

BUILDING A YOUNG CONSTITUENCY FOR PEACE ACROSS THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND TURKEY



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FOREWORD



David Lee **Chairman, EPF Board of Trustees**

Young people in the countries of the South Caucasus and Turkey have come of age during the conflicts and their aftermath and have already lived through dramatic hardships. They live in an environment characterized by closed borders, frozen conflicts, and flourishing stereotypes, with a dearth of opportunities to interact directly with each other.

In 2005, EPF began implementing the Youth Bank program as a way to develop active young leaders at the community level. The Youth Bank model was originally established in 1999 in Northern Ireland to address the area's violent political and religious conflicts. EPF immediately saw the applicability of the model in the South Caucasus to help people across conflicting societies find common ground, detract young people from conflicts, and involve them in positive activities within their communities.

EPF's successful experience encouraged us to expand the program to cross-community, cross-border, and cross-conflict settings. Now, EPF has enabled the establishment of Youth Bank committees in Abkhazia and Turkey, and uses the model to bring young people together face to face from across the region. EPF engaged youth from 43 locations across the South Caucasus and Turkey, ranging from İzmir to Gudauta through Armavir to Ganja to Marneuli.

Having seen many Youth Banks throughout the region working in their own communities, it was particularly satisfying in February 2013 to see these young people all together in one room building personal relationships and demonstrating that they are ready to take advantage of the opportunities of the future rather than holding on to the bitterness of the past.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'D' followed by a horizontal line and a few smaller strokes.

PROJECT AT A GLANCE

On March 1, 2012, Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF) began implementation of the *Building a Young Constituency for Peace across the South Caucasus and Turkey* project. The goal of the project was to contribute to peace and stability in the South Caucasus and Turkey by creating an environment of respect among young people and civil society groups across borders. EPF concluded agreements with its two partners, Save the Children (SC) and Toplum Gönüllüleri (TOG), for the activities included in the proposal to be undertaken in Abkhazia and Turkey respectively. SC enlisted the local NGO Alert, which is based in Gali.

The program had the following objectives:

- Building leadership and civic participation capacities of young people in the South Caucasus and Turkey to work in the field of community development at the grassroots level.
- Fostering trust among young people within and across communities by promoting cooperation around common agendas.
- Promoting positive perceptions across borders by publicizing cross-border youth cooperation.

The project employed the Youth Bank (YB) methodology, which was originally established in 1999 in Northern Ireland to address that area's violent political and religious conflicts. The YB offered a practical mechanism to help people in societies in conflict to find common ground, detract young people from conflicts, and involve them in positive, community-based activities.

The initial phase of the project included the establishment of nine new YB committees in Abkhazia (five) and Turkey (four). The process entailed announcing the opportunity, soliciting applications from interested youth, and selecting an appropriate number of participants in each committee. Once selected, YB participants underwent extensive training. The training covered the fundamentals of youth-led grant-making, including research techniques, interviewing, project selection, publicity, financial reporting, and monitoring and evaluation. It also introduced important values to the participants in their work, including transparency and collaboration. These trainings were also an opportunity for participants to network domestically and served to develop a sense of a YB community within each location. EPF collaborated with its long-time partner, the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI), to deliver trainings to new YB members.

Once trained, YB committee members then returned to their communities, conducted needs assessments for problems that could be addressed with small-scale funding, composed and publicized requests for proposals, received project applications, short-listed and interviewed project applicants, and oversaw and reported back on the selected projects.

Across the 43 YBs involved in the project, almost 200 projects were selected and funded and more than 1000 young people in the surrounding communities implemented projects with assistance from the YB committee members. YB committee members were also given opportunities to connect with other YB committees in their vicinities through domestic networking workshops, exchange visits to Armenia and Turkey, and a culminating conference in Istanbul, Turkey. During the culminating conference, participants from all locations presented information about their communities, the work of their YBs, discussed common problems and interests, and developed initial project ideas for collaborative projects.

While other youth engagement programs exist, the YB methodology is unique in its emphasis on being youth-led. This difference was best described by a YB participant in Gori, Georgia: "There are many projects implemented for young people in Gori. But YB is different because young people are trusted to design and implement the projects themselves. Most importantly EPF trusts us to spend the money, and this empowers us a lot." Being able to make decisions themselves increases YB members' confidence and capacity to act as viable agents for community change.

EXEMPLARY PROJECTS

Despite the different environments in the 43 communities in which the project was implemented, local needs assessments revealed common concerns among young people throughout the South Caucasus and Turkey. Below are descriptions of exemplary projects that strived to address similar themes in various communities.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Project: *Labyrinth*, Khobi YB

The needs assessment conducted by the Khobi YB members revealed that environmental pollution is a major problem facing the residents of Khobi. To promote the involvement of youth in caring for the environment, the YB committee funded a youth-led initiative group to organize a series of activities in the nearby village of Pirveli Maisi. They started by informing young people in Pirveli Maisi by organizing informational meetings at schools and distributing creative hand-made informational leaflets. The awareness raising campaign was followed by a cleanup action in the center of Pirveli Maisi village,



in which more than 30 community members volunteered. In addition, over a one month period, 26 volunteers worked hard to develop a small park in the village school yard, complete with wooden benches, garbage bins, trees, and flowers. This was welcomed by the local residents, as the park is the only meeting place for both young people and adults in the village. Because of the importance of the YB project for the village, the youth-led initiative group decided to name the park the *Youth Bank Park*, and designed the Youth Bank logo out of stones in the center of the park.

Tamar Gabisonia, a member of the initiative group that designed and led the implementation of the project, stated, “We are proud of what we all did together! The new park made the school surroundings much more attractive and enjoyable. However, we believe that the most important achievement of our project is that our peers realized their responsibility towards the environment and that they can play an important role in preserving and improving the environment around them.”

Project: *My EcoBag*, Yerevan YB

The Yerevan YB funded the project called *My EcoBag*. The project was implemented by a group of students, in cooperation with a European Voluntary Service (EVS) volunteer from Poland, Gosia Siuta, and two Armenian partners. The project had two components: visits to schools in order to introduce pupils to global and local environmental problems, including air, water, and soil pollution and the effect it has on humans and animals. The second stage included the design of ‘eco-bags’ made of canvas, which the participating children and young



people decorated with slogans and designs addressing important environmental issues, with their thoughts about nature and how to protect the environment. More than 200 schoolchildren participated in the project. A movie about the “My EcoBag” project is available on You Tube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9xgmPu4XS4>.

Project: *Let's Protect Nature!*, Gali YB

The Gali YB committee chose to support a project focused on engaging community members in environmental protection. One of the project team members, Dima Gogokhia, has learned about the YB and submitted a project to plant trees in the town park. Dima stated: "I often heard from the older generation that we were obliged to protect nature, but unfortunately the majority does not care about nature or the environment in general. When we started implementing our project, I was delighted to see many young people and adults engaged in the process of planting trees in the park." Through the project, the project team also distributed calendars focused on the theme of protecting nature. Dima was



very happy with the small steps that were initiated through his project: "This event passed a message to our communities that each of us is responsible to protect nature and create a healthy living environment. I am proud that there are young people in our town who are promoting environmental protection and that I am one of their supporters."

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

Project: *Let's Watch Old Azerbaijani Films Together*, Agjabedi YB

The project focused on rekindling interest in old Azerbaijani films that are full of vivid stories and demonstrations of cultural traditions. The project team consisted of a group of young activists from Agjabedi, who are friends in daily life and who are fans of old films. In the project proposal that they submitted to the Agjabedi YB committee, the project team mentioned that there is a lack of interest among the younger generation in the cultural heritage of their country. Older films allow the viewer to travel back in time and experience the country's history, culture, and traditions from a different period. At the same time, these films provided an interesting forum to initiate discussion about traditional values and how they have changed in the modern environment.



With the grant from the Agjabedi YB, the project team organized a series of film evenings for people from different backgrounds and of different ages. Volunteers and professional artists also contributed during the process of project preparation and implementation. But the real benefit can be seen in the YB members. Ismayil Ismayilov, a member of the Agjabedi YB, talked about how the process changed him and his fellow YB committee members: "We started working as a team without knowing each other well. Some of us were shy, some of us had doubts. We all had some shortcomings that came out during our joint work and we certainly made mistakes. But the best part about working together is that you are becoming friends and don't even realize it is happening. Now we became more communicative with each other, more self-confident in our opinions, and more comfortable in expressing ourselves. Through the YB, we became leaders in the community. This is our success!"

Project: *Short Movies*, Atakum YB

In order to socialize and develop their skills in the sphere of art, young people from Batman and Samsun decided to implement two projects on making short movies. Volunteers from Samsun received support from the Atakum YB team to

shoot two short movies raising public awareness about people with visual and hearing impairments. The idea was developed by Mustafa Aydin, a student in the special education department. Short movies are his hobby, which is why he decided to prepare the script and bring it to the YB. He wanted to address the lack of sensitivity that disabled people face in the society. After receiving a grant, he organized a team of volunteers who helped him to make two short and very touching movies. Shooting took place in the public transportation in Atakum, attracting the attention of passersby who became a part of the project. The short movies – “Understanding” and “Silence and Darkness” – were publicized via social media and presented in the İğne Deliği Youth Center. Both movies are available on You Tube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TDEwXBhgZI> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYdPtUwA7ZI>.



Project: *Happy Faces, Ochamchire Youth Bank*

Asida Adleiba believes that children are one of the most important collective responsibilities of a community. However many children’s lives are not full of positive emotions in Ochamchira. But Asida had had the simple idea of establishing a puppet theater in her home town in order to bring a small amount of happiness and entertainment to children in her community. When she learned about the YB, she got a project proposal form, filled it out, and submitted it to the YB. The project was supported and, together with her friends, they purchased all the necessary equipment for a puppet theatre.

The first performance of the puppet theatre was staged in Secondary School #4 and attended by children, teachers, young people, and parents. After that successful start, the group regularly organizes puppet theater acts in the schools of Ochamchire. Asida and her friends are very happy with the contribution they have made to the lives of young people in their communities. As she enthused, “The happy faces of the children motivate us to continue this activity in the region.” As one particular success, the local administration has been providing transportation for the puppet theater so that the group can perform for children in schools and other venues at a greater scale.



HEALTHY LIFESTYLE HABITS

Project: *Healthy Lifestyle and Hygiene, Sheki YB*

The *Defend Ourselves from Infections* project was elaborated by a group of young students from the city of Sheki and was selected for funding by the Sheki YB there. The problem to be addressed by the young activists was the practice of serving several clients with similar tools and instruments (e.g. manicure sets) in local salons. The lack of disinfection could lead to the spread of serious infectious diseases around the city. The project team consisted of young students, ladies between the ages of 18 and 21, who launched awareness campaign among the staff of women salons and their clients. The awareness campaign included the targeted distribution of booklets and flyers as well as public sessions conducted by physicians.

Young people, physicians, and city residents volunteered in the project. They helped to distribute flyers around the women’s salons functioning in different districts of the city. The physicians conducted sessions on the potential grave consequences of unsanitary usage of manicure, pedicure, and other accessories at the salons, what should be done to

prevent any problems, and what should be done if a person was infected.

One of the project team members, Gunel Allahverdiyeva, an 18 year old from Sheki, commented on the experience of being involved in community activism as a young woman. She stated, “There are unwritten rules in our society and we have to go along with them, but nobody thinks why we should in general. One of those rules says: A woman should not engage in any public activities; she should be totally engaged in the household. Before participating in this project, I did not believe that I would ever engage in public activities. Now, our project team is capable and willing to address not only so called ‘girls’ problems,’ but other problems that exist in our community. As for me, I have greatly matured during this project...and I like it.”

Narmin Jabbarzade, a Sheki YB committee member who was overseeing the project, reported that at least three salons in the city have changed their practices to comply with the doctors’ recommendations and bought equipment needed for disinfection. She states, however, that others have not changed their practices. According to Narmin, this is not seen as a grave setback: “At least the clients have become more aware and the staff in almost all the salons that participated in the project mentioned that they had started using rubbing alcohol to wipe the accessories after use. We supported this project and something has changed and we are happy about that!”



Project: *Healthy Spirit, Healthy Body, Aspindza YB*

According to the community needs assessment made by the Aspindza YB members, young people residing in Aspindza are susceptible to drug abuse and addiction. To tackle the above-mentioned problem and encourage local youth to exercise and practice healthy lifestyle, the youth-led initiative group organized a soccer tournament for young people residing in various villages of the Aspindza municipality. A total of 20 teams competed over a three-day period, with approximately 120 players taking part in over 18 matches. At least 40 community members attended each match. It was a huge success, and the decision was made to hold a second tournament this year and furthermore, to make this an annual event and a fantastic opportunity to unite the young people in fun, friendship, and sports to promote healthy lifestyles.



The project was an eye-opener for the rest of the community. One of the members of the project team, Nikoloz Suaridze, doesn’t recall any type of similar activity in Aspindza before the *Healthy Spirit, Healthy Body* project. According to him, “This was the first and the only large-scale

tournament administrated purely by youth. I can't recall any tournaments covering almost the whole municipality, until we implemented our project. BUT, if you ask me how many of them were organized after we did ours, I could not even tell you the number because there have been so many. Our project turned out to be inspirational to promote a healthy lifestyle and I am very happy because of this."

Project: *Choose a Healthy Lifestyle!!!, Zemo Bargebi YB*

In the village of Zemo Bargebi there are no places where young people can go to engage in different extracurricular activities. As a result, many young people are just hanging around in the streets, doing nothing. Giorgi Gergedava, one of the members of the project team, had wanted to study at the university, but due to economic hardship remained in the village to help at home.

According to Giorgi, "When the YB was created and composed by very young people in our village, the hope that this would lead to positive changes appeared among me and my friends. I heard about the call for proposals and decided to develop a project proposal with my friends... I could never imagine that YB members, these young people, counseled us how to develop the project proposal. I was impressed by their competence!"



Giorgi's project idea was dedicated to promoting healthy lifestyles by engaging young people in sports. It was the group's first experience of project development and implementation, which turned into a great learning experience. "We mobilized young people living in our village and encouraged them to participate in basketball, tennis, and chess competitions organized as part of our small project. The winners of competitions received awards."

The Zemo Bargebi YB was very pleased with the success of the project. The initiative group was also satisfied with their experience and already intends to continue regularly organizing sporting events to inspire all young people of the village to make changes in their community for the better!

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Project: *Gender and Young People's Free Time, Ganja YB-2*

The Girls Club Project was selected and funded by Ganja YB-2 through the YB's call for proposals. Aygul Akhmedova, who developed this project with her friends, is a 20 year old student from Ganja. She is studying Economics at the Ganja Agrarian University. Her project team wanted to address the issue of the lack of social activism among young women. They tried to clarify why there is an issue and came to the conclusion that there are a lot of prejudices, stereotypes, and traditions, which inhibit young women's activism.

The project team decided to develop a physical space where young women could come and speak about issues of concern to them or acquire new skills. The team developed a relaxed atmosphere, where participants would feel open to sharing their concerns and interests. In this warm atmosphere, young women exchanged their knowledge in various spheres, ranging from job interview techniques, through English language skills, to proper nutrition.

The project team had a lot of volunteers who helped to make their idea come true, including both EVS and Peace Corps volunteers, and members and practicing tutors from the Young Leaders NGO. That pool of various teachers shared their experiences and practices being used in their countries with the project team.

Elnura Musazadeh, a member of the Ganja YB-2, was satisfied with the results of the project thus far: “Our YB tries to unite people in solving a problem. While trying to solve it people are communicating and break their stereotypes, they move the frames fixed by the society, help each other, become friends. Even if the problem of women’s active participation in community life does not disappear or is not solved immediately through this project, the first step was taken by the participants and as we know, the first step is the hardest one to take”



Project: “GO” project, Selçuk YB

Selçuk is a town with a population around 28,000. There are not many places for young people to socialize. The idea of the “Go” project was brought to the YB in Selçuk by three high school students looking for a ways to socialize and develop skills at the same time. They were interested in strategic games and already played chess when they learned about the game “Go.” “Go” is a strategic game that originated in China more than 2,500 years ago, known and played in Asia and the Middle East. The game, which was very popular in the past, was almost forgotten in the town, as only one elderly man remember playing it in his childhood. Students learned that in there exists an association in İzmir that promotes the game and decided to submit a project to the YB to get the grant for spreading and promoting the game in Selçuk as a way to bring young people together.

The project team invited Gülçin Çakır, Türker Özşekerli, Yukari Yasuda, and Güçlü Yılmaz from the GO Association to present the game’s history and philosophy. Fifteen young people participated in the workshops organized in Selçuk and learned the rules of the game. After the workshops, the group of young people participated in the “GO Days” event organized in İzmir by GO Association. Workshops were followed by meetings organized in Selçuk by the young players. The



group is growing as more and more young people are attracted by the game. The project team stays in touch with the GO Association and participates in their GO events. The group is planning to participate in the national GO tournament, which will take place in İzmir in February and to promote the game further by organizing workshops in high schools in Selçuk.

As one of the players, Umut, commented: “At the beginning, I thought it was a little bit boring but after I had learned the rules and started playing I was amazed. I realized how useful it is in my daily life. After I started playing I became more successful at school. I want to understand and get to know better the people I’m playing with. Somehow I can communicate better with my friends and family now.”

Project: *Assisting Senior Citizens, Dilijan YB*

The Dilijan YB funded the project *Assisting Senior Citizens* submitted by 12 students of the local Medical College. Artur Avetisyan, Mariam Tukhtaryan, and Ani Asatryan wanted to provide social services to lonely elderly people living in their town. The grant was used to buy basic medication, a blood pressure meter, and first-aid kits for the people who often have health issues, but no opportunity to attend doctors or relatives to look after them. This project helped the group of elderly people to get in touch with students, who, apart from practicing their professional skills,



also demonstrated compassion and provided other assistance with household work. The elderly were regularly visited by the project team and received medical consultations and learned the symptoms that signaled serious problems. Most importantly, they received personal attention from people within their community.

SUPPORTING VULNERABLE GROUPS

Project: *Let’s Study Together, Tkibuli YB*

Even though accessibility for children with special needs has been prioritized by the Ministry of Education and Sciences within the framework of the current educational reform, various national and international programs implemented with this goal could not cover all the public schools of Georgia. Specifically, Gelati Village Public School, located in the mountainous part of the Imereti region, was not properly responding to the needs of children with special needs. To improve the educational opportunities for about 10 students with special needs from the village of Gelati, the youth-led initiative group equipped a classroom with the latest facilities (various adaptive teaching aids, developmentally appropriate books and toys, etc.), that enabled all students to learn effectively and participate equally in class. As the Director of the Gelati Village Public School noted, the supportive environment created through the implementation of this youth-led initiative enabled interactive learning and demonstrated visible changes in the way the students with special needs spend time in the school. They actively participated in the various activities organized by the youth-led initiative group, such as celebrating the International Earth Day by painting the walls of the school building to motivate the community to take care of the environment,



joining the New Year carnival, etc.

Tamar Kezevadze, a member of a youth-led initiative group, astutely noted the positive impact not only on the children with special needs, but also on the people surrounding them. “The adaptive learning aids turned out to be very useful. They helped them to feel more comfortable and make the classes more interesting not only for them but for the others as well. The parents are happy when they see their kids are respected and admired by others.”



Mariam Gabriadze, a member of the Tkibuli YB, who was monitoring the project, stated:

“I do believe that the work we are doing in the YB program is extremely important for our community. I will never forget the thankful and smiling faces of those kids with special needs, while monitoring the implementation of the project. I am proud to see that with the help of this project their relationship with classmates, teachers, and the learning process itself became more interesting and fun for them.”

Project: *Painted Hands*, Kısa Dalga YB

The project implemented by Kısa Dalga YB in Istanbul was presented to the team by the “Boyalı Eller” graffiti team (“Painted Hands”), a graffiti group composed of young people. The group has already gained recognition from the local municipalities and has decorated many public places. This time the group wanted to paint the inside of the orphanage in Eyup together with children.



Most of the children staying in this institution are between 6 and 12 years old and are separated from their families because of poor economic condition. The aim was to organize graffiti workshops for children and, by involving them in all process, paint the inside courtyard of the orphanage. The orphanage authorities welcomed the idea and prepared the wall for being painted. Because of the delicacy of the situation and the protection of the identity of the children,

only YB and project team members participated in the event. Over 50 children (age range 7 – 12) living in the orphanage painted the colorful graffiti on the wall surrounding the inside garden. Everybody had a chance to use the spray paint, paint the wall, and get some useful tips from the young graffiti artists. Creating the painting together and having an opportunity to redecorate the space they live in gave the children a lot of joy. As one of the volunteers said, “We decided to implement the project to give a little bit of happiness.” In the aftermath of the project, the YB representatives and “Painted Hands” team participated in a local radio program where they talked about the project. These volunteers have demonstrated a desire to continue cooperating with the orphanage.

Project: *All Equal*, Ararat YB

YB committees in Armenia pay increasing attention to projects addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, including those of people with disabilities and their integration into the society. One of the initiatives funded by Ararat YB in the village of Aralez was to work with the local basketball club, which had members with disabilities, and to organize a local tournament among them. Grigor Avetisyan, an 18-year old from Aralez, had written a letter to the YB. The letter told the story of his father, who, though



physically disabled, was a great sportsman and often played with other disabled people. He requested support to organize a professional basketball game, make t-shirts, and invite the public to see their survival power and the game. The 10 players prepared for the game, and the game took place in the local school, with 35 local people in attendance. One of the objectives of the project was to demonstrate the power of disabled people to adapt to different situations and show to the public that we are all equal and can be equally involved in activities in the same way that handicapable people are. The other objective of the project was to show the local population that we need to create an enabling environment for people with special need to use all the opportunities that are available to others.

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING

To complement the YB methodology and based upon EPF's prior experience, the project included a training on cross cultural communication (CCC) in a conflict setting prior to all joint activities. This is a best practice in conflict resolution programs that prepares individuals to meet what they may perceive to be an adversarial "other."

In order to address the needs and concerns of all partners, a training of trainers (TOT) was held for program staff from all partner organizations (EPF's three offices and president's office staff as well as from the NGO Alert and TOG) in Tbilisi from June 22-24, 2012. The TOT was conducted by the newly established organization, Peaceful Change Initiative. The objectives of the TOT were to prepare EPF staff to deliver the cross cultural communication trainings (initially in collaboration with a specialist from Peaceful Change Initiative) in advance of the upcoming exchange visits. At the end of the TOT, EPF and its partners had collaboratively developed a standardized training curriculum for use in all locations.



In advance of the exchange visits and the concluding conference in Istanbul, Turkey, all YB participants underwent the CCC training within their own locations. The trainings placed a specific emphasis on tolerance building and communicating across cultures and were held close to the travel time to heighten the participants' awareness of key issues around stereotypes, active listening, non-aggressive communication, etc. The trainings also provided a space to address any concerns that participants had prior to meeting their peers from other ethnic backgrounds and with different perspectives and experiences regarding conflict.

EXCHANGE VISIT TO ARMENIA FOR THE YB DELEGATIONS FROM GEORGIA AND TURKEY

The wisdom of an experienced painter is to put the colors together in a way that all colors keep their beauty, brightness, and simplicity, complement each other, and create a new image and new impressions... This is also the basic principle of the project *Building a Young Constituency for Peace across the South Caucasus and Turkey*, to bring together young people from different cultures and backgrounds, even conflicting sides, so that they learn and recognize each other's culture, cuisine, local problems and the approaches for solving them and are provided an opportunity to form their opinions about each other independently, free of prejudices, political influences, and past stories.

The exchange visit of the twenty-one YB members from Georgia and Turkey to Armenia took place in Armenia at the beginning of October, 2012. During the visit, YB members visited the YB teams in Dilijan, Ararat, and Yeghegnadzor and learned about how their Armenian colleagues work. In Dilijan, the Georgian and Turkish youth, together with local art school students, tried to create interesting collages based on batik-painting. The batik class of the art school was supported by the Dilijan YB. In the small town of Ararat, YBs discussed their community projects and met with a young rock singer, a participant of a YB funded project. There, the young people sang together and had a tour of the city. During their visit to Yeghegnadzor town, YB members from Armenia, Turkey, and Georgia together planted a garden in the Yeghegnadzor town park in uniquely designed flower pots – made in the spirit of young people – from outworn jeans and farmers' overshoes. This was a lot of fun – working together, to paint the overshoes first, plant the jeans in the square, choose the flowers. The groups drew the attention of passersby who joined them gladly as they were happy to see youngsters from their neighboring countries visit them in the small town.

As part of the exchange visit, participants visited cultural and religious centers, such as Noravank, Lake Sevan, the Art Market, and Sevan Monastery. A significant component of the exchange visit was the time that the Armenian, Georgian, and Turkish YB members spent talking to each other, learning about their families and friends, the food and cultural traditions, and aspirations for the future.

In the post-exchange visit evaluation, a Georgian participant wrote: "This was the first time that I traveled abroad and got to know people from different countries. The exchange visit to Armenia changed me completely, and I am very thankful that I had the opportunity to learn new things, meet new people, and hear different project ideas from the other participants."

During frozen conflicts and stagnated politics, youth and other civil society action has become an alternative method to bring people from conflicting countries around the same table. The YB as a leadership concept proves to be very effective in conflict-transformation settings. The experience demonstrates that giving young people a chance to spend time, plan projects, and work together around similar issues, understanding the realities in different countries, gives them a broader view of those countries in conflict.

And in those circumstances young people were given a rare chance to get to know the 'other side,' talk about the effects of the conflicts and try to break the internal barriers to sincere communication among themselves. Narek Beglaryan from Yeghegnadzor YB said after one of these meetings: "I'm sure that the closed borders between the countries in conflict are not so important for people who orient themselves towards the future and have similar aspirations."



EXCHANGE VISIT TO GEORGIA FOR THE YB DELEGATIONS FROM ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN

On October 27-29, 2012 the second exchange visit took place and demonstrated some highly visible results. This time 20 YB members from Armenia and Azerbaijan visited Georgia, and, together with four YB members from Georgia, participated in various indoor and outdoor activities. The exchange visit was intended to provide participants the opportunity to learn about each other's projects and work methodology, discuss cultural differences, and establish people-to-people contacts.

The three-day exchange visit began by introducing participants to each other and establishing good relationships between them with the help of entertaining and interactive games and exercises in a training settings. The techniques for cross-cultural communication were highlighted once again by the trainer from Peaceful Change Initiative, who facilitated the first day of the visit. While discussing YB experiences, young people found out that there are areas where cultural differences exist but there are also a number of areas where ideas and actions match and they can work together collaboratively.

The next day they undertook a joint field visit to Gori, a city in eastern Georgia. The purpose of this visit was to enable the exchange visit participants to see the Gori YB activities. More specifically, it provided opportunities for YB members from Armenia and Azerbaijan to gain insights into the peculiarities of the YBs in Georgia, the small projects funded by the Gori YB, partnerships with local youth, the private sector, and other stakeholders. The visit also enabled the exchange visit participants to observe and participate in one of the Gori YB funded projects that was about constructing a small park and planting trees there. The youth-led initiative group got very excited about planting trees together with their peers from Armenia and Azerbaijan and they proposed naming the small square the *Square of Friendship*.

In addition, the exchange visit program included, cultural activities that provided opportunities for YB members from all three countries to engage in informal interactions. The Georgian participants created a Facebook group in order to facilitate further interaction among the participants and the various YB committees.

The exchange visit participants were highly impressed and inspired by the possibility of further cooperation. Gulnur Aliyeva, a YB member from Azerbaijan summed up the benefits of the experience nicely: "The meeting in Tbilisi challenged my stereotypes about people, and allowed me to find new friends and learn new ideas from YB members in other countries. Now I am thinking how I could apply this new knowledge at home. What I remember most is the evening when I, Elnura, and Gohar, took a long walk together in Tbilisi. The whole exchange visit experience energized me!"



Samvel Khachaturian, a YB member from Armenia, told EPF after the event: "I learned so much during those three wonderful days in Georgia. I am so impressed by the hospitality of the Georgian people and the places we saw, the music we heard, and the closeness of the peoples of the Caucasus. For me, this was more than just travel and more than an exchange. It was a combination of emotional and inspiring moments spent with new friends."

REGIONAL YB CONFERENCE IN ISTANBUL

The project culminated in a final conference in Istanbul, Turkey with the participation of YB committee members from all locations on January 31 – February 3, 2013. YB members and representatives of EPF, TOG, Save the Children, and Alert came together for a three-day meeting in Istanbul to discuss the results of the previous steps of the project, share experiences, develop joint ideas in preparation for the cross-border grant-making cycle, and discuss the use of the YB model in the cross-border setting as a peace building tool. Fifty young people accompanied by program managers and facilitators came to the meeting well prepared, knowing the background and the basics of intercultural communication.

The content of the conference was divided into three main parts: getting to know each other, sharing YB experience, and peace and future cooperation. During the first day of the meeting, YB members coming from the five locations participated in a set of exercises which helped them to socialize and get to know each other. In the “World Café,” YB members shared their personal experience and the importance of the project in their life. The support given to each of the groups in the end demonstrated that the principles of the World Café worked quite well, and facilitated positive collaboration and an open environment over the following days.

The second day started with the YB Fair – a presentation of the work of local YB teams. YB members wrote, drew, painted, and displayed the successes of their projects within their communities. The conference room of the hotel turned into a bright space covered with colorful posters, photos, live stands, and informational leaflets. In this way, each group could get acquainted with what the participants of other YBs were engaged in during the year: some organized public relations campaigns, charity events and contests, some provided support to the needy. The YB fair finished with a group discussion during which the participants had the chance to talk about the work of their project counterparts from different locations.

The last day of the conference started with the “Multicolored” game, which was created by Toplum Gönüllüleri in order to show the volunteers the importance of cooperation, democracy, and peace by using informal education methods. The game was an opening for the “Peace and Cooperation” presentation. In the second part of the day, participants worked together to develop ideas for joint cross-community, cross-border, and cross-conflict projects on the topics suggested by the YB members. At the end of the day, nine project ideas were presented.

In the end, it is pleasant to note that the atmosphere of the meeting was truly friendly and demonstrated that the project has established a solid foundation for cooperation among the YBs in the region in the future. The young people communicated with each other without any prejudice toward nationality or the unfortunate past of the countries they came from. Side by side they spent all days of the meetings working on joint projects, sharing with each other the new ideas, introducing each other to their different cultures and traditions, singing, dancing, and rejoicing at full speed.



DESCRIPTION OF ALL INVOLVED IMPLEMENTERS

The project included: Eurasia Partnership Foundation, Toplum Gönüllüleri Vakfı, Save the Children, and the NGO Alert.



Eurasia Partnership Foundation's (EPF) mission is to empower people to effect change for social justice and economic prosperity through hands-on programs, helping them to improve their communities and their own lives. Over approximately 20 years of working in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, EPF has become a leader in the implementation of cross-border and trilateral programs in the South Caucasus, aiming to address shared regional challenges and build confidence across borders. EPF has been directly focused on youth empowerment since 2005. Through the YB program in all three South Caucasus countries, active young leaders learn methods for accountability and transparency in decision-making. YBs are formed and trained to manage a pool of small grants, which are distributed among community members to foster civic activism. The YB model was originally established in 1999 in Northern Ireland to address the area's violent political and religious conflicts. The model offered a practical mechanism to help people across conflicting societies find common ground, detract young people from conflicts, and involve them in positive activities.



Toplum Gönüllüleri Vakfı (TOG – Community Volunteers Foundation) contributes to the personal development of young people by encouraging them to participate in social responsibility projects as volunteers. Every year the Foundation supports the realization of over 800 projects and activities implemented by over 35,000 young people through more than 100 university clubs. TOG trains trainers who implement peer to peer trainings on subjects such as volunteerism, project management, human rights, social rights, reproductive health, health literacy, and organizational management. The organization provides scholarship opportunities and internships to young people and supports them in developing and fundraising for projects that address locally defined issues.



Save the Children's (SC) mission is to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives. SC began its partnership with Georgian families and communities in 1993. Initially, SC's programs focused mainly on supporting socially vulnerable people suffering from social and economic crises (caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union) and then responding to humanitarian and emergency needs for internally displaced persons from Abkhazia due to civil war. Since, 1997 SC gradually shifted focus to development programs and has since successfully implemented projects in child protection, formal and non-formal education, social and economic development, civil society strengthening, women's health, STI/HIV-AIDS intervention, and emergency preparedness as well as response and assistance to ensure that children are safe, protected, and better able to attain their rights.



Alert had been working in Abkhazia since 2001 and has significant experience in confidence-building within Abkhazia. Alert has implemented numerous projects focused on socio-economic development in the region through the community participatory approach. Alert's priority is to empower women and children's participation in every project. Furthermore, Alert enhances the capacity of local communities and select NGOs through the provision of training sessions on locally relevant issues, such as confidence-building, conflict-resolution, tolerance, intercultural learning, and the promotion of women's/children's rights. Since 2010, Alert has been closely cooperating with UNDP and expanded its target area into the northern part of Abkhazia, including mobilizing communities in fully Abkhaz populated communities. Alert focuses on sharing experience related to youth empowerment with other NGOs in Abkhazia through delivering trainings on community mobilization, project proposal writing and strategic planning.



