary change. In normal science, research operates within a dominant paradigm—a framework of theories, methods, and standards accepted by a scientific community. However, when persistent anomalies arise that cannot be explained or resolved within this paradigm, a crisis emerges, often followed by a paradigm shift.

This model resonates strongly with recent scientific transformations. For example:

- Climate science has undergone a shift from isolated environmental studies to an integrated understanding of Earth systems and human influence—marking a transition toward the Anthropocene Paradigm.
- Economic uncertainty and increasing crises, including the 2008 global financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic shock, the post-2020 inflation and debt crises, and Trump's new tariff plans, have revealed deep flaws in prevailing economic models.
- COVID-19 exposed the limits of existing public health paradigms and highlighted the dynamic nature of scientific consensus during crisis, where recommendations shifted in real time as new data emerged.
- Artificial intelligence challenges traditional understandings of cognition, creativity, and even ethics, raising questions not only within science but across philosophy, law, and society.

These shifts illustrate how science in the contemporary world often operates at the edge of paradigmatic boundaries, with multiple competing frameworks (e.g., different models of AI learning, or competing theories of pandemic response, or social movements that target growing inequalities) coexisting or clashing.

The Sociology of Science and Institutional Resistance

Kuhn argued that paradigm shifts are often resisted by the scientific establishment because they require abandoning deeply held assumptions. This insight is increasingly relevant in today's polarized scientific and political environment.

Contemporary examples include:

- Gene editing technologies like CRISPR have generated fierce debate—not only within biology but also among ethicists, policymakers, and the public.
- Quantum computing challenges classical notions of computation and information, requiring a reframing of foundational principles in physics and computer science.

Kuhn's insight that science is a human activity—embedded in institutions, traditions, and power structures—helps explain why revolutionary ideas often face resistance. In the age of digital communication and open-access knowledge, new paradigms may emerge more rapidly, but they also encounter new forms of skepticism, misinformation, and political interference.

Post-Kuhnian Challenges: Fragmentation and Interdisciplinarity

Kuhn's model was based primarily on the physical sciences, which tend to have more unified paradigms. Today, however, science is increasingly *interdisciplinary*, with blurred boundaries between fields. This fragmentation complicates the idea of a single dominant paradigm within any given domain.

For example:

- *Neuroscience* combines biology, psychology, computer science, and philosophy.
- *Climate science* merges geology, atmospheric science, economics, and policy.

In such hybrid fields, the idea of a clearly defined "normal science" is more difficult to apply. Instead, multiple paradigms may coexist in productive tension, with progress driven by negotiation rather than revolution.

Immanuel Wallerstein's Relevance in a Chaordic Age

Wallerstein's theory views global change not as random or linear, but as shaped by deep economic and political structures. While the world-system is highly resistant to change, *periods of crisis* can create opportunities for transformation.

Systemic Thinking for a Chaordic World

Wallerstein's approach to analyzing the world as a single, complex, interdependent system mirrors the chaordic structure of today's global dynamics. In a world where traditional hierarchies are breaking down and uncertainty reigns, his framework helps explain how core powers maintain influence through adaptive control, not rigid dominance.

Instability as a Feature

Wallerstein predicted that the capitalist world-economy was entering a period of *systemic crisis* that has become a structural condition. He argued that we are in a "*bifurcation*" moment, that is a point at which the current system could evolve in radically different directions.

Critique of Capitalist Logic

The logic of endless capital accumulation, he describes, is increasingly in conflict with ecological limits, social movements for equality and justice, and digital transformations. The chaordic age demands new paradigms beyond capitalism and nation-states.

Wallerstein's ideas offer a powerful toolkit for navigating our times marked by complexity, instability, and transformation. His world-systems approach provides a lens to understand how we got here, why the current global order is fracturing, and what might emerge next. In a world where old paradigms no longer hold.

Polányi's Core Ideas and Their Relevance

Embeddedness of the Economy

Polányi claims that in most of history, the economy was embedded in social relations; the “self-regulating market” of the 19th century was the anomaly. Today, as global crises force systemic rethinking (e.g., regenerative economics, circular economies), Polányi reminds us that markets must be re-embedded in social and ecological systems for resilience with commons-based governance.

The Double Movement

According to his analysis, market liberalization provokes a countermovement—society pushes back to protect itself from dislocation. In a chaordic age, this “*double movement*” accelerates—market disruption (automation, deregulation, globalization) and sparks powerful pushbacks (localism, social justice movements, environmental activism). Recognizing and understanding this double movement as an inevitable pattern, not an anomaly, i.e., anticipating and integrating pushback into reform, helps to navigate the turbulence.

Moral and Historical Perspectives and Institutional Anchoring

Purely market-driven societies erode social cohesion and ultimately destabilize themselves. The tension between chaos (innovation, disruption) and order (stability, trust, shared norms) demands institutional frameworks that balance dynamism with protection—exactly the balance Polányi argued for. The use of historical analogies to avoid repeating the path from market fundamentalism to systemic breakdown, Polányi's historical framing helps us see warning signs (rapid market expansion, social dislocation, rise of authoritarian politics) and potential corrective pathways.

Polányi provides us with a map of systemic pendulum swings and a reminder that order without adaptability is brittle, and adaptability without protection is destructive. That is the central challenge of surviving and thriving in a chaordic age.

If Karl Polányi helps us understand the structural pendulum between market forces and social protections, Schacker helps us understand the narrative and cultural arc of how we cross the bridge from breakdown to breakthrough.

Michael Schackers Paradigm Shift as Chaordic Transition

Michael Schacker's ideas in *Global Awakening* are almost tailor-made for a chaordic age, because he focuses on how societies navigate moments when chaos and order are colliding to produce a new paradigm. Schacker's core thesis is that we are living through the collapse of an old mechanistic worldview and the emergence of an organic, systems-oriented worldview. A chaordic age is precisely the in-between phase—too unstable to be the old order, too unfinished to be the new. Schacker treats this liminal zone as the crucible where transformation happens.

Schacker's "Four Phase" Framework

Schacker identifies recurring stages in major historical shifts (like the Enlightenment): *Early awakening*—a new way of thinking emerges at the margins. *Conservative backlash*—defenders of the old order intensify resistance. *Intensive phase*—crisis escalates and change accelerates. *Flip point*—the new paradigm becomes dominant.

This maps almost perfectly onto a chaos–order cycle—chaos peaks in the “intensive phase,” order reasserts itself in the “flip point,” but as a *different* order than before.

Tools for Navigating the Transition

Schacker argues that regenerative systems, ecological literacy, and distributed innovation are key to stabilizing after chaos without reverting to rigid old structures. He offers a blueprint for constructive action—citizen engagement, systemic reforms, and cultural shifts—which is essential in a chaordic age where directionless change can tip into collapse.

Schacker's contribution provides a *narrative arc* that explains *how* societies move from chaos to a new order, plus practical interventions to make the new order more humane and sustainable. He emphasizes conscious participation to co-shape the next system. The chaordic age is dangerous because old systems are failing faster than new ones can replace them. Today Schacker offers: *A diagnosis* (mechanistic worldview collapse); *A prognosis* (organic systems worldview ahead); *A treatment plan* (regenerative economy, empowered citizens, adaptive institutions).

GENERAL COMPARISON OF THE FIVE SCHOLARS

Thomas Kuhn's idea of paradigm shifts in science aligns with Karl Jaspers, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Michael Schacker in seeing transformation as a patterned process, but they differ in scope and focus: Jaspers maps civilizational and spiritual breakthroughs across millennia, Kuhn explains conceptual revolutions within scientific communities, Wallerstein analyzes structural changes in the global capitalist system, and Schacker outlines whole-society worldview shifts from mechanistic to organic. All four describe phases of stability, crisis, and reordering, yet Kuhn stays within the epistemic domain of science, while the others extend the cycle

to encompass culture, economy, and the future of humanity itself.

Contrasting the Five Approaches

In terms of scope of their studies and methodological orientation, Kuhn's scope is the narrowest (disciplinary science), while Jaspers and Schacker cover the widest arcs (civilizational and worldview shifts). Wallerstein works at a global-socioeconomic scale, Polányi at a national-to-global socio-economic-historical scale, and Schacker bridges macro history with future-oriented systemic change. Methodologically, Kuhn and Jaspers are more interpretive and historical-philosophical, Wallerstein and Polányi are socio-historical with structural analysis, and Schacker blends historical pattern analysis with normative action plans. Jaspers spans ancient spiritual transformation. He is existential and philosophical. Kuhn is rather rigidly confined by disciplinarity that the others transcend in different ways. Wallerstein focuses on systemic capitalism at the macro-structural and economic-historical level. Polanyi zooms into societal-moral reactions to markets from the perspectives of socio-economic history combined with moral philosophy. Schacker maps the shift from scientific worldview to systemic regenerative thinking, combining paradigm theory, regenerative science, and cultural evolution.

Agency and Normative Outlook

Jaspers places strong emphasis on individual and collective existential agency. He believes that in moments of crisis and upheaval—like those during the Axial Age—humans have the capacity to engage in philosophical reflection, ethical choice, and dialogue that can transform consciousness and society. Agency is deeply tied to freedom, responsibility, and self-awareness, enabling individuals and cultures to co-create new meaning and moral frameworks amid uncertainty.

Jaspers holds a normative and existentially grounded outlook. He advocates for authenticity, intercultural understanding, and ethical dialogue as essential to navigating crises. His work suggests that humanity must embrace its freedom responsibly and cultivate shared values to transcend chaos and avoid nihilism. He sees moral and spiritual awakening as necessary for meaningful progress.

Kuhn's model largely limits individual agency within scientific revolutions. Scientists operate mostly within established paradigms—shared frameworks of theories, methods, and standards—that guide “normal science.” Agency comes into play primarily during periods of crisis, when anomalies accumulate and the old paradigm can no longer solve problems. At this point, collective shifts occur as new paradigms emerge, but these shifts are often non-rational and shaped by sociological and psychological factors rather than purely logical choices. So, Kuhn views agency as constrained and often unconscious, exercised more by communities than by individuals.

Kuhn adopts a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, stance. He explains how scientific change happens

rather than how it should happen. His work is normatively neutral—he does not argue that paradigm shifts are inherently better or worse, only that they are inevitable and necessary for scientific progress. Kuhn challenges the idea of steady, cumulative progress, suggesting instead that science advances through discontinuous revolutions, which complicates straightforward notions of rationality and objectivity. In short: Kuhn portrays agency as collective and constrained within paradigms, and he maintains a neutral, descriptive outlook without prescribing normative judgments about scientific change.

Wallerstein's world-systems theory emphasizes structural constraints on individual and collective agency. The global capitalist system, with its entrenched core-periphery dynamics, shapes possibilities and limits for action. While actors—states, elites, social movements—can influence and sometimes alter the system, their agency is largely conditioned by systemic forces that operate over centuries. Change tends to be slow and uneven, emerging from contradictions and crises within the world-economy rather than from intentional, large-scale planning.

Wallerstein is critical and somewhat pessimistic about the sustainability of the current capitalist world-system, highlighting its exploitative and unequal nature. Though he does not prescribe detailed solutions, he advocates for transformative change and supports movements toward social justice and systemic reform. His stance is normatively oriented toward greater equity and systemic transformation, even if the path forward is complex and uncertain.

Wallerstein sees agency as structurally constrained but recognizes long-term systemic change driven by crises; he holds a critical but somewhat open normative stance favoring justice.

Polányi stresses the importance of social agency in resisting and reshaping economic forces. While markets can exert strong pressures, societies possess the capacity to push back (the “double movement”) through social movements, institutions, and political action that re-embed markets in social norms and protections. Agency is thus collective and proactive, as communities and states act to protect social welfare and cultural values.

Polányi adopts a normative and critical stance against market fundamentalism, arguing that unregulated markets are socially destructive. He champions social protection, moral embeddedness, and democratic control over economic life. His outlook is explicitly normative, emphasizing the need to balance economic efficiency with social justice and human dignity. Polányi emphasizes collective social agency actively resisting market excesses, with a strongly normative commitment to social protection and re-embedding economics within society.

Schacker emphasizes collective agency and conscious participation in large-scale societal transformations. He argues that societies are not just passively carried by structural forces but can actively shape paradigm shifts through systemic innovation, cultural change, and regenerative practices. Agency is distributed across actors—individuals, communities, institutions—who co-create new worldviews and adaptive systems.

Schacker adopts a strongly normative and activist stance, focused on regenerative, ecological, and socially just futures. He calls for deliberate efforts to transition from a mechanistic to an organic worldview, urging engaged citizens to take responsibility for systemic renewal. His outlook is optimistic but demanding, encouraging proactive transformation grounded in sustainability and human empowerment.

In summary, Jaspers and Schacker both chart transformation through shifts in consciousness—but while Jaspers looks backward to foundational spiritual eras, Schacker seeks forward to a new organic worldview. In terms of agency and normative outlook, Kuhn portrays agency as collective and constrained within paradigms, and he maintains a neutral, descriptive outlook without prescribing normative judgments about scientific change. Wallerstein maps long-term systemic patterns; Schacker adds an anticipatory dimension—projecting a conscious paradigm shift toward sustainable systems. Polanyi’s concept of the “double movement” (market advance and societal pushback) finds resonance in Schacker’s framing of the backlash and paradigm shift phases that can be related to Kuhn’s structure of scientific change. Kuhn, Wallerstein and Polanyi often trace patterns; Jaspers reflects on consciousness, while Schacker focuses on actionable change, explicitly urging activism and presenting a roadmap for engagement.

Convergences of the Five Approaches

All of the five scholars recognize transformative historical periods—whether spiritual, scientific, economic, or ideological—that define human development. They view the current era as a crucial junction, whether it’s in consciousness (Jaspers), scientific advances and structures (Kuhn), capitalist structures (Wallerstein), social resistance (Polanyi), or worldview paradigms (Schacker). They also share the conviction that meaningful change requires rethinking foundational assumptions—about existence, science, economy, society, or worldview.

These observations and propositions have not been sufficiently recognized and some rather neglected during the past decades and by the explicit or tacit consensus of both social scientists and political analysts. In most cases analysts deal with each crisis as separate, isolated phenomena. This negligence and restricted perception (based upon the paradigm of the sovereign nation state and doctrine of independent academic disciplines) is greatly responsible for the present global turmoil which is at its heart a civilizational crisis.

One of the major negative results is the lack of responsibility taking for global or transnational disasters by the dominant players and stakeholders—from national and regional political leaders and institutions via institutions of knowledge creation and distribution including eminent social scientists. This institutionalized irresponsibility and indifference surrounded by a tacit consensus about dividedness as an unchangeable given is, to a significant degree, responsible for undermining and emptying out democracies as well as for endangering the future of human existence on the planet. The recent return of the nation state and accompanying nationalistic cliches and prejudices within Europe, and around its borders, has resulted in the

rise of rightwing and religious extremism, populism and an increasing rejection of multiculturalism. Xenophobia, racism and intolerance have been growing not only in the peripheries but also in the core countries of established democracies of affluent societies.

Young Diplomats and the Challenges of a Fragmented and Chaordic World

In today's increasingly complex and divided global landscape, diplomacy is more vital than ever—and also more challenging. For young diplomats, entering the field in the 21st century, this means navigating a world that is not only multipolar but also deeply fragmented—geopolitically, economically, digitally, and ideologically. While older generations of diplomats operated in a Cold War binary or post-Cold War unipolarity, young diplomats now find themselves mediating in a chaordic world with no single center of power, no unified global agenda, and no agreed-upon rules of engagement. I would like to present some key challenges young diplomats face in this environment of global transformations and the skills needed to confront the multiple challenges.

Multipolarity and Competing Worldviews

One of the central challenges is the rise of multipolarity. Power is no longer concentrated in a single hegemon or a stable bipolar order. Instead, influence is diffused among traditional powers (the U.S., China, Russia), regional actors (India, Brazil, Turkey), and even non-state players (tech corporations, international NGOs, and transnational terrorist networks). These actors often hold competing worldviews, from liberal internationalism to authoritarian nationalism, making consensus more difficult to achieve.

For young diplomats, this demands an acute understanding of geopolitical nuance and shades of meaning. They must engage not only with foreign ministries but with a wide range of stakeholders, understanding divergent cultural, political, and ideological lenses. The challenge is to promote dialogue without imposing uniformity—bridging divides while respecting difference.

The Decline of Multilateralism

Institutions like the United Nations, World Trade Organization, and World Health Organization have traditionally provided frameworks for diplomatic cooperation. Yet today, multilateral institutions are increasingly gridlocked, with vetoes, national interests, and populist backlash eroding their legitimacy. Therefore, diplomats must contend with a trust deficit in global governance.

They are often called upon to work around institutional paralysis—through informal and cultural diplomacy, regional partnerships, or issue-based coalitions. This demands both creativity and realism: the ability to build temporary alliances, push for reform from within institutions, and maintain cooperation even

when formal structures falter.

Digital Diplomacy and the Information Crisis

Digital technology has transformed diplomacy. Social media, AI, and real-time communication have flattened traditional hierarchies, giving diplomats new tools to engage directly with global publics. However, this also opens the door to misinformation, cyber warfare, and diplomatic missteps made visible on a global scale.

Diplomats today are often more tech-savvy than their predecessors, but they face the unprecedented challenge of conducting diplomacy in a hyper-transparent and emotionally charged digital environment. The "Twitter effect" can amplify misunderstandings, escalate conflicts, and put pressure on diplomats to respond quickly rather than thoughtfully. Managing this tension between speed and substance is one of the key tests for young professionals in the field.

Climate Change, Conflict, and Global Inequality

Contemporary diplomacy is no longer just about state-to-state relations; it increasingly involves addressing transnational crises like climate change, forced migration, pandemics, and economic inequality. These issues intersect with and often exacerbate traditional conflicts, creating layered, multidimensional problems.

Diplomats must be fluent not only in international law and political science but in climate science, health policy, and data analysis. They must also be empathetic communicators, able to understand the human impact of global policies and to advocate for solutions that are equitable, sustainable, and inclusive.

Generational Shifts and Institutional Rigidities

Diplomats also face internal challenges within their own institutions. Many foreign ministries are hierarchical, conservative, and slow to change. Young professionals may struggle to have their voices heard or to innovate within bureaucratic structures. Their values—often more open, collaborative, and globally conscious—may clash with older modes of diplomacy shaped in a different era.

However, this generational shift is also an opportunity. Young diplomats bring new energy, diverse perspectives, and a greater commitment to equity, climate action, and digital transformation. The challenge is to work within the system while pushing it to evolve.

Conclusion

In a fragmented world, young diplomats are not just negotiators between states—they are bridge-

builders across cultures, ideologies, technologies, and generations. These diplomats inherit a world in disarray but also possess tools and mindsets that can help reimagine diplomacy for the 21st century. To meet the challenges of multipolarity, institutional decay, digital disruption, and planetary crisis, diplomats must not only be skilled and informed—but resilient, adaptable, and courageous. Successful diplomacy not only shapes the future of the field, but the future of global cooperation itself.



Ferenc MISZLIVETZ - the founder and director of the Institute of Advanced Studies Kőszeg (iASK) and a Jean Monnet professor. He elaborated the innovative regional development concept, called KRAFT program (Creative Cities, Sustainable Region). He has taught and conducted research at various universities in Europe and the United States, including the University of Bologna, and Columbia University in New York. He is the founder of the Institute for Social and European Studies Foundation (a Jean Monnet European Centre of Excellence). He has served as the President of the Social Sciences unit of the Hungarian UNESCO Committee and holds a UNESCO Chair in Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainability in Kőszeg. His research interests include democracy, civil society, Central-European and European Studies, globalization and sustainability. Besides his academic awards, he was several times acknowledged, such as the Ernő Pungor Award and the Order of Merit of Hungary (civilian). iASK has won two prestigious FIABCI awards for the city dimensional real estate development of the historic town of Kőszeg.

Contact: ferenc.miszlivetz@iask.hu

Secrecy, Security, Candour, Trust, Cooperation, Solidarity

In an increasingly interconnected world, the dynamics of international relations and global governance hinge upon the delicate interplay between secrecy and transparency, security and openness, individual interests and collective responsibilities. Secrecy, whether in statecraft, corporate strategy, or intelligence operations, remains a double-edged sword: it can protect populations and preserve strategic advantages, yet it can also breed suspicion and undermine legitimacy. Security, long regarded as the foundation of international stability, extends beyond military defense to encompass economic resilience, environmental protection, and public health, demanding coordinated responses across borders.

Counterbalancing secrecy and security is the imperative for candour—honest communication that fosters understanding, mitigates conflict, and strengthens accountability. Candour underpins the cultivation of trust, a vital currency in global interactions, enabling states, institutions, and communities to navigate uncertainty and pursue common goals. Building trust is inseparable from cooperation, which operationalizes shared interests into joint actions, whether in climate agreements, pandemic response, or conflict resolution. Finally, the principle of solidarity elevates cooperation to an ethical commitment: recognizing interdependence, protecting the vulnerable, and advancing collective well-being in a world characterized by asymmetries of power, wealth, and vulnerability.

Together, these concepts form a framework for understanding how the global community can balance self-interest with common responsibility, secrecy with transparency, and security with shared humanity—a balancing act that defines the challenges and possibilities of the contemporary international order.

In an era of unprecedented global interdependence, the survival of humanity and the preservation of its civilization depend not only on states and markets but on the cross-border self-mobilisation of politically and morally responsible civil society. While issues of secrecy and security often dominate international relations—shaping policy, intelligence, and defense—these alone cannot address existential threats such as climate change, pandemics, or nuclear proliferation. What is required is a complementary ethic of candour, fostering transparency and honest dialogue, which in turn builds trust among diverse actors across borders. Such trust enables meaningful cooperation, allowing communities, organizations, and nations to coordinate actions in pursuit of common goals. Ultimately, the effectiveness of global problem-solving rests on solidarity, i.e., the recognition of shared vulnerability and collective responsibility. Only through the morally and politically engaged mobilization of civil society, working across nations and cultures, can humanity cultivate the ethical, practical, and relational foundations necessary for its long-term survival and the flourishing of a just, sustainable global civilization. The mobilisation of politically and morally responsible civil society is the only guarantee of human and civilizational survival, rather than the „security” provided by the state, guaranteed by military power.

Atoms for Peace: Illusion, Self-Deceit, and Contemporary Relevance

The *Atoms for Peace* initiative, launched by U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1953 during the height of the Cold War, represented a bold attempt to reconceptualize nuclear technology. In a speech to the United Nations General Assembly, Eisenhower proposed turning the atom bomb—a symbol of global destruction—into a source of energy, development, and international cooperation. The program sought to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy while simultaneously discouraging the proliferation of nuclear weapons. To achieve these aims, it emphasized the sharing of nuclear technology for energy, medical, and industrial purposes, coupled with the establishment of oversight mechanisms, which later evolved into the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The initiative offered a vision of a world in which the scientific and technological potential of the atom could serve humanity rather than threaten it.

Despite its ambitious goals, *Atoms for Peace* proved largely an illusion. Technically and politically, nuclear energy was inherently dual-use: while reactors could produce electricity and medical isotopes, the same technology could be diverted, intentionally or inadvertently, to develop nuclear weapons. Many nations could exploit “peaceful” programs to advance covert military capabilities, undermining the very premise of a secure and cooperative nuclear order. Geopolitically, the Cold War rivalry made genuine cooperation almost impossible. U.S. promotion of peaceful nuclear energy coexisted with a massive arms buildup, and non-aligned nations often perceived the initiative as a form of Western control disguised as humanitarian aid. As a result, the ideal of a world unified by peaceful nuclear technology remained aspirational rhetoric rather than operational reality.

Beyond its unrealized technical and political promises, *Atoms for Peace* also became a source of self-deceit. For governments, it offered a moral justification for continued nuclear weapons development while presenting a façade of international cooperation. For the public and international community, it created a sense of reassurance, suggesting that nuclear technology could be safely managed and fully separated from weapons proliferation. This moral comfort masked underlying vulnerabilities, creating the illusion that technological optimism alone could secure peace. Leaders and citizens alike were encouraged to believe in control and progress, even as the risk of nuclear escalation and proliferation persisted.

The paradox of *Atoms for Peace* continues to resonate in contemporary nuclear debates. Modern civil nuclear programs, international safeguards under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and emerging technologies such as small modular reactors and fusion energy continue to promise energy security, medical applications, and climate solutions. Yet the dual-use dilemma remains unresolved, as evidenced by cases like Iran, North Korea, and other nations pursuing sensitive nuclear technologies. Strategic rivalries among nuclear-armed states demonstrate that moral optimism and technical safeguards alone cannot prevent arms races or security dilemmas. The rhetoric of peaceful nuclear progress continues to provide reassurance, but without political realism, ethical vigilance, and international accountability, it risks

perpetuating the same cycle of illusion and self-deceit first evident in Eisenhower's initiative.

A good recent example of the uncontrolled and unaccountable mechanisms and determinants of security, we will never know how much enriched uranium (prepared for nuclear weapons) was left over after the largest and heaviest American bombs were dropped on Iran's nuclear plants. This is the perfect example of the unsolved nuclear dilemma: the failure of the 'Atoms for Peace' program and the illusion of the genius scientists – Robert J. Oppenheimer, among others – who created the first nuclear weapons dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. If this belief is to be maintained, together with the ideology that nuclear weapons are in good hands with certain powers and deadly dangerous in the case of possession by others, there will always be a reason to continue wars or start new ones after temporary ceasefires or truces.

Decades later, the same *Atoms for Peace* paradox persists. Civil nuclear programs, safeguards under the NPT (Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons), and emerging technologies like small modular reactors or fusion projects continue to promise development and energy security. Yet the dual-use dilemma, combined with strategic rivalries among nuclear powers, demonstrates that technical optimism alone cannot guarantee safety or peace. The moral comfort derived from the rhetoric of "peaceful" nuclear energy obscures the structural vulnerabilities of global governance, perpetuating the cycle of illusion and self-deceit.

Ultimately, the legacy of *Atoms for Peace* highlights a broader lesson: technological solutions, however promising, cannot substitute for political realism, ethical vigilance, and international accountability. Peace and security require not only innovation but a sober recognition of risks and the willingness to confront uncomfortable truths about power, morality, and human fallibility. The *Atoms for Peace* program offers a cautionary lesson for global governance and technological optimism. While nuclear technology holds immense potential for energy and development, it cannot guarantee peace or security on its own. True safety requires not only innovation but also the recognition of inherent risks, transparent oversight, and ethical responsibility at both national and international levels. By confronting the dual-use nature of nuclear technology and acknowledging the limits of moral rhetoric, societies can avoid self-deception and work toward a more stable and genuinely peaceful global order.

As the growing complexity of unstoppable technological progress and its mismatch with the units of political decision-making (e.g., nation states and their vision of absolute sovereignty) has proven, possessing a growing number of nuclear arsenals and capabilities to strike by a self-appointed few will not result in human safety, security or lasting peace. Quite the opposite: it is a *perpetuum mobile*, a rapidly executed and persistently maintained figuration and an unstoppable driver for the spiral of destruction and, at the end, self-annihilation.

Countervailing Forces to the Spiral of Destruction: Trust, Cooperation, and Solidarity

Trust, cooperation, and solidarity via candour can be built from below, step-by-step, by individuals, and based upon knowledge, science diplomacy, cultural and people's diplomacy. These tools are in our hands today. This bottom-up approach, however, cannot stop at artificially defined and militarily maintained state borders. As is

happening today amidst the terror and threats of hybrid wars, new regional cooperations are emerging at various geographical spots. This is evidence of a growing awareness of the importance of cross-border solidarity and mutual dependence.

Building trust, applying for more cross-border and domestic solidarity and tolerance (religious, cultural, or ethnic), and achieving survival and sustainability via cooperation may sound illusory, idealistic, and non-realistic in the contemporary global context, but this is the only way to countervene, slow and reverse the spiral of mutually assured destruction, which is, at the end of the day, self-destruction. General goodwill, including political and social willpower, manifested in declarations are necessary but not sufficient preconditions for halting the driving forces of war and violence and the permanent threat of wars accompanied by violence.

Science and knowledge, including institutions that create and disseminate new knowledge via socially responsible universities and knowledge hubs, as well as open discussion and deliberation of citizens' associations, are essential to arrive at a new understanding and consensus for lasting peace and redevelopment. Without a deeper understanding of the paradoxicalities, complexities, and perplexities of today's world, we remain defenceless. But we also need enabling institutions on the global, regional, and local levels, capable of conducting negotiations in conflict situations and restoring rule-based order.

Words versus Deeds of Global Caretaker Institutions

Institutions are unavoidable players of a rule-based world. They are the guardians of rules and the arbiters in disputes. Their efficient function, however, needs legitimacy; in other words, they need to be credible and accountable. The past decades resulted in an unprecedented weakening of global and regional institutions, causing further uncertainty, unpredictability, and anxiety at every level. The United Nations, UNESCO, the European Union, and the European Political Community, of which the countries of the Southern Caucasus are active members, play an important role in providing discussion forums and contributions in serious local and regional conflicts. These institutions, as well as all of their related regional, political, economic, trade, health, etc. institutions, need to adapt to rapidly changing trends and changes. If they want to maintain their role as guardian institutions, they need to maintain their credibility and avoid at all costs double-speak, indifference, selected attention, and internal corruption. Their legitimacy is based upon the balance of their values and actions, on their ability and capability to convincingly mediate tensions between their stated values and actions.

Today, at the beginning of an evolving geopolitical paradigm shift, our institutions need to adapt to these rapid and fundamental changes, the comeback and escalation of hybrid wars, and all the elements of inter-related and inter-dependent polycrises. In other words, they need serious reform and restructuring: a new rules-based order designed with a much broader consensus than provided by the post-WWII liberal world order, the Pax Americana.

Pax Americana is broken, and no new global order has replaced it yet. We call it the Great

Interregnum after Antonio Gramsci, Zygmunt Bauman, or the transformation of the world system into something yet unknown after Immanuel Wallerstein. While Gramsci's interregnum is a political crisis within modernity, Bauman radicalizes it into a sociological diagnosis of late modernity: interregnum becomes permanent. Wallerstein globalizes it into a historical-systemic transformation of capitalism itself. All three share the sense that the present is defined by in-betweenness—the exhaustion of the old without the birth of the new. They differ mainly in scale (political, social, systemic) and temporality (temporary, permanent, epochal but finite).

Global caretaker institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, are designed to manage collective challenges that transcend national borders. Their mandates span peacekeeping, development, public health, and crisis management, reflecting the belief that coordinated, multilateral action can safeguard humanity's welfare. Yet a persistent tension exists between the “words” these institutions articulate—their mission statements, resolutions, and normative commitments—and the “deeds” they enact in practice. This tension raises questions about their credibility, effectiveness, and the gap between aspiration and operational reality.

The words of global caretaker institutions are often ambitious and morally compelling. The UN Charter enshrines principles of peace, human rights, and humanitarian assistance, while the WHO emphasizes health as a fundamental human right. Such rhetoric is crucial as it establishes international norms, legitimizes multilateral action, and mobilizes states, civil society, and the public around shared objectives. Aspirational language also serves as a moral compass, signaling global expectations even when enforcement is challenging.

However, the deeds of these institutions frequently fall short of their promises. Political constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and dependence on voluntary funding often limit their capacity to act decisively. UN peacekeeping missions, for example, have succeeded in mediating conflicts but also faced catastrophic failures in Rwanda (1994) and Srebrenica (1995), where moral commitments were undermined by operational limitations and political interference. Similarly, the WHO's coordination during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted both its essential role and its limited authority in ensuring timely compliance by sovereign states. Economic interventions by the IMF, including structural adjustment programs in the late twentieth century, sometimes delivered stabilization but also generated inequality and social disruption, reflecting a gap between policy promises and real-world outcomes.

This divergence between word and deed is more than a technical problem; it carries profound ethical and strategic implications. Persistent gaps risk eroding trust in global governance, reducing cooperation from states, and weakening the normative authority of international institutions. At the same time, aspirational rhetoric remains important: it shapes discourse, mobilizes civil society, and provides benchmarks against which actions can be evaluated. Moving toward alignment requires stronger accountability mechanisms, adequate and predictable funding, realistic goal-setting, and closer collaboration among states, civil society,

and other actors.

Global caretaker institutions operate in a complex and politically contested world where words inspire but deeds often struggle to match their promise. Recognizing the tension between rhetoric and action is essential for reform, accountability, and the cultivation of public trust. The ultimate effectiveness of these institutions depends not only on the ideals they articulate but also on their ability to transform aspiration into consistent, tangible, and ethical action that addresses the pressing challenges of the contemporary world.

Paradoxes and Perspectives of the European Peace Project

The European Peace Project, often associated with the post-World War II process of European integration, represents an unprecedented effort to secure lasting peace on the continent. Following centuries of conflict, including two devastating world wars, European nations sought to create a framework in which war would become unthinkable and cooperation would replace competition. Institutions such as the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Economic Community, and ultimately the European Union (EU) were designed to bind economies, politics, and societies together, fostering interdependence and collective stability. Yet, while the project is celebrated for its achievements, multiple perspectives illuminate both its successes and its limitations.

From a normative or idealist perspective, the European Peace Project stands as a remarkable historical achievement. Over seven decades, it has prevented interstate war in Western Europe, promoted reconciliation between former adversaries, and cultivated a shared commitment to human rights, democracy, and rule of law. The award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the EU in 2012 symbolically recognized this success. Advocates highlight that by embedding cooperation in economic, legal, and political structures, Europe created durable incentives for peace and collaboration that extend beyond mere diplomacy.

A realist perspective, however, emphasizes the role of external factors in shaping European peace. This view acknowledges that the EU's stability has been underwritten by U.S. military and economic dominance during the Cold War and by the broader strategic context of bipolar global order. From this standpoint, the European Peace Project may owe as much to geopolitics as to institutional innovation. Peace is seen less as the result of normative commitment and more as a byproduct of security dependencies and balance-of-power considerations.

A critical perspective interrogates the EU's peace project as both aspirational and incomplete. While internal peace has largely been maintained, critics point to social and economic inequalities between member states, the persistence of nationalism, and the exclusionary nature of EU borders. Migration crises, economic disparities between East and West, and debates over sovereignty reveal tensions between unity and hierarchy, raising questions about whose interests the peace project serves. Moreover, external interventions and trade relationships suggest that the EU's commitment to peace internally is sometimes paired with coercive

strategies externally.

From a global or comparative perspective, the European Peace Project is often viewed as a model for other regions seeking to transcend historical conflict through integration and cooperation. Yet its uniqueness—shaped by U.S. protection, shared industrial development, and a relatively homogeneous regional culture—limits the replicability of the European model. Observers caution that global applications require adaptation to vastly different historical, political, and economic contexts.

The EU is facing the biggest challenge of its history, including the identification of European integration as a peace-making process. The global turmoil of the 21st century has led to a deepening geopolitical crisis that threatens the collapse of the rule-based international order. International law, as well as law-enforcing organisations, have proved incapable of law enforcement. The main guarantor of European security and the Euro-Atlantic Alliance, the United States, has grossly abandoned its eight-decade-long leadership position of the global West by turning towards a special interpretation of American interests in isolation. The United States is no longer the global hegemon, while the greatest aspirant, China, seems to be moving in this direction through strategic partnerships with what has been termed “the Global South”.

The position of other big players remains shaky and uncertain. The Russian military offensive against Ukraine forced the EU to abandon its one-sided energy dependency on Russia and military dependence on the U.S. Three and a half years after the permanent moral, political, and ideological condemnation in retaliation to Russia’s aggression, the European Union decided for robust rearmament parallel with the continuation of Eastern enlargement. Negotiations already brought some potential accession dates in the case of Albania and Montenegro but remain more obfuscated and contested vis-à-vis Ukraine and the Southern Caucasus countries. Attempting to enhance the negotiation platform, the EU created the European Political Community, a forum for all the candidates and potential candidates.

Apart from these obvious achievements, the EU is still not capable of giving clear and credible answers to lingering questions stemming from immediate challenges like:

- (1) How to establish geo-strategic autonomy vis-à-vis the United States and at the same time keep its attractiveness as a soft power?
- (2) How to realise its long-term promise about further and continuous enlargement towards the Western Balkans parallel with the new promise for an extraordinarily fast integration of war-torn Ukraine?
- (3) Is it possible, and if yes, how and when, to create an effective and efficient European Defence Force (European Army) relying exclusively on EU member states and at the same time keeping NATO alive?
- (4) Is the rapid remilitarisation of Europe able to harmonise with its soft power image and its aspirations as a future global player? If so, how is this realisable in concrete terms?

Can this obvious U-turn in military security politics become a credible and lasting base for a new global peace order? Or, on the contrary, will the EU submerge in the vortex of never-ending and escalating hybrid wars and consequently abandon its core values formulated in the European Charter?

The European Peace Project can be understood through multiple lenses, each illuminating different dimensions of its achievements and limitations. Idealist perspectives celebrate the unprecedented success of maintaining peace; realist perspectives underscore the structural and geopolitical foundations; critical perspectives reveal internal contradictions and exclusions; and global perspectives consider its lessons and limits for the wider world. Together, these perspectives highlight that the European Peace Project is both a historical accomplishment and an ongoing experiment—one that continues to balance unity and diversity, aspiration and pragmatism, in the pursuit of lasting peace.

As we reflect on the structural and existential challenges facing our time, both global and regional, it becomes evidently clear that secrecy, militarisation, and distrust only make the world more insecure and create an unending cycle of crises. The story of Europe's integration, born from the ashes of devastation and the prospect of economic cooperation, is a pivotal example of our moment in history. One of the key founding figures of the European Union, Jean Monnet, stated, "The power of simple ideas disarms mistrust, which is the main source of misunderstandings between people." The issue of mistrust is evident today, and it is important to understand its role in perpetuating conflict, while reconciliation can only come from openness. In sum, the European Peace Project represents both an extraordinary achievement and a continuing challenge. It has transformed a continent long plagued by war into a zone of unprecedented stability, embedding ideals of cooperation, human rights, and shared prosperity into its institutions. Yet, as multiple perspectives reveal, this peace is neither absolute nor automatic. Idealist views celebrate the normative success of integration; realist perspectives highlight the structural and geopolitical forces that sustain it; critical perspectives expose persistent inequalities, national tensions, and exclusionary dynamics; and global perspectives underscore its conditional applicability beyond Europe. As Jean Monnet insightfully noted, "Europe will be forged in crisis and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises." Indeed, the history and future of the European Peace Project demonstrate that its cohesion and resilience are shaped not by theoretical ideals alone, but by pragmatic responses to recurring political, economic, and social crises. The project's enduring significance lies in its capacity to transform crises into opportunities for collective problem-solving, forging a dynamic balance between aspiration and pragmatism that continues to define Europe's path toward lasting peace. Europe's history - overcoming crises with effective and imaginative solutions - validates that peace is not an end point but rather the totality of legitimate, fruitful practices conducted transparently and cooperatively.

As new crises continue to put pressure on the EU's institutions and values, our perspective must extend beyond the delusion that security can be assured through force or technological superiority alone. Sustainable and real peace requires a change of paradigm: from secrecy to openness, isolation to solidarity, and competition as a country to collaboration across borders.

Universities and Intellectuals: Renewing Their Role in the Contemporary World

In the twenty-first century, universities and intellectuals face a moment of profound opportunity and responsibility. Global challenges—ranging from climate change and pandemics to inequality, disinformation, and geopolitical instability—require more than technological innovation or policy interventions; they demand critical thinking, ethical reflection, and engaged scholarship. Yet, in recent decades, higher education and intellectual life have often been constrained by market pressures, political polarization, and an overemphasis on vocational training. Renewing the role of universities and intellectuals is therefore essential not only for academic progress but also for the health of democratic societies, global cooperation, and sustainable development.

One key area for renewal lies in public engagement and ethical leadership. Universities should reclaim their traditional role as spaces for critical inquiry, debate, and moral reflection. Intellectuals, in turn, can offer independent analysis and guidance on pressing societal issues, from bioethics and artificial intelligence to climate policy and social justice. By actively participating in public discourse—through media, community partnerships, and policy advising—scholars can help bridge the gap between specialized knowledge and societal decision-making. This engagement fosters a more informed citizenry and counters the spread of misinformation that increasingly shapes public opinion.

Another critical role is in global problem-solving and transnational collaboration. Universities are uniquely positioned to convene diverse perspectives, conduct interdisciplinary research, and propose solutions to challenges that no single state or organization can address alone. Collaborative research networks on climate adaptation, global health, sustainable urban development, and peacebuilding exemplify how universities can contribute beyond national boundaries. Intellectuals, meanwhile, can articulate ethical frameworks for international cooperation, ensuring that scientific and technological advances are aligned with human rights, equity, and long-term sustainability.

A renewed role also involves reimagining education itself. Universities must cultivate critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability in students, equipping them to navigate uncertainty and complexity. Curricula should integrate civic education, ethical reasoning, and interdisciplinary problem-solving, producing graduates who can act as informed, socially responsible leaders. Intellectuals can guide this transformation by challenging narrow disciplinary boundaries and advocating for a broader understanding of knowledge that encompasses science, humanities, and the social sciences alike.

Finally, universities and intellectuals can serve as guardians of democratic norms and social cohesion. In an era of rising polarization, authoritarian tendencies, and disinformation, higher education institutions provide forums for reasoned debate, dialogue, and deliberation. Intellectuals can promote values such as tolerance, critical inquiry, and civic responsibility, reminding societies that knowledge carries both power and ethical obligations. By defending the independence of thought and inquiry, they help safeguard the

conditions necessary for both social stability and innovation.

They can – and should – act as mediators or peace builders, bringing together expertise from multiple disciplines and fostering open discussion. By building trust and creating ongoing dialogue, particularly across borders of identity, ideological principles, and disciplinary approaches, we can create new, resilient pathways to peace. Looking towards an uncertain future, let us make use of the Georgian Peace Paradigm coined by Professor Zurab Khonelidze, and collectively draw on university-level knowledge in order to inspire new forms of cooperation and to help empower a new generation of responsible citizens who can promote justice and peace. Universities and intellectuals have a renewed and urgent role to play in today's world. By engaging the public, fostering transnational collaboration, reimagining education, and defending democratic and ethical norms, they can help societies confront complex global challenges. Their renewed relevance lies not only in producing knowledge but in ensuring that knowledge serves humanity—guiding action, shaping values, and cultivating informed, responsible citizens capable of addressing the crises and opportunities of the twenty-first century.



Prof. Dr. Veronika Wittman is an Associate Professor for Global Studies at the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences at the Johannes Kepler University Linz, Austria.

She was enrolled in the PhD Program of the Austrian Academy of Science 2000-2001 and was a Junior Visiting Fellow at the IWM in Vienna 2000- 2001 as well as a Research Visiting Fellow at the Institute For Ibero-American Studies in Hamburg 2006. Dr Wittman also worked at the UN Office in Ecuador in 2002. She conducted extensive field research on numerous visits to different parts of Africa. She received her *venia legendi* for Sociology at JKU in 2013. Veronika Wittman has published several books and papers in journals and in edited volumes and has participated as invited speaker at numerous international conferences.

Contact: veronika.wittmann@jku.at

Science Diplomacy and Youth

Connecting Knowledge and Peacebuilding in the South Caucasus

The essay, "*Science Diplomacy and Youth: Connecting Knowledge and Peacebuilding in the South Caucasus*"^{vii}, examines the pivotal role of science diplomacy in addressing global challenges, with a particular emphasis on fostering peacebuilding and sustainable development. It explores how scientific cooperation can function as a mechanism for enhancing international relations, resolving conflicts peacefully, and addressing complex "polycrises" such as environmental risks, violent conflicts, and fragile statehood. By promoting collaboration, resilience, and human security, science diplomacy emerges as an indispensable tool for advancing global stability.

The paper draws on South Africa's peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy as a case study, employing it as a model for other regions, including the South Caucasus. It highlights key lessons in non-violent conflict resolution, reconciliation, and the celebration of diversity, demonstrating how these principles can inform peacebuilding efforts in other conflict-prone areas. The analysis underscores the significance of strong governance, justice, and robust institutions in addressing the root causes of instability and fostering sustainable peace.

In its conclusion, the essay advocates for the integration of science diplomacy into global policy frameworks to address shared challenges. It emphasises the importance of learning from both successes and failures, presenting South Africa's transformation as a blueprint for fostering "Unity in Diversity" in other regions. Furthermore, the paper underscores the critical role of youth engagement in peacebuilding, arguing that empowering young people is essential for creating an inclusive and resilient global society. Through this lens, the essay positions science diplomacy as a transformative approach to building a more peaceful and cooperative world.

Introduction

Science diplomacy has emerged as a critical tool for addressing global challenges and fostering international cooperation in an increasingly interconnected world. As Fedoroff (2009) defines it, science diplomacy is "the use of scientific interactions among nations to address the common problems facing humanity and to build constructive, knowledge-based international partnerships." Operating at the intersection of science, policy, and international relations, it encompasses initiatives such as "Science for Diplomacy," which leverages scientific collaboration to improve relations between states and plays a pivotal role in fostering new forms of multilateralism. By transcending national borders, scientific cooperation elevates the role of academia in addressing shared global challenges, positioning it as an essential stakeholder in peacebuilding efforts.

This essay examines the multifaceted role of science diplomacy in promoting peace and sustainable development, with a particular emphasis on its potential application in the South Caucasus—a topic that future research might empirically validate. It contextualises key concepts such as science diplomacy frameworks, youth engagement in peacebuilding, and lessons from South Africa's peaceful transformation. Foundational works, such as Fedoroff's (2009) definition mentioned above, provide a theoretical basis for understanding the evolving role of science diplomacy in the 21st century. Contemporary examples, including its application in addressing climate change, global migration, and conflict resolution, further illustrate its practical relevance.

Youth engagement is another central theme of this essay, aligning with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security (2015). This landmark resolution recognises the critical role of young people in promoting peace and security, outlining five key pillars for action: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration. By amplifying the voices of young people and enabling their meaningful participation in decision-making processes, the resolution underscores the transformative potential of youth-led initiatives in peacebuilding and governance.

The essay also draws on South Africa's peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy as a case study, examining its relevance as a model for other regions, including the South Caucasus. While South Africa's experience offers valuable lessons in non-violent conflict resolution, reconciliation, and the celebration of diversity, future research might critically evaluate the challenges of applying these strategies to the unique socio-political and cultural contexts of the South Caucasus.

By synthesising these elements, this essay aims to deliver a thorough analysis of the role of science diplomacy and youth engagement in peacebuilding. It contends that a multidisciplinary approach, grounded in both theoretical frameworks and practical case studies, is indispensable for tackling the intricate challenges associated with promoting peace and sustainable development in conflict-affected regions. Viewed through this perspective, the paper seeks to contribute to the wider academic discourse on harnessing knowledge and collaboration to cultivate a more peaceful and inclusive world.

The Limitations, Constraints, and Future Prospects of the Work

The essay, *"Science Diplomacy and Youth: Connecting Knowledge and Peacebuilding in the South Caucasus,"* offers valuable insights into the role of science diplomacy in fostering peacebuilding and sustainable development. However, it is important to acknowledge its limitations and constraints, as well as to consider potential avenues for future research and development.

A key limitation of the essay is the absence of empirical data. The analysis predominantly relies on theoretical frameworks and historical case studies, such as South Africa's peaceful transformation. While these provide a robust framework for understanding one region, there is no empirical evidence to suggest that lessons from one region can be directly transferred to another. This approach risks overlooking the distinctive socio-political, cultural, and historical contexts of the South Caucasus, which may significantly affect the practicality and effectiveness of implementing South Africa's strategies.

Regarding the constraints of this essay, four key points must be highlighted. Firstly, the scope of analysis: The essay's focus on South Africa and the South Caucasus inherently limits its scope, potentially overlooking valuable insights from other regions or contexts where science diplomacy has been successfully applied. Secondly, resource limitations: The lack of access to extensive resources, such as funding for fieldwork or access to region-specific data, has likely constrained the depth and breadth of the analysis. Thirdly, time constraints: Given that this essay is based on a lecture or presentation, the time available for conducting in-depth research and analysis may have been restricted, thereby affecting the comprehensiveness of the work. Finally, the challenges of policy implementation must be acknowledged: While the essay offers valuable theoretical insights, the practical application of its recommendations may encounter significant obstacles due to political, economic, or institutional barriers within the South Caucasus.

With regard to future prospects for research, several key considerations merit attention:

1. **Incorporation of Empirical Research:** Future studies could integrate fieldwork, surveys, or interviews with stakeholders in the South Caucasus to generate empirical evidence that substantiates the essay's arguments. Such an approach would enhance the credibility, depth, and contextual relevance of its recommendations.
2. **Development of Context-Specific Strategies:** Expanding the analysis to address the distinctive challenges and opportunities of the South Caucasus would render the findings more applicable. This could involve examining the region's unique governance structures, cultural dynamics, and resource management issues to formulate tailored strategies.
3. **Broader Comparative Analysis:** Including additional case studies from other regions that have successfully utilised science diplomacy for peacebuilding could offer a more comprehensive understanding of its potential applications and limitations. This would also facilitate a more nuanced comparison of diverse contexts.
4. **Creation of Youth-Centric Frameworks:** Future research could focus on designing detailed frameworks or toolkits for engaging youth in peacebuilding, drawing on successful global examples. Such efforts would provide actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners, ensuring that youth engagement is both impactful and effective.

5. **Enhancement of Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration:** Future research could benefit significantly from partnerships with experts in fields such as law, environmental science, and conflict resolution. A cross-disciplinary approach would offer a more holistic perspective on the challenges and solutions explored, enriching the analysis and broadening its applicability.

By addressing these limitations and constraints in future research, this essay aspires to develop a more robust and actionable framework for utilising science diplomacy and youth engagement in peacebuilding initiatives. The integration of empirical data, context-specific strategies, and cross-disciplinary perspectives would significantly enhance the depth and practical applicability of its findings. Moreover, the creation of detailed frameworks for youth engagement, alongside an expanded scope of comparative analysis, would ensure that the work remains both relevant and impactful in tackling the multifaceted challenges of promoting peace and sustainable development in conflict-affected regions.

Methods

To clarify the essay's approach and objectives, a well-defined methods section is presented to outline how the paper intends to achieve its aims. This methods section includes the following components:

1. **Case Study Approach:** The essay adopts a case study methodology, focusing on South Africa's peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy as a model. This case study is analysed to derive lessons on non-violent conflict resolution, reconciliation, and the promotion of diversity. The insights gained from this analysis can, in future research, be applied to the context of the South Caucasus to examine how similar strategies might contribute to peacebuilding efforts in the region.
2. **Conceptual Framework:** The essay is underpinned by the principles of science diplomacy, as defined by Fedoroff (2009), which emphasise the utilisation of scientific collaboration to tackle global challenges and enhance international relations. This framework further integrates key concepts such as human security, sustainable development, and governance to explore how science diplomacy can address "polycrises", including environmental risks and fragile statehood.
3. **Comparative Analysis:** While not empirically validated, the essay undertakes a theoretical comparative analysis between South Africa and the South Caucasus, concentrating on shared challenges such as diversity, governance, and resource utilisation. This analysis seeks to identify transferable strategies and practices that could be adapted to the specific context of the South Caucasus.
4. **Focus on Youth Engagement:** Particular attention is given to the role of youth in

peacebuilding and governance. The essay examines how the active involvement of young populations can contribute to sustainable development and reconciliation efforts, drawing on examples from South Africa as well as global youth-led initiatives.

5. **Cross-Disciplinary Approach:** The essay seeks to adopt a cross-disciplinary approach by integrating perspectives from political science, environmental studies, and international relations. This interdisciplinary approach ensures that the analysis is both comprehensive and attentive to the multifaceted nature of the challenges under consideration.

By employing these methods, the essay aims to provide a thorough and nuanced exploration of the role of science diplomacy and youth engagement in fostering peacebuilding and sustainable development.

Lessons from South Africa

4.a. Lesson I: What It Means to Be Human and What It Means to Be Free

What lessons does South Africa offer to humanity? Many, indeed. The first lesson addresses the profound question of what it means to be human.

Under the apartheid regime, the political system classified individuals into eight racial categories, each assigned differing political rights enshrined in the constitution. To exemplify the inherent absurdity of the Population Registration Act, the case of Franz Auerbach, a Jewish South African, offers a particularly striking illustration. In October 1988, Auerbach formally petitioned the South African Department of Home Affairs, requesting that he not be categorised as "white" in official records but instead be designated as "human." The Department's written response was both literal and revealing: the category "human being" was not recognised under the law. Auerbach's subsequent appeal to be classified as "coloured" was similarly denied. In 1990, as an act of protest against the system, Auerbach returned his South African passport (see Wittmann 2004, 370; Kaiser and Müller 1992, 154ff.). This poignant anecdote underscores the dehumanising nature of apartheid legislation and serves as a powerful reminder of the broader struggle for the recognition of shared humanity and equality.

During the decades of apartheid, the people of South Africa demonstrated that resistance against discrimination is always a worthy endeavour. From 1948 to 1991, there is a rich history of individuals and movements that stood up for human and civil rights, leaving an enduring legacy of courage and determination.

Presented below is a selection of key events and figures from the extensive history of South Africa's resistance against the apartheid system:

- **The Signing of the Freedom Charter (1955):** This pivotal moment was not only a milestone

in the struggle against the apartheid system but also laid the foundation for the democratic South Africa that would emerge decades later. The Freedom Charter remains a significant human rights document in the country's history.

- **Soweto Uprising (1976):** The younger generation protested against the imposition of Afrikaans as the language of instruction in schools. To honour the resistance of these students, South Africa commemorates "Youth Day" every June 16.
- **Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (Tata Madiba):** Widely regarded as one of the most iconic freedom fighters of the apartheid era, Mandela (1994) spent 27 years in incarceration for his unwavering commitment to freedom and democracy. Beyond his role as a leader in the anti-apartheid movement, Mandela exemplifies what Max Weber (1919; 1921/1922, 122–176) described as a "charismatic political authority," inspiring millions with his vision and resilience.

These events and figures collectively highlight the enduring spirit of resistance and the pursuit of justice that defined South Africa's struggle against apartheid.

4.b. Lesson II: South Africa's Peaceful Transformation

In the 1990s, South Africa underwent a remarkable and peaceful transformation, transitioning from an autocratic apartheid regime to a democratic political system. In the new democratic South Africa, the rights of minorities are enshrined and protected within the constitution.

Reconciliation was not merely a political slogan but was actively pursued through pragmatic and deliberate policies. Today, the Republic of South Africa recognises 12 official languages, including Afrikaans as a minority language. Additionally, the national anthem is sung in multiple South African languages, symbolising unity in diversity, while the national flag represents a fusion of the apartheid-era flag and the African National Congress (ANC) flag, with its green, yellow, and black colours.

South Africa's ability to achieve a peaceful transformation serves as a role model for other regions of the world, demonstrating how conflicts can be resolved through non-violent and non-military means. This approach aligns with the principles of science diplomacy, which emphasise the resolution of conflicts through peaceful and cooperative methods. As Willy Brandt (1981) eloquently articulated in a speech, "Peace is not everything, but everything is nothing without peace." The trajectory of South Africa serves as a profound embodiment of this sentiment, providing invaluable insights into the processes of fostering peace and reconciliation within deeply divided societies.

4.c. Lesson III: A Democratic and Free South Africa and Its Birth Pangs

Since the establishment of the democratic and free Republic of South Africa in 1994, a generation of "Born Free" citizens has emerged—those born after the end of apartheid. The narrative

of a "Rainbow Nation" and the aspiration for "Unity in Diversity" remain central to the country's identity. However, these ideals are accompanied by the significant challenges of a young democracy, including persistent violence, poverty, and Afrophobia.

Breaking Stereotypes and Placing Humanity at the Centre

South Africa's journey highlights the importance of breaking stereotypes and placing the human being at the heart of societal transformation. This requires embracing contradictions and responding to them constructively.

From "Either-Or" to "As Well As": A Paradigm Shift

A key lesson for the 21st century is the need to move away from an "either-or" mindset towards an "as well as" approach, fostering inclusivity and adaptability. This shift holds significant potential for science diplomacy, particularly in addressing contemporary global challenges such as environmental risks and violent conflicts.

Environmental Risks and Violent Conflicts in the 21st Century

Environmentally induced migration, as highlighted by the WBGU (2007), poses a substantial threat to the stability of political systems worldwide. Global warming exacerbates conflicts over critical resources such as food and water, while simultaneously weakening the resilience of states.

Human Security and Climate Wars

The intersection of human security and climate change underscores the urgent need for effective peacebuilding and governance. As Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (Tata Madiba) exemplified, the world requires visionary leadership to navigate these challenges. Peacebuilding efforts must rest on three core pillars: good governance, justice, and strong institutions.

The Potential and the Challenges

South Africa, like many regions, possesses significant potential due to its youthful population and abundant natural resources. However, the absence of the necessary prerequisites to harness these resources effectively, coupled with fragile statehood, undermines the realisation of this potential. Without addressing these structural weaknesses, peace remains elusive.

Contemporary Polycrises and the Role of Science Diplomacy

The interconnected crises of the modern era — polycrises — demand innovative and cooperative solutions. Science diplomacy emerges as a critical tool for global policymaking, offering a peaceful and collaborative means to address shared challenges and foster sustainable development. South Africa's experience serves as both a cautionary tale and a source of inspiration, demonstrating the complexities of building a democratic political system while offering valuable lessons for addressing the pressing issues of the 21st century.

Conclusion

In terms of contextualisation, the essay *"Science Diplomacy and Youth: Connecting Knowledge and Peacebuilding in the South Caucasus"* positions itself within the broader discourse on science diplomacy as a mechanism for addressing global challenges, particularly in advancing peacebuilding and sustainable development. By employing South Africa's peaceful transformation as a case study, the essay seeks to explore the potential of science diplomacy in resolving conflicts and fostering reconciliation in other regions, such as the South Caucasus. However, the specific socio-political dynamics of the South Caucasus constrain the depth and nuance of this contextualisation.

Findings

The essay underscores three key insights:

1. Science Diplomacy as a Tool for Peacebuilding:

Scientific cooperation is identified as a powerful mechanism for fostering international collaboration, addressing "polycrises" such as environmental risks and fragile statehood, and promoting human security.

2. Lessons from South Africa:

South Africa's peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy highlights the critical importance of non-violent conflict resolution, reconciliation, and the celebration of diversity. These principles are presented as potentially transferable strategies for addressing conflicts in the South Caucasus.

3. Youth Engagement:

The essay emphasises the pivotal role of youth in peacebuilding, focusing on their capacity to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development and reconciliation efforts.

By synthesising these findings, the essay contributes to the ongoing discourse on leveraging science diplomacy and youth engagement as tools for fostering peace and addressing complex global challenges. However, further research is required to deepen the analysis and enhance the applicability of its recommendations to the specific context of the South Caucasus.

Implications

The findings of this essay suggest that science diplomacy, when integrated with youth engagement, has the potential to serve as a powerful framework for addressing global challenges. The South African case study highlights the critical role of good governance, justice, and resilient institutions in fostering peace and reconciliation. However, the implications for the South Caucasus remain largely theoretical, given the absence of empirical data and region-specific analysis.

Policymakers and practitioners are encouraged to consider science diplomacy as a strategic tool for building resilience and fostering collaboration in conflict-prone regions. By doing so, they

can explore its potential to address complex challenges and promote sustainable peace in diverse and fragile contexts.

Learning from Failures

Learning from failures is a crucial component of effective peacebuilding. Sustainable peace requires good governance, justice, and resilient institutions capable of addressing the root causes of instability. South Africa's peaceful transformation offers valuable lessons, demonstrating the potential of non-violent conflict resolution and the significance of embracing diversity and fostering reconciliation. These principles provide a compelling model that could be adapted to the context of the South Caucasus.

Science Diplomacy and Future Pathways

Science diplomacy presents a promising pathway for addressing interconnected challenges, or "polycrises", such as environmental risks and violent conflicts, by fostering international collaboration and enhancing resilience. To ensure the success of peacebuilding efforts, human security and sustainable development must be prioritised, serving as the foundation for long-term stability and progress. At the same time, educating young people in science diplomacy skills is a fruitful pathway for a peaceful future in conflict regions of the world.

References

Brandt, Willy. "Peace Is Not Everything, but Everything Is Nothing Without Peace." Speech, November 3, 1981. Bundeskanzler Willy Brandt Stiftung. Accessed July 15, 2025. <https://willy-brandt.de/en/willy-brandt/quotes-speeches-opinions/quotes/>.

Fedoroff, Nina. "Science Diplomacy in the 21st Century." *Cell* 136, no. 1 (2009): 9–11. Accessed May 25, 2025. <https://www.linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S009286740801636X>.

Kaiser, Andrea, and Thomas O.H. Müller. *Das neue Südafrika: Politische Porträts*. Bonn: Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachfolger, 1992.

Mandela, Nelson Rolihlahla. *Long Walk to Freedom*. Boston, New York, and London: Little, Brown, 1994.

"The Freedom Charter." Adopted at the Congress of the People, Kliptown, June 26, 1955. Published March 31, 2011. Accessed August 25, 2025. <https://sahistory.org.za/article/freedom-charter>.

"UNDP Calls for Youth-Inclusive Approach to Prevent Violent Extremism." Accessed August 25, 2025. <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/undp-calls-for-youth-inclusive-approach-to-prevent-violent-extremism/>.

United Nations. "Peacebuilding: Youth, Peace, and Security." 2025. Accessed August 25, 2025. <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/policy-issues-and-partnerships/policy/youth>.

WBGU. *World in Transition: Climate Change as a Security Risk*. 2007. Accessed June 13, 2025. https://www.wbgu.de/fileadmin/user_upload/wbgu/publikationen/archiv/wbgu_jg2007.pdf.

Weber, Max. *Politik als Beruf* [Politics as a Vocation]. Munich and Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1919.

Weber, Max. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* [Economy and Society]. Tübingen: Mohr, 1921/1922.

Wittmann, Veronika. *Frauen im Neuen Südafrika: Eine Analyse zur Geschlechtergerechtigkeit* [Women in the New South Africa: An Analysis of Gender Equity]. Frankfurt am Main: Brandes & Apsel Verlag, 2005.

Jaspers, Karl (1953), *The Origin and Goal of History*, Bullock, Michael (Tr.) (1st English ed.), London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, p. 2.

Armstrong, Karen (2006), *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of our Religious Traditions* (1st ed.), New York: Knopf, p. 367.

Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. New York: Academic Press, 1974.

Thomas Kunh, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962.

Karl Polanyi in *The Great Transformation*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944.

Michael Shacker, *Global Awakening, New Science and the 21st Century Enlightenment*. Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2013.

--

- *The article is based on the lecture Science Diplomacy and Youth. Connecting Knowledge and Peacebuilding in the South Caucasus. Lecture given by Veronika Wittmann on 18 July 2025 at the "Nelson Mandela International Day (Ambassadors for Peace Training)", Sokhumi State University Tbilisi in Georgia from 18-19 July 2025. Unpublished. Academic AI, a generic and scalable cloud platform, was used for language improvement and citation management. See: <https://acomarket.at/en/portfolio/projects/academic-ai-en> (Accessed: 31 August 2025).*

★★★



Joel M. Hakizimana - Ambassador for Peace, CAO of the ECOSOC NGO CIRID and Coordinator of the Global Campaign for Pan-African Citizenship, Geneva, Switzerland.

Contact: joel.m.hakizimana@gmail.com

From Mandela to the Georgian Paradigm of Peace: Building Bridges Between Africa and the Caucasus

Introduction

The current international system faces fragmentation, instability, and recurring threats of internal and external conflict. The global community can no longer afford the escalation of new civil wars, given the human and economic costs they impose on societies. In this context, experiences from different regions become valuable resources for comparative learning and peacebuilding. This paper seeks to highlight lessons drawn from African reconciliation processes, particularly in South Africa and Burundi, and to link them with the emerging Georgian Paradigm of Peace developed at Sokhumi State University.

The Legacy of Nelson Mandela and the South African Example

The choice of Nelson Mandela's legacy as a symbolic reference point reflects his pivotal role in preventing cycles of violence and genocide. Following decades of apartheid, Mandela resisted the temptation of revenge, instead promoting the vision of a "Rainbow Nation." South Africa thus stands as a beacon of reconciliation, its legacy extending beyond its borders. For example, South Africa played an active role in the African Peace Initiative between Russia and Ukraine in June 2023, underlining its continued relevance in global peace diplomacy.

Burundi and the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement

Burundi represents another significant case in African peacebuilding. For a century, the country endured repeated episodes of ethnic cleansing. In 1999, Nelson Mandela, appointed by the United Nations Security Council, assumed the role of mediator in the Burundi conflict. He called on Burundians to transcend ethnic divisions and embrace a unified national identity. The process culminated in the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement of August 2000, which marked the end of a prolonged cycle of violence in the African Great Lakes Region.

Civil society played an essential role in this process. The Centre Indépendant de Recherches et d'Initiatives pour le Dialogue (CIRID), founded by Deo Hakizimana, was a consistent actor promoting dialogue. During the peace negotiations, younger members of CIRID established CEDAC (Training-Center for the Development of Ex-Combatants), which contributed to reintegration efforts and was later recognized with United Nations consultative status in 2015. More recently, this legacy expanded with the creation of RECOVI, an organization committed to supporting communities affected by war.

Africa's Contribution to Global Peacebuilding

Africa brings to the global peace table successful examples of truth and reconciliation. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Burundi's Arusha Agreement remain emblematic cases of negotiated settlements rooted in inclusivity, dialogue, and forgiveness. These models highlight the importance of local ownership and international support in achieving sustainable peace.

Switzerland's "Spirit of Geneva," which has historically provided a neutral ground for peace negotiations between rival empires, complements these African experiences. Together, they form a diverse but converging legacy of peace diplomacy that can inspire new regional approaches.

The Georgian Paradigm of Peace and the Spirit of Tbilisi

The initiative to bring together CIRID, CEDAC, RECOVI, and Sokhumi State University represents a new cross-regional dialogue. Sokhumi State University has developed the concept of the "Georgian Paradigm of Peace," articulated in the works of Professor Zurab Khonelidze. This paradigm emphasizes reconciliation, dialogue, and the transformative role of education in conflict resolution.

The proposal to develop a "Spirit of Tbilisi" resonates with this vision. As Geneva became a hub of international diplomacy in Europe, Tbilisi has the potential to emerge as a regional diplomatic center for the Caucasus. This initiative would symbolize a commitment not only to Georgia's internal peace process but also to broader regional stability and international cooperation.

Conclusion

The convergence of African and Caucasian peace experiences demonstrates the universality of reconciliation as a foundation for sustainable peace. South Africa, Burundi, Switzerland, and Georgia each contribute unique legacies of overcoming conflict through dialogue and mediation.

By combining these lessons and fostering cross-regional collaboration, the call to develop the "Spirit of Tbilisi" offers an opportunity to establish a new hub for peace diplomacy. It is through such initiatives that the international community can resist fragmentation and build a more just and cooperative future.

Carl Gustav Bjertnes - a passionate peace advocate from Norway and a representative of SEEDS-AFRICA. He emphasizes the transformative power of conscience, love, and youth-led peacebuilding efforts across Africa and globally. Through his work, he inspires young leaders to become active agents of change, fostering reconciliation and sustainable peace.

Contact: carl.bjertnes@gmail.com



Messages of Hope: From Mandela's Legacy to the LoveForce Movement

Introduction

Peacebuilding requires more than treaties and negotiations; it demands moral vision, conscience, and transformative action. Across continents, individuals and movements have shown that reconciliation is not an abstract concept but a lived strategy. This paper examines three interconnected elements of global peacebuilding: the historical inspiration of Nelson Mandela, the emergence of conscience-driven initiatives such as LoveForce, and the role of youth in shaping future peace processes.

The Mandela Light: History as Moral Compass

Nelson Mandela's life remains one of the most compelling narratives of moral resilience in modern history. Born into systemic injustice under apartheid, Mandela did not emerge broken but rather strengthened by a deep moral conscience. His leadership illuminated the principle that peace is not merely political compromise but a reorientation of society around justice and human dignity. His words — *"As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same"* — encapsulate his vision of peace as a contagious force.

Mandela's example continues to transcend geographical boundaries. South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy is not only a national achievement but also a global symbol of reconciliation. His philosophy still informs conflict mediation and reconciliation efforts across the world, reminding us that peace requires both moral clarity and political courage.

LoveForce and the Power of Conscience

Building on such legacies, contemporary initiatives have sought to institutionalize the moral foundations of peace. One such initiative is LoveForce, a foundation established in Geneva on the International Day of Conscience, celebrated annually by the United Nations on April 5. Unlike an ideology, LoveForce is rooted in the universal human conscience. Its mission is to protect ecosystems, rebuild war-affected communities, and awaken global solidarity across borders, faiths, and cultures.

LoveForce embodies what might be called "courageous love." It is not sentimental but active — a love that transforms enmity into cooperation. This approach resonates with peacebuilding practices that emphasize reconciliation over retaliation. As exemplified by Emmanuel Jal, a former child soldier turned peace advocate and musician, conscience can reframe past trauma into tools of transformation. His performance at Mandela's

2008 London birthday tribute highlighted this intersection between personal history, reconciliation, and collective healing.

Youth as Architects of Peace

The responsibility of carrying forward this legacy now rests with younger generations. Mandela consistently emphasized education not merely as a tool for individual advancement but as an instrument of societal transformation. Universities, such as Sokhumi State University in Georgia, are positioned to cultivate this vision by fostering research, innovation, and dialogue rooted in peace and dignity.

Students are not passive recipients of knowledge but active architects of peace. By integrating principles of love, conscience, and reconciliation into their studies and projects, they can contribute to addressing global divisions. This vision aligns with Africa's rising role as a contributor to global peace philosophy. Africa's message to the world is clear: reconciliation and dignity are not utopian ideals but pragmatic strategies for sustainable peace.

Conclusion

Messages of hope are not abstract aspirations; they are strategies for survival and transformation. From Mandela's light in South Africa to the conscience-based movement of LoveForce in Geneva, and to the aspirations of youth in institutions like Sokhumi State University, the trajectory of peacebuilding underscores the interdependence of history, conscience, and action.

Mandela's legacy teaches that peace is not inherited but built, conscience reminds us that reconciliation is a universal responsibility, and youth ensure that these messages continue into the future. Together, they form a collective call: to resist enmity, to embrace unity, and to recognize love and conscience as the strongest tools of diplomacy and peace.

More Information about Event:

<https://www.sou.edu.ge/news-details.php?title=Peace-Ambassadors-Training-for-Nelson-Mandela-International-Day&id=1694&lang=en>