

COMMENTS FROM THE EDITORS

“Actual or potential conflict can be resolved or eased by appealing to common human capabilities to respond to good will and reasonableness”¹

The publication you are holding is “Cost of Conflict: Untold Stories-Georgian-Ossetian Conflict in Peoples’ Lives.” This publication follows the collection of analytical articles “Cost of Conflict: Core Dimensions of Georgian-South Ossetian Context.” This collection brings together personal stories told by people who were directly affected by the conflict and who continue to pay a price for the conflict today.

In multilayered analysis of the conflict and of ways of its resolution the analysis of the human dimension is paid much less attention. This subsequently impedes the perception of the complete picture and leads to decisions that neglect the interests of those people who carry the heavy burden of conflicts and wars. At the same time, the memory and experiences of such people hold the keys necessary for peaceful resolution of conflicts at all levels – national, regional or international. These hundreds of thousands of people who often involuntarily end up become a party to the conflict with their unique experiences make important decisions to remember or forget, take the path of repentance, forgiveness, or remain in a permanent state of searching for retribution. And this affects not only the mood and decisions of direct carriers of these memories, but also the mood and decisions of future generations.

The collection of human stories started at the end of 2015. Journalists Irina Kelekhsaeva and Goga Aptsiauri asked people directly affected by the conflict to assess past events, talk about current realities, discuss the possibilities of relationships and perspectives for the future from current points of view. These human stories are authored by men and women of all ages who grew up already during conflict, and those who have a unique experience of shared life, those who remember that shared experience, and those who prefer not to talk about it. Despite the fact that all these experiences are unique and are filled with personal pain, we purposefully have left out the names of the storytellers, in order to emphasize once more the commonalities in their experiences.

Georgians and South Ossetians have very different interpretations of the events that took place in the 1990s, as well in 2008, despite the similarities

¹ Davidson, William D., and Montville Joseph V. “Foreign Policy According to Freud.” *Foreign Policy*, no. 45 (1981): 145-57.

of enormous challenges that people on the both sides had to go through. Sometimes it is enough to change the ethnicity of people in the stories and it becomes difficult to distinguish a story told from one side from the one told on the other.

In their memories, along with personal experiences people point to those whom they consider directly responsible for the conflict – in most cases the political elite. With deep sorrow they recall so-called “betrayals” and trauma caused especially by close neighbors and friends. At the same time people do not forget the real human actions taken by the representatives of the opposite side – mostly by close neighbors, acquaintances, friends of friends or even complete strangers.

These stories remind us that not only does the overall context matter, but also the life of every single person. These stories are not only full of losses, pain suffered and boundless resentment, but they also include assessment of the present situation and thoughts about the future. In most cases the assessment of the present and views about the future differ greatly on both sides of the conflict. The stories reflect the political background that exists in each society and which influences the way events are viewed by people. Both in South Ossetian and Georgian stories the reader can see completely opposite political and public sentiments that exist in Tskhinval and Tbilisi and that directly affect the free expression of the will by the people. Often peoples’ existing potential for building confidence is sacrificed in favor of political expediency, total control and pressure.

On one hand, in both South Ossetian and Georgian stories the perception of events clearly reveals a never-ending vicious cycle – the trend of victimization of the own side and demonization of the other side. On the other hand, there are hints of the willingness for confidence building and reassessment, perhaps not such a deep one, but still reassessment of the past. Such different perceptions and approaches to conflict resolution, perhaps are the result of Tskhinval’s and Tbilisi’s completely different approach to these issues, their access to different information spaces and political paths.

Maybe this is the reason that the South Ossetian stories are mostly looking at the tragic past and present, while the Georgian stories are mostly oriented towards the future, despite being largely told by forcefully displaced people and full of pain.

As hard as it might be for the reader to digest these stories, and as much as they might seem not true, it must be underlined that the presented approaches are central for both sides.

Whether we like it or not, whether it is acceptable for us or not, whether we feel comfortable as citizens to acknowledge their existence or not,

whether it creates obstacles for building trust or not these are the feelings, perceptions and pain we are dealing with on both sides. Failing to recognize the existence of these approaches and this pain, ignoring it, attempting to explain it only by propaganda and continuing to shut down the people who carry this pain, become serious obstacles on the path of finding a way out in the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict, and in the case of other conflicts in different parts of the world.

Therefore, the editors of this volume, working on the analytical articles, felt that this publication would not be complete without human stories. Having read the data collected on both sides editors decided that it is worth a publication of its own within the framework of the “Cost of Conflict” publication. The pain and losses described in the “Untold stories” are completely different and often reflect dramatically opposite points of views, but they are costs that the societies continue to pay even today.

For this reason, the geographic terminology used by the authors was not edited and no changes are made changes to the authors’ presentation and interpretation of the facts. Each of us, as editors, has our own individual views on the terminology, facts and interpretation of the events, but we have been very careful not to make any changes to the personal views of the narrators.

We hope that readers will find the diversity of perspectives useful in increasing understanding. While we editors may disagree with authors and with each other about many issues, we agree that we respect each other’s rights to hold different perspectives.

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P.S. The stories were originally recorded in Georgian (Georgian side), Russian and Ossetian (the Ossetian side). The collection “Cost of Conflict: Untold Stories-Georgian-Ossetian Conflict in Peoples’ Lives” is published in Georgian, Russian and English languages. Unfortunately, during the translation style and nuances of the live speech are lost and not always and not everywhere the reader has the opportunity to “listen the live voice” of the narrator.

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