

Human Security and Dialogue Challenges in Ukraine's Donetsk Region

Report prepared for **Peaceful Change initiative**

**(Abbreviated version of fuller report based on field visit by Dr Samir Puri to Donetsk Oblast,
10-17 September 2016; & subsequent research in late 2016)**

Executive summary

This report examines the human security and local peacebuilding challenges in Donetsk Oblast (region) areas under Ukrainian government authority. It is based on a field trip undertaken 10 – 17 September 2016 on behalf of Peaceful Change Initiative (PCi) and draws on other PCi research and analysis completed in late 2016. The underlying rationale of the report is crucially that **key local peacebuilding work should not wait for a deal to end Ukraine's war, nor be stalled by a failure to reach a Track I agreement.**

At one stage, when conflict erupted in 2014, there was a view that this might be a short-term crisis, and that it would be dealt with quite quickly. From the perspective of early 2017, and nearly 3 years on from the start of the conflict, that view has now been firmly dispelled and people understand that they are in this situation for the long term.

While movement at the political level has been at a glacial pace, there are a lot of complexities at the local level that need to be addressed as soon as possible (though confidence-building measures could make it into an eventual overall deal). For example, easing of cross-divide travel would be a step in the right direction, as it would allow people to rub shoulders and re-establish some level of understanding.

There are four points in the context of the conflict in eastern Ukraine which are particularly pertinent and pressing for any discussion about human security concerns:

* Ritualistic violence: While the violence does not reach everywhere, there are certain areas in which the violence has a relentless and almost timed regularity.

* Freedom of movement: Moving between Government controlled areas (GCA) and non-Government Controlled Areas (NGCA) is interrupted by huge queues in (often) poor conditions. It is compounded by a corrupt permit system. It is important to understand the attitudinal impact of this physical separation that has been forced on people.

* Friction between locals and IDPs: In a situation where everyone is suffering, the influx of IDPs, who come to compete for the same jobs and services, has led to real tension. In addition, many locals have taken the attitude that they shouldn't 'pay' for people from a 'traiterous region'.

* The whole issue of detainees, access to justice, and related matters.

In essence, this report is prompted by two key questions:

--**"What needs to be reconciled and between whom?"** (See Section B, below). And,
--**"Where does Track One and the local dimension meet"**, or, in other words, and as reflected in the core narrative of the report, how much of the situation is in the hands of people who are most affected by it (the Ukrainians themselves)?

Disclaimer - This report reflects personal observations and analysis by the author and does not represent an organisational view or affiliation. The report draws on a mixture of desk research, a field trip in September 2016 to government controlled areas of Donetsk Oblast, and the author's one year spent living in this region (September 2014 to summer 2015). It does not contain public opinion survey data on attitudes, but offers a snapshot of perceptions based on select interviews, and a broader analysis of trends, events and activities. All interview material from which observations in this report have been gleaned was gathered in 2016. In some cases those being interviewed in Ukraine requested anonymity. This wish has duly been respected when footnoting sources.

Structure and Introduction

Structure - Overall, this report covers three main headings:

A. Principal human security issues in government controlled Donetsk

Living with direct and indirect consequences of intermittent but persistent fighting is a reality for people of the region. The human security challenges are analysed in this section in terms of pervasiveness and using the four headings already alluded to in the Executive Summary:

1. The persistence of violence that continues to affect people close to the contact line.
2. Restrictions to freedom of movement.
3. The specific challenges facing Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).
4. Issues of detainees and access to justice.

B. Mapping existing dialogue-based peacebuilding activities

The first questions to pose are fundamental ones: what exactly is to be reconciled? Between which parties should dialogue work focus? There are no simple answers, partly because of the overlapping local, regional and international stakes at play, and the mix of state and non-state armed group protagonists. To make sense of the dialogue landscape three levels are examined:

1. 'Vertical dialogue' – between authorities in Kyiv and government-controlled Donetsk
2. 'Horizontal dialogue' – amongst communities within government-controlled Donetsk
3. 'Cross-divide dialogue' – between government-controlled Donetsk and 'DNR' areas

C. Tentative guidance for NGOs, donor governments and multilaterals

The report offers some guidance and pointers for those involved in funding and implementing work within the broad family of local peacebuilding initiatives. Its headline observations are for the need to safeguard local voices, and to be wary of 'imported' voices – even from elsewhere in Ukraine – that impose narratives that fail to account for the experiences of local people.

Introduction - This analysis on the human security and local peacebuilding challenges in those parts of Donetsk Oblast (region) that are under Ukrainian government authority (GCA) should be read alongside a parallel report commissioned by PCi to pose the same questions as asked here of those areas controlled by the self-declared 'DNR' ('Donetskaya Narodnaya Respublika').

Overarching question: does peacebuilding wait for a deal to end Ukraine's war? For many ordinary citizens in Ukraine's Donbas region, the outbreak of war in 2014 marked the sudden onset of crisis and catastrophe. Back then the duration, shape and severity of the war could hardly have been foreseen. Nearly 3 years later, while the war remains unresolved, it has

settled into a state of protracted crisis. Despair and frustration at the persistence of fighting is, quite understandably, a common sentiment in the Donbas.

The powerlessness that residents feel accentuates the importance of local perspectives and 'bottom-up' conflict resolution. Peacebuilding does not have to be postponed until a 'track one' deal is agreed at the highest political levels to end the war. Rather, by mapping the challenges facing dialogue and peacebuilding work, this can inform donors by providing a sense of the nature and possible trajectory of local conflict resolution challenges that are yet to come.

The purpose here is to place the needs and concerns of the people of Donetsk Oblast centre stage. This is especially important in the context of Ukraine's war. Given the wider stakes involved, there is an understandable tendency to frame the fighting in east Ukraine in terms of 'east-west relations'. Regional and global relations with Russia have been debilitated by the war. However, narratives of a 'new Cold War' unhelpfully render Ukraine something of a chess piece on the geopolitical board. In one sense, geopolitics is what the whole story is about. For the purposes of this paper this level is put to one side to consider the needs of local communities. In this regard, there can also be a tendency to view the contested Donbas region through the prism of Ukraine's government in Kyiv. The governance challenges being wrestled with in Kyiv are, of course, a principal determinant in conflict resolution. But, as this report stresses, such a Kyiv-centric prism also carries the risk of reducing the people of the Donbas, and the governance arrangements by which they will ultimately live, to that of mere bargaining chips.

A. Principal human security issues in government controlled Donetsk

The frustration and toll of living with war

While the future course of Ukraine's war cannot be predicted, the elusiveness of a political deal to end definitively the fighting exacerbates the human security problems faced by locals. Living with the direct and indirect consequences of intermittent but persistent fighting is a reality for many. It would, however, be remiss to fail to note that the geographical spread of the fighting has largely been contained since reaching its apex during 2014 and 2015.

The Minsk Agreement of September 2014, its addendum Package of Measures (February 2015), and the work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) has contributed to stabilising the frontline – but has not ended the war. Ukrainian government armed forces continue to skirmish and trade artillery fire with 'DNR' and 'Luhansk People's Republic' ('LNR') separatists. That the war has ground into a stalemate, characterized by an essentially static frontline and a steady drip feed of violence, can hardly be declared a triumph in the name of conflict management. The potential for renewed escalation renders this a most fragile equilibrium. Indeed, the original Minsk Protocol seemed to collapse into

irrelevance during the winter of 2014-15 as fighting intensified. This escalation reached its apex as an Additional Package of Measures was being agreed at Minsk (also known as 'Minsk II'), stipulating once again for a ceasefire, and for a withdrawal of weapons of a certain calibre by both sides from the frontline. Simultaneously, a battle raged for the strategic town of Debaltseve (in Donetsk Oblast) which the separatists captured that same month. However, the fall of Debaltseve remains the last *major* change of ownership of territory (as of end of 2016). The frontline has been anything but peaceable since then and fighting has persisted in the form of shelling and probing attacks. Notably, a battle over the small village of Shirokinye (east of Mariupol) raged on and off during 2015. In June 2015 an attempted break-out by the separatists at Marinka, also in Donetsk Oblast, was largely held by Ukrainian armed forces.¹ There have been further probing attacks since then.

Rather than full-scale escalation, perhaps a more probable risk is of the partiality of Ukraine's ceasefire drifting into permanency. Evidence for this concern comes from the SMM, which has reported a continuous ebb and flow of ceasefire violations ever since it deployed to east Ukraine in 2014.² This has led to popular and political Ukrainian criticism of the Minsk deal as being deficient in resolving the war, and for freezing what remains a volatile situation into a state of lingering permanency.³ The people of the Donbas have duly felt the frustration and toll of living with war. With the OSCE-chaired Minsk process, and 'Normandy Format' of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany handling negotiations, conflict resolution occurs above the heads of ordinary people. And yet, it is their ultimate fate that is a key stake in the fighting and the talks.

Pervasive causes of human insecurity

How a person of the region feels is directly related to the principal causes of threat, suffering, anxiety and inconvenience imposed upon them by the persistence of the war. Ranking causes of suffering is not possible or fair, but pervasiveness is an important criterion. The most pervasive causes of human insecurity will feed directly into the task facing local peacebuilding work.

1. Especially for people close to the contact line – shellfire and persistent violence

Donetsk Oblast has been the epicentre of a lot of the fighting. The frontline snakes its way past Debaltseve in the north of the Oblast, past the now devastated Donetsk airport, to Mariupol in the south. Along some parts of the line only a narrow distance separates Ukrainian armed forces from 'DNR' forces. And the exact location of the line can change as one or the other side inches closer to the other. Villages and conurbations can be bisected

¹ OSCE, 'Spot report by the OSCE SMM, 3 June 2015: Fighting around Marinka', 3 June 2015, <http://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/162116>

² OSCE SMM daily reports online: <http://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm>

³ Svitlana Kobzar, 'Mind the Gap: Interpreting the Minsk II Agreement', Institute for European Studies Policy Brief, issue 2016/03, March 2016. <http://www.ies.be/files/Policy%20Brief%202016:3.pdf>

by the frontline. Some 'grey zone' settlements fall in no-man's land, creating dire conditions for people who remain there.

OHCHR has reported 'an increase in civilian casualties caused by shelling from various artillery systems' between 16 May and 15 August 2016, with '188 conflict-related civilian casualties: 28 killed (three women and a girl, 20 men and four boys) and 160 injured (47 women and four girls, 97 men and ten boys, and two unknown), while between 16 February and 15 May 2016, 113 casualties were recorded (14 killed and 99 injured).'⁴ At times, the military positions of both sides are located close to or even in civilian areas. If these areas have been partially or completely abandoned, soldiers can billet themselves in vacated schools and in abandoned homes. For citizens, all of this, and the trauma of living in proximity to shellfire, which falls in unpredictable patterns and at unexpected times, is quite understandably nerve-wracking.

2. Of widespread impact to Donbas residents – restrictions to freedom of movement

The largely static frontline has exacerbated the importance for Donbas residents of safely being able to cross this line. The reasons to do so are myriad, but might include: families bisected by the line; the elderly or disabled; those displaced by fighting ending up separated from family and friends; or property and businesses that remain on the other side of the line to where one now lives. There are five established crossing points, four in the Donetsk Oblast and a fifth in Luhansk Oblast. A huge volume of traffic clogs these crossing points on a daily basis, including people on foot and in cars. They continue to face difficulties in attaining a permit to allow them to use the crossing point, since administrative arrangements in the conflict zone are poor. The application system is cumbersome and prone to corruption – passes can be purchased on the black market to speed up the process. Some have tried to cross the line away from the official crossing points, leading to some tragic instances of civilian vehicles striking landmines. Moreover, the long queues can expose those waiting to cross to on-going hostilities. In a May 2015 report on freedom of movement, the OSCE SMM analysed the origins of the permit system, which was introduced by Ukrainian authorities to regulate travel through the 'Anti-Terrorist Operation' (ATO) zone.⁵ The situation has not discernibly improved since then. The Zaitsevo crossing point (which is close to Horlivka) sees many people attempting to cross daily in both directions, some waiting overnight so as to not lose their place in the queue. Their motive for crossing may simply be to buy groceries unavailable or unaffordable in 'DNR' areas. Local people express great frustration with the hazards, delays and costs of the permit system.

The limitations to cross-frontline movement entrenches a physical separation between government-controlled Donetsk and the 'DNR'. As well as compounding people's

⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine 16 May to 15 August 2016', September 2016, p. 12.

⁵ OSCE SMM Thematic Report, 'Protection of Civilians and their Freedom of Movement in the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions', 6 May 2015.

misery, this physical barrier has also affected perceptions of the 'other'. As will be discussed, it is the single greatest obstacle to establishing meaningful cross-divide dialogue. Depending on the duration that it persists, the physical divide will contribute to exacerbate intercommunal tensions and misunderstandings, leaving each community open to one set of negative propaganda. For local peacebuilders, as explained below, the attitudinal impact of this separation is a key matter.

3. The diffusion of Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs)

There are myriad reasons why some people have fled the fighting, where they have gone, and why others stayed put. As a very general rule of thumb, people with the material means and opportunity to flee the fighting may have done so, perhaps entering the Russian Federation or moving to other parts of Ukraine. Whereas those lacking the material means, or unable to leave due to elderly or disabled relatives, or simply unwilling, have remained in their homes. As of 4 April 2016 the number of officially registered IDPs in Ukraine exceeded 1.76 million, according to the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine.⁶

There is a risk of intercommunal tensions, given that so many people have resettled. A great many families across Ukraine have faced increased hardship due to the economic impact of the war, as felt through price inflation and the loss of the hryvna's value. As the OSCE recorded in focus groups, IDPs around Ukraine have said that 'they were welcomed with solidarity and understanding. Over time the resources of the host communities became scarcer and expressions of solidarity and support shifted to frustration or indifference towards the displaced persons.' Moreover, 'numerous IDPs reported that they did not want to "advertise" their status, preferring to "blend in" and "keep a low profile".'⁷ Other salient issues relate to unaccompanied and separated children, and the elderly in particular wanting to return quickly to their homes. A major issue is the suspension of pensions in non-government controlled areas, with some people fleeing the 'DNR' – or choosing to cross the frontline repeatedly – to access government and social services that ceased being provided in areas no longer controlled by Kyiv.

4. Other human security challenges

This range of issues bequeaths to community-level peacebuilders in Donetsk Oblast significant obstacles. Matters of ill-feeling and blame, no matter whether these are loudly pronounced or quietly suppressed, can manifest in how ordinary people make sense of the fate that has befallen them, their families and the place of their birth. Overlapping issues of displacement, separation, the spiralling economic impacts of war and the reduction or total absence of governance create a complex human security situation. The issues listed above

⁶ OSCE SMM Thematic Report, 'Conflict-related Displacement in Ukraine: Increased Vulnerabilities of Affected Populations and Triggers of Tension within Communities', July 2016.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 8, 16.

are amongst the most pervasive – but they are far from the only causes of human insecurity. Moreover, the severity and relevance of these issues will vary between specific localities.

There exist a great many other threats to life, livelihood and wellbeing. For example, access to justice in and around the conflict zone has been complicated. With courts relocating from areas like Donetsk city that fell under “DPR” control to government-controlled cities such as Kramatorsk and Mariupol – case and files evidence have remained out of judicial reach as a result.⁸ Detainees have also been an issue, with the security forces on each side arresting those suspected of collaboration with the enemy – in government-controlled Donetsk, relatives of these people have told OSCE, UN and INGO personnel that they have simply lost all contact with the detained relative.⁹

In sum, taking into account all of the above the following judgement is offer. **The nature of suffering caused by the war has directly contributed to the whole issue of polarised views, and where blame is apportioned or deflected. This in turn creates some of the challenges facing local peacebuilding and dialogue work, which is examined next.**

B. Mapping existing dialogue-based peacebuilding activities

If Ukraine's war cannot be ended definitely, then its consequences must be managed. It is not the aim here to forecast the progress to be made by the Normandy Format diplomacy (involving Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany) or by the OSCE-chaired Trilateral Contact Group (which brings together Ukrainian government, Russian Federation, 'DNR' and 'LNR' representatives) to end the war. Rather, with all signs pointing to some degree of conflict and insecurity persisting into the medium term, even if a deal arrives, there will be a need for conflict-resolution work afterwards. In the medium term the importance of dialogue and peacebuilding work is assured.

Partly because of the overlapping local, regional and international stakes at play, and also the mix of state and armed non-state actor protagonists involved, there is no simple answer to the question of who should be the focus of reconciliation work. Dialogue, peacebuilding and – eventually, although it may take some time – reconciliation work, may well be attempted by all sorts of actors, and with all kinds of priorities and outcomes in mind.

The task here is to make some sense of this all. Various contacts, both in Kyiv and in the east, convey the importance of providing some strategic guidance and coherence to the many disparate efforts already underway. The government in Kyiv is already involved in a 'national dialogue' with the Donbas; there are international organisations (multilateral and INGO) helping to facilitate local dialogues; there are Ukrainian civil society organisations and NGOs from across the country involved; *and most crucially there are local organisations rooted in the Donbas that are also involved in this work.*

⁸ OSCE SMM Thematic Report: 'Access to Justice and the Conflict in Ukraine', December 2015; OHCHR 'Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine 16 May to 15 August 2016', September 2016, pp. 17-23.

⁹ *Ibid.*: OSCE, pp. 29-31; OCHCR, pp. 13-16.

What follows is not an attempt to dictate what does and what does not constitute peacebuilding or dialogue work in Ukraine. Rather, it is an attempt to map some of the many activities underway, and to observe where overlap and interdependencies might exist. This web of activities is presented in terms of levels, with a view to developing tentative policy suggestions in the concluding section of this report.

1. 'Vertical dialogue' – encouraging Kyiv to reach out to government-controlled Donetsk

The Ukrainian government understands the importance of credible, effective governance of the territories in the Donbas. Indeed, this is related to Ukrainian government undertakings and obligations arising from the Minsk process. The challenge resides in the sense of alienation and distance, both physical and attitudinal, separating the east from Kyiv. Relevant work includes:

- The OSCE National Dialogue project to support confidence-building work between parts of Ukrainian society. Although this work began in 2014, the 'National Dialogue for Reforms, Justice and Development' was launched in 2015. In May 2015 an event was held in Kramatorsk called 'Recovery through Dialogue'. It featured officials, elected representatives, civic activists, diplomats, entrepreneurs and journalists from Kyiv and Donetsk Oblast. The discussion was organised by thematic issue.¹⁰
- This work is run by the OSCE Project Coordinator in Ukraine (PCU, based in Kyiv) and not by the OSCE SMM. Further 'Reconstruction Through Dialogue' events are expected to occur twice annually, with one each year held in Kyiv and the other in the Donbas.
- The OSCE PCU also aims to host an 'Annual Masterclass in Dialogue Facilitation' event to take place in December 2016 in Kyiv.
- Finally, OSCE PCU administers a series of 'Youth Councils' in Kramatorsk, Kharkiv and Lviv. These have aimed to empower youth leaders in dialogue and reconciliation work.

Some direct benefits stem from this useful schedule of work. **The first** is the political delicacy surrounding reform or reconciliation matters. Diplomatic progress at the international level will set the tone for this work, and contribute to the urgency felt by Ukraine's government to engage in reform. Kyiv carries considerable political risk in this regard. The difficulties of compromise spilled into violence outside the Rada on 31 August 2015 when a grenade was thrown by an ex-Ukrainian volunteer soldier.¹¹ Kyiv's new Ministry of Occupied Territories will

¹⁰ OSCE PCU, 'Report of the Eastern Ukraine Forum "Reconstruction through Dialogue" 13-14 May 2015, Kramatorsk'.

¹¹ *Kyiv Post*, 'Third serviceman dies from Rada grenade attack', 1 September 2015: The incident occurred amidst protests organised by the populist Radical Party and nationalist Svoboda (Freedom) party to oppose a parliamentary bill on decentralisation of powers to Donetsk and Luhansk.

wrestle with these issues. **The second** matter is crucial here: it asks whether vertical dialogue efforts set the tone for, and relate to, 'horizontal' intercommunal reconciliation, and to 'cross-divide' dialogue – indeed, do they link up at all?

2. 'Horizontal dialogue' – amongst communities within government-controlled Donetsk

This refers to intercommunal dialogue efforts that, predominantly, involve local people who try to address local issues. The civil society and local NGO scene in government-controlled Donetsk is flourishing, while there has been a clampdown in the 'DNR'. Because so many NGOs are at work in Ukraine, mapping them by name would add little value. Rather, there is value in categorising their initiatives according to broad purpose. Several main categories exist:

- **Civic education initiatives** aimed at challenging stereotypes and spreading a message of hope or reconciliation within communities. This can include workshops and education initiatives in schools. And it can address, through dialogue, tensions that might have come to exist between IDPs and their host communities.
- **Civic watchdog protection groups** that represent citizens' concerns to local authorities. This is a key role for civil society. The lack of a local voice can be evident across Ukraine, not least in Donetsk Oblast, where local governance and service provision are inadequate.
- **Practical advice initiatives** to assist IDPs and the elderly, for example, with assembling the paperwork for a permit application to cross the frontline, or providing legal advice around court cases or detainee issues. Bereft of advice, local people might have no way of knowing what to do or who to contact to help them.
- **Material assistance initiatives** that, by their humanitarian nature, speak for themselves.
- **Psychological treatment** for children, adult civilians, emergency personnel, volunteer and professional soldiers who have witnessed traumatic events in the war. Once again, although not directly fostering dialogue, this work has clear, albeit indirect, relevance.

With such a range of tasks there exist several 'multi-purpose' civil society initiatives and NGOs. Some start by addressing one set of concerns, and by virtue of broaching on others, extend their work into dialogue or peacebuilding. Some initiatives feature trained mediators, but it is important to stress that the track-record is mixed and training is not necessarily widespread.

3. 'Cross-divide dialogue' – between government-controlled Donetsk and 'DNR' areas

This is the least-developed level of dialogue work – understandably so, given that the war is still underway, and given the physical separation imposed by the frontline and the

inadequate permit application system. Aside from these obstacles, there is yet another matter to consider: that the local realities of Donbas reconciliation mean that credible dialogue cannot be imposed from outside. And that this may not simply mean outside Ukraine, but also outside the Donbas.

A theme that underlays the conflict has been the distance that the people of the Donbas have felt from Kyiv, let alone from Western parts of Ukraine. While Ukraine's war is hardly a straightforward matter of an insulated two-sided civil war – regional and international dynamics have also been at play – the 'distance' factor between Ukraine's regions when approaching peacebuilding is an added complication and challenge.

Conflict sensitivity can stand and fall on key issues of nuance. Careful attention must always be paid to take account of the importance of the local perspective versus the imported perspective – even if 'imported' from elsewhere in Ukraine. There are local subtleties at play when it comes to broaching dialogue over what are now deeply contentious issues.

In Mariupol, to take a particular example, the local chapter of the **Union of Ukrainian Women** (an umbrella body for women's organisations) reports that it used to work with civil society all across the Oblast, but the contact line now divides its work. They still keep in touch from time to time but now do not get on as well owing to mutual suspicion or from a lack of understanding. In fact, this mistrust relates not only to the context across the contact line, but also to distrust between 'western' Ukraine regions and the Donbas in general (regardless of which side of the contact line this refers to).

Local NGO actors observe that northern areas of the Donetsk Oblast (Kramatorsk/Sloviansk) are very distinct from the southern part of the Oblast around Mariupol. The local nature of these dialogue initiatives only further accentuates the importance of keeping in tune with local sentiments, and for that to be a prerequisite for effective dialogue work.

C. Tentative guidance for NGOs, donor governments and multilaterals

Wars exacerbate stereotypes and xenophobias, intensifying suspicions of existing 'out groups', and drawing new divisions within societies. It is clear that Ukraine has experienced these trends. The perception gaps that exist between 'western' or 'Kyiv-centric' Ukraine and the Donbas have its own historic roots, many of which are entirely innocent and unrelated to conflict, but may come down to the physical distance between these regions, the differing ways in which their local economies have evolved, and the possibility that citizens from a certain region may not have travelled to, lived, studied or worked in other regions.

Concluding remarks and a return to key questions

1. What exactly is to be reconciled - and between which parties should dialogue work focus? Part of the response here is that it is a matter of perspective. As this report has explained, with regards to 'National Dialogue', reconciliation entwines with reform of centre-regional relations. Reforms might involve localisation of certain administrative powers from Kyiv to the regions, or at a later stage may resemble something more akin to full-blown devolution. The important point is that reconciliation will, for better or for worse, go hand-in-hand with the potential redistribution of governance arrangements.

This is important, but the real focus of this report has been at the levels of 'Horizontal Dialogue' and 'Cross-divide Dialogue'. It is here that local approaches to peacebuilding are the most relevant. Arguably, local-level peacebuilding efforts might work better if in some ways they are de-linked and therefore de-politicised from the wider issues of debate that may simply pass over the heads of local people. This leads to the following observations:

- **Looking down the various levels:** When one envisages these levels, from the Normandy Format's international diplomacy, to the OSCE-led Trilateral Contact Group, to the National Dialogue between Kyiv and Donbas, and to the myriad local initiatives underway, this could ideally resemble a triangle, or a flow diagram. In reality, the levels are fragmented and compartmentalised. This is inevitable, given the complex and overlapping interests of the many parties involved. With explicitly local dialogue in mind, spotting signs of direct complementarity might seem sensible. In fact, a balance needs to be struck to insulate Donbas-based reconciliation work from outside influences.
- **Do not wait for a deal:** Working to assuage intercommunal tensions within Donetsk will begin in earnest after a political deal – but that it must wait is misconstrued. Especially in circumstances when patterns of violence slow down and become more predictable, local conflict management approach cannot fixate on waiting for a deal that might takes years to come, and even then, will need extensive local buy-in to guarantee implementation.
- **The milestone is an easing of cross-divide travel:** The real milestone, deal or no deal, will be an easing of the process of crossing the line and thereby breaking down of stereotypes.

2. What does it mean to be sensitive to local conflict dynamics?

With the big picture lens set aside in favour of the local level focus an important observation stands out. Dialogue work cannot simply involve 'lecturing to attendees', especially if it aims to engage in the delicate process of undermining stereotypes.¹²

¹² Interview with Roman Koval, Head of Institute for Peace and Common Ground, Kyiv, September 2016

In essence, **local conflict sensitivity**, with the Donbas context in mind, requires neither shutting out external voices nor ignoring local ones. A vital balance needs to be struck, with a key aim to avoid scapegoating and stereotyping. Both externally and locally sourced mediators have a crucial role to play. But any effective mediation must be able to grasp the full range of perspectives and experiences of ordinary people on both sides of the contact line, as well as those whose experience has straddled the contact line. Furthermore, that is occurring in a context where motivated local partners abound in government-controlled areas (GCA) and are hard to find in the 'DNR', where there is a comparative lack of NGO/civil society activity. In the latter, the feasibility of establishing contacts remains a challenge. In the former, (GCA), the risk comes from external help that might, in a conflict insensitive way, seek to imprint local efforts with the wider, regional and global issues of contention that in some way plague or beset conflict resolution efforts at all levels when it comes to Ukraine.