The Limits of Humanitarian Aid and Development Cooperation in War-torn Separatist Regions (A Case Study of Abkhazia)

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Abstract
Throughout the Cold War, the international donor community had confined their effort in conflict situations primarily to humanitarian aid and ideologically motivated development cooperation. Donors were not prepared to deal with the multiple and complex challenges of post-conflict reconstruction, which came with the end of the cold war and were connected with the processes of globalisation. After a period of violent conflict, war-torn societies face many challenges. In many cases they lack the financial, institutional and human resources to solve the problems bounded with post-conflict reconstruction. External actors are asked to play a more active role in assisting countries emerging from conflicts, but there are legal, budgetary and ethical limits of humanitarian aid and development cooperation. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate on the case study of Abkhazia, that the classical paradigm of linear cycle of post-conflict reconstruction via the fluent transformation from a short term humanitarian aid to a longer term development cooperation, simply can not function in separatist regions.

Key words: humanitarian aid, Abchazia, separatism

1. Introduction
The plan for the European post-war recovery was introduced by George Marshall in 1947. During the next four years the USA invested into the infrastructure, social and economic system of the continent, which was heavily affected by the events of the Second World War, roughly 13 billion USD. Rapid recovery of the living standard of pre-war European citizens was mainly accomplished by massive humanitarian aid and deliberate investments. This outstanding success led to the call for Marshall Plan’s equivalent in regions that had gone through an armed conflict. It is necessary to say that the conditions of Europe at the end of 1940s were markedly different from the conditions in countries ravaged by armed conflicts today. Admittedly, European infrastructure was heavily disrupted, but institutional environment and know-how necessary for the absorption of aid remained unscathed. In addition Western Europe was the crucial ally of the United States in the fight against the spread of communism. With the end of the Cold War this ideological motivation disappeared and donor countries today weigh all the pros and cons as to whom provide the economic, political and moral support.

Besides conventional humanitarian aid that aims to stabilize the situation immediately after the war in the worst affected areas through material supplies, donor countries are not willing enough to provide long-term programs into regions of conflict on the grounds of the high probability of new violence escalation. If only for this reason it is clear that area-wide programs of post-conflict recovery similar to the Marshall Plan are not practicable at the beginning of the 21st century.

It is thus the aim of the international community to support the development of war-affected regions through more specifically oriented recovery programs traditionally including
humanitarian aid and development cooperation. These two approaches have their own theoretical starting points, and legal, budgetary and ethical limits. In this paper we examine the potential of each approach for separatist regions, since their position in the area of development cooperation is considerably different from that of other regions without separatist tendencies. Their uniqueness will be shown on the case study of Abkhazia. The theoretical starting points will be described on the basis of secondary literature dealing with post-conflict reconstruction; consequently we apply this theory to the analysis of the results of foreign development activities during the post-war recovery of Abkhazia.

2. From war to post-conflict reconstruction

War permeates the history of human civilization from the dawn of mankind and thus has taken various shapes; it is thus not easy to find a universal definition. For the purpose of this paper, which is primarily not concerned with war itself but rather with post-war reconstruction, it will be sufficient to define war as the most violent form of social conflict during which more than 1000 inhabitants die due to direct armed attack among two and more sides, at least one of them being organized state. As for the intensity, war is here perceived as the last and the highest stage of conflict.

Conflicts are often classified into three stages: pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict. The crucial engagement of development organizations arrives mostly in the last stage, for which the post-conflict reconstruction became the accepted usage in the development terminology. This idea calculates with a linear cycle of post-conflict reconstruction from humanitarian aid to development cooperation. Since today it is the predominant approach to the development of war-affected regions, we will apply these crucial stages on the post-conflict reconstruction of Abkhazia.

3. Conflict in Abkhazia and its consequences

Abkhazia is a small republic on the eastern coast of the Black Sea, where the disputes between Abkhazians and Georgians grew into an armed conflict at the beginning of the 1990s. The results were 15 000 casualties, a population decrease from 525 000 to today’s 160 000 inhabitants, more than 300 000 refugees and a completely devastated infrastructure. Abkhazians took control over the whole territory of historical Abkhazia, and declared sovereignty and independence from Georgia. On the official level the war was ended by the April 1994 peace agreements. Although signed sixteen years ago, the two key questions, without which no sustainable peace can take place – the political status of Abkhazia and the conditions for the return of refugees – were not yet solved. Economic vulnerability is to a great extent the result of political instability, population decrease, closed borders and embargo and manifested itself in the collapse of the VAT and the lack of personnel in the most important economic sectors (agriculture and tourism). It is possible to say that a palpable tension between Abkhazians and Georgians persists in the ethnic, political and economic domain till today. Though arms were laid down, the conflict continues. For such a conflict the term Frozen Conflict became an accepted usage.

33 Though the methodology and the approach to the study of conflicts are different at the Heidelberg Institute (HIIK) and Uppsala Project (UCDP), the two main approaches in conflict research, this basic definition is common to both of them
34 It is a separatist region with a surface area covering 8 600 km². Georgia insists on the autonomous status of Abkhazia inside the Georgian state structures, Abkhazia is demanding full independence based on the right of nations for self-determination.
35 When the last population census took place in Abkhazia in 1989, the number was 525 000. The after-war numbers of inhabitants vary from source to source since they are based on estimates. The number 160 000 comes from estimates done by the observer mission UNOMIG under the patronage of the UN, which took place at the end of 1998. It is the most frequently stated and relatively broadly accepted estimate.
3.1 Persistent need for humanitarian aid in Abkhazia

Humanitarian aid is aiming at providing assistance during war and immediately after its ending, specifically focusing on hardship reduction. Furthermore it should offer an opportunity for reaching worthy life conditions for war-affected people.

After the war, relations between Abkhazians and Georgians remain very strained, and cases of mutual cooperation are very scarce. As a consequence, together with very low budget outlay of Abkhazia, the living standards of the Abkhazian population are still very low and their improvement depends to a great degree on foreign interventions. The most important among them is humanitarian aid, which has long tradition in Abkhazia. Organizations like the Red Cross and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have been engaged in Abkhazia from the beginning of the war. Almost one third of the Abkhazian population depended on their aid during 1990s and even in 2006 these organizations still provided the humanitarian aid for 20 000 people. In addition, funds like UNIFEM, WFP and ECHO earmark from the end of 1990s every year the amount of 2 million € on safeguarding food self-sufficiency (OCHA: Interim report on Abkhazian events, 2003, 5).

Activities of these organizations are therefore to this day quite indispensable, nevertheless it is clear they are not, and will not, be sufficient. Food self-sufficiency should be connected with a basic reconstruction of the agricultural infrastructure, but international organizations fund such projects only in the three southern-most Abkhazian regions (Gali, Ochamchira and Tkvarcheli)\(^{36}\), where stabilization and development are based on Georgian support. Since Georgia has not guaranteed in its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper the support of agricultural infrastructure in entire Abkhazia, but only in the aforementioned three southern regions, the recovery of the agricultural infrastructure in other regions cannot come about. Donors policy goes hand in hand with the statements of the EU, USA and UN leaders, who declare unequivocal support for Georgian territorial integrity. This example shows that even if humanitarian activities would correspond to the primarily minimalist concept and aid would be provided only on the basis of core humanitarian principles: independence, objectivity and neutrality, aid cannot be in war-affected region entirely apolitical. Thus humanitarian organizations have to still engage in this area even when it is more than fifteen years after the war and emergency aid is usually described as short term in nature.

3.2 Development Cooperation in Constraints of Donor Countries Foreign Policy

The initial phase of aid, essential for securing population’s survival and safety, is followed by the phase of subsequent economic and social development. In the linear cycle of post-conflict reconstruction through external intervention, this type of aid is represented by development cooperation.

At the beginning of 1990s the system of development cooperation was oriented on donor possibilities, therefore donors provided aid within their policies and at their own discretion. A change in the understanding of development cooperation appeared in 1996, when the Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) issued the document “Shaping the 21st Century”. This document for the first time stressed the need for a forward orientation of the aid on the grounds of recipient’s requirements, which is in effect still today. This means that every country accepting development aid must have The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. The government of the receiving country should, after a broad public debate, introduce its macroeconomic, structural and social policies, that would lead to economic growth and poverty reduction. Foreign donors would proceed in their activities into the defined sectors and regions only on the grounds of the PRSP. In other words, foreign donors should provide

\(^{36}\) Before war an overwhelming majority of the population in these regions was comprised of Georgians and the planned return of refugees is to begin actually in those districts.
their aid only to those sectors and regions which are stated as priorities in the PRSP of the receiving country. In the case of Abkhazia donors should provide development cooperation only on the basis of the PRSP issued by the Georgian government.

The first Georgian PRSP from June 2003 dealt with development possibilities of Abkhazia, but all planned activities were to be realized only after its political status would be solved. The development vision for Abkhazia was to promote the political goals of the Georgian government. The economic blockade of Abkhazia from the Russian Federation already did not work and among the leaders of the Georgian parliament and in the government the prevailing idea was that economic sanctions will not be efficient and that it will be necessary to approach the Abkhazian problem more actively. This approach was expressed by the establishment of the Department of Conflict Resolution in April 2004. One of its goals was the coordination of development activities with foreign donors in Abkhazia. The Department authorized the realization of development projects in Abkhazia even before the political issues concerning its status were solved. All aid was territorially limited to the Gali region and was to be used for the repatriation of Georgian refugees and the reconstruction of infrastructure connected with their return (building of schools, reconstruction of houses, clarification of property relations, seed material and fertilisers supply, water main construction and so on). The new development program was immediately supported from abroad by a united initiative of the European Union, UNDP, USAID, WB and the Swiss development agency.

In 2006 the PRSP was revised. Aside from the Gali region, development activities were extended to the adjacent Ochamchira and Tkvarcheli regions. As for the Georgian side, the projects are controlled by the government and its departments. The realization is provided by Abkhazian non-profit organizations. For the course of the project they are responsible to the donor agency. These projects include the construction of four hospitals, the creation of a registry of returning refugees, programs for their psychosocial stabilization, the opening of a legal aid office for the retroactive acquisition of property, and small projects for employment in the private sector. (Georgia: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Progress Report 2006, 78-79).

Multilateral development agencies provide in addition to financial backing also the necessary know-how. The European Commission, the United Nations Development (UNDP) and the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) provide nearly 4 million € every year for the socio-economic recovery of Abkhazia. In relation to these activities another million € is provided by the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) and less than one million € by the ECD-Decentralized Cooperation Program (Georgia: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Progress Report 2006, 61). Although the Georgian government declares the stabilization of Abkhazia as one of its main priorities, the financial reality is not corresponding with this declaration. In the last ten years Georgia has received a total of 130 – 230 million € every year, of which Abkhazia has access to only 6 million €. (Monitoring Resource Flows To Fragile States 2007, 66). The efforts of foreign development organizations take into account the Georgian PRSP entirely and realize its activities exclusively in the specified sectors and above mentioned regions, that have a potential to accept larger amount of refugees of Georgian nationality. All development cooperation in Abkhazia leads unequivocally to the formation of adequate conditions for the return of refugees and to safeguarding their subsequent safety. Development strategy defined in the PRSP proves to eliminate in practice very successfully the development activities that could serve the economic development of the separatist region and thus contribute to the political support of the local separatist regime. Another possible explanation of the absence of development projects in the rest of the Abkhazian territory is the fact that for bilateral donors development
intervention is an integral part of their foreign policy that unambiguously supports the preservation of the Georgian territorial integrity.

**Conclusion**

Humanitarian aid should lead to the most effective restoration of dignified living conditions of local inhabitants. With a low rate of public expenditure in separatist regions the activity of humanitarian organizations is necessary not only to reduce hardships for inhabitants after war, but at the same time to serve at least to a partial infrastructure recovery. In spite of that humanitarian aid from its very nature should not lead to profound structural changes. If there were such ambitions, humanitarian organizations would have to struggle to abide by their code of independence, impartiality and neutrality. In separatist regions it is hard to remain apolitical even in cases, in which humanitarian organizations have only minimalist goals. In situation of ethnic conflict aid must flow equitably to all ethnic groups. In Abkhazia, humanitarian organizations engaged in the Gali region have, on the grounds of supporting only Georgian refugees, damaged their reputation in the rest of Abkhazia.

Development cooperation has its limits in post-conflict reconstruction as well. While in other post-war regions there usually are legitimate authorities that international development organizations can regard as partners, in separatist regions the situation is different. Since all potential bilateral donors from states associated in the OECD/DAC implicitly accept the principle of Georgian territorial integrity and the principle of partnership and aid orientation based on recipient’s needs, it is not possible for them to realize almost any development projects in Abkhazia. These principles provide Georgia with effective instruments for the suspension of foreign development interventions activities in their separatist regions. Development cooperation thus in those particular cases cannot be conducive to economic and social development in some regions. Since selection of priority countries for development cooperation is moreover an integral part of foreign policy of all donor countries associated in the OECD/DAC, the political issues in those cases are superior to development issues.

Not even after fifteen years from signing the Moscow Peace Treaty did the efforts of the international community lead to political peace that would guarantee Abkhazia a chance for economic and social development. If it is not possible to reach sustainable peace in the top-down process, the only chance for development of separatist regions through foreign development interventions is via bottom-up processes. These include a broad engagement of local civic society through the so-called peace-building. This can happen through soft projects funded mainly by non-profit organizations with the aim to build up and support civic society. If there is no political will to settle a conflict in a separatist region, no economic and social development can take place within the paradigm of the linear cycle of post-conflict reconstruction through transition from humanitarian aid to development cooperation.

**References**


