

Since August 1997 the International Center on Conflict and Negotiation has initiated implementation of the scientific and analytical project called "The Network for Early Warning and Monitoring of Ethnic, Social and Religious Conflicts in Georgia". The project is funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

The main objective of the project is to assess a degree of risk of re-escalation or emergence of conflicts by means of studying the current situation existing in conflict zones and regions populated with ethnic minorities in Georgia, and preparing on its basis appropriate recommendations for their early warning and prevention.

The project scientific team based both in the regions and in Tbilisi, and coordinated from the ICCN office has started to publish a scientific and information bulletin aiming at wide coverage of the project development stages and the obtained scientific and analytical results.

It would not be probably an exaggeration to say that the post-communist period is one of the most significant stages in the history of world development. This is a most complicated and very painful process of redistribution of spheres of interests accompanied by the transformation of human mentality and reappraisal of values that had been created from generation to generation.

Unfortunately, this period has become

noted with numerous conflicts arising on the territory of the former Communist bloc of countries and bringing about casualties, forced eviction of people from native places, famine.

Neither the post-Soviet domain is an exception in this regard, especially as concerns the Caucasus region, distinguished with its ethnic and religious diversity.

Lately, the Caucasus has found itself in the focus of world's increased attention, this being conditioned by not only its strategic geopolitical location, but also by its ethnic and religious diversity - one of the main supporting factors of the conflicts arising in the Caucasus.

In this respect the centrally positioned South Caucasian republic of Georgia, being most multinational among the post-Soviet Caucasian states, deserves special interest. Following the Soviet Union's break-up, it has become involved in civil and ethnic/territorial conflicts. The wounds resulted therefrom are still green, and the progress in the negotiations about the protracted conflicts is to be urgently achieved.

The analysis of the current situation in the conflict zones shows that even a slightest impulse may lead to re-escalation of the existing conflicts or create new hotbeds. The International Center on Conflict and Negotiation is missioned to contribute to the matter of searching ways for peaceful settlement of

the existing conflicts and prevention of the new ones, for which purpose the project "The Network for Early Warning and Monitoring of Ethnic, Religious and Social Conflicts in Georgia" (NEWMEC) is being implemented by the ICCN team.

The analysis of the work conducted at the present stage within the framework of the project shows that the conflicts currently existing in Georgia, the Caucasus and the entire post-communist area have very much in common. This makes it possible to work out a general empirical model for early warning of conflicts in the "risk zones", to a certain extent based on the already available experience of the NEWMEC network (it should be mentioned here that the term "risk zone" implies two categories of regions: these are the regions where a conflict has already took place and the searching of ways for its peaceful settlement is under way (e. g. in Abkhazia, Samachablo (South Ossetia), and some of the regions compactly populated with ethnic minorities where the probability of a new conflict exceeds a certain measure).

Each "risk zone" can be described by the aggregate of socio-political indicators and the factors influencing the situation in the region, which we briefly denominate as the "situation variables". Basing upon them and by means of the empirical model the extent of probability of conflict for a certain time period in a given "risk zone" may be established, while a picture of the "situation variables" dynamics enables to forecast the probable development of events.

Any theoretical model is of value only if it accurately reflects the actual state of

affairs. This especially concerns such sphere of public relations as conflicts, for, as it is known, it is least of all liable to forecasting and modelling. At the first stage of the project implementation the research group considered it expedient to analyze the already existing conflicts in Georgia (Abkhazia and former South Ossetia) under the scheme as provided by the empirical model. It is a peculiar test through which the compliance of theory with practice is being checked. From this point of view the historic prerequisites and concrete objective reasons calling forth the origin of the two conflicts have been studied. Restoration of the historic/political/economic chronologically arranged picture of the pre-conflict period in Abkhazia and the former South Ossetian Autonomous District and creation of a complete "package" of "the situation variables" (or socio-political indicators) for the region have been completed.

In case the test brings forth a positive result, we trust that the empirical model for early warning (subject to appropriate corrections) may become an effective mechanism for accurate assessment, analysis and forecast of events and developments in the "risk zones" enabling to detect general trends of the processes taking place in such zones and work out recommendations for the prevention of latent or possible conflicts.

The detailed description of the said empirical model and the analysis of concrete results for the "risk zones" existing in Georgia on its basis will be dealt with in the following issues.

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