

Conflict Resolution

*the missing element in the
Northern Ireland peace process*

Michael Hall

on behalf of the
Local Community Initiative

ISLAND (19) PAMPHLETS

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Introduction

In June 1997 a group of community activists, representing most shades of Unionist/Nationalist and Republican/Loyalist opinion, met in Belfast and formed the 'Local Community Initiative' (LCI). While many of these activists had previously worked together on numerous 'cross-community' projects, the common thread uniting this particular group was the assistance each individual was providing to a Belfast-based organisation, MICOM, which had been engaged in community development and conflict resolution work in the former Soviet Republic of Moldova (then experiencing violent conflict with its breakaway region of Transdnistria, a conflict with similarities to that in Northern Ireland, for at its core lay a clash between conflicting, deeply-rooted 'identity' needs).

MICOM's efforts with the opposing sides in Moldova and Transdnistria had involved exchanges with Northern Ireland, during which numerous individuals, community organisations, political leaders, councillors and others, representing the entire political and cultural spectrums within Northern Ireland, willingly offered their assistance. Most significantly, many people who were otherwise staunch adversaries were able – without any diminution of their deeply-held aspirations – to work together to assist the Moldovans and Transdnistrians move toward a resolution of their own conflict.

The LCI, formed primarily to assist the work in Moldova, also wanted to see whether any of the lessons learned there could be put to positive use in Northern Ireland. For what was being attempted in Moldova represented an entirely new way of approaching the resolution of deep-rooted conflict, one which was not limited to the Moldovan setting but held the potential for worldwide application.

As this pamphlet goes to press, there is much anxiety and despondency in Northern Ireland as the summer of '99 approaches: implementation of the Good Friday Agreement is at impasse over the question of arms decommissioning, while tensions over the still-unresolved 'stand-off' at Drumcree are dangerously high. It seems that the parties to the Northern Ireland conflict are as yet unable to find the means to work collaboratively on issues of common concern.

The primary purpose of this pamphlet, published under the auspices of the LCI, is to create awareness of an alternative way of moving towards a resolution of our centuries-old conflict, one which would *complement* rather than replace existing mediating processes, and which could also bring those working at community level into a more productive relationship with our political leaders.

Michael Hall

Conflict at the other edge of Europe

When television news footage first alerted the world to the appalling plight of Romanian orphans – following the downfall of the Ceausescu regime in 1989, a year which saw Communism collapse throughout Eastern Europe – many people in Northern Ireland felt a desire to respond. In Belfast, much of this energy was channelled through the numerous community organisations which had sprung up throughout working-class areas as the ‘Troubles’ escalated and communities attempted to counteract the effects of the ongoing violence.

In the Ainsworth area of Belfast’s Shankill Road residents began to bring groceries and clothing to Ainsworth Community Centre, asking if these could be sent to Romania. Ainsworth in turn approached Farset Youth and Community Development Project, to see if its vehicles could be utilised. Jackie Hewitt, Farset’s manager, had already been giving the matter serious consideration.

Our chairman, Rev Roy Magee, had been out to Romania and had returned quite devastated by what he had seen. I was already getting other requests to do something but Farset had been involved in community work long enough to know that the answer to these problems wasn’t always to throw money and material at them. So we put together a specialist team to go out and investigate the needs on the ground in a more structured way.

The team included paediatricians Ian Adamson and Garth McClure, management consultant Barney McCaughey, as well as Rev Magee, Fred Proctor, Barney Filor and community development specialist Joe Camplisson. Camplisson had been the NI Community Relations Commission’s first fieldworker in 1970, and through his work on the ground and the training in Community Development he received from Professor Hywell Griffiths of Queen’s University, had come to view community development as something which could not only assist local communities raise their levels of awareness and their ability to challenge outside structures, but which could become a strategy for change within those structures.

Camplisson felt that the Romanians would benefit from outside expertise, not only at grassroots level but within governmental structures. He arranged to bring a group of Romanians to Belfast – representing different aspects of Romanian life: industry, farming, health care, local government, etc – and placed them with counterparts in Northern Ireland. When the Romanian party returned home a number of initiatives directly resulted, including a relief scheme for the unemployed, a training programme for paediatricians, and a national association for the physically handicapped.

A year later Camplisson accompanied a team from Northern Ireland to meet with counterparts in Bacau, in the eastern region of Romania known as Moldova (Moldavia). Somewhat confusingly, just across the border lay the Soviet Republic of Moldova. The bulk of the territory making up the Republic of Moldova

(whose majority population is Romanian-speaking) had once been controlled by Tsarist Russia, then there had been a period when it had merged with Romania, until finally, in 1939, it was taken back into the USSR by Stalin.

In the wake of Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* ('openness'), suppressed identity needs within the Soviet republics had surfaced and a nationalistic fervour, often violent, erupted which would eventually lead to the break-up of the USSR. The prospect that Moldova too would break from the Soviet Union raised deep identity-related anxieties among its population. The non-Romanian-speaking minorities – in particular, the Ukrainians and Russians (who were ethnically Slavs) – felt threatened by the moves towards unification with Romania being pursued by sections of Moldova's Romanian-speaking majority.

In January 1992, because of the severe economic difficulties Moldova was experiencing, Camplisson was invited to make an assessment of community development needs there as well. But while Moldova certainly had its economic and structural problems, tensions between the different ethnic groups were also increasing and inter-communal conflict seemed inevitable. The main flashpoint was to be in the narrow strip of land east of the Dniester River – Transdnistria (literally 'beyond the Dniester') – where the Romanian-speaking population was actually outnumbered by Russians and Ukrainians. The local authorities in Transdnistria, alarmed at the movement towards Moldovan/Romanian unification, refused to implement new pro-Romanian language laws and proclaimed their autonomy. Subsequently, full-scale violence erupted which left hundreds dead and thousands homeless. A ceasefire was eventually negotiated in July 1992 with the assistance of Russia, overseen by a joint peace-keeping force of Russian, Moldovan and Transdnistrian troops. Transdnistria was accorded 'special status' within Moldova, the terms of which were to be agreed later.

The process begins at community level

In May 1992, when the fighting was still in progress in Transdnistria, Camplisson travelled to Moldova. There he was met by journalist Mihai Voloh and lawyer Irina Colina, who introduced him to community, local government and business leaders in cities, towns and villages, while conducting a survey of needs from a community development perspective. All agreed it would be useful to bring some of these Moldovan leaders into contact with experts from Western Europe. Funding was raised to organise a conference in Nitra, in the former Czechoslovakia.

The conference in Nitra (July 1992) involved 60 participants representing interests in agriculture, education, business, social welfare, community organisation and various forms of voluntary action. Western experts gave presentations then joined in workshops with the Moldovans. Facilitators were on hand to assist the workshop participants in an identification of needs and to help them determine what could be done about those needs back in Moldova.

The Moldovan participants had been mostly drawn from the 'Romanian' population of Moldova. Irina Colina, however, was a 'Slav' and admitted to Camplisson that she had felt somewhat intimidated whenever the debate had digressed onto political matters, for when recent atrocities were alluded to they were invariably attributed to Slavic elements. She asked whether a similar conference could be organised to examine Transdnestrian needs. For Camplisson it was the first clear indication of the 'them' and 'us' division in Moldovan society.

In October 1992 Camplisson travelled to the troubled region of Transdnestria. The ceasefire was only a few months old and evidence of war was everywhere, not only in the ruined buildings but in the apprehensions constantly expressed by the populace. Although from Camplisson's theoretical perspective community development could be utilised as a *strategy towards* conflict resolution, at this stage he was primarily concerned with setting in place a specific community development programme, with only minor attention given to any conflict resolution outcomes. But one particular encounter was to produce a change in that emphasis. A local Communist Party leader took him to visit a health centre where he was asked to give a talk about the community development work he was engaged in. One elderly woman intervened, the host translating:

We don't really want to know about jobs and economic recovery and all of those things; all we want is peace. Can you not help us bring an end to this war? We want peace, but we don't want their flag, or their language or to be Romanians.

To Camplisson it was almost as if he was back home in Northern Ireland, for here was a perfect example of an identity-related conflict. That encounter was to be a turning point in the process he was now committed to.

The meeting in the health centre ended with a singsong in the dark and a warm display of camaraderie. Although Camplisson had promised the elderly woman that he would see what he could do, it was difficult to know where to begin. Another of his Moldovan associates, Gheorghe Mirzenko, a teacher, suggested they talk to the local police in Bendery, a town which had experienced heavy fighting. The police station was in rubble and an adjacent building had been commandeered. Across the road was the open-air headquarters of the local militia – the unofficial army which had established the breakaway Transdnestria – and one of their tanks had its gun trained menacingly on the makeshift police barracks with its complement of Moldovan policemen. By this time the tripartite peace-keeping force was in place, there to keep the two sides apart.

Camplisson and Mirzenko went in to meet the chief of police and the Russian major in charge of the peace-keeping force, to discuss what could be done. The major tried to bring the militia commander over to join in the discussion, but he refused to sit in the company of the police chief. Both the major and the police chief offered Camplisson their support, but admitted that they could not see any movement anywhere which could take the two sides towards resolution. Camplisson

then met separately with the local militia commander and found him to be just as hospitable and just as willing to endorse any efforts he might make.

With these endorsements Camplisson then met with members of the Joint Control Commission, responsible for the tripartite peace-keeping force. They too wanted to be helpful but likewise were not in a position to do anything. The only person who could take a decision was the new leader of the breakaway Transdnistria, President Smirnov. Camplisson and his companions travelled to Tiraspol and were able to meet with Smirnov. Smirnov readily offered his support and provided a letter to Camplisson requesting his help with the resolution of the conflict. Camplisson was now free to engage in work anywhere in Transdnistria. A similar endorsement from the Moldovan leader, President Snegur, was obtained the following year.

Camplisson also felt it was necessary to engage, within the conflict resolution process, each of the 'outside' players who had an interest in the search for solutions – Russia, Romania and Ukraine – otherwise it could begin to unravel through suspicion and political obstructionism. Accordingly, he travelled to Moscow and was able to obtain the backing of officials in the Russian Department of Foreign Affairs for whatever conflict resolution process he might initiate.

Before any such process could be designed, however, the community development work continued. Following the success of Nitra, a committee was established to arrange a second conference, this time focusing on the needs of the Transdnistrians. It took place in January 1993 and involved 44 Transdnistrians in another productive exchange with Western participants. Among the Northern Irish participants were ex-Loyalist prisoner Billy Hutchinson and ex-Republican prisoner Tommy Gorman who worked together in the Springfield Inter-Community Development Project in Belfast. Their presentations in particular indicated clearly that the situation in Moldova was akin to that which prevailed in Northern Ireland in 1969 – literally on the brink of disaster. This helped to inject a sense of urgency into the proceedings (as did the tragic events in Yugoslavia, especially the appalling reality of 'ethnic cleansing').

The organising committee behind the Nitra conferences, with its members drawn equally from both Moldova and Transdnistria, formalised itself into what would become known as the Joint Committee for Democratisation and Conciliation (JCDC). The JCDC had hoped to bring together the participants at the two conferences and this was realised in June 1994. Two groups of delegates, representing each side of the Moldovan conflict, met with foreign experts in the fields of agronomy, economic development, community development, international relations, conflict analysis, civil policing, journalism and the voluntary sector. Facilitators were drawn from the UK, the US, Canada, Germany, Romania and Russia. Many ideas for social, economic, cultural and political advancement, including action plans – many of them joint plans – were taken back to villages, towns and cities on each side.

Engaging the political leaderships

The Moldovan leader, President Snegur, and the Transdnistrian leader, President Smirnov, had followed Camplisson's efforts with interest, and both had now requested his assistance with the resolution of their conflict. Under the auspices of the CSCE (later to become the OSCE), which had set up a peace mission in Moldova in November 1993, the two governments had established 'Expert Groups', charged with devising suitable constitutional arrangements which would assist a settlement of the conflict. The challenge for Camplisson and his colleagues was how to engage these two Expert Groups in a conflict resolution process compatible with CSCE endeavours. And it was a challenge which would require quite a different approach from that used for the Nitra process.

In any conflict situation the people at the grassroots, while suffering the most, have neither the responsibility nor the authority to deliver a resolution to that conflict. In Moldova and Transdnistria it is only with the political leadership that such responsibility lies. These two groupings, then, have different needs and must be engaged in different ways. For those at the grassroots struggling to survive from day to day you endeavour to help them address their needs in ways which bring them into productive relationships with their opponents, in the hope that mutual understanding develops at both the personal and the community level. This is the purpose behind the Nitra-type conference/workshops.

For the political leaders, however, the *reverse* is the case. While you obviously want to establish enough trust to permit a working partnership, you are *not* concerned with building inter-personal relationships between the opposing leaders. Indeed, this is to be avoided. As the political leaders are the only ones with authority to resolve the conflict, you want to *hold them* to a representation of the extreme positions and assist them to resolve those extreme positions. It would be pointless if opposing leaders became 'buddies' and in the process no longer accurately represented the fears and aspirations which gave rise to the conflict within their respective communities. Such leaders would undoubtedly experience 're-entry' problems when they returned to those communities, and might even be replaced by others felt to be more representative of the extremes, with the result that the credibility of the process would be destroyed.

During the 70s John Burton from London University had been brought in to advise Camplisson in his conflict resolution work in Northern Ireland.

One of Burton's ideas I was drawn to was that of trying to get people into a situation where, with the help of a third party, they could judge whether or not what they were doing was self-defeating. There was no point in *me* telling them that, they had to be placed in a position where they could set out their objectives, evaluate their strategy for achieving those objectives,

and then determine *for themselves* whether it was taking them towards those objectives or taking them further away. Even if they didn't start out with any clear objectives, you could still focus on motivations, even negatively expressed ones – “I want the Brits out” or “I want the IRA destroyed” – and help them look beyond such statements and determine what fears or aspirations they reflected.

Another of Burton's assumptions which I share is that it is the people on the extremes who are most representative of that which has given rise to the conflict – and it is *through them that you can get sight of the problem*. Of course, when you start to work with the extremes, assisting a self-analysis of their positions, it needs to be done not in isolation but within a process, so that both sides can see how their respective positions have evolved and have been influenced by the *other side*. Often it boils down to significant identity needs, which are not necessarily expressed through political, social or economic issues, but through the symbols which people want to have in place. So the question becomes one of how they can satisfy those identity needs without coming into conflict with others.

Now the process which brings them to that point unfolds while they are sitting across the table from one another, and Burton's conflict resolution theory holds that people can only ultimately satisfy their *own* needs by recognising that the needs of the enemy have also to be met, and that *they* have something to say in satisfying the needs of their enemy.

As a first step, senior representatives of both governments were brought to a workshop at the University of Kent, Canterbury, in July 1994. This was conducted by Camplisson, John Groom, University of Kent, and Chris Mitchell, George Mason University. Camplisson need not have worried about the two delegations becoming ‘buddies’. They refused to travel together, insisted on coming in different planes and on staying in different hotels.

The workshop soon threw up dilemmas for the organisers. Camplisson had explained to the two Presidents that the encounter would be handled using a ‘problem-solving’ approach. However, the two delegations came with the idea that this meant that they could throw onto the table ‘problems’ such as customs, currency, the army and similar matters. But to focus on these issues, Camplisson believed, was to concentrate on *containing* the conflict, not *resolving* it. To him, a ‘problem-solving’ approach required that the adversaries first of all determined the *nature* of the conflict, just *who* was involved in it, *who* had to be engaged in the search for solutions, *how* they perceived their own and each other's positions, and what sort of *mechanisms* were necessary to implement any resolution. The two sides might indeed agree to some ‘political settlement’ yet *continue* to regard each other as enemies to be destroyed, so that while the conflict might be temporarily contained *it would not have disappeared*. The need, therefore, was to define the problem and keep redefining it until its true nature was clarified. Although this dilemma was not resolved at Canterbury the workshop was nevertheless viewed positively by the two governments.

With the work being undertaken in Moldova becoming increasingly complex, the Moldovan Initiative Committee of Management (MICOM) was established, with Camplisson as its Executive Director and Canadian Irene Sage its Deputy Director. Lord Hylton, a campaigner on penal affairs and human rights with a long interest in Northern Ireland, became MICOM's chairman. Also on the MICOM Executive was Ian Bell, representing Charities Aid Foundation.

Camplisson also renewed contact with his academic associates, including John Burton, to seek their assistance. Among new colleagues offering support was American Mark Hoffman, lecturer at the LSE and a specialist in conflict resolution and international relations. He was to become a core member of the conflict resolution team which would eventually emerge. Representing the JCDC on MICOM's Executive was its chairman, Yuri Ataman, who had first made an appearance when he had been brought in as a translator during Nitra II.

Camplisson also had the support of a growing number of community activists in Belfast, mainly centred around the Fasset Community Project, where Camplisson had based himself. Just as importantly, the C S Mott Foundation, Michigan, USA, had got to hear of the work and had decided to provide core funding – up to now Camplisson's efforts had been entirely voluntary.

In September 1994 Camplisson and Sage travelled to Moldova to prepare for a second workshop. However, by the time the plans for this were in place a political impasse had developed, with the two sides in Moldova refusing to meet and the international intermediaries having no success in bringing them together. Nevertheless, because MICOM was accepted by both sides as a non-governmental organisation with no hidden agenda, they agreed to participate.

The dilemma which had arisen at the first Canterbury conference surfaced again at the second – day-to-day political needs dominated the proceedings, consigning any problem-solving approach aimed at conflict resolution to the background. Camplisson and his associates realised that the two components – the immediate political needs and the longer-term conflict resolution needs – had to be married in some way, even if this was something of a retreat, for a failure to address immediate needs could be detrimental to the process. Accordingly, he introduced an exercise used at one of the Nitra conferences.

At the end of the first day's session everyone was given a handful of blank cards to take back to their hotel room. On these cards they were each asked to write down suggestions relating to the following four categories: what they felt *their side* might do to move things towards resolution; what they felt the *other side* might do; what they thought they could *do together*; and finally what they thought the *international community* could do. After they left I was quite apprehensive, for I realised I was asking them all to make individual judgements and yet these people came from an authoritarian political culture where it was only those at the very top who took such decisions. Next morning it was with great relief that I saw them coming back with all their cards completed.

In fact, the exercise produced dozens of different issues. This opened up some very productive discussions among the two teams of delegates and many of those issues were incorporated into Presidential agreements which subsequently evolved (but are still to be ratified).

It had been a successful conference but for Camplisson and his associates it was still conflict *containment*, not conflict *resolution*.

The JCDC comes to Northern Ireland

The community-based process launched by the Nitra conferences had not remained static while the two political leaderships were being engaged in the separate, but complementary, conflict resolution process. The JCDC had been busy establishing community development initiatives in cities, towns and villages. In order to assist the growth and strengthening of the members of the JCDC, both as individuals and as a group, it was felt it would be valuable to engage them in a comparative study with similar individuals and groups working in another area experiencing deep-rooted violent conflict, namely Northern Ireland.

In August 1995 twelve members of the JCDC came to Belfast. Their programme included placements which complemented the visitors' diverse occupational backgrounds. Towards the end of their stay they were brought together for two days of workshops with local community activists, equally representative of their own divided society. The purpose was to afford the participants an opportunity to draw lessons from one another's experiences, and to assist movement towards the resolution of the conflict situation they each faced.

The discussions which ensued during the exploration of their two conflicts – and the two 'versions' of each of those conflicts – did throw up clear parallels. First of all, each conflict had been preceded by a phase during which any identity-related tensions were dormant and it was social and economic needs which predominated. Then some catalyst acted to disturb this: in Moldova it was the period of *glasnost* and the demand for civil liberties; in Northern Ireland it was the demands made by the Civil Rights movement. When such demands encountered structural resistance within the two political systems the purely 'civil rights' issues were quickly overtaken by the reawakening of identity-related tensions, which in turn led to an escalating violence.

There was a consensus within the workshops that violence had been totally counter-productive. One of the Moldovan delegation summed up his feelings:

What was the outcome for us? Moldova lost the chance to build a new, united and independent republic. Because of the mistrust created between people in both areas and between all the different nationalities, we ended up instead with economic chaos and increased criminality. Many people regret what happened and are trying to rebuild trust and find a solution.

One of the Northern Irish participants expressed a similar conclusion:

Our experiences have led [some of] us to believe that the future has to be an *agreed* one – we cannot end up with a reluctant or rebellious minority, no matter which community forms that minority.

Camplisson pointed out one fundamental lesson to be drawn from the Moldovan conflict – that both government and people there were engaged in movement towards conflict resolution and had decided not to seek a ‘victory’, a situation which had not yet developed in Northern Ireland where people were a long way from accepting the idea of a ‘win-win’ outcome.

The aspect of the exchange with most significance for the JCDC was the realisation that community groups in Northern Ireland were able to work together on a wide variety of issues *irrespective* of whether their society’s conflict was on its way to resolution or not, and that in such co-operation there was no requirement that people in either community abandon or dilute their deepest aspirations. The example this offered was to have almost immediate impact.

Along the Dniester river are two adjoining towns which share a common industry. One town, Rezina, possesses a large quarry from which the raw materials are unearthed used in the manufacture of cement. The cement factory is located in the other town, Rybnitsa. There is a major problem, however: Rybnitsa lies on the east (Transdnestrrian) bank of the river, while Rezina lies on the west (Moldovan) bank. During the fighting of 1992 all commerce and contact between the two jurisdictions ceased, leaving the citizens of each town to eye each other warily, while the overhead cable system used to transport buckets of raw material across the river lay idle. Workers in both the quarry and the cement works, and any peripheral service industries, became unemployed.

Once the ceasefire came into effect a few individuals began to ask whether some form of co-operation between the two towns could be resurrected. However, each town was now using a different currency, there was a new ‘customs’ post between them, there was no joint transport system, and deep suspicions existed not only between the citizens of the two towns but between their two local authorities. Given such obstacles, no real co-operation was felt possible.

The ex-mayor of Rybnitsa, Evgeni Berdnikov, was a member of the JCDC delegation to Belfast. Inspired by the evidence they had seen there of inter-community co-operation, he and other members of the JCDC decided to proceed boldly. Despite encountering criticism and suspicion from both sides, within a few weeks of returning to Moldova they had managed to bring representatives of the two towns together, with the result that the two sets of local representatives agreed to co-operate across a wide range of issues. Berdnikov publicly attributed the impetus behind the venture directly to the Northern Ireland exchange. And one of the first initiatives which they agreed would help break down some of the barriers preventing economic co-operation was glaringly obvious – the resumption of contact between the quarry and the cement works.

The Expert Groups come to Northern Ireland

On a field trip to Moldova in October 1995, Camplisson found that the governmental Expert Groups were locked into yet another impasse and that even the OSCE could not inveigle them to enter dialogue. However, when Camplisson met with the two sides, they both intimated that *he* might bring them together.

To their surprise, Camplisson informed them that he did not consider that this would be useful. He realised intuitively that these recurrent impasses were symptomatic of a deeper, more fundamental problem, which was that the *roots of the conflict* between the two sides were not being fundamentally addressed. Therefore, as long as these deep antagonisms remained unresolved, any mediated negotiations, with the expectation upon both sides to make progress, only served to threaten them instead and they felt forced to retreat from it.

I realised that they needed to step back from things and examine them, and prepare themselves for going forward into proper conflict resolution. I suggested that they needed new insights into how to deal with their conflict and that one way to do this might be through a ‘study visit’ to Belfast. I fully understood that they had the responsibility to find constitutional arrangements which would allow them to function and survive, and this is what the OSCE was facilitating. Our role, MICOM’s role, however, was different – it was to help them deal with the complexities of the *underlying* conflict between them and their role within that conflict.

Both sides agreed and a ‘study visit’ to Belfast took place in March 1996 (by this time the impasse had been broken but all concerned felt the purpose of the visit remained valid). In his welcoming remarks to the two governmental delegations, as well as the assembled facilitators and Northern Irish participants, Camplisson set out his hopes for the exchange.

In many respects you in Moldova are far ahead of us on the path to conflict resolution. You have already accepted that there is a *problem to be solved*. You have moved away from the notion – one that we retain here in Northern Ireland – that the *other person* is the problem. You have also accepted the need for a ‘win-win’ outcome for both parties. You have reached, if you like, the ‘starting blocks’ of a conflict resolution process – you have agreed to approach this in a ‘problem-solving’ way.

Camplisson’s assertion that the visitors had already embarked upon a genuine conflict resolution process seemed to be borne out by the introductory remarks of a spokesman for the Moldovan governmental delegation.

I think it would be right to go into the roots of our conflict without blaming each other, without seeking the culprit. We are still far away from an agreement, but we should not be too hasty – step by step we will be able to solve the problem.

For their part, the Transdniestrian delegation echoed the same sentiments, reiterating that “violence is not a solution”.

Some similarities between the Northern Ireland and Moldovan conflicts had already been highlighted during the 1995 community-level exchange; in particular, the fact that political alignments in both countries tended to be ‘identity-related’. A Northern Ireland/Moldovan ‘encounter’, therefore, had the potential to highlight important ‘lessons’ for decision-makers in each conflict. As the Northern Ireland conflict was still far from resolution after a quarter of a century, an insight into why this was so could serve as a lesson – and, indeed, a warning – to the Moldovans. Conversely, as the parties to the Moldovan conflict had embarked upon a genuine conflict resolution process only four years after full-scale civil war, an insight into why and how this had come about could serve as a lesson to the Northern Irish.

As the present Northern Ireland conflict, notwithstanding its centuries-old character, owes its genesis to decisions and actions taken by all sides – government and opposition – in the late 60s and early 70s, the organisers of the exchange decided to set their focus there, and to bring some of the key ‘players’ of that period into a retrospective analysis of their policies, strategies and tactics. The organisers had the capacity to identify such leaders and persuade them to participate, and those identified willingly did so, even in the knowledge that they would not find it easy to sit alongside those whom they still perceived as ‘the enemy’. The intention was to determine to what extent the policies and tactics of these players had been self-defeating, when measured against their original aspirations and objectives.

Having been preceded by a lecture by Jonathan Bardon on Irish history which set the conflict in its broader European dimension, the workshops opened with a presentation by Harry West, former Stormont government minister, who gave his analysis of how the ruling Unionist Party had viewed the descent into violence. In his opinion the Northern Ireland government had “brought immense prosperity to all shades of opinion in the country” but was unable to appease “the minority within the minority whose overall ambition was to destroy the state”. Despite the introduction of a package of reforms which dealt with the main Civil Rights demands, IRA violence had persisted and could only have been defeated by resolute action by the British government. Not only was this not forthcoming but the British Prime Minister Edward Heath effectively halted the democratic process by closing down the Northern Ireland Parliament.

West was followed by Paul Arthur who felt that Northern Ireland had been “a society without empathy, where we had no understanding of the other side”. Unionist distrust of the ‘disloyal’ minority, coupled with the minority’s own feeling of being oppressed, combined to create the ‘mind-set’ which had its own sense of history and made it easier to accept that violence was a way forward.

But there was little thought given to the effects of such violence or what could be gained by it. Indeed, he felt that it had only been in the last five or six years that people on both sides, especially from within those sections of our communities which had borne the brunt of the suffering, had begun to address such questions.

The second session looked at what actually happened on the streets in the late 60s. Bernadette McAliskey, former Civil Rights activist, stated that the “problems of the 60s were not the *start*, they were the *end result* of the refusal to deal with the core problem of this state”, namely the Partition of Ireland in 1920 by the British government, a problem which, she pointed out, was still not being addressed today. With Partition those who would have been among the majority in an independent Ireland now found themselves a minority in the new state of Northern Ireland, the leaders of which sought to ensure that Nationalists never came to power. The mechanisms by which they sought to do this finally exploded in the 1960s. She was also scathing about the current ‘peace process’ saying: “If you are looking for a peace process that works, don’t look here.”

Boyd Black, giving a Unionist/Loyalist perspective, took issue with McAliskey’s assertion that Partition was the root cause of the problem. The ‘problem’, as he saw it, was that two communities with divergent aspirations *already existed* in 1920, and Partition was not so much a *political* reality imposed by Britain, but a *social* reality imposed *upon* Britain. One set of aspirations could only have been granted by coercing the other. “Now either you say that the British government should have coerced one grouping, or that the British didn’t have much alternative and took the line of least resistance.” He had less sympathy for the British government for imposing a separate parliament on Northern Ireland, for this effectively excluded the people here from mainstream United Kingdom political parties and processes. Furthermore, it left power in Northern Ireland in the hands of Protestants who felt threatened and reacted accordingly, thereby increasing minority alienation. Nevertheless, this alienation was slowly decreasing by the 50s and even the early Civil Rights movement could be viewed as an attempt to move forward through established institutions. However, the state still felt threatened and those who wished to misuse the Civil Rights movement to destroy the system were able to get the government to overreact.

In the third segment the rise of paramilitarism was charted, with Andy Tyrie, former chairman of the UDA, and Tommy Gorman, ex-Republican prisoner, describing how they had each experienced the escalating violence, and stressing that their personal involvement was motivated by a desire to protect their respective communities and ‘identities’. The significance of the exchange was indicated when Tyrie admitted that it was the first time he had shared a platform with a former member of the IRA, and that while he felt ‘uncomfortable’ about this he accepted that such encounters were inevitable.

To complement the ‘political’ workshops, the programme included individual placements, cultural activities, field trips and a wide range of lectures the

purpose of which was to provide the visitors with a deeper insight into different facets of life in Northern Ireland. They also met with individuals involved in community work, local government, and Social Services provision.

They also travelled to Derry to hear from two practitioners in community action: Paddy Doherty and Glen Barr. Doherty, the Director of Inner City Trust, had sought to demonstrate that government-supported direct self-help action aimed at social, economic, political and cultural advancement was compatible with his Irish Republicanism. Glen Barr, a leader of the 1974 Ulster Workers' Strike, and now Director of the Ebrington Centre, a community employment project, pursued a similar role within Derry's Protestant community, although the two men often worked together on mutually beneficial projects. Of particular interest was the two men's attempt to halt the growing segregation which had occurred on both sides of the River Foyle. This was a poignant reminder to the visitors whose communities were divided by the River Dniester.

One further talk which impressed the visitors was that by Derick Wilson at the Corrymeela Centre, when he spoke on deep-rooted violent conflict, particularly with regard to Frank Wright's notion of 'ethnic frontiers'.

An 'ethnic frontier' can take different forms; in Northern Ireland it is characterised by historical circumstances whereby people of one tradition were placed in the *midst* of people of another tradition who had been there before them. The need to secure one's own identity meant it was always much easier to make links *within* traditions and harder to make them *across* traditions. It also led to the need to protect one's own group by discriminating against the other. But 'ethnic frontiers' are often driven by fear and somehow we have to deal with those fears and emotions. To do so we not only need a political process, we need a process of meeting each other in small groups. This is important, for people will not trust the political process unless they also experience that same trust at first hand, and likewise I don't think the politicians will sign up to any deal unless they feel the people want it.

The Moldovan and Transdnestrian delegations found the 'study visit' extremely valuable, one delegate saying: "After what we have learned about Northern Ireland I think *our* reconstruction will take less time." What they had heard had also confirmed their own views on the counterproductive nature of violence.

War will not solve our problem. Even though I am a military man I am opposed to it. If either side makes arguments in favour of their right to use force for its own position, we simply retain the grounds for future conflict.

I am even more convinced that it is only without violence and by means of negotiations with due respect and understanding to another side, even by way of very prolonged negotiations, that this is the way to a resolution of the conflict. Both parties have to accept a compromise, in the interest of the whole population.

However, the Northern Irish experience had also taught them that *prolonged* negotiations still needed to be seen to be producing results.

I think we got a very good lesson that a very long process of negotiations, where compromises are not reached, will bring about very bad results. We also realised how deep-rooted a conflict can become if problems are neglected. It goes from generation to generation and becomes even more deep-rooted.

Andy [Tyrie] talked about ‘half-truths’ being told by both sides, and what I think is important is that here on both sides of *this* table – Moldovan and Transdnestrian – we are trying to create the truths for *both* sides. No-one is the bearer of ‘truth’ in the final instance. If we define the ‘truth’ as the rights belonging to a *single individual*, we will be better able to understand the rights of communities. If we can find ways of satisfying the rights of individuals then we should also be able to satisfy the rights of groups.

The Northern Irish participants also felt that the ‘study visit’ was very productive, even ‘illuminating’ in the opportunity it provided for self-analysis. Judging by the exchanges which frequently punctuated the presentations of the Northern Irish speakers – for example, Harry West’s analysis drew a heated response from a founder-member of the IRSP – it was quite evident to the visitors that the Irish conflict was still very much alive and close to the surface of people’s emotions. At the same time it was also quite obvious to some of the Northern Irish participants just how little the differing interpretations of their conflict had changed over the intervening twenty-seven years. Unionist fears of the ‘internal enemy’ and Republican condemnations of the ‘unjust settlement’ still remained undiluted at the core of current analyses. Some of the speakers gave no indication that, in retrospect, they now felt their positions and tactics to have been self-defeating. Indeed, little self-questioning seemed to have taken place. It was left to one of the Northern Irish observers, Bill Rutherford, a retired surgeon, to pose one fundamental question to all of the participants:

I worked in the hospital where the majority of people wounded during those 25 years were brought and I had to tell the relatives of people who had died that their husband or son or father or whoever was now dead. And because of this I felt the pain of what was going on here, and I think when you get close to the pain then you only have one question: ‘Why?’

Camplisson, in his summing-up, made the following comments:

Sometimes it is not the things we do or say that are the most difficult things to deal with, but the things which are *not* said and the things which are not properly understood. We need to have clear understanding of our own positions: what it is we are seeking, how we are going to achieve it, whether or not the strategy we are employing is actually taking us towards our objectives – for very often the lack of clarity on all these things leads us to make decisions which can take us towards violence. And through a

deeper understanding we learn that if we seek to satisfy our own needs, we must take cognisance of our adversaries' needs in a sympathetic way. Indeed, we must begin to know our enemy as well as we know ourselves. What does *he* want? Why? What do *we* want? Why? What are his perceptions of us? How do we perceive him?

To be able to reach this point usually necessitates 'third party assistance' and there are two distinct ways such assistance can be introduced. 'Facilitators' like ourselves can help you move towards conflict resolution, while 'mediators' can assist you in constructing the necessary political framework. The two processes are separate but with care can be made complementary.

The day after the Moldovan/Transdniestrian party returned to Moldova a (prearranged) summit meeting took place between the two presidents. The governmental Expert Groups with responsibility for preparing the summit agenda – something which the two presidents could agree upon – had felt that the visit to Northern Ireland would not only provide them with the space to do so, but the very nature of the programme might itself be conducive to a positive exchange.

During their stay in Belfast, therefore, a special day had been set aside for the Expert Groups to prepare the final documentation for the coming summit. The two groups felt it had been a very productive day, and during the summit itself both delegations praised the Northern Ireland 'study visit' and stressed the importance of the conflict resolution process of which the visit was a part.

Birth of the 'Local Community Initiative'

The number of individuals and organisations coming within the ambit of MICOM's work steadily increased. Community organisations played host to the visiting Moldovan and Transdniestrian delegations; local councils offered hospitality and provided generous civic receptions; community activists, ex-prisoners, academics, politicians and many others readily offered their assistance and expertise, some even accompanying the MICOM team to Moldova, Slovakia, or wherever their input would be most useful.

Uniquely, this local support network was drawn from right across the political and cultural spectrums within Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Not only that but, for the sake of assisting the Moldovans, some individuals who were otherwise staunch opponents found themselves prepared to sit together in the same room to debate and share their experiences with the visitors.

Many within this support network, particularly those at the community activist level, had been engaged in 'cross-community' activities for many years, and for them such encounters were nothing new. And it was largely from among this group that MICOM's core support at grassroots level was drawn. Some of these core supporters now began to ask whether the work being done in Moldova

contained anything positive for the situation they faced in Northern Ireland.

In response to such questions a meeting was convened in June 1997 of those community workers most closely involved with its work. All shades of political opinion were represented: Unionist and Nationalist, Loyalist and Republican. The meeting concluded that the problem-solving, conflict resolution approach adopted in Moldova *did* contain the potential, with some adaptation to local circumstances, to play a useful role in Northern Ireland. This was especially so as the political processes then taking place were, as in Moldova, encountering serious problems: some of the Unionist parties were boycotting the ‘Multi-Party Talks’ taking place at Stormont, while Nationalist parties were boycotting the discussions taking place at the Forum for Political Dialogue.

A Steering Group (Camplisson, Barney McCaughey and Michael Hall) was given the go-ahead to promote the initiative, initially by canvassing the views of all the political parties. The others present, calling themselves the Local Community Initiative (LCI), promised to assist in setting up meetings with leading members of those political parties with which they had close contacts.

The Steering Group then held a series of exploratory meetings, each meeting facilitated by a member of the LCI, with representatives of most of the main political parties: Jim Rodgers of the UUP; Nigel Dodds of the DUP; David Ervine and Dawn Purvis of the PUP; Gary McMichael of the UDP; Tom Hartley and Pat Docherty of Sinn Féin; and Alex Attwood of the SDLP. After presenting an outline of the complementary processes of community development and conflict resolution being pursued in Moldova, they explained that their purpose was to take soundings, on behalf of the LCI, as to whether such a conflict resolution process had anything to offer within the Northern Ireland setting. The politicians were assured that this process would *complement*, rather than set itself in competition to, any current political negotiation process(es).

The response from each of the party representatives was positive; indeed, some were very enthusiastic. A comment made by one of the politicians – “this is the type of thing we need” – reflected the response of both Unionists and Nationalists. What was most encouraging was that none of the parties expressed any problem when told that *all* parties would need to be engaged in such a process. And this was at a time when the DUP had withdrawn from the mediated negotiations taking place at Stormont because of the presence of Sinn Féin, while Sinn Féin itself was having no luck in getting face-to-face meetings with those Unionist parties remaining in the Stormont Talks.

However, most of the party representatives, while revealing an interest in the genesis of the process and the theory behind it, also posed questions of a more ‘practical’ nature for which there were as yet no answers. These questions revolved around the *mechanisms* of any process: what would the process look like, what were the various roles within it, who would be paying for it, when would it start, and what would be its duration?

When the Steering Group met to evaluate the feedback from these meetings,

they had to acknowledge that they just did not have the resources to take forward a conflict resolution process at this stage. It was accepted that all they could do for the moment was to keep the political parties informed of events in Moldova, and bring them into that process whenever possible.

Encouraging a shared analysis

In Moldova the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement in May 1997 had seemed to indicate a new urgency being injected into the search for a settlement. However, difficulties surrounding implementation of this agreement effectively put yet another block on any momentum, and meetings between the two Expert Groups ceased completely in July 1997. In the face of this new impasse, both sides requested that MICOM organise a second workshop in Northern Ireland to engage the Expert Groups, which would hopefully move the negotiating and conflict resolution processes forward once again.

After careful consideration MICOM felt that without preliminary preparation for such a workshop there was a high risk of failure. In particular, MICOM was concerned that raised expectations might not be fully realised.

The ongoing inability to resolve the ideological and political differences between Moldova and Transdnistria was in its turn frustrating attempts by both governments, as well as local community organisations and various NGOs, to confront the severe economic, environmental and other problems facing both Moldova and Transdnistria. Hence, it was felt that the most appropriate way to rekindle movement in the negotiations would be to highlight to the Expert Group negotiators the consequences ‘on the ground’ of the continued failure to achieve resolution. It was decided, therefore, that the ‘preparatory work’ would take the form of a seminar, organised by the JCDC and MICOM, in which governmental representatives, along with the international Mediators, would be invited to enter into a shared analysis of political, social and economic realities with representatives of NGOs from both Moldova and Transdnistria.

Albena, on Bulgaria’s Black Sea coast, was selected as the location for the seminar, which took place over five days in September 1997. The seminar was attended by representatives of some of the more active and significant NGOs in both Moldova and Transdnistria. They reflected a wide variety of interests: culture and education, political studies, the media, engineering, agriculture, co-operative banking, human rights, youth organisations, women’s groups, village councils, veterans’ unions, legal advisors, university faculties and others. They were joined by representatives of various community organisations, professional bodies and NGOs from Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Both the Moldovan and Transdnistrian governmental Expert Groups were represented and the

OSCE and Ukrainian Mediators also attended.

The purpose of the seminar was to identify and analyse problems and needs surrounding violent conflict and economic system change, develop ideas and action plans for remedy, and prepare for the planned Study Visit to Northern Ireland by the Moldovan and Transdnestrian governmental Expert Groups together with the OSCE, Russian and Ukrainian mediating ambassadors.

To achieve these objectives, the Programme consisted of panel presentations from members of relevant NGOs from Northern Ireland and Great Britain, and a mixture of plenary sessions and workshops.

All participants seemed to find the seminar extremely worthwhile and its methods challenging. The organisers were greatly encouraged by the way in which those from various levels of leadership – non-governmental, governmental and international bodies – found common cause and worked together in a shared identification of problems and related needs, across a wide variety of issues. Action plans were made for local co-operation, especially along and across the River Dniester.

In his opening address to the seminar, Camplisson had posed a series of questions: Why are we all gathered together? What is our motivation? What are our goals? What are our hopes and aspirations? Why are we sitting down with strangers, some of whom are our adversaries? What everyone present was ultimately engaged in, he said – even if the seminar might concentrate on the day-to-day, practical needs of building a civil society – was a search for a way of living together without fear of one another. And it was a search which called for a contribution from everyone, at many different levels within society.

He asked the participants to reflect for a moment on the brutal reality of violent conflict – especially as experienced by the bereaved and the refugees. Those gathered at Albena were attempting, he said, to confront one of the most complex and difficult problems of our time – deep-rooted violent conflict. He then drew the participants' attention to the broader implications of their quest. To them, it might seem to be concerned primarily with their own particular conflict, but the very methodology they were utilising, if successful, could provide invaluable lessons to all those involved in community development and conflict resolution initiatives around the world.

The Expert Groups return to Northern Ireland

The event for which the Albena seminar had been preparation, a Study Visit to Northern Ireland by members of the two Expert Groups accompanied by the international Mediators, took place in November 1997. A new element was added to MICOM's work when Mediators and Facilitators came together for a shared review of their respective processes.

Some of the programme highlights included:

Orientation tour of Belfast 'peaceline'

- A visit to Ainsworth Community Centre, where Louis West, manager, described the centre's various activities aimed at addressing problems surrounding inter-communal violence along the Protestant/Unionist side of the 'peaceline'.
- Megabytes, Andersonstown Road. Jim McCorry, director, spoke of his global perspective and his work as a Socialist Republican on the Catholic side of the 'peaceline', as well as his cross-community work.
- Farset Youth and Community Development Project. A talk was given by Billy Hutchinson, Director of Farset-based Springfield Inter-Community Development Project; Tommy Gorman, its Deputy Director; and Rev Father Gerry Reynolds. Hutchinson and Gorman spoke of their respective experiences since the early 70s, which included those prior to and since their imprisonment (seventeen and thirteen years respectively). Father Reynolds spoke about his attempts to build bridges between the two communities.

Civic Lunch, Ballyclare

Hosted by Newtownabbey Borough Council. During the 1996 visit to Newtownabbey, Council members had been impressed by the determination shown by the Moldovan and Transdnistrian leaders to work towards resolution, and the Mayor, and a former mayor, Fraser Agnew, revealed that their commitment to non-violence and conflict resolution had been reinforced by that example.

Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue

After a welcome address by the Northern Ireland Forum Chairman, John Gorman, the Expert Groups and Mediators heard a panel presentation by members of the recently-formed Northern Ireland Forum Political Affairs Committee, during which they were given a comprehensive and broadly-based Unionist analysis of the political situation in Northern Ireland.

Later, at a special meeting of the Forum, a panel presentation was made to the Northern Ireland political representatives by Anatol Taran (leader of Moldova's Expert Group), Valerii Litskai (leader of Transdnistria's Expert Group), John Evans (Head of Mission, OSCE), Ambassador Karlov (Russian Federation) and Evgheni Levitskai (Ukraine). Part of the session appeared that evening on local television.

Also at the Forum the visitors heard two presentations. Firstly, from Linda Devlin, Northern Ireland Office, on how the two jurisdictions of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland related to each other across a wide range of issues and concerns. Secondly, from Paddy Hart, International Fund for Ireland, and Tony Kennedy, Co-operation North, as to how major funding was harnessed for the purpose of bringing communities in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland into a closer relationship with one another.

Belfast City Hall

At the City Hall the Expert Groups were given a talk by Brian Kennedy of the Bank of Ireland on the relationship between British sterling and the Irish punt and the complexities and anomalies it gave rise to. This subsequently proved to be invaluable to the Moldovan and Transdnestrian delegations, for whom currency problems loomed large.

The Expert Groups also met with representatives of Sinn Féin, who gave their own equally forthright analysis of politics in Northern Ireland.

Finally, there was a civic reception hosted by the Deputy Lord Mayor, Jim Rodgers. Present were elected representatives, Unionist and Nationalist, and local community activists from projects which had supported MICOM's work.

Parliament Buildings, Stormont

Tony Canavan, Head of Section, Community Relations Unit, explained to the visitors how his unit was attempting to address the problems of a divided society by providing funding for numerous cross-community projects initiated by locally-based NGOs. Robert Crawford, Northern Ireland Office, explained to the visitors how the United Kingdom government, through its legislation, had sought to deal with the complexities of the Northern Ireland situation.

For most of their stay the visitors had been provided, courtesy of the NI Forum, with a specially-prepared room in the Forum building. There the two Expert Groups, the Mediators and the MICOM Facilitation Team engaged in a series of explorations of the numerous problems felt to be impeding the way to resolution of the Moldovan/Transdnestrian conflict. In particular, the international Mediators and the Facilitation Team discussed how the two separate processes – the mediated negotiations and the conflict resolution process – related to one another, and how they could be made to work in a more complementary fashion.

One of the main gains for the visitors was the very fact of having been given 'space' to take a step back from their own conflict – and the stalled negotiations – and look at them from a different perspective.

They also gained a deeper understanding of the Northern Ireland conflict. The continued existence of the 'peaceline' after 28 years of inter-communal conflict helped to convince the visitors that violence did not 'solve' problems, but merely created more. The visitors had also learned much, by their own admission, from their exposure to the representatives of the Northern Ireland political parties. Their comments revealed that they had fully understood the problems still besetting the Northern Ireland 'peace process': "The Stormont Talks are being boycotted by some Unionist parties; the Forum by Nationalist parties. You only seem to have *half* a 'peace process'?"

A striking measure of the seminar's success was provided shortly afterwards, when, following the visitors' return to Moldova, it was announced on Moldovan television that regular meetings of the Expert Groups, which had ceased in July, would resume from 4 December.

Association of Mayors ‘Study Visit’

As part of its community development programme in Moldova, MICOM and the JCDC were helping to address the complex problems confronting village councils in the transition from communism and the command economy to a mixed economy and democratic structures and institutions. Many village councils were represented by the Association of Mayors, which had 120 members drawn from all parts of Moldova. A special ‘study visit’ to Northern Ireland was arranged for the Association of Mayors and took place in July 1998.

Highlights

A full day was spent at Belfast City Hall, where Rev. Roy Magee’s reflections on the conflict between the two traditions generated much interest.

A visit to Draperstown Rural College, County Londonderry, proved highly relevant to the Moldovans. They were given important insights into why this deprived area found it necessary to have its own study facilities, which provided local people with the necessary skills to create jobs within their community.

A visit to County Donegal included the Ballyconnell Community Development Project in Falcarragh. The visitors heard about the struggle by local people to rejuvenate an area which had been steadily losing population and experiencing social and economic blight. The Project had helped turn this situation around.

There was also a talk on the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation through which the Ballyconnell Project had been able to gain assistance. The Project’s Director, Paul Skinnader, detailed how an area suffering from high levels of unemployment, few resources, poor soil and with little going for it except beautiful scenery, could be rejuvenated. The Manager, Michael Murray, offered further insights into just what a local community could achieve once it began to receive even limited funding.

Also in Donegal, the Dunlewy Project proved to be of great interest. Although this was a community-based, self-help, tourism development project, the local people were conscious of the richness of their culture and were not trying to ‘sell’ it, but to ‘share’ it. Seamus Gallagher, the Project Manager, talked about its strong emphasis on community development as well as environmental concerns.

At a civic lunch in Carrickfergus, Fraser Agnew spoke about the continuing work between Northern Ireland and Moldova and of its impact on conflict resolution work in Northern Ireland itself. Janet Crampsey, mayor of Carrickfergus, welcomed the visitors, and the Economic Development Officer for the borough, Stella McArdle, gave a presentation on the council’s economic programme and the self-help initiatives being supported by the council.

As well as a number of feedback opportunities to evaluate the impact of the study settings, a number of formal sessions were given over to in-depth analysis. The ‘study visit’ proved very successful, with its objectives being largely met.

Return to Albena

As a follow-up to the highly successful 1997 Albena seminar, a second seminar was held in September 1998. Present were journalists, businessmen, parliamentarians, students, housewives, lawyers, teachers, military personnel, as well as representatives of NGOs, local and national authorities, national minorities and others. There were specialists and facilitators from Moldova/Transdnistria, Northern Ireland, Great Britain, United States, Poland, Germany and Romania. There were representatives of the Moldovan and Transdnistrian governmental Expert Groups. Also present were: General Roman Harmosa, the OSCE deputy Head of Mission; Vladimir Ustinov, the Russian Federation deputy mediating ambassador; Evgheni Levitskai, the Ukrainian mediator; and George Roman of the Joint Control Commission (peace-keeping force).

By addressing community development and conflict resolution needs in a complementary way, the general purpose of the seminar was to facilitate interaction between governmental and non-governmental sectors in Moldova and Transdnistria so as to let the former hear about the lives and conditions of ordinary people, and for both to begin to find ways of working together in the development of civil society and participative democracy. It was also hoped that the processes of mediated negotiations and conflict resolution would gain impetus and purpose from such interaction.

The non-governmental representatives worked together in both small group and plenary report-back sessions, forming themselves into special interest groups whose purpose was to identify problems and to prepare relevant action plans.

The governmental representatives, along with the international Mediators, had special workshops of their own built into the seminar, aimed at assisting preparations for a resumption of their mediated negotiations – which had stalled yet again – and their attempts at conflict resolution.

Governmental and NGO representatives came together in the plenary sessions, in an unofficial capacity, to work on the identification, review and analysis of problems and related needs, and how these might be addressed by all levels of leadership working collaboratively within and between both jurisdictions.

An important theme running through the seminar was a focus on personal responsibility and on making the link between the personal and the global. A challenging aspect of the Action Plan training was the suggestion that ‘oneself’ be included in the initial definition of the problem, as one of the pillars maintaining it. The fact that an individual had not taken any positive action made that individual part of the problem. Taking personal responsibility through action with others transformed that individual into part of the solution.

Information about other conflicts, and listening to the feelings of people recently confronted by conflict, such as the Northern Irish participants, had a

significant impact on the discussions, and, indeed, the atmosphere of the proceedings. The Northern Irish participants described the deep trauma both their communities had suffered, and yet, at the same time, they also presented an affecting image of what peace was about, for they each acknowledged personal flaws in dealing with one another and quite clearly acted in ways which showed their concern for, and support of, one another, despite strongly held political differences.

Seminar outputs included the making of plans and preparations for the resumption of the stalled inter-governmental negotiations – these negotiations resumed on 7 October. Also, shortly after the seminar the Moldovan representative on the Joint Control Commission – the body overseeing the Security Zone and the peace-keeping forces – announced that the number of Moldovan troops in the Security Zone was being reduced following discussions on the subject at Albena.

The seminar was an important boost to the community development work and conflict resolution efforts in Moldova and Transnistria. Perhaps, however, it was the interaction between the different levels which was the most significant, and possibly unique, aspect of the seminar.

The ‘Football Visit’

While the community development work was proceeding ever more productively, this was not the case with the processes of mediated negotiations and conflict resolution. Although MICOM’s interventions had been able to assist the governmental Expert Groups to overcome each impasse in their mediated negotiations, the two sides still hesitated, despite all the groundwork accomplished during the ‘study visits’, to engage properly in a process of assisted analysis, one in which they would analyse their own and each others’ positions, as well as examine the strategies they were adopting to achieve their objectives. Such a process, MICOM felt, was the only realistic way to engender movement towards meaningful resolution of the conflict. During Albena, however, tentative discussions had taken place regarding a forthcoming event MICOM felt might provide an opportunity to encourage the two sides to move closer to this assisted analysis – and that event was a football match.

In February 1998 President Lucinschi, Moldova, and Igor Smirnov, Transnistria, had been met in their respective capitals by Camplisson and Lord Hylton. In the course of the meetings Camplisson, in a jocular manner, had said to each leader that he was planning a summit ‘workshop’ in Belfast for both presidents on 18 November 1998. The fact that Moldova was to play Northern Ireland in Belfast on that day in a European Championship match, had, ‘of course’, no bearing on his reasoning. The idea of such a visit somehow got into the next day’s papers in Moldova. The Head of the OSCE mission in Moldova, John Evans, US, told MICOM that such a visit would, in his opinion,

greatly assist the search for a solution to the Moldovan/Transdniestrian conflict.

A sub-group of the LCI (Tommy Dickson, Louis West, Fraser Agnew and Alan Hewitt) persuaded Jim Boyce, the president of the Irish Football Association, to extend an invitation to the match to both presidents. A further invitation went from Dr Mo Mowlam, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. In the event, due to serious domestic and regional difficulties, necessitating the attention of both presidents, only a Moldovan emissary team was able to come, led by ambassador Ion Leshanu. However, an unexpected benefit emerged from the changed circumstances, in that it provided an opportunity to focus on the needs of the Moldovan governmental representatives. The Northern Ireland conflict experience had shown that while it was vital to engage protagonists in a shared process, it could be important and productive to engage each protagonist separately, in what was termed 'single identity' work. Utilising a similar 'single identity' approach with the Moldovan government delegation proved very productive.

As well as in-depth workshops and discussions, the programme also included its usual mixture of civic receptions, interactive cross-communal activities and social events – all now the hallmarks of any MICOM venture. The main components of the programme were:

- Michael Hall and Alan Hewitt took the visitors on a tour of the 'peacelines' in North and West Belfast, to show them the physical and environmental impact made on both communities by such stark divisions, and as a reminder that when political leaders fail to remove the underlying causes of distrust then the generational character of such barriers is assured.
- The visitors went to Parliament Buildings, Stormont, for a discussion on the Good Friday Agreement led by Jackie Johnston, a Northern Ireland Government official. At Stormont they also heard presentations from: John Alderdice, former leader of the Alliance Party and now Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly; Alban Maginness, SDLP and former Lord Mayor of Belfast; Jim Wells, DUP; Fraser Agnew, United Unionist Assembly Party; John Kelly, Sinn Féin; and Fred Cobain, UUP. These political leaders gave their respective party positions on the current state of the peace process, and highlighted important factors which had led to the new possibilities, and dangers, which now existed.
- There was a social evening during which Ambassador Leshanu remarked that the visit had helped him appreciate just how small a place the world was and how important it was to build peaceful relationships between peoples.
- And, of course, the Northern Ireland v Moldova European Championship match, where the Moldovans were guests at a pre-match dinner at Windsor Park. Jim Boyce, in welcoming Ambassador Leshanu and his delegation, wished them success in their quest for resolution of the conflict in Moldova. [It is worthy of note that the Moldovan international team, as with the Northern Ireland team, includes players from both sides of their 'divide'.]

The Drumcree linkage

During the July 1998 Study Visit to Northern Ireland, the Drumcree ‘stand-off’ had again reached crisis point. Roadblocks erected by Loyalist protesters had forced changes to MICOM’s programme, with the Moldovan and Transdniestrian visitors at one stage effectively isolated in their hotel. Conflict resolution specialists Mark Hoffman and Susan Allen Nan, part of MICOM’s facilitation team, were asked by two LCI members, Fraser Agnew and Alan Hewitt, both Orangemen, whether they felt there was anything the ‘Moldovan format’ could offer to the impasse at Drumcree. They responded that first they would have to determine the *nature* of the problem at Drumcree, and so, at short notice, arranged to meet separately with a representative of the Garvaghy Road Residents’ Coalition and a representative of the Portadown District Orange Lodge. Although time constraints prevented anything from developing from these fleeting soundings, Hoffman and Allen Nan were of the opinion that the ‘Moldovan format’ *could* prove useful here, and expressed a willingness to return and pursue the matter if requested to do so.

In January 1999 MICOM was again asked to explore possibilities for assistance regarding the Drumcree issue. Meetings took place with relevant individuals and a discussion paper was then prepared by Camplisson and Hall and presented to those individuals. The text of the paper read as follows:

Drumcree ‘Stand-off’: a discussion paper

The purpose of this discussion paper is to assist in generating movement towards a solution to the Drumcree ‘dispute’.

The Problem

The ‘dispute’ which has arisen between the Orange Order, specifically its Portadown Lodge, and the Garvaghy Road Residents’ Coalition, has thwarted all attempts at resolution since 1995. Indeed, the dispute has all the signs of becoming even more entrenched, with no positive outcome in sight.

Failed attempts at ‘resolution’

Various ‘scenarios’ have been suggested as a ‘compromise solution’: the march to be allowed to proceed but with smaller numbers and without music or banners; the march and the protest against it to be allowed to take place simultaneously, but peaceably; the march to take place only on alternate years... to no avail. The good offices of various intermediaries – church, business and political leaders; the British and Irish governments – have been applied to the dispute . . . to no avail. Conventional mechanisms for settling disputes – mediated negotiations, arbitration, ‘proximity talks’ – have been brought to bear on the problem... again, to no avail.

A ‘dispute’ or a symptom of something much deeper?

Most of these failed attempts at finding a solution have emanated from people of undoubted expertise, and what has been attempted to date has often worked successfully when applied to other types of dispute. The conclusion must be, therefore, that the Drumcree ‘stand-off’ is not a mere ‘dispute’, but is instead a potent *manifestation of the deep-rooted identity-related conflict* which divides our two communities. If this is indeed a more accurate description of the ‘stand-off’, then the Drumcree ‘dispute’ may *not* be amenable to resolution via ‘dispute-focused’ mechanisms operating *in isolation*.

Conflicting perspectives

Portadown Lodge feel that they have a right to walk along what they consider to be a ‘traditional’ marching route, and assert that the refusal to let them do so is an infringement of their civil and religious liberties.

Garvaghy Road Residents’ Coalition feel that as they do not share the cultural traditions being celebrated by the Orangemen, any attempt to march through the area without agreement is an infringement of *their* civil liberties.

Furthermore, the impact of 30 years of violent conflict has led to deep distrust on both sides. Many Orangemen feel that the Residents have an agenda other than the pursuit of ‘equality’, while many Residents feel that the Orangemen’s desire to march down the Garvaghy Road has more to do with preserving Protestant ‘dominance’ than with preserving Protestant ‘heritage’.

For its part, the government, while wishing to be seen as evenhanded, cannot avoid being perceived as party to the dispute. It is now in the position of arbiter between two ‘rights’ which are in collision, and with no prospects of a ‘win-win’ outcome.

Wider implications

While the ‘dispute’ certainly has a definite ‘local’ setting, it is quite clear that the stances adopted by both sets of protagonists hold a deep resonance among many within Northern Ireland’s two main traditions. Many Protestants and Unionists view the ‘stand-off’ as a test of their resolve to preserve their cultural heritage, which they claim has been under constant attack. Many Catholics and Nationalists see it as a test of whether or not they are going to be accorded equal status in Northern Ireland, claiming that their community has been forced into a subservient position throughout most of the state’s existence. The Drumcree ‘stand-off’, then, is a symptom of *much wider community needs and concerns*.

Is there a need for a ‘dual’ approach to resolution?

If, as is suggested above, the Drumcree ‘stand-off’ is much more than a ‘local’ dispute, and is instead a symptom of our deep-rooted conflict –related to frustrated identity needs among Northern Ireland’s two main traditions – then a number of things follow as a consequence:

- (i) it is highly unlikely that it can be resolved by simply treating it as a local problem;
- (ii) it is equally unlikely that it can be resolved at a local level alone.

What might be required is a new way of looking at the dispute and its context. A *conflict resolution process*, focusing on the *root causes* of the problem, and operating *alongside* other processes (mediation, etc) could bring forward new ways of thinking, fresh ideas and prospects for a ‘win-win’ outcome.

Brief outline of a possible conflict resolution process

- Before commencing, both sides would be encouraged to approach their conflict as a *shared problem* and to engage in a ‘problem-solving process’, the essence of which would be analysis.
- The process would be facilitated by an international team of conflict resolution specialists (acting as a neutral third party), acceptable to all sides.
- As a preliminary step, the facilitation team would engage representatives of the two main protagonists (separately) in an identification of what other parties needed to be brought into the conflict resolution process.
- The team would then engage all these parties (separately or in groups) in an *assisted self-analysis* of:
 - the factors which gave rise to the conflict as manifest at Drumcree
 - the nature and depth of the conflict and the identity-related needs which were at its core (including those of one’s opponents)
 - the factors contributing to the current impasse at Drumcree
- If this assisted analysis proved productive the parties would then be engaged in an exploration of those actions and strategies which either hindered or advanced the attainment of their respective needs.
- Actions which might prove to be mutually beneficial would also be identified, and to this end the parties might look at the experience of other conflicts around the world.
- Ultimately, short and long-term strategies for engendering ongoing *movement towards* conflict resolution might then be agreed upon and set in place.
- The facilitation team would **not** attempt to mediate or seek to reach a short-term accommodation (regarding the ‘stand-off’) within the conflict resolution process. The team’s function would be to facilitate *movement towards* long-term conflict resolution among the protagonists.
- However, given the current widespread desire to find a speedy settlement of the Drumcree ‘stand-off’, it is likely that mediation attempts by others would be operating at the same time. The conflict resolution process outlined above would not seek to hinder any such initiatives, but would strive to make them compatible with conflict resolution imperatives.
- Indeed, it would be hoped that a *complementarity* could be established between the conflict resolution process and any mediated negotiations. For example, if the protagonists at some stage came to hold the shared belief that the issues *at the core* of the Drumcree ‘stand-off’ *were being adequately addressed within the conflict resolution process*, this might make it possible for the ‘stand-off’ itself to be more easily isolated as a simple ‘dispute’, thereby making it more amenable to settlement through mediated negotiations.

Overview

Reaction to the ‘Drumcree’ discussion paper by the main protagonists has been open but noncommittal, and we respect the confidentiality of those who provided feedback. However, while a conflict resolution process such as outlined in the paper is not being actively pursued in relation to Drumcree, the ideas upon which it is based have generated interest elsewhere in the community, both at grassroots and at party political level.

Given such interest, this pamphlet, by describing the conflict resolution process as it evolved in the Moldovan context, hopes to stimulate discussion surrounding the benefits to be gained from such an approach being applied to our own conflict, especially if all other avenues currently being pursued continue to meet with obstacles.

Even if the present impasse over arms decommissioning is overcome, it is likely that the political process will continue to meet with further hurdles, each of which could have the potential to derail it. In Moldova, however, whenever such problems created impasses in the political process – and there have been many such impasses – the parties found that the conflict resolution process offered a means whereby they could take ‘time out’, during which they could endeavour to build trust again. Furthermore, within the conflict resolution process the parties are engaging in an analysis of the *root causes* of their conflict, as well as a search for a ‘win-win’ outcome, something which the political process, by its adversarial nature, is not geared to do.

It has to be stressed again that the conflict resolution process as outlined in this pamphlet is not something which would compete with the political negotiating process, but instead would *complement* it and seek to enhance its effectiveness.

The Moldovan experience also highlights the positive results which can be gained when efforts at grassroots community level are brought into a close co-operation with the political negotiating process, and the possibility exists for a similar co-operation here, with community groups not only helping to extend the process of analysis at grassroots level, but, if called upon, helping to allay fears within our communities as to the nature and purpose of the process itself.

The members of the Local Community Initiative are willing to facilitate debate on the ideas contained within this pamphlet, should that be requested.

Addendum: MICOM’s work in Moldova continues. Many difficulties lie ahead, particularly with regard to the Expert Groups’ continued reticence to become fully involved in assisted analysis. Recent events in Kosovo have also impacted negatively in Moldova and Transdnistria. It is of some comfort that MICOM’s community development and conflict resolution work has undoubtedly contributed to the stabilising of the situation in Moldova, and helped prevent the drift toward ghettoisation which occurred elsewhere in the region, a drift which in places was compounded by the tragedy of ethnic cleansing.

MICOM's efforts in Moldova would have been impossible without the generous support of many people throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Some of these people have played an ongoing role in those efforts – indeed, it is from such stalwarts that the 'Local Community Initiative' was formed – while others have performed a diverse assortment of tasks: offering hospitality, sharing expertise, giving talks, organising 'tours', participating in workshops, providing government support, giving party political analysis to the Moldovan and Transdnestrian visitors, or simply engaging in discussion with MICOM and its associates on the merits of the work being pursued in Moldova.

The list below is not exhaustive. Indeed, it only includes those who either live in Northern Ireland and the Republic or whose work is specific to here. A similar list would be required for all MICOM's associates in the rest of the UK, US, Europe (including Russia and the Balkans), Australia, and, of course, in Moldova and Transdnestria.

Ian Adamson	David Ervine	Patsy McShane
Fraser Agnew	Seamus Gallagher	Rev Roy Magee
Tommy Aitken	Dermot Gault	Bernie Marshall
David Alderdice	Ludmilla Gilmour	Tom Maskey
John Alderdice	Will Glendinning	John Morrow
Paul Arthur	John Gorman	Dr Mo Mowlam
Alex Attwood	Tommy Gorman	Irene Murphy
Jonathan Bardon	Michael Hall	Pat Morgan
Glen Barr	Jack Hanvey	Martin Morris
Alan Bell	Paddy Hart	Dermot Nesbitt
Boyd Black	Tom Hartley	Fred Proctor
Jim Boyce	Alan Hewitt	Tommy O'Reilly
Jim Brown	Jackie Hewitt	Billy Patterson
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Patricia Cahill	Billy Hutchinson	Moirá Quinn
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