Bridging divided societies

Black Sea NGO Forum
3rd Edition
Constanta, Romania

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Preliminary remarks

State of facts in the region

- The Black Sea Region is an area with a tremendous variety of political, social, and ethnic fault lines and a significant number of protracted, deeply-rooted conflicts

- The peaceful settlement of these conflicts requires substantial political change within the rival polities along with significant changes in the collective self of the societies in conflict

- Numerous efforts of negotiations, different breakthroughs and relapses into war, "frozen periods of time", several interventions of various third parties have not led to any successes in the peace processes led at the official level

Critical issues 1

Official negotiation processes

- The biggest challenge for the international community when dealing with the state formation conflicts in the Black Sea region is the incapacity of finding a straightforward solution under international law that would encompass both the principle of territorial integrity and of the right for self-determination of people

- The official EU institutions and the other regional organizations active in the Black Sea (i.e. OSCE) have political and conceptual limitations that prevent them from meaningfully engaging with and addressing this region's state formation conflicts. (Inability to engage with ALL conflict affected groups)

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Critical issues 2
Liberal Peace

- EU bases its external policies on the **liberal peace paradigm** = liberal, market-enhancing states, multi-party democracies and pluralistic civil societies are the best guarantors for internal and external peace.

- This has been promoted as a standard approach by international agencies in several post-war societies in the Black Sea and has led to many **"no war, no peace" fragile situations** rather than to sustainable peace processes .

- The emphasis of peacemaking is often primarily on **"deal making"-** achieving ceasefire agreements, while less emphasis is given to the question, when, how and by whom these agreements will and can be implemented (**ownership in the countries**) and how this implementation will and can be monitored

- The possibilities of **promoting peace from the outside are limited**. It is primarily important to support agencies and forces inside the country and not to dis-empower them with standardized outsider templates.

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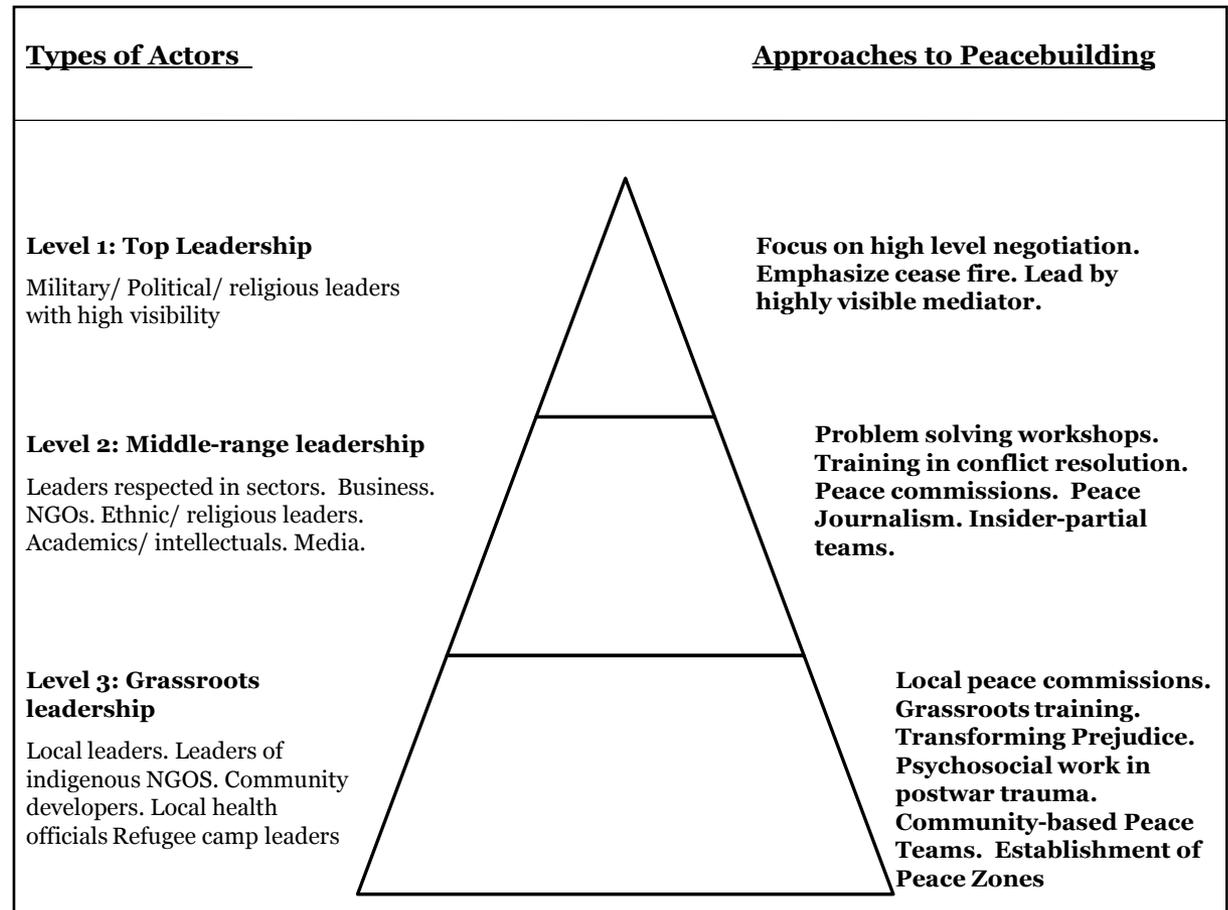
The role of the civil society
Two types of actors

- **Private Diplomacy Actors** are private organisations and people who mediate conflicts, support peace processes, and engage in dialogue with a variety of actors with the purpose of conflict resolution. These actors engage in escalating periods of conflict, during full blown conflict, or shortly after a peace agreement has been reached. (PDA survey/ IFP project)

- **Civil society Organizations** along with other non-governmental sectors, like the media, academia, business and religious institutions are critical internal agents of the change from-within the societies affected by conflict. "Local civil society is best positioned to deal with the consequences of direct violence by mediating for hostage and prisoners of war release and exchange, anti-war campaigning and non-violent resistance, and by contributing to the prevention and cessation of armed hostilities through building bridges between divided communities, creating safe spaces and effective processes for negotiations" (Natalia Mirimanova)

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The role of the civil society

- One of the gaps in peacebuilding is the interdependence gap that means that the vertical line (a civil society that is influential and genuine) and horizontal line (across the division lines between conflict parties) integration is insufficient .

- Peacebuilding initiatives tend to concentrate on the horizontal dimension of conflict transformation, while liberal peace approach taken by the EU or other governmental actors, aims at the vertical dimension within conflict sides. The combination of the two is necessary. A comprehensive approach to the support of peacebuilding by civil society has a potential to close this gap.

Photo Adapted from John Paul Lederach, Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies.

Types of Actors   **Approaches to Peacebuilding**

Level 1: Top Leadership
Military/ Political/ religious leaders with high visibility

Focus on high level negotiation. Emphasize cease fire. Lead by highly visible mediator.

Level 2: Middle-range leadership
Leaders respected in sectors. Business. NGOs. Ethnic/ religious leaders. Academics/ intellectuals. Media.

Problem solving workshops. Training in conflict resolution. Peace commissions. Peace Journalism. Insider-partial teams.

Level 3: Grassroots leadership
Local leaders. Leaders of indigenous NGOS. Community developers. Local health officials Refugee camp leaders

Local peace commissions. Grassroots training. Transforming Prejudice. Psychosocial work in postwar trauma. Community-based Peace Teams. Establishment of Peace Zones

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The role of the civil society
Bridging divided communities

- Bridging communities is a particular sphere of civil society operation.

- The role of the international Private Diplomacy Actors is very important for the implementation of cross-conflict projects, because they act as conveners and mediators where direct cross-conflict activities are impossible to carry out.

- CSOs that position themselves as peacebuilders have to:
  - navigate between the extremes of conformism and marginalization: they need to preserve trust and respect of their societies and retain influence on their authorities
  - promote conflict transformation, propose alternative conflict resolution activities and thus deviate from the dominant national discourse on the official peace process
  - critical re-assess their own side's wrongdoings and understand the legitimacy of the opponent side's "truth"

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Lessons learned from practice

A third party perspective

1. Challenges –Black Sea civil society at work
   - o Civil society actors in peacebuilding are regarded as supplementary and largely apolitical
   - o In country civil society fragmentation & lack of cooperation – formation of oposite camps whitin the same community/country.
   - o The tendancy to adopt the same line as the official negotiation process – little room for creative or alternative solutions solutions and space for conflict transformation discourse
   - o The tendancy to work on commissioned projects – a focus on activities or deliverables rather than on the ultimate goal, process or strategies

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Lessons learned from practice

A third party perspective

2. Challenges – third party intervention sins

   o Static conflict analysis (root causes and symptoms). Lack of analysis on the changes in the conflict system during long periods of time

   o The tendancy to make an interpretation of the parties "truth". Classifications or interpretations made by third parties are irrelevant (focus on needs)

   o Lack of coordination and cooperation between third parties (private or official diplomacy actors) in a conflict setting

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Lessons learned from practice

A third party perspective – Meeting the challenge

1. Working with the "party"

   o Working first inside each society and enhancing a dialogue between the different antagonistic actors. Managing fragmentation in the groups.

   o Diversity of conflict analyses and solution proposals amongst single conflict parties. Skillful listening as a must

   o Look at the system dynamics within the individual conflict parties (mediation talks often focus on **selling inwards – encouraging the parties to find common solutions;** but little attention is given to **selling outwards** how successful are the delegates in convincing their constituencies back home)

   o Acess radicals by going through moderates even if they are extremist (always ensure buy in from the governamental actors)

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Lessons learned from practice

A third party perspective – Meeting the challenge

2. Working with the "parties" (1)

- o   Movement towards interdependence as oposed to dependence or independence (working **with** the people and not **for** them)
- o   Change is about people not things – subtsntial investements into building **trust** with and in between people
- o   Creating **safe spaces** and mediative capacity of the parties in the **preparation phase** through active listening – when parties co-deisgn their meeting formats there is little anxiety about agendas and processes

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A third party perspective – Meeting the challenge

2. Working with the "parties" (2)

- o Transparence,inclussivity and constant feedback and information sharing as rules when dealing with conflict affected groups (work with marginalised actors)

- o Look at 'hybrid forms of mediation' that take into account both managing risks and creating longterm engagement (i.e. linking peace talks to implementation).

- o Good facilitation processes result in people co-owning, co-designing and implementing peacebuilding processes.

- o Ensure institutional anchoring of dialogue processes (sustainability)

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A third party perspective – Meeting the challenge

2. Working with the "parties" (3)

- o Versatility of the ways of engagement of conflict parties is important to tackle the asymmetry issue pertinent to asymmetric, state formation conflicts

- o Tailoring dialogue on the basis of mutual recognition and reciprocity restores the broader society's trust in the possibility of a dialogue with the opponent side (expert talks)

- o Reconstruction of the communication space where there is isolation and lack of interface models a common public sphere that prepares the societies for coexistence (media resources)

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Lessons learned from practice

A third party perspective – Meeting the challenge

3. The engagement– a strategic blend of methodologies (1)

   o The overall strategy of the engagement should seek to balance the poles of taking a problem-based or a vision-led approach (feeling of hopelessness/unrealistic euphoria)

   o The guiding principle: multipartiality (the possibility of integrating opposing perspectives and models into an overarching common system of peacefull settlement of conflict)

   o Focusing primarily on the subsistence needs of the people affected by conflict.

   o Relation building, empoworment and joint reflections

   o Process is as important as outcome. Building cohesion cannot consist of a series of unrelated activities (link activities/designed and executed by key actors/unifying vision and empowering process)

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Lessons learned from practice

A third party perspective – Meeting the challenge

3.   The engagement– a strategic blend of methodologies (2)

o   Raise awarness of the problems and their background (basis for consensus and the need to change)

o   Focusing people's energy towards a desirable future which makes the peacebuilding worthwhile

o   Capacity building and skill building in order to support the other processes

o   Change management processes – institutionalise mechanisms that address mutual disappointments in the process

o   Encourage roosters of NGOs work with organisation specialised in conflict, there is a lot of expertise from other domains, need of knowledge sharing and mutual buy-in

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A third party perspective – Meeting the challenge

4. Measuring impact and ensuring long term engagement
    o The issue of **Financial Sustainability** and Coordination – it is now being dealt with through international partnerships and consortiums of NGOs
    o Providing the Framework but not solutions (parties' ownership & responsability of the process) – CMI : advocacy, capacity building & dialogue/mediation/facilitation
    o Balance between short term goals and long terms outcomes and clear strategic approach as oposed to ad-hoc interventions
    o Ensuring continuos evaluation and assesment of one's impact (baseline documents and ongoing evaluation systems)
    o Continuous communication and coordination with other governmental or non-governmental bodies