

RESEARCH REPORT

# TRACK III DIALOGUES IN UKRAINE

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# 1. About the Research Project

"Track III Dialogues in Ukraine – Major Trends and Challenges" (2016-2017) was the **first research-based attempt to better understand the difficulties in Track III dialogues<sup>1</sup> in Ukraine** with the explicit goal of building a scientific basis for systematic responses to these difficulties.

The project began with the **shared observation** of the authors of this report that efforts to establish civil or commercial mediation in Ukraine on the one hand and dialogues addressing the current societal and political crisis on the other both seemed to face considerable and apparently similar difficulties, with many of these endeavours simply failing. Putting together internal/Ukrainian and external/international perspectives to explain these difficulties proved to be illuminating and thought-provoking for all sides.

The **aim** of the research project born in that moment and further refined over time was to explore the most obstructive challenges to dialogue and peace mediation processes in Ukraine on track III, to stimulate reflection and action towards possible meaningful responses and to identify key questions for further research. The core **research question** was: What are the major patterns underlying the difficulties in dialogues on track III in Ukraine and their causes and potential risks? The **intended results** were insights into those patterns that might explain the observed difficulties and – through sharing and discussing these insights with the practitioner and policy community – hopefully productive changes in the way these difficulties are perceived and dealt with. To this end, an **action research approach** was chosen to actively engage dialogue actors, policy-makers, state agencies and donors in the research process (see Chapter 2).

Besides two Expert Round Tables based on **methodologies of participatory inquiry** (see Chapter 2), the project entailed an empirical study comprising 40 semi-structured interviews and three focus groups (see Chapter 3) relying on **qualitative research methodology**. The **academic output** of the project includes a series of research articles in international peer-reviewed journals,<sup>2</sup> with dissemination of the research findings through research networks,<sup>3</sup> blog posts and popular mass media.<sup>4</sup> The **policy impact** of the research was designed to be achieved through a discussion paper with preliminary results<sup>5</sup> and a Research-Based Policy Paper on the final findings, the latter published in

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<sup>1</sup> The term "Track III" refers to the concept, used by scholars and practitioners, of different societal levels/tracks : The first level (track 1) comprises the leadership of a country (e.g. political and/or military). The second level (track 2) covers leading figures in society such as religious dignitaries, intellectuals, political parties or regional power figures. Track 3 is comprised of leading civil society figures at the local level and grassroots initiatives. Work on the ground highlighted the need to expand this three-level structure to include a further component: the track 1.5 level, which refers to top-level politicians, yet in informal, non-official settings.

<sup>2</sup> Tatiana Kyselova, Professional Peacemakers in Ukraine: Mediators and Dialogue Facilitators Before and After 2014, 3 *Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal*, (2017), pp. 117-136, available at

<http://kmlpj.ukma.edu.ua/article/view/120119/115078>; Tatiana Kyselova, Mediation in Ukraine: Challenges of Peace and War, 26 *Tulane Journal of International and Comparative Law*, (2017-2018)

<sup>3</sup> The Policy Paper was disseminated through the Mediation Support Network; Folke Bernadotte Academy Conflict Prevention Research Working Group; Jean Monnet Network in European Studies; Academic Friends of EPLO – European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, see <http://eplo.org/activities/academic-friends-eplo/>

<sup>4</sup> Тетяна Кисельова, Професійні миротворці в Україні до та після 2014 [Professional Peacemakers in Ukraine Before and After 2014], *Українська правда*, 17 листопада 2017, електронний ресурс

<http://life.pravda.com.ua/projects/5a0b01b1bee64/2017/11/17/227484/>

<sup>5</sup> Julia von Dobeneck, Anne Isabel Kraus, Tatiana Kyselova, Challenges to Mediation and Dialogue in Ukraine: Distrust in Procedures and a Dysfunctional Market, CPM Discussion Paper (Frankfurt (Oder), 2016), available at [http://www.peacemediation.de/uploads/7/3/9/1/73911539/dp\\_challenges\\_dialogue\\_ukraine\\_cpm\\_updated.pdf](http://www.peacemediation.de/uploads/7/3/9/1/73911539/dp_challenges_dialogue_ukraine_cpm_updated.pdf)

English<sup>6</sup> and Ukrainian<sup>7</sup> and widely disseminated (see Chapter 2). The policy impact of the research project was already noticeable at the time of publication of this report: in particular, the professional community of local dialogue facilitators amended their strategies and reacted to the research by developing Dialogue Standards (see Chapter 2).

The project was **supported** by the Robert Bosch Foundation. The empirical study carried out by Tatiana Kyselova as part of the project was funded by the EU Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Innovation under Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 609402 - 2020 researchers: Train to Move (T2M).

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<sup>6</sup> Tatiana Kyselova, Julia von Dobeneck, Track III Dialogues in Ukraine: Major Patterns and Resulting Risks, Research-Based Policy Paper (Kyiv, Frankfurt (Oder), 2017, available at [http://www.peacemediation.de/uploads/7/3/9/1/73911539/track\\_iii\\_dialogue\\_ukraine\\_policy\\_paper\\_cpm\\_kma.pdf](http://www.peacemediation.de/uploads/7/3/9/1/73911539/track_iii_dialogue_ukraine_policy_paper_cpm_kma.pdf); <http://jmce.ukma.edu.ua/node/281>

<sup>7</sup> Тетяна Кисельова, Джулія фон Добенек, Діалоги на рівні громадянського суспільства в Україні: основні тренди та ризики, Аналітична доповідь за результатами дослідження (Київ, Франкфурт-на-Одері), 2017, електронний ресурс [http://www.peacemediation.de/uploads/7/3/9/1/73911539/pp\\_trackiiialogues-ukr.pdf](http://www.peacemediation.de/uploads/7/3/9/1/73911539/pp_trackiiialogues-ukr.pdf)

## 2. Action Research Approach

Following an action research approach,<sup>8</sup> the project actively engaged Ukrainian and international dialogue and mediation practitioners, policy-makers, state agencies, donors and Ukraine experts in the analysis of the observed challenges and reflections on how to tackle them. Key features of this research approach as used in this project are summarized below.

The **aim** of this approach is to induce new ways of thinking and acting in the practice of peacemaking. Its **basic principle** is to connect with various actors who – directly or indirectly – shape this practice and collect, analyze and merge their knowledge of specific problems and feed it back into practice. Depending on the practice and policy actors' capability and willingness to participate (limited by time, confidentiality and political constraints), research is done 'with' and not 'on' or 'for' the professional community: Where possible, the usually asymmetrical and distant relationship between researching subjects and researched objects is turned into collaboration between researchers and practitioners who are in various ways involved and interested in changing the status quo in their field. Knowledge-making and change are thus grounded on the needs assessment, expertise and agency of both practitioners and researchers as much as possible.<sup>9</sup>

The underlying **theory of change** that guided this research project is that joint reflection on the professional practice in a shared field of action (here: Track III Dialogue in Ukraine), done in a safe and stimulating environment, can initiate incremental change processes in the thinking and acting patterns of the individuals involved, researchers and practitioners alike. If there is a collective momentum emerging from the insights of this joint (self-)investigation, it can eventually produce the critical mass and strategic weight to change the status quo on a systemic level.<sup>10</sup>

In this project, the research findings themselves were used as the main or at least initial **stimulus of change**. Instead of researchers translating the findings immediately into recommendations and guidance for practitioners, they presented the findings and asked the members of the professional community to autonomously think about and implement ways to change the identified patterns in their own practice. The final Policy Paper therefore merely included general implications of the research findings rather than detailed recommendations.

An example of such a change triggered by this research project (among other factors) was the development of dialogue standards by the Ukrainian professional community of mediators and dialogue facilitators. In May 2018, even before the final Policy Paper was released, a group of Ukrainian dialogue facilitators led by the Ukrainian NGO Institute for Peace and Common Ground and supported by the Project Coordinator Office of the OSCE in Ukraine started drafting Standards of Dialogue after a public discussion on the patterns identified by this research project – the first pattern being conceptual unclarity of dialogue practice in Ukraine (see Section 4.2). The working group consisting of representatives of eight Ukrainian NGOs and involving one of the authors of this study (Tatiana Kyselova) as an independent consultant developed a (Ukrainian context-specific) definition of dialogue and its main principles, tested the wording of the document at two public events for mediators and dialogue facilitators in October-December 2018 and launched an open online consultation for all members of the Ukrainian professional community in January 2018 (see [the draft Standards](#)). The final standards are due to be published in March 2018 on the website of the [Institute for Peace and Common Ground](#), which also intends to develop more detailed recommendations for the use of dialogue by Ukrainian state agencies and local government based on the new Dialogue Standards.

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Reason, Hilary Bradbury (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*, London: Sage Publications 2008, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Depending on the degree of involvement of practitioners, this collaboration has a practical or participatory character: Jacques M. Chevalier, Daniel J. Buckles, *Participatory Action Research: Theory and Methods for Engaged Inquiry*. Milton Park and New York 2013, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Danny Burns, *Systemic action research: Changing system dynamics to support sustainable change*, in: *Action Research* 12(1), 2014, 3-18.

The **data** in this research project were collected in several feedback cycles where the researchers' and practitioners' understandings of problems and potential solutions were exchanged and discussed until the perspectives of all stakeholders seemed to be sufficiently represented. Iterative feedback loop methodologies are used in action<sup>11</sup> and qualitative research<sup>12</sup> to incrementally counterbalance biases and blind spots in perception, interpretation and evaluation. Feedback on both the research content and the process is sought and integrated (e.g. Have all potential reasons for difficulties been identified? Have the perspectives of all relevant stakeholders been integrated into the research?). From an epistemological point of view, each feedback cycle produces a shift in the understanding of problem and solution, creating a spiral of incremental knowledge-making that produces ever more empirically grounded and theoretically reflected insights. As this is of course an endless process, it needs to be limited by criteria relating to the aim of the research.

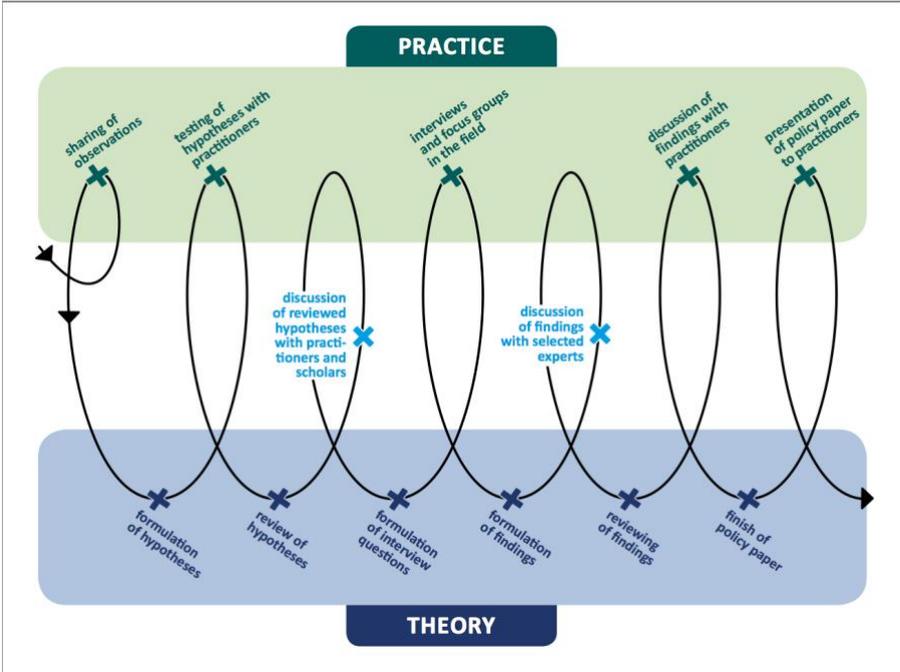


Table 1: Feedback Spiral

Table 1 shows the spiral structure of the research process. Some of the steps in this process are described below (see also Chapter 5: List of events in the research process).

The first step in the research process was the development of a **Hypotheses Paper** about the factors that might impede mediation and dialogue in Ukraine and help to spell out a context-sensitive process design approach for the country. In a nutshell, the hypotheses

supposed that specific cultural conditions and institutional frameworks in Ukrainian society on the one hand and procedural flaws on the other inhibit mediation and dialogue efforts (see the Hypotheses Paper in the annex to the Discussion Paper "Challenges to Mediation and Dialogue in Ukraine: Distrust in Procedures and A Dysfunctional Market" ([English/Ukrainian](#)).

The next step was an **Expert Round Table (ERT I)**, hosted by the Center for Peace Mediation at European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder) on 10 March 2016. The Round Table brought together international experts, who were or have been conducting mediation or dialogue activities in Ukraine, to critically discuss and modify the hypotheses in the light of these actors' experiences.

The insights gained from the discussions and participants' subsequent inputs at ERT I were summarized in the **Discussion Paper "Challenges to Mediation and Dialogue in Ukraine: Distrust in Procedures and A Dysfunctional Market"** ([English/Ukrainian](#)). A key conceptual shift taken at the Round Table and in digesting its results was that the cultural factors, which one third of the hypotheses had described as being impediments to mediation and dialogue in Ukraine, were reframed and broken down into a combination of practical, institutional, political and procedural difficulties in the efforts to implement these processes in Ukraine.

Informed by the data and feedback collected at ERT I, a comprehensive **Qualitative Empirical Study** was carried out in 2016 and 2017 in Ukraine. With a focus on dialogue activities on track III (civil

<sup>11</sup> Ernest Stringer, Action Research, London: Sage Publications, 2007, 1.  
<sup>12</sup> Prachi Srivastava, Nick Hopwood, A Practical Iterative Framework for Qualitative Data Analysis, in: International Journal of Qualitative Methods 8(1), 2009, 76-84.

society/grassroots level), it aimed to explore further the possible reasons for the specific difficulties these activities are facing. The study consisted of two **Focus Groups** with 15 participants and **40 Semi-Structured Qualitative Interviews** with Ukrainian and international dialogue facilitators, dialogue participants and individuals from organizations such as the OSCE and the United Nations and international donor organizations active in Ukraine. An additional **Focus Group and Brainstorm Session** with Ukrainian and international mediation and dialogue experts in Berlin on 25 November 2016 reflected on the preliminary findings from ERT I, the field interviews and the focus groups and discussed a series of open questions arising from them.

On 20 May 2017, a **second Expert Round Table (ERT II)** with Ukrainian and international dialogue facilitation experts was held in Kyiv. The subject of the discussions was a policy paper draft, including specific recommendations deriving from the research so far.

The final outcome of the research project, the **Research-Based Policy Paper "Track III Dialogues in Ukraine: Major Patterns and Resulting Risks"** ([English/Ukrainian](#)), summarizes the main findings of the whole research cycle and illustrates implications. The findings suggest that it would be beneficial to take stock and reassess implementation strategies in order to increase the impact potential of facilitated dialogues and embed them systematically within larger programmes of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. While designing or reassessing the strategic approaches, special attention should be paid to the theories of change underpinning the choices of issues and geographical focus of facilitated dialogues, as well as to questions regarding the inclusion of women and 'the other Ukrainians' and the impact of dialogues at various levels.

In a series of 11 **dissemination workshops**, the findings and implications were shared and discussed with dialogue facilitation experts, policy-makers, ministries and donor institutions (see the list of events in the research process in Chapter 5 and the list of participating organizations in Chapter 6.). The resonance was very positive, and many actors declared their intention to use the results for reviewing their dialogue programmes.

### 3. Qualitative Empirical Methodology

The research project entailed a qualitative empirical study of an exploratory nature based on semi-structured qualitative interviews and focus groups. The study relied on qualitative methodology and diagnosed the general patterns, possible reasons and risks if these patterns are continued, but does not allow for precise estimation of the scale or quantitative characteristics of the identified patterns. Nor does it assess the identified patterns against the background of a normative approach to facilitated dialogue, its methods or the measurement of its societal impact.

**Operational Definition of Dialogue:** There are no global standard definitions of dialogue as a means of conflict management or conflict transformation, although the term is widely used by practitioners referring to different elements or concepts of dialogue and different methodological approaches.<sup>13</sup> This pre-existing conceptual unclarity is mirrored in Ukraine, where the interviewees of the study have a rather intuitive yet clear understanding of what can and cannot (see pattern 1) be termed dialogue in the sense of a means of conflict transformation. Interviewees thus referred (directly or indirectly) to *dialogues as specially prepared meetings between people or groups of people facilitated by a third party with the aim of building mutual trust and/or making a joint decision (hereinafter “facilitated dialogues”)*.

**Time frame and geographical focus:** The fieldwork stage of the empirical study was conducted in May-August 2016 and January 2017 in Kyiv, Odesa, Lviv, Kramatorsk and Berlin and consisted of three focus group discussions with 21 participants and 40 in-depths interviews. Most of the interviews and focus groups were conducted in Ukraine; one focus group was conducted in Berlin, Germany. The Ukrainian interviews and focus groups were conducted at four locations (Kyiv, Odesa, Lviv, Kramatorsk) but interviewees represented a much wider geographical area, including Kyiv, Cherkasy, Kremenchuk, Mariupol, Dnipro, Kharkiv, Odesa, Lviv, Donetsk oblast (Svyatohirsk, Kramatorsk, Pokrovsk).

**Interviewees and focus group participants:** The pool of participants for the interviews and focus group discussions was designed based on the information from the database of the National Association of Mediators of Ukraine, and later relied on the snowball sampling technique. The average age of the interviewees was 39.8 years; women comprised 54.1% of the interviewees. The main target group of this research comprised the professional community of mediators and dialogue facilitators (36%). The distribution of other groups – international organizations, donor agencies, Ukrainian government and policy-makers and Ukrainian civil society – is shown on the graph below.

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<sup>13</sup> N. Ropers, “From Resolution to Transformation: The Role of Dialogue Projects,” in: Berghof Handbook, Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2004; available at: [http://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Articles/ropers\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Articles/ropers_handbook.pdf) T. Paffenholz, “Dialogues in Peace and Mediation Processes,” in: Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative Report, 2016; available at: <http://www.inclusivepeace.org/sites/default/files/IPTI-National-Dialogues-12-pager.pdf> A. Feller / K. Ryan, “Definition, Necessity, and Nansen: Efficacy of Dialogue in Peacebuilding,” 29(4) Conflict Resolution Quarterly, 2012. OSCE Reference Guide “Mediation and Dialogue Facilitation in the OSCE”; available at: <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/126646?download=%20true>

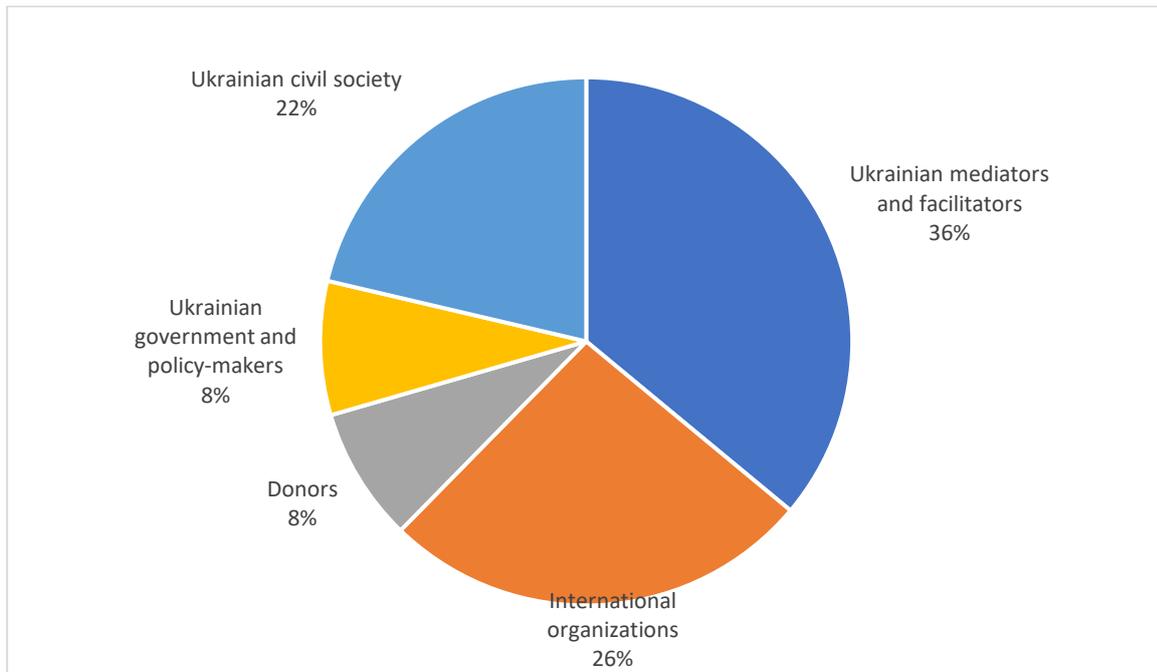


Table 2: Distribution of groups of informants

Although it is acknowledged by the researchers in this study that the point of view of the participants in dialogues (ATO veterans, IDPs, civil society activists, government officials, etc.) is very important, given the research question of this study, they were not included in the sample as a separate group. This decision is based on the fact that dialogue participants are able to offer perspectives only on individual dialogues but not on the overall patterns at the societal level. Nevertheless, five interviewees in this study, who represented civil society groups, also had previous experience of taking part in dialogues and were therefore able to offer this perspective.

Interviewees and focus group participants were thus selected on the basis of their expert knowledge of the field and their experience. On average, the interviewees had 15.7 years of professional experience, of which 6.5 years were in the dialogue and peacebuilding field. Given the wide spectrum of questions relevant to peacebuilding activities, 55.7% of the interviewees practise as mediators or dialogue facilitators (32.8% full-time as their primary professional occupation); others were involved in mediation and dialogue facilitation as organizers of dialogues, awareness promoters, advisors/consultants, trainers, researchers, project managers, programme designers and funders.

International experts comprised a quarter of the sample and came from Australia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Russia, Switzerland and the United States. They worked in international organizations or international donor agencies currently operating in Ukraine. To ensure that the international experts had the highest degree of familiarity with the Ukrainian context, an attempt was made to interview those who actually lived in Ukraine. Therefore, only three out of 16 international experts have not lived in Ukraine but were deployed on various missions of total duration up to seven weeks; all other international experts have permanently lived in Ukraine on average for 1.8 years.

**Consent and confidentiality:** The empirical study obtained official permission from the Ethical Committee of the University of Turin to conduct research involving human subjects. All interviewees and focus group participants were informed of the aim of the research and confidentiality rules and signed informed consent forms. All interviewees except four gave their written consent to the inclusion of the titles of their organizations in the research report (See the list of interviewed organizations). The confidentiality of the interviewees' personal data and related information is maintained in accordance with Ukrainian law and ethical research rules.

## 4. Track III Dialogues in Ukraine: Main Findings and Key Quotes

This chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the main findings of the project. Due to the fact that the data gained in the empirical study (see Chapter 3) are particularly rich and have been analyzed in depth with qualitative research methodology, the following quotes mainly derive from interviews and focus groups conducted as part of the empirical study. The feedback collected at the Expert Round Table I was published in the preliminary Discussion Paper; feedback collected at the Expert Round Table II was integrated into the final Policy Paper.

### 4.1. Context of the Ukrainian Conflict

The interviewees in this empirical study were asked about the context of the Ukrainian conflict, which openly manifested itself starting from the Euromaidan protests in late 2013. Their responses were analyzed in two categories – the pre-conflict societal context and the context of the conflict including conflict response.

In terms of the **pre-conflict societal context**, interviewees in the empirical study stressed certain specific features of Ukraine as a post-totalitarian society – a highly adversarial and arrogant political culture; societal distrust towards institutions; patterns of conflict suppression that result in a high level of escalation when the conflict eventually arises; generally low individual responsibility in matters of everyday life.

- *The conflict has opened many wounds that Ukrainian society carried with it for a long time. The issues that were suppressed because of a lack of trust between people, because of cultural issues, made certain subjects taboo and showed Ukrainians how weak the bonds between the different regions of Ukraine are. And those zones that were weak, they turned into local conflict – mostly social conflict, cultural conflicts, maybe even religious, but this was in place long before. (International dialogue expert)*

Many interviewees said that apart from some relatively successful experience of ethno-political conflict prevention in Crimea, neither the Ukrainian authorities nor conflict resolution professionals had any previous experience in dealing with large-scale violent or armed conflicts. On the positive side, Ukraine was not seen as a failed state – it has (some) functioning democratic institutions, ongoing democratic reforms, an existing community of professional mediators and facilitators<sup>14</sup> and an extremely vibrant and rapidly developing civil society.

- *I think one of the special features of the Ukrainian conflict is that Ukraine is a rather developed political society despite all the problems with the reforms and nation-building. In fact, 25 years of independence were not wasted. [Ukrainian] people learned to function within institutions and many have substantial experience in government – some even serving as prime minister, deputy prime minister or holding other positions. It is not some failed state where nothing ever worked for the last 50 years. Similarly, civil society also has a wealth of very good experience. Against this background, when the armed conflict erupted in Eastern Ukraine (much later than in other post-Soviet countries), it turned out that the level of skills, understanding and experience of work with armed conflicts was very low compared to the relatively high level of competence in other spheres of governance and society. Therefore, Ukrainians themselves as*

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<sup>14</sup> This research has identified more than 30 Ukrainian organizations specialized in mediation and dialogue facilitation as professionals; some of them have more than 15 years of experience in this area. As estimated by the interviewees in this study, even before the 2013 crisis, Ukraine already had a pool of more than 3,000 people trained in domestic mediation. See Tatiana Kyselova, Professional Peacemakers in Ukraine: Mediators and Dialogue Facilitators Before and After 2014, 3 *Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal*, (2017), pp. 117-136, available at <http://kmlpj.ukma.edu.ua/article/view/120119/115078>

*well as external observers had rather high expectations about how efficiently Ukraine would deal with the conflict. (International dialogue expert)*

Within such a diverse and dynamic transitional context, assumptions and peacebuilding experiences from other, developing, countries therefore need careful examination and adaptation to the Ukrainian context.

Apart from the pre-2013 societal context, the **context of the conflict** itself makes peacebuilding in Ukraine challenging. The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the ongoing armed conflict with Russian-backed separatists in Eastern Ukraine have created a multitude of security, economic, societal and other challenges. The interviewees saw the Ukrainian conflict as characterized by complexity and interdependence of multiple conflict layers – from the geopolitical struggle between the world superpowers to multiple secessionist conflicts and political divisions inside the country.

- *The overall context in Ukraine right now is not particularly conducive to reconciliation and peacebuilding, because we are in a state of conflict, several conflicts. There is a war, there is an armed conflict going on in part of the country, at least one part of the country. There are various other conflicts, such as political conflict about decentralization. There is conflict over resources. (International dialogue expert)*

The conflict was also seen by interviewees as intra-societal – not based on belonging to a certain ethnic or other community but depending on individual self-identification and political views. The lines of division therefore run through families, friendship circles and communities all over Ukraine – whether East or West.

- *I think [the Ukrainian conflict] is different from most of the other conflicts because it is not an inter-societal conflict (between communities) but an intra-societal one. Intra-societal describes a conflict not just between two countries like Ukraine and Georgia; not between East and West; it is also a conflict deeply rooted within Ukrainian society – between different worldviews, between different generations probably also, and this generates serious disputes in society, within families. I have met and spoken to so many people within our project. They were saying that they are not talking to their father any more, or to someone in the family any more, since the crisis of 2014 and many also had their own personal internal conflict resulting from being born in Russia. That is something that I haven't encountered in Chechnya or South Caucasia, for example, where it was more between communities. This intra-societal aspect makes it on the one hand very difficult to deal with; on the other hand, it also has potential for peacebuilding. I think we have to see both sides. (International dialogue expert)*

The important role of the Russian government in initiating and supporting the armed conflict was widely referred to by the interviewees, who also drew attention to the hybrid character of the conflict.

- *I think Ukraine is a unique case. I have been working in different post-Soviet conflicts for a long time, and everywhere internal dynamics prevailed. This does not mean that there was no external influence, but this external influence was secondary. Ukraine is the first case in my practice (and as far as I know in the practice of post-Soviet conflicts) when external factors [the role of Russia] dominated over internal ones even at the stage of conflict instigation. That's true. But even taking this into account, the conflict, unfortunately, has its own nature and dynamics. Therefore, alongside the external factors, and perhaps even more than external factors, internal dynamics have an important role because we are not dealing with a case of direct military intervention but with a hybrid situation. So dialogues based on the same principles that we used in internal conflicts are very challenging in Ukraine because people do not perceive this conflict as internal and are right not to do so. And it is not possible to do dialogues through ignoring either internal or external factors. It makes everything more complicated. The methodology of dialogues should be adapted to [the Ukrainian] reality. (International dialogue expert).*

Although the hot military phase of the conflict ended in 2014/early 2015, fighting is ongoing with minimal but stable casualties on both sides. By 2017, the conflict had claimed the lives of more than 10 000 people.

- *One of the biggest problems is that we are dealing with ongoing conflict. This is not a frozen conflict, it is a hot one. It is being escalated by the new technologies and communications. Social media, mass media and other channels existed before that but there was no such real-time inclusion of everyone in it ... (Ukrainian dialogue facilitator).*

The conflict has received a mixed response from the international community, which applies both types of measures – economic sanctions and political pressure on Russia and military empowerment of Ukraine on the one hand, and peace negotiations and multi-track peacebuilding on the other. Similarly, the Ukrainian government is carrying out a costly and prolonged military campaign in the east of the country, and simultaneously has to respond to international pressure aimed at reconciliation and peacebuilding. The latter *de facto* started even before the active fighting had begun, which resulted in overlapping conflict phases.<sup>15</sup> This has translated into two different approaches to peacebuilding on the ground.

- *And it's so diverse: I mean there is no one strategy, even if you look at the German civil society actors who run projects funded by the German government in Ukraine. They have at least two different strategies: one is a strategy that clearly supports the pro-democracy, pro-European forces and it's still peacebuilding, while others would say it is a part of anti-Russian propaganda or warfare by the West against Russia, so to speak. And then there are some people who try to do conventional peacebuilding work across the divide in Ukraine, while others don't like this idea so much. So there are different actors on the ground who have totally different analyses of what the conflict in Ukraine is all about and they have different strategies. (International dialogue expert)*

These peacebuilding initiatives have led to a “crowded field” of peacebuilders<sup>16</sup> with fierce funding competition among local and international organizations and within these groups.

- *I am not that negative about [the crowded field of peacebuilders] but rather unhappy because it is huge competition in a very unpleasant format. Sometimes people steal ideas from each other, it is clear. But here [in Ukraine] they steal partners, donors, donors compete with each other, donors compete with NGOs, some intergovernmental organizations compete with non-governmental ones. So there's a lot of unpleasantness. For some reason, it suddenly became tight although, in reality, the field is vast, but it seems to everyone that there is not enough space. This overpopulation of dialogue space makes me unhappy, although there are professionals who know and have skills to do [dialogues] but there are also all kind of other guys. (International dialogue expert)*

Three years into the war, which is entrenched within a polarized societal context, conflict resolution and peacebuilding remain uncertain and uneasy. Political negotiations on the resolution of the conflict are currently in stalemate. The Minsk peace process was initially designed to bring about a ceasefire but not a comprehensive settlement to the conflict; it currently excludes civil society and remains highly distrusted within society.<sup>17</sup> For many reasons, which lie outside the scope of this research, the national dialogue at the early conflict stage failed.

- *Russia is an active participant in the peacebuilding process (if it is possible to call it a peacebuilding process) but simultaneously and absolutely clearly it is a conflict party. And so this calls the whole sustainability of the Minsk group led by the OSCE into question. Everyone*

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<sup>15</sup> Apart from conflict prevention efforts on tracks I and II, the first civil society projects aimed at peacebuilding and dialogue on track III received funding as early as autumn 2014. Similarly, some conventional post-conflict interventions were carried out in Ukraine during the phase of ongoing fighting, for example UN/EU/World Bank Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment.

<sup>16</sup> This research has identified more than 20 international organizations as well as around 30 local organizations active in dialogue and peacebuilding on various tracks in Ukraine.

<sup>17</sup> R. Cristescu and D. Matveev, “The Challenge of Inclusiveness in the Peace Processes in Ukraine”, Background Paper, Civil Society Dialogue Network, 2017.

*is playing a game, everyone understands everything but pretends that it should be this way. This creates a lot of complexities. If the track I political process is initially absolutely fake, then it is very difficult to assume that peacebuilding initiatives and formats at the lower level can lead to anything except some local horizontal improvement of relationships because this link to politics is missing. (International dialogue expert)*

Peacebuilding and dialogue efforts (in terms of numbers) are therefore currently concentrated on track III – the “people to people” level. However, this level is also affected by the contextual conflict factors and the international community’s mixed conflict response, which has been imprinted on society as “neither war, nor peace” or “societal schizophrenia”. Nearly all the interviewees in this study emphasized the ever-increasing polarization and fragmentation of Ukrainian society at all levels, including civil society, and these processes are supported by the mass media and political discourse.

- *What has been happening in the country for the last two years? There was a process of “dehumanization” of the opponent with the aim of proving that it is impossible to negotiate with them. This was done through two instruments. First, stigmatization – “they are terrorists and separatists who are not spoken to anywhere in the world” (although in fact this is not the case). The second instrument is denial of competence – “they are not independent, they are puppets, it is impossible to negotiate with them”. This eliminated a lot of problems for the government because the government is interested in the paradigm of external intervention so that no one would think it is also an internal conflict. Well, there is of course an external dimension as well, but this political level lives its own life while internal conflict is denied [by the government]. And this is what depends on us. You do not need consent from Putin or Obama to launch dialogue processes inside the country, you only need the political will of the elite to recognize one simple thing – we need to talk to people who hold different views. (Ukrainian civil society activist)*
- *In fact, this is societal schizophrenia that we have now – when we are in war, they are enemies, but viewed from the other side, they are people. It is unclear how to behave in the situation when they are just ordinary, normal people and simultaneously the enemies who must be killed. Are they enemies or not? (Representative of donor organization)*

To conclude, the context of the Ukrainian conflict was seen as enormously complex and challenging and was therefore compared by one of the interviewees to the Syrian conflict.

## 4.2. Key Patterns, Reasons and Risks

Euromaidan and the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine have prompted an almost immediate reaction from the international community in terms of supporting civil society peacebuilding, reconciliation and dialogue initiatives. Ukrainian NGOs received their first grants for dialogue and peacebuilding activities as early as in 2014. Since then, the international community has supported numerous other mediation and dialogue initiatives throughout the country.

Based on the qualitative data from interviews and focus groups, this research has identified six major patterns of dialogues on track III (civil society level). It has also attempted to explain these patterns and understand their potential risks.

### **Pattern 1: Different Dialogue Concepts and an Overuse of the Term “Dialogue” Risk to Undermine its Value**

The interviewees in this study<sup>18</sup> said that dialogue has become a buzzword and the number of dialogue projects in Ukraine is very high compared to other conflict locations - a phenomenon termed “*profanatsia dialoga*” (Rus) by one interviewee.

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<sup>18</sup> In the rest of this paper, the source of research findings refers to information obtained through focus groups and interviews. Where the source is different, it is directly mentioned in the text.

- *I have not seen so many supported dialogues [by donors] elsewhere. All of them flocked to Ukraine and started bringing everyone to the table. These dialogues take place across various dimensions and they were extraordinary in quantity from the very first days [of the conflict]. (International dialogue expert)*
- *They certainly talk about dialogue all day long but at the end of the day: are they doing dialogues? (International dialogue expert)*

Many one-time events such as debates, film discussions, live libraries, conflict analysis meetings and strategic communication events organized by various actors in Ukraine are called “dialogues,” but in the opinion of the interviewees these are not true dialogues because they aim neither at mutual trust-building nor at decision-making and problem-solving.

- *Now everything is called by a fashionable name: “dialogue”. Debates are dialogues, round tables are dialogues, sitting and shouting at each other is a dialogue.... “The Shuster Show” was also a dialogue. (Ukrainian dialogue facilitator)*

There are also many projects whose titles contain the word “dialogue” but which focus on public awareness about peace and tolerance, student exchanges, intercultural school and university curricula, peace journalism, culture of political decision-making and other issues that generally promote a culture of dialogue and peacebuilding in Ukraine but do not result in actual meetings around a table. In a similar vein, many dialogue projects are focused on capacity building without a clear understanding that training does not automatically translate into facilitated dialogues (see also pattern 6). Although these are valuable peacebuilding activities, the interviewees in this study suggested distinguishing them from facilitated dialogues.

- *In my personal opinion, one of the big problems is how people have used the term dialogue. So, they’ll just do something and put the word “dialogue” in it. Well, it also has the problem of attaching a reputation to dialogue. OK, if you call something a dialogue and it is a dialogue, and it fails...well at least it failed, at least it legitimately failed. But if you call something a dialogue that is not a dialogue and it fails, then it hurts the reputation of dialogue. (Representative of international organization)*

Possible reasons for the proliferation of dialogue projects:

- Inflow of international peacebuilding organizations and, subsequently, a crowded field of actors
- Increased funding opportunities under the umbrella of peacebuilding and reconciliation
- Low expertise in conflict resolution on the part of donors and local implementers (see pattern 6), and consequently low awareness of conceptual issues
- Local implementers applying for and using funds with the preliminary aim of maintaining their own organization, not necessarily aiming to facilitate dialogue (“grant-eating”)
- Hesitance to invest substantial efforts and resources in preparation and facilitation of dialogues

The lack of clarity regarding dialogue concepts and the consequences of this vagueness encouraged Ukrainian mediators and facilitators to seek a common understanding of the term. Interviewees remarked that an overuse of the term contributes to dialogue fatigue and a perception of dialogues as “empty talks” which – if continued – in the authors’ opinion risks inflating the value of dialogue and adds complexity to its already blurred definition as a means of conflict transformation.

## **Pattern 2: Focus on “Technical” Instead of “Existential” Issues Conceals Unclear Risks**

While there is no general agreement among experts as to whether dialogues that are aimed at problem-solving can be considered as dialogues or as “problem-solving workshops”, experts interviewed in this study agreed that in the Ukrainian context, these activities are treated as dialogues in the sense of the operational definition of dialogue (*dialogues as specially prepared meetings between people or groups of people facilitated by a third party with the aim of building mutual trust and/or making a joint decision (hereinafter “facilitated dialogues”).*)

According to the interviewees, not many facilitated dialogues are taking place in Ukraine and most of those which do exist focus on ‘technical issues’ (also referred to as problem-solving or result-oriented), such as the decentralization reform, the inclusion of local civil society in community decision-making, the solving of community problems and the integration of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

- *The prevalent thinking of the international community is... that they want to in a way bypass the obvious: that it is a political conflict, that Russia is involved and so on. They bypass it by trying to find issues that are technical, because technical issues can be solved; you just find the right technology and you bring it here and the solution will somehow come. (International dialogue expert)*

Facilitated dialogues that deal with ‘hot existential issues’ (also called identity- or value-oriented issues by the interviewees) regarding societal stereotypes, reconciliation, tolerance, various narratives of the conflict, historical memories, etc., are rare. Although existential dimensions can also be addressed within ‘technical dialogues’ (for example the question of East-West stereotypes in dialogues on humanitarian aid to IDPs), some interviewees indicated that attempts to do so were rare and unsuccessful.

- *They are shying away from the hard issues. They agree they need dialogues, they agree they need to ring a bell, they agree they need to cooperate because there’s no single person who is regarded as trustworthy by all sides. But they still shy away from tackling the hard questions, like getting along with the 2nd of May events in Odesa... Instead, they want to do some social dialogues on the kind of problems that IDPs have, which is good but not enough. (International dialogue expert)*

The focus on ‘technical issues’ is confirmed by the Dialogue Support Platform, which lists issues discussed in various track III dialogues in Ukraine in 2015-2016: 90 out of 110 listed issues can be regarded as ‘technical’ (judging by their titles).<sup>19</sup>

Possible reasons for the focus on “technical issues” include:

- The use of ‘technical dialogues’ as a strategy that teaches people to talk to each other in a depoliticized context as a prelude to later discussion of ‘hot issues’ (according to some interviewees, this is the only feasible strategy in Eastern Ukraine)
- The polarized context (including the interest of political elites in maintaining societal divisions rather than promoting political unification) not being conducive to facilitated ‘existential dialogues’ and a reconciliation discourse
- The high level of media interest in facilitated ‘existential dialogues’ and the likelihood of their immediate politicization, even when conducted solely within the government-controlled territories.

Overall, there was no agreement among the interviewees about what types of facilitated dialogues – ‘technical’ or ‘existential’ – are most needed in or most suited to the Ukrainian track III context. Nevertheless, the interviewees pointed to the potential of ‘existential dialogues’, in particular those focusing on historical memory or the future of Ukraine, to connect Ukrainians and ultimately lead to societal transformation.

The potential risks of a continued emphasis on ‘technical issues’ over ‘existential’ ones remain unclear. The only possible negative consequence that became apparent in this study refers to “the other Ukrainians” who may remain excluded if the focus on ‘technical issues’ persists (see also pattern 4).

### **Pattern 3: Geographical Focus on Eastern Ukraine’s Government-Controlled Territories Risks Further Societal Polarization**

Most facilitated dialogue initiatives take place inside the government-controlled territories and are geographically focused on Eastern Ukraine, which is most affected by the armed conflict. According to

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<sup>19</sup> Ukraine Dialogue Support Platform: <http://ukraine.dialoguesupport.org/en/tags>

the interviewees and an analysis of internet sources, since 2014 only a handful of facilitated dialogues on track III have involved people from the non-government controlled territories (“cross-contact- line” – hereinafter CCL dialogues) or Russian civil society groups (hereinafter Russian-Ukrainian dialogues). The pattern seemed to continue in 2017 despite the Ministry of Temporary Occupied Territories having given a green light to facilitated CCL dialogues in its 2017 Action Plan.<sup>20</sup>

Possible reasons for the focus on the Eastern Ukrainian territories controlled by the Ukrainian government include:

- Limited resources of the Ukrainian government and the international community restricting the area of engagement
- Need to concentrate on a selected region to produce meaningful results
- Eastern Ukraine accommodating the highest number of IDPs and local communities with humanitarian needs requiring support.

Additionally, the following challenges regarding facilitating CCL and Russian-Ukrainian dialogues were seen as reasons for the “safer” focus on government-controlled territories:

- Societal and political bias against contacts with Russians and people from non-government-controlled territories during wartime
- Possibilities of political manipulation and accusations of collaboration with “the aggressor” if facilitated CCL and Russian-Ukrainian dialogues are held<sup>21</sup>
- High security risks for people from non-government-controlled territories when participating in facilitated dialogues
- Unclear status and minimal societal influence of civil society from non-government-controlled territories as well as Russia and a subsequent lack of clarity regarding whom to involve
- Logistical problems for facilitated CCL and Russian-Ukrainian dialogues, including difficulties of finding neutral venues and obtaining visas for participants.

Interviewees argued that a focus on the Eastern territories controlled by the Ukrainian government is perceived as unequal resource distribution, which actually increases rather than decreases polarization and divisions between East and West. Ukrainian facilitators would therefore invest their efforts in dialogue facilitation across the whole of Ukraine (all parts of it) while the impetus for CCL and Russian-Ukrainian dialogue facilitation mainly comes from the international community, based on experience in other conflict zones. The interviewees did not suggest increasing the number of CCL and Russian-Ukrainian dialogue facilitations but rather improving their quality, including a strategic systematic approach to process design and a connection to the political track I process (see pattern 6).

- *Things that happened to Crimea and the East are symptoms. This is not a disease but rather symptoms of a disease that affects the whole country. When you start treating only the external symptoms the disease gets worse. And this is very threatening. The focus on the East is not only artificial; it leads to conflicts inside the community. [People say]: “We had shelling, and you didn’t; humanitarian aid went there, they built a new school here, but not there. You have safely survived 70 km [from the frontline] and applied for that project and got it ...”(Ukrainian dialogue facilitator)*

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<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Temporary Occupied Territories Action Plan on Domestic Policy Regarding Certain Areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions where State Authorities Temporarily Do Not Exercise Their Power, 11 January 2017, available at: <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/8-2017-%D1%80>

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, “Under the Cover of Peace and Women”: NGO Statement, 5 March 2017; available at: <http://www.ukrpress.info/2017/03/05/pid-prikrittyam-miru-y-zhinok-zayava-nou/> The authors of the statement were thirteen Ukrainian women activists. Inter alia, they called for the establishment of “a Parliamentary Commission to investigate the activity of peacebuilding initiatives that are carried out under the cover of women and human rights movements”. Although admittedly this clash between two groups of NGOs has to do with the interpersonal relations between their leaders, it still demonstrates the deep polarization of Ukrainian civil society on peacebuilding and reconciliation issues.

#### **Pattern 4: Focus on Mainstream Political Views in Dialogues Risks Further Exclusion of “the other Ukrainians”**

The interviewees were concerned that Ukrainians who do not support the current political mainstream views represent one societal group that is largely excluded from facilitated dialogues. No term seemed to describe this group exhaustively; the authors therefore adopted the term “the other Ukrainians” from interviewees to indicate excluded political views.<sup>22</sup> The other Ukrainians may oppose joining EU and NATO and be critical of the current Ukrainian government. Sometimes they are referred to as anti-Maidan, pro-Russian, pro-federalist, Donbas Ukrainians, or anti-European Ukrainians, but none of these labels captures all aspects.<sup>23</sup> For the purposes of this research, the analytical category of “the other Ukrainians” should be distinguished from the “people from non-government-controlled territories” because the latter are treated as a separate analytical category. The term “the other Ukrainians” therefore refers only to people holding non-mainstream political views and living within government-controlled territories.

- *The current spirit of patriotism deters people who think differently. In my dialogue practice ... only 10% of participants held other views and ideas; for example, seeing Maidan differently. Perhaps there were more of them but only those [10%] spoke openly at the dialogues. And it troubles me because these people live everywhere – in Kyiv, Poltava. In Kremenchug tonight someone broke the memorial plaques to ATO [Anti-Terrorist Operation] soldiers. We do not know who these people were but it is an aggression against patriotic orientation. And this is the problem: These people were not heard and they feel some kind of threat. (Ukrainian dialogue facilitator)*

Possible reasons for the exclusion of “the other Ukrainians” include:

- The current mainstream political discourse excludes and marginalizes “the other Ukrainians”. Involving them in facilitated dialogues would exacerbate tensions with mainstream politics.
- A discourse of inclusiveness related to facilitated dialogue does not exist in governmental rhetoric and is absent from the professional community of dialogue facilitators, although a few organizations of mediators and facilitators use inclusivity strategically as their own organizational brand.
- “The other Ukrainians” are not desperate to take part in facilitated dialogues as many currently suffer from economic hardship and psychological trauma and fear retribution for their non-mainstream political ideas.
- International documents<sup>24</sup> and governmental policies<sup>25</sup> that deal with peacebuilding and facilitated dialogues do not mention “the other Ukrainians” as the target of inclusion.

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<sup>22</sup> The term “the other Ukrainians” is also used by A. Wilson to describe a similar “group” of people: Andrew Wilson, “The Ukrainians - Unexpected Nation”; Yale University Press, 2015

<sup>23</sup> In an empirical study by the Center for Peace Mediation, conducted in Odessa in 2015, interviewees were very cautious about applying simplistic labels, especially binary distinctions (such as pro-Russian/pro-Ukrainian or pro-/anti-Maidan), and described their own political position with specific, self-chosen labels or terms covering a wide range of perspectives. I. Kerber and A.I. Kraus: “Dialogue in Odessa, Ukraine”, Research Report, Center for Peace Mediation, available at: [http://www.peacemediation.de/uploads/7/3/9/1/73911539/odessa\\_dialogue\\_study.pdf](http://www.peacemediation.de/uploads/7/3/9/1/73911539/odessa_dialogue_study.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> UN/EU/World Bank, “Ukraine: Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment”; available at: <http://www.un.org.ua/en/publications-and-reports/un-in-ukraine-publications/3738-ukraine-recovery-and-peacebuilding-plan-volume-2>

<sup>25</sup> The Ministry of Temporary Occupied Territories Action Plan aimed to implement certain fundamentals of domestic policy regarding certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, where state authorities temporarily do not exercise their power, 11 January, 2017, available at: <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/8-2017-%D1%80> Ministry of Temporary Occupied Territories, Draft State Programme on Recovery and Peacebuilding in Eastern Regions of Ukraine; available at: <http://mtot.gov.ua/uvaga-ogolosheno-provedennya-gromadskyh-publichnyh-obgovoren-proektu-derzhavnyi-tsilovoyi-programy-vidnovlennya-ta-rozbudovy-myru-v-shidnyh-regionah-ukrayiny/> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, National Action Plan on Implementation of United Nations Security

The authors suppose that a continued focus on technical issues might unintentionally contribute to further exclusion of “the other Ukrainians” because problem-solving does not always require the representation of opposing political views among participants. The authors assume that if the exclusion of “the other Ukrainians” from many facilitated dialogues remains unheeded by the international community, Ukrainian government and civil society, this pattern may contribute to further societal polarization.

### **Pattern 5: Quantitative Overrepresentation of Women at Track III Not Translating into Qualitative Influence**

Women are the only population segment expressly mentioned in all analyzed policy documents produced by the international community and the Ukrainian government as a target of inclusion in dialogue facilitations and peace processes.<sup>26</sup> However, according to the interviewees, women in fact represent around 75% of Ukrainian dialogue facilitators and the majority of participants in most facilitated dialogues on track III. In contrast, the interviews suggested that women’s civil society groups – along with other civil society groups – are excluded from track I and possibly also from track II. In quantitative terms, an asymmetrical representation of women can thus be observed – they are overrepresented at track III and excluded from track I. At the same time, interviewees noted that women lack qualitative influence on all tracks: for example, decisions are often taken without women or disregard women’s issues.

- *We aim to increase the involvement of national minorities and women in peacebuilding. But with women it is all right; here they are more actively involved than men. We have a shortage of men who have time to take part in these initiatives. Men are very valuable human resources for us. They are generally businessmen who have a bit more free time than men who are busy working [for others]. This is indeed a valuable resource. (Ukrainian dialogue facilitator)*

Possible reasons for women’s overrepresentation and lack of influence:

- Traditional gender stereotypes prevalent in Ukrainian society lead to men being busy with earning money and having no time or incentive to take part in facilitative dialogues
- Traditional prevalence of women within civil society translates into prevalence of women in dialogues and dialogue projects
- Low awareness – including among women themselves – about the importance of gender-related issues such as sexual and gender-based violence precludes raising topics that are important for women in some dialogues
- Insufficient training of facilitators in gender-sensitive methodologies precludes greater empowerment of women at the dialogue table.

Interviewees agreed that continuous insistence on quantitative representation of women in facilitated track III dialogues may be detrimental, risking reinforcing a Ukrainian stereotype that “something that is done by and for women is not serious” – the implication being that facilitated dialogues can’t be serious. The authors assume that the current strategy is detrimental to the inclusion of women, as it deters attitudinal change by representing the fact of a quantitative overrepresentation as an achievement and camouflaging the low qualitative inclusion of women in actual decision-making processes.

### **Pattern 6: Dialogue Without Sustainable Project Strategies Risks Low Impact of Dialogues**

When talking about patterns in relation to facilitated dialogues in Ukraine, interviewees were concerned about the potentially limited impact of facilitated dialogues given the many activities taking place. Although they were aware that the impact of facilitated dialogue in any conflict context is extended over time and difficult to measure, they were nevertheless convinced that the impact

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Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/113-2016-%D1%80/print1493904687523518#n11>

<sup>26</sup> See notes 17 and 18 above.

potential of track III facilitated dialogues in Ukraine can still be improved. This can be done even within the current macro-political and logistical constraints, provided that poorly coordinated short-term implementation strategies (“parachuting”) are decreased.

- *We observe unsystematic work. They start some projects that have neither a logical end nor a logical continuation. These projects are very isolated actions that do not have any meaning unless they are included within a system and can be continued. I have a feeling that donors do not care about this or that they hope for magic: We'll work for six months on social cohesion in communities and we'll finish it; that's enough... (Ukrainian dialogue facilitator)*

The possible reasons for “parachuting” implementation leading to low impact were numerous:

- Absence of evaluation of facilitated dialogues precludes tracking of results
- Absence of systematic monitoring of facilitated dialogues at the national level and subsequent low coordination among donors, local implementers and dialogue facilitators (and within these groups)
- Insufficient conflict expertise and lack of deep understanding of peacebuilding and dialogue on the part of donors, leading in some instances to activities being funded as “peacebuilding” although their aim is in fact to strengthen national identity and patriotism
- Varying levels of conflict sensitivity and expertise among local implementers (while the core professional community of mediators/facilitators generally has a sufficient professional level, new players lacking expertise and experience have been receiving grants for dialogue projects, some of which end with inadequate training or even physical fights during the facilitated dialogues)
- Short time frames of most facilitated dialogue projects (6-12 months) impede systematic approaches
- Lack of connection of some facilitated dialogues to local needs, leading to “dialogues for the sake of dialogues” (although donor institutions or international organizations attempt to conduct feasibility studies or consultations with local actors regarding local needs and prospective process designs, many consultations ultimately remain disregarded)
- Little awareness on the part of donor institutions and local implementers that many people on the ground are still not ready to talk to each other, requiring greater preparation of facilitated dialogues (from psychological training and tailored meetings with potential participants to awareness-raising events), which is not provided for in many facilitated dialogue projects
- Lack of mechanisms connecting local needs to competent facilitators who can respond to a request quickly and facilitate dialogues
- Insufficient post-dialogue support to participants of facilitated dialogues – “diapraxis”<sup>27</sup> – such as support for joint activities resulting from facilitated dialogues
- Lack of post-training support for facilitators (peer supervision, internships, cofacilitation and other professional practices as well as payment of fees); such support would enable facilitators to apply what they have learned without immediately needing to facilitate dialogues on their own
- Civil society perception of track I peace process as “fake”, leading to low interlinkage of tracks (some civil society activists regard their inclusion in the track I process as meaningless and threatening to their reputation, so they do not support the results of facilitated dialogue at higher tracks)
- Lack of outreach by facilitated dialogues to mass media and the public (although some types of facilitated dialogues – like CCL or Russian-Ukrainian dialogues – do require secrecy, even purely technical dialogues facilitated in government-controlled territories are currently not widely publicized and do not communicate the outcome to wider society).

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<sup>27</sup> But some positive dynamics can be observed in this question, as more dialogue projects are beginning to include budgets for post-dialogue activities, although the time frame for these projects still remains very short (one year).

Interviewees found that the above challenges to impactful facilitated dialogues could lead to a waste of limited international resources and also increase the public perception of “dialogues as empty talks”, eventually leading to “dialogue fatigue”. Although the flaws in impact and efficiency of dialogue projects sound familiar to many practitioners worldwide, the authors conclude that if these flaws are included in the overall picture of dialogue patterns identified in Ukraine, they seem to reinforce the risks inherent in other patterns.

### 4.3. Summary and Implications of the Research Findings

This research, based on empirical data, has identified six major patterns and related risks in current dialogue activities on track III in Ukraine:

1. There is a multiplicity of different co-existing dialogue concepts and an overuse of the term "dialogue", together creating the risk of undermining the value of dialogue in public opinion.
2. Dialogues are focused on technical issues and tend to avoid hot identity- and value-related issues that are associated with risks that are still unclear.
3. Dialogues are concentrated in Eastern Ukraine, risking further societal polarization.
4. Dialogues focus on mainstream political views, risking further exclusion of “the other Ukrainians”.
5. The quantitative overrepresentation of women on track III does not translate into qualitative influence in actual decision-making processes, risking reinforcing gender stereotypes.
6. There is a general lack of sustainable project strategies, risking low impact of dialogue activities.

In a nutshell, the results suggest that track III dialogues have a limited potential impact and might mimic the political track I process with its exclusiveness and “technical focus”, instead of promoting cross-fertilization between track III and track I.<sup>28</sup> If this is true, should these activities be continued at all?

Although the research has identified serious flaws and risks associated with facilitated dialogues in Ukraine, the results also do not tell us that the overall situation would be better without dialogues. Looking at the current conflict dynamics in the country, the potential costs of having no facilitated dialogues at all seem to be greater than having dialogue with its current shortcomings and risks: Every day, polarization and fragmentation of society increase while societal trust and social bonds between Ukrainians deteriorate, making new outbreaks of violence in different parts of the country more likely. Facilitated dialogues, along with other inclusive participatory practices, have the potential to bridge the divides in families and in the country as a whole and thus to contribute to democratic societal transformation in the long run.

However, in order to realize this potential, the patterns that seem to be responsible for the low or detrimental impact of dialogue activities, according to the findings of this research, have to be changed. After three years of peacebuilding and dialogue efforts in Ukraine, it is time for all actors involved to take stock and reassess implementation strategies in order to increase the impact potential of facilitated dialogues and to embed them more systematically in larger programmes of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Special attention should be paid to using the term dialogue consistently, to the choices of issues and the geographical focus of facilitated dialogues, to questions regarding the inclusion of women and “the other Ukrainians” and to constructive and sustainable dialogue strategies at various levels.

In order to formulate detailed recommendations that will help counteract the observed negative tendencies and enable positive changes on the basis of empirical data, more in-depth research is required, which should involve further evaluation of existing information and the collection of additional data and feedback (see Chapter 2). In particular, the following questions will be explored in

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<sup>28</sup> For analysis of some challenges facing the track I processes, see R. Cristescu and D. Matveev, “The Challenge of Inclusiveness in the Peace Processes in Ukraine”, Background Paper, Civil Society Dialogue Network, 2017.

more detail by the research group: What are the systemic and institutional reasons for the gap between tracks I and III and – taking these characteristics into account – how can this gap be bridged? How do the mechanisms behind the exclusion of “the other Ukrainians” work and how could dialogue practice systematically integrate non-mainstream views? What methodologies of dialogue monitoring can help to improve implementation strategies? What theories of change underpin choices of issues and geographical focus of facilitated dialogues and what implementation strategies derive from these choices?

## 5. List of Events in the Research Process

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| 24 Nov 2015    | Initial Workshop, Viadrina: Brainstorm on Research Design and Hypotheses   |
| 10 Mar 2016    | Expert Round Table I, Viadrina: Joint Reflections and Collecting Feedback on Hypotheses  |
| May-June 2016  | Semi-Structured Interviews, Ukraine (Kyiv, Odesa, Lviv): Collecting Answers to Interview Questions   |
| 5 May 2016     | Focus Group 1, Ukraine, Kramatorsk: Joint Reflections on Interview Questions   |
| 1 June 2016    | Focus Group 2, Ukraine, Kyiv: Joint Reflections on Interview Questions   |
| 25 Nov 2016    | Focus Group 3, Berlin: Joint Reflection on Preliminary Findings and Resulting Questions  |
| January 2017   | Follow-up Semi-Structured Interviews, Ukraine (Kyiv, Lviv)   |
| 28 Feb 2017    | EPLO Civil Society Dialogue Network Meeting, Vienna: Presentation of Preliminary Findings  |
| 20 May 2017    | Round Table II, Kyiv: Presentation of Preliminary Findings and Collecting Feedback   |
| 7-8 June 2017  | Folke Bernadotte Academy Research Workshop, Stockholm: Presentation of Research Project and Preliminary Findings and Collecting Feedback   |
| 5 Sep 2017     | Network Meeting of NGOs Working With Dialogue and/or Mediation in Ukraine at ZIF, Berlin: Presentation of Preliminary Findings and Collecting Feedback                               |
| 6-7 Sep 2017   | Viadrinum Summer School at European University Viadrina: Presentation of Preliminary Findings and Collecting Feedback  |
| 6 Oct 2017     | Workshop with OSCE PCU, SMM, ODIHR, Kyiv: Presentation of Findings/Policy Paper and Collecting Feedback  |
| 24-25 Oct 2017 | Training of International Diplomats, Workshop at German Embassy, Kyiv: Presentation of Findings/Policy Paper and Collecting Feedback   |
| 10 Nov 2017    | Workshop with Ukrainian Civil Society Activists being Trained as Mediators by ChildFund International, Frankfurt/Oder: Presentation of Findings/Policy Paper and Collecting Feedback |
| 15-16 Nov 2017 | Viadrina Conflict Days at European University Viadrina: Presentation of Findings and Collecting Feedback   |

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| 21 Nov 2017     | International Conference “Civil Society in Ukraine”, Kyiv: Presentation of Findings/Policy Paper and Discussion  |
| 22 Nov 2017     | Ministry of Temporary Occupied Territories (MinTOT), Kyiv: Presentation of Findings/Policy Paper and Discussion  |
| 29 Nov 2017     | Round Table with Experts from German Federal Foreign Office and Heinrich Böll Foundation at ZIF, Berlin: Presentation of Findings/Policy Paper and Discussion                  |
| 7 Dec 2017      | OSCE Annual Forum of Mediators and Dialogue Facilitators, Kyiv: Presentation of Findings/Policy Paper and Collecting Feedback  |
| 14 Dec 2017     | Workshop for international organizations and donor agencies working in Ukraine, organized by MinTOT, Kyiv: Presentation of Findings/Policy Paper and Collecting Feedback       |
| 21 Dec 2017     | Public lecture hosted by the Master’s Programme in Mediation and Dispute Settlement at Kyiv Polytechnic University, Kyiv: Presentation of Findings/Policy Paper and Discussion |
| 15 January 2018 | Workshop for UNDP Ukraine office, Kyiv: Presentation of Findings/Policy Paper and Collecting Feedback  |

## 6. List of Participating Organizations and Individuals

### 6.1. Brainstorm on Research Design and Hypotheses

Alex Azarov, mediatEUr  
Imke Kerber, European University Viadrina  
Lars Kirchhoff, European University Viadrina  
Anne Isabel Kraus, European University Viadrina  
Tatiana Kyselova, Kyiv Mohyla Academy / University of Turin, Italy  
David Lanz, swisspeace Mediation Programme  
Julia von Dobeneck, European University Viadrina

### 6.2. Expert Round Table I<sup>29</sup>

Center for Peace Mediation, European University Viadrina, Germany  
Institute for Conflict Management, European University Viadrina, Germany  
Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Ukraine  
University of Turin, Italy  
Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH, Germany  
MediatEUr, Belgium  
(formerly) OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, Ukraine  
Neu-Ulm University of Applied Sciences, Germany  
Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Switzerland  
Mediation Support Team, CSS ETH Zurich, Switzerland  
National Academy of Sciences, Ukraine  
swisspeace Mediation Programme, Switzerland  
OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre, Austria

### 6.3. Interviews and Focus Groups

#### **UKRAINIAN DIALOGUE FACILITATORS AND MEDIATORS**

Ukrainian Mediation Center, NGO, Kyiv  
Foundation for Freedom, NGO, Lviv  
Network of Facilitators, informal network, various cities  
National Association of Mediators of Ukraine, NGO, various cities  
Center for Support of Civil and Cultural Initiatives “Tamarisk”, NGO, Dnipro  
Center for Mediation and Law, NGO, Kharkiv  
Institute for Peace and Common Ground, NGO, Kyiv  
Ukrainian Centre for Nonviolence Communication and Reconciliation “Dignity Space”, NGO, Kyiv  
Initiatives of Change, NGO, Kyiv  
Odesa Regional Group of Mediation, NGO, Odesa  
Donbas(s) Dialogue, NGO, Svyatohirsk  
Association of Middle East Studies, Ukrainian Peacebuilding School, NGO, Kharkiv

#### **UKRAINIAN GOVERNMENT AND POLICY-MAKERS**

Pokrovsk City Council, Pokrovsk, Donetsk oblast

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<sup>29</sup> For privacy and confidentiality reasons, participants in Expert Round Tables, interviews, focus groups and dissemination workshops are listed by organization, not by name.

Parliament of Ukraine – Verkhovna Rada, Kyiv  
Ministry of Justice of Ukraine, Kyiv  
Ministry of Temporary Occupied Territories and IDPs, Kyiv

#### **UKRAINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY**

Integration and Development Centre for Information and Research, NGO, Kyiv  
Response Centre, NGO, Mariupol  
International Education Initiative “Open House” (Vidkryta Khata), NGO, Kyiv  
Donbas(s) Think-tank “Fabryka Dumky”, NGO, Kyiv  
East Ukrainian Center for Civic Initiatives, NGO, Kyiv/Luhansk oblast  
Responsible Citizens of Donbas(s), NGO, Kyiv/Donetsk oblast  
Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, Kherson  
Anonymous organizations

#### **INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), Finland  
MediatEUr, Belgium  
swisspeace, Switzerland  
CSSP – Berlin Center for Integrative Mediation, Germany  
Inmedio Berlin, Germany  
Nonviolence International, USA  
Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), representative in Ukraine  
Mercy Corps, USA  
OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, Ukraine  
Office of the UN Resident Coordinator, Ukraine  
Embassy of Finland in Ukraine  
Anonymous organizations

#### **DONORS (and international organizations acting as donors in Ukraine)**

Rinat Akhmetov Foundation for the Development of Ukraine, Kyiv  
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, office in Ukraine, Kyiv  
United Nations Development Programme, Kyiv  
Office of the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine, Kyiv  
Anonymous organizations

## **6.4. Expert Round Table II**

Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH, Germany  
European University Viadrina, Germany  
Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Ukraine  
Network of Dialogue Facilitators, Ukraine  
swisspeace Mediation Programme, Switzerland  
Center for Nonviolence Communication and Reconciliation “Dignity Space”, Ukraine  
Mediation Support Team at the Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, Switzerland  
Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Group, Ukraine  
Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), representative in Ukraine  
National Association of Mediators of Ukraine, Ukraine  
Pokrovsk City Council, Donetsk oblast, Ukraine  
Network of Dialogue Facilitators, Ukraine  
Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), Finland

Responsible Citizens of Donbas(s), Ukraine  
National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Ukraine  
OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, Ukraine  
OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre, Austria  
Office of the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine  
Odesa Regional Mediation Group, Ukraine  
Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Ukraine  
Women's Initiatives for Peace in Donbas(s), Ukraine  
Ideas for Change, Ukraine  
Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Switzerland

## 6.5. Dissemination Workshops<sup>30</sup>

More than 120 Ukrainian mediators and dialogue facilitators at various public events  
More than 100 students from European University Viadrina, Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Kyiv Polytechnic University  
Folke Bernadotte Academy Research Working Group on Conflict Prevention, Stockholm  
Centre for Russian, European and Eurasian Studies, University of Birmingham  
Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence, National University Odesa Law Academy  
University of Uppsala, Sweden  
University of Warsaw, Poland  
University of Hamburg, Germany  
Embassy of Germany in Ukraine  
Embassy of Switzerland in Ukraine  
Embassy of Canada in Ukraine  
Embassy of the United States of America in Ukraine  
Embassy of the United Kingdom in Ukraine  
German Federal Foreign Office, Berlin  
Childfund International, Berlin and Ukraine Offices  
Pax Christi, Berlin  
Russian-German Exchange, Berlin  
Inmedio, Berlin  
IFA, Berlin  
SWP, Berlin  
Berghof Foundation, Berlin  
ZIF, Berlin  
OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine  
OSCE Project Co-ordinator Office in Ukraine  
OSCE ODIHR office in Ukraine  
Ministry of Temporary Occupied Territories and IDPs in Ukraine  
USAID, office in Ukraine  
European Commission, office in Ukraine  
Stabilization Support Services, office in Ukraine  
Humanitarian Dialogue, office in Ukraine  
Peaceful Change Initiative, office in Ukraine  
Council of Europe, office in Ukraine  
UN Women, office in Ukraine  
United Nations Development Programme, office in Ukraine

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<sup>30</sup> Eleven dissemination workshops were held at various institutions. The scholars, practitioners and political actors who attended are involved or interested in the field of dialogue facilitation and Ukraine. The number of institutions does not reflect the number of dissemination workshops.

## 7. Sample questions for interviews and focus group discussions

### **Impediments to dialogue and mediation in Ukraine**

#### **Guide for Interviews and Focus Groups**

Notes:

- 1) “Dialogue” or “mediation” is used interchangeably, depending on the respondent (dialogue facilitator or mediator, etc.)
- 2) Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in a very flexible qualitative manner and specific questions varied greatly from one respondent to another. The interviewer did her best to ask at least a few questions from each part of the questionnaire. The questions below merely give a rough idea of the content of the conversations

#### **Questions**

##### **Part 1. Professional self-identification**

1. How would you define dialogue/mediation?
2. Can you sum up dialogue/mediation in one word?
3. Do you think that a professional community of dialogue facilitators/mediators exists in Ukraine?
4. Why do dialogue facilitators in Ukraine do what they do? What is their motivation?
5. What motivates international organizations and donors to support dialogue and peacebuilding activity in Ukraine?
6. Do you know/have you heard anything about the practice of facilitation/mediation that in some way contradicts your understanding of dialogue/mediation and dialogue/mediation values?

##### **Part 2. Vision of future and mechanisms to achieve this future**

7. Please imagine that in 10 years, dialogue/mediation has become a recognizable tool in Ukraine and is widely used at all levels of society. Are you comfortable with this rather general vision of the future?
8. If yes – what should be done first at the national level to achieve this future?

##### **Part 3. Problems and impediments**

9. What problems may impede the development of the dialogue/mediation movement in Ukraine?
10. What is the role of the community of professional facilitators/mediators in dialogue/mediation development?
11. What is the role of cultural patterns in dialogue/mediation development?
12. What is the role of the state in dialogue/mediation development?
13. What is the role of international organizations and donors in dialogue/mediation development?
14. What is the role of the legal community in mediation development?