

1.3 Methodology and approach

International Alert will facilitate two distinct dialogue tracks: **economic diplomacy**, and **human security**, the latter of which, as it matures, could develop sub-tracks that focus on specific policy issues. Both tracks are built around a core group of Georgian and Abkhaz experts, who in turn will draw in relevant individuals, both independent experts and from respective authorities, with a specific area of expertise or influence. At key junctures in the dialogue, Russian experts will also be invited, as well as other internationals involved in official-level mediation, to ensure geo-political realities are taken into consideration and complementarities with, e.g. Geneva Discussions. Four stages of engagement are foreseen, with dialogue throughout, though they may run at different paces and sometimes concurrently:

1. **Knowledge accumulation** and identification of issues of mutual interest: seminars, (joint) study trips, policy research and scenario building to broaden the scope for solutions and build the competence base on both sides.
2. **Advocacy**: gaining and/or consolidating support from international mediators and from the Georgian and Abkhaz political leadership. This will be through consultations, roundtable discussions, etc. The approach is to develop advocacy platforms within the respective societies and political spheres around a particular issue.
3. **Public outreach**: through a carefully crafted outreach strategy, balancing the need for public discussion to build support for new and unconventional ideas with the need for confidentiality as experts and officials work through the possible scenarios. Includes public discussions, media interviews, small confidence-building initiatives, etc.
4. **Concrete policy recommendations**: for the economic track, this will first involve the elaboration of economic development scenarios, culminating in a provisional regulatory framework for the Georgian-Abkhaz context.

The two tracks are conceived as separate processes due to the specific policy objectives of the economic track and in terms of it having its own dynamic constituency of support. Nevertheless, there is scope for synergies and resource sharing between the tracks, e.g. when flexible programming is needed to responding to changes in dynamics within a particular process. In this respect, there are economies of scale in putting both processes together, in terms of management and administration; this will also enable better coordination and complementarity of the processes.

Economic diplomacy track:

Target groups: Georgian and Abkhaz economists, experts, lawyers, entrepreneurs, MPs and officials from relevant ministries and departments (e.g. foreign relations, economy, trade, customs, tax, etc.), presidential administrations, and newly emerging political forces.

Background: Alert has been studying the issue of regulating economic relations across the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict divide since 2007. The focus of this process has been to assess the potential of mutual economic interests as a basis for conflict transformation. In this new phase, Georgian and Abkhaz officials, economic actors and experts will be engaged in discussions on practical proposals for regulation. The results of these discussions will feed into a model, which will be used to advocate for policy change on regulation. The coming together of officials and economic actors, such as businesspeople, Chambers of Commerce and others, is a rare, exciting opportunity to shape future peaceful relations. Thus, the purpose of further establishing the economic diplomacy track is to expand the range of topics on which the sides can engage to find mutually acceptable solutions to the conflict.

Overarching theory of change: We believe that greater economic connectivity, based on clear norms and rules on which sides agree, increases incentives for peace. In the context of protracted conflicts, identifying common economic interests and regulating trade facilitates economic de-isolation and a better investment climate on all sides of the conflict. It also fosters secure interaction and models future relations based on mutual confidence and pragmatism, which positively transforms the context in which current or future official peace talks take place.

Outputs: The process consists of four phases which may be consecutive or overlap, depending on the context. Phase 1 outputs include: a) launching the economic diplomacy track as a sustained channel for cross-conflict discussion and learning; b) forming a cohort group of Georgian and Abkhaz experts with clear insight into the regulation of trade across contested borders; c) producing economic connectivity analysis. Phase 2 will consolidate support from international mediators, donors and bodies involved in the resolution of the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict and from the Georgian and Abkhaz political leadership. Phase 3 will create new economic development scenarios and frameworks for cooperation in the Georgian-Abkhaz context. Phase 4 will produce a concept/framework for Georgian-Abkhaz trans-Ingur/i economic relations. These outputs are innovative and enrich a variety of synergistic interactions between the sides.

Activities:

1. Expert seminars for Abkhaz and Georgian officials/policy makers and businesses

Agenda: To generate interest and support for regulating Georgian-Abkhaz trans-Ingur/i economic relations, and to assist the sides to recognise and take advantage of their own advantages uncontested by the opposite side. Alert will strengthen the existing cross-conflict group of experts (politicians, officials, academics, lawyers, economists, etc.) through regular consultations and expert seminars. These will use international case studies in which economic relations are regulated across contested borders, e.g. China/Taiwan, Serbia/Kosovo, Cyprus, Moldova/Transnistria, and other

areas where the economy is factored into conflict-prevention and -resolution processes. This expert group will lay strong foundations for a knowledge hub and an advocacy platform within their societies and influence political dialogue.

Format: During inception, expert seminars will be organised separately for Abkhaz and Georgian stakeholders under Chatham House rules. The purpose of the seminars will be to bring together unique trade and conflict expertise. Alert's [Regulation of trade across contested borders](#) report will be used to stimulate discussions on trade regulation models in similar conflict contexts. Experts from Taipei, Belgrade, Pristina, Chisinau, Tiraspol, and northern and southern Cyprus will share analysis and expertise on trade facilitation across their respective conflict divides. These case studies offer a variety of different models for regulation; however, Alert will continue to conduct research on other similar case studies. These discussions will allow stakeholders to correlate examples with trade regulatory frameworks relevant to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict (such as the DCFTAs between the EU and various regional free trade areas, WTO, etc.). When support and interest from Abkhaz and Georgian officials and businesses has been sufficiently fostered, joint expert seminars will be organised to start drafting a concept/framework for regulating Trans-Ingur/i economic relations.

2. Study trips to Cyprus, Moldova/Transnistria, and Kosovo/Serbia

Agenda: Study trips to the aforementioned areas will be organised to allow professionals together (parliamentarians, lawyers, customs specialists, businesspeople) to learn first hand about creative solutions that have enabled economic relations between different parties. These trips will provide a secure, necessary space to discuss options and ideas for regulating trans-Ingur/i economic relations.

Format: The study trips will bring Abkhaz and Georgian stakeholders together in conflict regions where creative solutions have been found to facilitate trade, guard mutual interests, and encourage human interaction in a safe environment. The focus of study will be: legal provisions; history of the design of specific legal formula to overcome the issue of international non-recognition of one of the parties (and will include meetings with lawyers and experts engaged in drafting regulations); rules that currently define terms of trade between the two sides. Site visits will be organised to observe border checkpoints, witness procedures, and talk to policy and customs officials, health inspectors and insurance companies. Trips will be followed by workshops and the drafting and dissemination of reports and policy briefs to evaluate and relate international experience to the particularities of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.

3. Consultative/advocacy meetings in Georgia/Abkhazia and with international institutions

Agenda: During the early stages of monitoring illicit trade across the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict divide and our initial efforts to consolidate expertise on trade regulation, cooperation with the FCO, Swiss MFA, EU (DG Trade, EUMM and EUSR), and OSCE was a key component for developing our economy-driven conflict-transformation process. This strand of engagement will be strengthened in this project. We will build on the concept of economic connectivity as a platform to expand horizons. This will constitute a legitimate and potentially fruitful component of building security and peace, one that the current and next OSCE Chairmanships have defined as their priority. It is critically important to widen the conflict-transformation horizon and empower new actors, such as the business community, to play a more active role in enhancing the meaning of trade and economic relations, and thereby facilitate political peace process.

Format: As part of our advocacy strategy, we will carry out transparent and inclusive consultations and informal shuttle diplomacy work with the authorities on both sides, building wider support for the economic diplomacy track. This will include trips to Georgia/Abkhazia, London, Brussels, Vienna, and Geneva/Berne.

4. Research/analysis, policy briefs and a framework for regulating trans-Ingur/i relations

Purpose: We will analyse the policy measures required to facilitate economic exchange across the divide and beyond, as well as the implications of expanded economic connectivity on the peace process. This will entail working on economic development scenarios desirable for all sides to push forward the process of developing a concept/framework for facilitation of Georgian-Abkhaz trans-Ingur/i economic exchange (not exclusive of other regional economic actors).

Format: Each phase of the project will produce 2-3 policy briefs based on ongoing discussions with key Abkhaz and Georgian stakeholders, as well as international actors. Policy briefs will be shared and discussed with key stakeholders during the advocacy/consultative meetings, and published online. Depending on demand, some analyses may need to be kept confidential within a defined circle of third parties. The main purpose of the policy briefs is to inform current high-level interactions and carve a deeper niche for the economic diplomacy track. We will work closely with our expert groups from Georgia and Abkhazia to develop a dissemination strategy. Each policy brief will aim to bring officials closer to, and develop a methodology for, a concept/framework for regulating trans-Ingur/i economic relations.

5. Dialogue meetings

Agenda: Dialogue meetings will be organised to discuss the policy briefs, assess existing approaches to regulating trade, and explore economic development scenarios that resonate with the pragmatic interests of both sides and enhance regional security. The final dialogue meeting will finalise the concept/framework for regulating trans-Ingur/i trade for presentation. These meetings will serve as pre-cursors for the established economic diplomacy track and model this new format.

Format: Dialogue meetings (potentially in Europe) will be organised under Chatham House rules to provide free space for Abkhaz and Georgian stakeholders to engage with each other and interact with international experts.

6. Communications/public advocacy

Agenda: Given the sensitive nature of the topic and the bilateral format, during the project's initial stages, publicity will be limited to targeted Georgian and Abkhaz stakeholders and the international community. Regular meetings with these stakeholders will ensure transparency and coordination.

Format: A media strategy will be developed, in close coordination with all stakeholders, to deliver messages on new approaches to the public. Local events, roundtables, seminars, and presentations, etc., will present research outputs and test propositions developed by the expert cohort as a way to publicise approaches among local communities.

7. Confidence building

Overall, the economic diplomacy track process is a confidence-building, new approach to peacebuilding that emphasises the participation of stakeholders beyond formal political representatives; however, this participation is structured and clearly linked to formal peace talks. It is a conflict-transformation measure and a model for building 'peace infrastructure' to facilitate and then support the accord. At the political level, the consolidation of the economic diplomacy track will lead to the emergence of an officially acknowledged channel of cross-conflict discussion. This would be a great step towards economic cooperation and would open new avenues for peace. Analysis of international cases where economic relations are regulated across contested borders, as well as jointly designed provisional legal frameworks or other models of regulation, will build cross-conflict relationships and make cross-border economic activities more orderly, safe and transparent. This will reduce the risks of engaging in trade, weaken criminal networks, and create fresh impetus to invigorate trust-building processes in a practical and tangible manner.

Human security track:

Target groups: Independent analysts, journalists and civil activists; MPs, local authorities, Ombudsman's office, Public Chamber, officials from relevant executive departments, and public figures/opinion formers, etc.

Background: Since 2006, Alert's Georgian-Abkhaz human security dialogue has been framed around an acknowledgement of the sides' shared interest in each other's perception and experience of security, on the understanding that insecurity deepens mistrust. 'Dialogue through Research' has, since 2008, aimed to widen the circle of people engaged in 'virtual' dialogue by sharing objective analysis, the product of dialogue, with the wider societies, as well as with international actors engaged in the official mediation process. As such, the dialogue has been designed to be flexible and able to adapt to focus on topical themes and serve as a platform for testing ideas emerging from other processes (official and unofficial), while retaining its own identity.

Overarching theory of change: We believe that, by bringing about real and perceived improvements in human security on either side of the conflict divide, in the absence of major escalation of the conflict, feelings of insecurity and thus perception of threat will decline over time. At the same time, a more open and informed public discussion within the societies can transform the conflict discourse into one that is more constructive and rational, and produce concrete suggestions as to how to move forward, as well as build support for innovative solutions.

Activities and outputs

1. Dialogue meetings:

Agenda: A core expert group will identify the range of human security issues on which to focus, which additional dialogue participants to engage, including from official structures, and commission research from each other on issues of common interest. Dialogues will be at approx. 9 month intervals (5 throughout the programme duration); will discuss findings of research; agree public outreach & advocacy strategies arising; define concrete confidence-building initiatives.

Format: Each dialogue meeting will have both closed working sessions and open events, e.g. 1-day public conference or 'invitation only' roundtable (depending on political sensitivities) to share analysis with a wider policy and academic audience (in Brussels or London). This ensures an outward-facing dialogue process and an element of transparency. As the dialogue process evolves, we will encourage the emergence of parallel 'technical' tracks, or working groups, that may require specific areas of thematic or legal expertise to push forward policy recommendations on either side. Inclusion of officials in the dialogue will be done in close consultation with core dialogue participants. This involves careful preparatory work by dialogue participants, and negotiation across the sides by Alert.

2. Research/analysis

Function: Research provides a number of functions: analysis as an essential step in identifying evidence-based solutions; substance and focus for dialogue meetings; a conversation opener for advocacy and public debate; an educational resource for students and other stakeholders. While there is a constant stream of analysis from and about the region, little of it is informed by dialogue; neither is it the product of a systematic dialogue. Capacity building in research methods, including the incorporation of gender analysis, is foreseen in year 1.

Format: Alert will publish 3 joint research summaries under its own logo, but also allow Abkhaz and Georgian partners to develop their own series and publish the full research under their own 'brand', to ensure full ownership, and also take into consideration political sensitivities. Alert will also develop 3 shorter 'policy briefs' to be disseminated publically to make the research findings more accessible to a wider international policy and public audience.

3. Public outreach and discussion

Function: Public discussion has a number of purposes. It allows dialogue participants to stay in touch with public opinion, but is also an essential part of advocacy to advance debate and build public support for ideas, approaches and concrete policy issues that emerge from dialogue. Furthermore, an additional objective is to counter the radicalisation of domestic discourse, which we observe as a result of a combination of internal politics, extreme global events exacerbated by political technologies, and the use of social media and propaganda, which are increasing levels of fear and paranoia within the societies. There is a preventative purpose in carefully facilitated public discussions within the societies, at different levels, to amplify a more objective, rational discourse, to cool the temperature of debate, and to equip people with tools for critical thinking and reflection that builds their resistance to ‘mobilisation’ to justify violence. Capacity building in facilitating public discussion, with a focus on stimulating ‘critical thinking’, is foreseen in year 1.

Format: Three types of internal public discussion will be supported:

- a) Regular bi-monthly public discussions within civil society and academic circles on topical issues, not necessarily directly related to the dialogue process. These will take place not only in Sukhum/i, but in Gal/i and other towns.
- b) Six-monthly internal panel discussions on analysis produced through the dialogue process, widening the circle of those who are included. These may include officials, members of Public Chamber, etc. Participants may introduce other topical issues onto the agenda as well, with accompanying press coverage if it is not too politically sensitive.
- c) Regular written articles, video interviews, etc., in either mainstream or independent media in the respective societies, and on Russian-language regional media, e.g. Caucasian Knot, and on Alert’s website.

4. Confidence-building measures (CBMs)

Function: Overall, this whole process is a confidence-building measure, building understanding and relationships through joint analysis and dialogue and aiming to promote concrete changes in policy and practice which have positive impact on the lives of conflict-affected people. However, within this process, we can foster CBMs in other ways, defined as **promoting change within one society that will have positive resonance in the other**; while these may be identified through a dialogue process, they may also be pursued by civil society independently of the other ‘technical’ dialogue tracks which will evolve. We also identify it as important to popularise and build support for peace activism in general, especially with youth, and ensure both young men and women are equally involved.

Format: For this purpose we will include a Confidence-building Fund (CBF) to be able to react quickly and seize opportunities to support local CBMs as and when they are identified. This will be distinct from COBERM¹ due to the much smaller scale of the initiative (up to 10 grants of, on average, £4,000). Decision making and allocation of resources from CBF and reviews of progress will be made at project steering meetings, which will coincide with 6-monthly dialogue meetings. However, initiatives may be identified on a rolling basis in consultation with Alert and FCO. Each initiative will have its own coherent logic, theory of change, budget, risk management, communications/publicity and M&E strategy.

5. Policy advocacy

Function: To push for concrete changes in policy and practice recommendations arising from research and dialogue.

Format: Policy advocacy cuts across all other activity areas. The dialogue itself is policy-orientated, and all other activities and outputs (e.g. research, policy briefs, public outreach activities, roundtables, public debates, interviews, etc.) should be conceived within an overall advocacy strategy that supports engagement between the sides and concrete changes in policy and practice that will have a positive impact on the conflict dynamic. However, there will be specific activities that relate solely to policy advocacy, which cannot necessarily be prescribed in detail in advance. For example, dialogue participant meetings behind closed doors with officials, who may not be able to attend public meetings for reasons of political sensitivity; consultations between Alert and officials in Tbilisi, Sukhum/i; meetings between dialogue participants and international mediators; consultations by Alert or dialogue participants with Russian experts on framing of issues. For this purpose, the budget includes a consultancy fee for local experts and travel costs.

Cross-cutting areas of ownership, sustainability and contribution to the peace process

Ownership of these processes is ensured by engaging Georgian and Abkhaz stakeholders from the very beginning – from the initial research and mapping of economic prospects to becoming a sustainable link between the conflict parties, which can integrate different opinions and feedback into project activities. Framing the processes on common interests between the parties, e.g. on economic opportunity and security, and basing the dialogue on a created evidence base increases the chances of success. At very least, analysis will remain behind to be used at a later date. Building support constituencies and public support through advocacy and outreach will also help to create a momentum behind proposed policy changes. Within the economy strand in particular, a key prospect for sustainability is the potential emergence of a new, expert-level informal or semi-formal negotiations track between Georgia and Abkhazia on trade, economic relations and infrastructure. This will add a new dimension to the peace process.

¹ EU Funded Confidence Building and Early Response Mechanism, which supports local civil society projects.