

## 1.6 Relationship management

### Georgian officials and the 2016 elections

As part of our advocacy efforts, Alert has always been engaged in formal meetings and consultations with the authorities in Georgia. This includes government officials, MPs, representatives of political parties, including from the opposition, and new/emerging political forces. This has expanded our target group and ensured that we have supporters, irrespective of changes in the government. Different political forces in Georgia may have different policy approaches to conflict management and adhere to distinct sets of tactics. We have always positioned ourselves as facilitators; this gives us the advantage of convening power to bring the sides together, assist them in their dialogue, and provide knowledge and advice. Over two decades this approach has led us to be regarded as one of the most credible interlocutors by political constellations in the country, and we have built up excellent rapport with representatives across the political spectrum dealing with the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.

Key individuals/institutions include those who can influence policies towards reconciliation and take part in Geneva Discussions, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the State Ministry of Reconciliation and Civic Equality (SMR), the Ministry of Economy, and MPs. Our consultations with the Georgian MFA and SMR have indicated traction is building for our economic diplomacy track. For example, the SMR minister (appointed this week), has been helping us identify key figures to approach in the Georgian government about involvement, and has participated in two of our recent meetings on trade regulation across contested borders, and provided very positive feedback. We will build on our established networks, and will closely monitor the context around the elections to identify and pre-emptively engage with new stakeholders if/when the government significantly changes in 2016.

### De facto Abkhaz officials, and individuals and institutions within Abkhazia

A key component of our methodology is bringing together (new) people across the conflict divide (including engaging politicians who understand their local political space), based on professional interest, focusing on matters of pragmatic interest for all sides, and promoting synergies (as opposed to conflict). In Abkhazia, we work with lawyers, economists and entrepreneurs, as well as key officials from the presidential administration, the Ministry of Economy, MFA, and MPs. On occasions, we have also worked with the Ministries of Education and Culture, and individuals from local administrations and town councils. Our engagement has shown that, due to the prolonged period of isolation and dominance of security concerns, policy making and developing long-term strategies are not familiar terrain for Abkhaz politicians, entrepreneurs, and social activists. Moreover, no concrete concept has been formulated for economic development. The Abkhaz national economic development concept is essentially Russia's; this is a complex plan that has provided hundreds of millions of US dollars in assistance to Abkhazia and caters to Moscow's geopolitical rather than Abkhazia's economic needs. Moreover, local corruption and short-sighted economic decisions that favour certain groups and individuals, as well as contradict sustainability, environmental logic and local development, do not fit well into a concept of long-term economic development. Therefore, our process on regulating trans-Ingur/i economic relations provides local Abkhaz officials with the opportunity to refocus their thinking on the economy, diversify options, and engage in peacebuilding.

### International organisations and the international community

Coordination and networking with key local and international institutions working in Georgia and Abkhazia are integral to our approach, as they help us to retain links with higher-level political processes. Additionally, this allows us to pursue both synergies and distance where the need arises. Alert's approach to this engagement is based on transparency and consultation. During previous stages of monitoring illicit trade across the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict divide, we established cooperation with the FCO, co-chairs of the Geneva Discussions (OSCE, EU, UN), and EU structures, such as DG Trade, EEAS, EUMM and EUSR; these are all regular interlocutors in our project discussions as well as active participants and discussants in international roundtables held by Alert over the years. The economic diplomacy track has wide support and momentum, which we will maintain in close cooperation and collaboration with these institutions. This will ensure that we can make timely adjustments to our process where appropriate and capitalise on potential 'windows of opportunity' in the political process, maximising impact and deepening the economic diplomacy track.

Close collaboration will continue with the Swiss MFA, who assisted us in communications and mediation with the Abkhaz authorities for the Georgian-Abkhaz policy dialogue in September 2015. We presented our studies on monitoring illicit trade also to the Swiss company SGS, which is tasked with monitoring movement of goods across the Russian-Georgian border (for implementation of the WTO agreement). Given ongoing Georgia-Russia engagement in WTO discussions, we will ensure regular exchange of information and analysis, as regulating trans-Ingur/i trade has potential to increase economic activity by opening new trade routes and markets for Georgian and Abkhaz economic actors.

We will also engage with the OSCE in our process. Strengthening economic connectivity to increase security in the OSCE area is one of the priorities for the current and next OSCE Chairmanship. We will build on this platform to expand and empower new actors to play a more active role in enhancing the meaning of trade and economic relations as a legitimate and potentially fruitful component of building security and peace.