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[Ambassador Dieter Boden Speaks at Europe House](#)

Ambassador Dieter Boden, a distinguished German diplomat who has served both as German Ambassador to the OSCE as well as UN Special Representative to the Secretary General, spoke at the Europe House about conflict resolution in the disputed territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Ambassador Boden worked in Abkhazia and participated actively in the mediation peace process. He drew attention to the tendency to oversimplify the conflict and suggest that the solution is Russia's retreat from the territories and that after that the people would be easily reconciled. He said that from his experience speaking with Abkhaz youth he saw a people that were deeply traumatized, distrustful and helpless. He emphasized the great need to build confidence between the people and that the way to do this is implement confidence-building measures (CBM), and the key role of local civil society in this process. These would be projects that would aim to gradually end the patterns of animosity that have become entrenched in the almost 20 year-period since the end of the war. While emphasizing that the conflict cannot be solved without Russia's help, he warned against the neglect of soft strategies that can help foster peace even in the absence of political opportunity for reintegration.

He spoke also about the EU's late though vital role in the peace process, especially after the OSCE and the UN missions were discontinued after the 2008 conflict. He pointed at the strength of the EU promoting democracy, rule of law, and human rights, the development of which would bring about stabilization, but also questioned whether or not the EU has a commitment to a coherent political vision for stabilization. The possibility exists that with time other priorities can supersede the interests in peace in the South Caucasus. He sketched two perspectives on why it may not: one is that the Caucasus is an essential part of Europe and cannot afford to step back from involvement there, and the other is that it must maintain involvement to remain a credible global actor.

When responding to questions from the audience, Ambassador Boden pointed to missed opportunities for peace, including intense domestic debate surrounding the word "sovereign" in describing Abkhazia, which delayed the process of negotiation and in that time Russia and Abkhazia had deferred the UN declaration. He also stated the need to admit past mistakes and to build political dialogue around them, like how the first war in South Ossetia was started by the Georgian side. He drew a parallel to his own country, Germany, which has gone through the process of coming to terms with a painful past. Finally, in addition to confidence building measures, he said that another strategy to make Georgia attractive for South Ossetia and Abkhazia is to strengthen domestic democratic institutions.