

1.4 Experience

<p>Conflict-resolution work in Georgia, including Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the impact of such work</p>	<p>Alert has worked on conflict transformation in the Georgian-Abkhaz-South Ossetian context since the mid-1990s. The list below is indicative, not fully comprehensive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1998-2005: ‘Caucasus Forum of NGOs’ was established to strengthen trust and links among the Caucasian peoples, promote tolerance, civic consciousness and overcome inter-ethnic hostility. The Forum generated numerous dialogue initiatives and joint projects between women, youth, journalists, ex-combatants, and created a nucleus of civil society peacemakers, many of whom who later went on to work on their own conflicts, and hold public office. • 2005-present: ‘Caucasus Business and Development Network’ has been promoting regional economic cooperation and linking entrepreneurs, e.g. working with local producers to create products – cheese, tea, wine and honey. This process gave rise to the economic research and Trans-Ingur/i trade dialogue (see below). • 2008-present: ‘Dialogue through Research’, where Georgian Abkhaz experts ‘commissioned’ each other to study topics (e.g. Security Guarantees, ‘De-isolation’). Published 6 studies, held international roundtables on political analysis (e.g. on the Abkhaz 2014 crisis; Russian-Abkhaz Treaty), and hosted the spin-off ‘Caucasus Dialogues’ to influence public debate. Abkhaz partners claim this process helped to develop public and policy advocacy messages. • 2009-2013: ‘Mediation & Dialogue’ initiative - assessment of past civil peacebuilding processes; built capacity of group of young analysts through study of historical narratives & political discourses; developed and tested and ‘eye-opening’ methodology to promote ‘critical thinking’ using psychological theory; facilitated cultural dialogue. • 2009-2015: South Ossetia teacher training and youth empowerment: trained 47 teachers creating a foundation for grassroots activism, implemented civic initiatives, one of which, independently of Alert, introduced an anti-corruption scheme in the university entrance exam process across the territory; conducted 3 studies (restricted).
<p>Track 1.5 dialogue experience</p>	<p>Alert’s first experience of Track 1.5 dialogue in the Georgian-Abkhaz context was in July 2003 with a meeting in Farnham Castle, when women from Sukhum/i, Gal/i and Tbilisi invited the heads of both official delegations to the Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations to a four-day meeting to discuss Gal/i. Many agreements in principle were made on, e.g. providing textbooks; teacher training; a children’s library; sports clubs; hospital equipment; police equipment. Unfortunately, changes in leadership in Georgia later that year hindered follow-up. Nevertheless, the occasion fostered constructive relationship between the Gal/i participants and the Abkhaz MFA (Shamba), which lasted a few years. Since then, we have included officials in their personal capacity in our ‘dialogue through research’, either in meetings or as researchers/respondents, and most recently in January 2015 at an international roundtable in Brussels to discuss the Russian-Abkhaz treaty (with figures from MFA Abkhazia, National Security Council Georgia, and Russian academics).</p> <p>Most relevant, however, is the economic track 1.5 process already underway, which this proposal seeks to evolve further, itself the result of earlier processes outlined here. In 2007, on FCO’s request, Alert facilitated a meeting of Georgian & Abkhaz economists, civil society actors, with Abkhaz foreign ministry representation, on a Georgian-led (FCO Conflict-Pool funded) plan to establish a ‘Special Economic Zone’ in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone. While it was apparent from the start that the Abkhaz would not simply accept a Georgian proposal, the meeting launched the process which has evolved over the years to gradually build a critical mass of support for the economic diplomacy track put forward in this proposal. The process involved a number of phases of innovative research, dialogue, study of other contexts, and targeted advocacy; it has helped to deepen knowledge, challenge assumptions and build the necessary evidence base to understand how economic relations between the sides might contribute to conflict resolution, while taking political risks and sensitivities into account. The economic track has already opened a new dimension for conflict analysis and dialogue, expanded the traditional scope of stakeholders involved, and offers a potential avenue for greater security and peace. Our track record means Alert is well placed to continue to develop a concrete concept of a trade regulation scenario in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict context. Key achievements to date include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research: We supported Georgian and Abkhaz economists, lawyers, political experts to conduct research, resulting in three novel studies on trans-Ingur/i economic relations: Views from two banks (2011) explores political and economic gains and losses if relations were to be regulated; a Stakeholder analysis (2012) examines business community attitudes towards cross-divide trade; A case for regulation (2013; 2015) assesses the volume and economic significance of trans-Ingur/i trade and lays out the legal dynamics. • Advocacy: These publications helped to build support and an evidence base for policy making and dialogue. The sharing of research findings with officials and professionals across the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict divide stimulated a request for analysis of examples of trade regulation in other unresolved conflicts, resulting in Alert’s Regulating trade across contested borders report in 2015, with case studies from Taiwan/China, Kosovo/Serbia and Cyprus. • Dialogue: Since 2015, this evidence base has supported a series of dialogue meetings in Brussels, Geneva, and Berne for Georgian and Abkhaz stakeholders, as well as the OSCE, WTO, UN and the Swiss government, seminars in Tbilisi and Sukhum/i, as well as Istanbul (for Georgian) and Yerevan (for Abkhaz officials). These events opened up channels for dialogue, allowing relevant economic and political officials on both sides to become more receptive to and openly discuss the concept of trade regulation and rule-based economic relations.

<p>Confidence-building measures (between and within the societies)</p>	<p>All Alert’s work on the context has confidence building at its heart (e.g. in dialogue meetings or advocacy messaging) or longer-term aim (e.g. increasing security, freedom of movement, expression, economic wellbeing, etc.); however, when talking about specific confidence-building measures, we define it as any measure which promotes change within one society that will have positive resonance in the other (with the emphasis on promoting change). Symbolic gestures and actions are perceived as shallow, demonstrating a lack of understanding of what motivates and concerns the other side. Herewith are a number of illustrative examples, by no means fully comprehensive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ‘Caucasus Forum of NGOs’, facilitated by Alert, generated many confidence-building initiatives between 1999 and 2005. The regional format meant that opposing sides could work together in third places, e.g. a number of joint election or incident-monitoring mobile teams were mobilised to different parts of the Caucasus, which both served as a model of cooperation and ‘public diplomacy’, as well as cemented relationships and commitments to push for conflict-sensitive changes within both sides’ societies. • Alert was the first organisation to start funding small initiatives in the Gal/i district since 2000, before other agencies, including the UN, took on this role. The initiatives were identified based on meeting real needs, improving the situation for people and supporting fledgling civic humanitarian initiatives, but they were also a confidence-building measure between Sukhum/i and Tbilisi, and between Sukhum/i and Gal/I, as all “sides” interests were met and information about initiatives was shared. • Similarly, Alert first supported a Public Advice Centre in Gal/i, in 2007 (subsequently supported by other donors) which also served a human rights monitoring function, the format of which was acceptable to the Abkhaz (i.e. an NGO) and the function of which was acceptable to the Georgians (who wanted an international mission). • One particular example illustrates a ‘confidence built’ moment, i.e. an outcome of accumulated interaction, was during the Kodori events in 2001, when Georgian partners were publicly active in condemning the events, writing letters, organising demonstrations, and giving interviews to show a message of solidarity with their Abkhaz counterparts. This was in stark contrast to Georgian reactions to similar escalation in 1998, and was remarked on by Abkhaz Forum members at the time as being very significant in developing trust in their Georgian counterparts.
<p>Shaping government policy in recognised and unrecognised territories</p>	<p>The most obvious example of Alert shaping government strategy in the Georgian-Abkhaz context is the adoption of an economic chapter in the Georgian government’s 2010 ‘Engagement through Cooperation’ strategy, for which we have documented evidence that it was influenced by a 2000 report on ‘Business of Peace’, and lobbied for by Georgian partners engaged in Alert’s economic dialogue initiatives at the time. However, the politicised and high-profile nature of the strategy, typical of the political leadership of the time, somewhat undermined a lot of positive progress in Alert’s process, which suddenly became too closely associated with one side of the conflict. Indeed, from 2007, our role in facilitating dialogue on trade had often been to ensure the sides moved at similar speeds towards a common goal, sometimes having to hold back the Georgians from making proposals to the Abkhaz which they were not yet ready to accept, thus scuppering chances for later agreements. Thus, Alert’s role has been to provide the platform from which policy recommendations can be generated and to build internal advocacy platforms. Political sensitivities in Abkhazia in particular mean that internationals cannot directly lobby the de facto authorities, although Alert regularly meets with officials from both sides to provide briefings to ensure transparency of our aims and processes, as well as to test the boundaries of what is acceptable at any moment in time. Gaining their support for participation in this economic diplomacy track is already a policy success. Events held on economic themes are well attended by both Georgian and Abkhaz politicians, and statistics and messages from Alert’s research have been quoted by the Abkhaz leadership. Local partners link the timing of positive changes in rhetoric and policy to high-level officials’ exposure to our reports and subsequent closed meetings. Therefore, Alert is well positioned to take the track 1.5 dialogue process further, to upgrade the existing diplomacy tracks to the political level.</p>
<p>Understanding of conflict history and current dynamics and Russia’s approach</p>	<p>Alert’s staff have substantial length of experience working in the region, including two senior advisors from the region itself, one of whom has PhD in Conflict Studies and has published extensively on conflict-related issues, and the other has conducted a number of studies and needs assessments and reports over the years on South Ossetia (limited circulation) and Gal/i. Our long track record means that we not only have an understanding of conflict history, but a detailed knowledge of the stages of that ‘history’ as it unfolded, and personal relationships with some of the key figures in both political and civil sectors, i.e. institutional memory. Alert itself has invested efforts in studying conflict-related issues to produce a body of analysis (e.g. the ‘Dialogue through Research’ and Economy series) and all our work is informed through this analysis. A conscious decision was made to involve Russian experts in our dialogues since 2010 to ensure the Russian perspective is taken into account. The Russian approach is one of self-interest, with the protracted conflicts and support to non-recognised entities as a tool for leverage in protecting its sphere of interest. Russian policy has evolved over the years as the external context has changed. However, approaches differ within the different parts of the Russian establishment, which goes some way to explain often unpredictable actions, the combination of coercion and support, and apparent contradictions of a Russian-Georgian dialogue track operating in parallel with Geneva.</p>