

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION SCHOOL TOWARDS A NEW GENERATION OF PEACEBUILDERS

Civil society peacebuilding and conflict transformation (CT) approaches constitute the forte of EPF Armenia and one of the methodological pillars on which a major part of its work is based. For many years, EPF has built and continues building its expertise in these areas, and its portfolio of working across open and closed borders and conflict divides contains several undertakings. Roughly fifty percent of EPF's work relates to these issues.

Apart from programmatic activities that you can see by visiting [this link](#)¹, EPF also runs a [Conflict Transformation School](#)² for a variety of actors, from civil society representatives, media, youth, international organization personnel to state employees, both Armenia-based as well as international.

The CTS is not a traditional educational institution but rather a coherent, continuous and methodologically determined peacebuilding learning and sharing process. EPF sees the CTS as a sustainable platform to support the new generation of civil society peacebuilders to access alternative sources and counterbalance mainstream propaganda with critical thinking skills.

The School offers different foci, based on the needs of the applicants. Civil society and media folks, for instance, may need a focus on [critical thinking](#)³, which is indispensable in the current era of so-called 'post-truth'. International personnel may need knowledge and skills in [conflict sensitivity](#)⁴ and emergency planning, i.e. knowledge and understanding of conflict dynamics, as they may affect development work. Those actors who plan dialogues with the 'other side' may need [facilitation skills](#)⁵. Those who want to acquire a 'bird's eye' view on the situation and find solutions to problems which seem insurmountable may ask EPF with its partners and networks to help them via organizing a [Creative Game](#)⁶. See an example of a [module](#)⁷ of the CTS here.

In today's world, working in conflict and for its transformation becomes a skill which is useful to everybody rather than only to those who are directly engaged in dialogue and negotiations with the 'other side' of a large-scale violent conflict. While EPF does not specifically train on other types of CT, such as interpersonal or organizational, its [CSO DePo school](#)⁸ contains [modules](#)⁹ on these issues and can address them as well.

EPF's success in helping CSOs, media and other actors in strategic planning and organiza-

1. <http://www.epfarmenia.am/en/current-programs/cross-border/>

2. <http://www.epfarmenia.am/en/program-portfolio/armenia-azerbaijan/armenia-azerbaijan/conflict-transformation-school-cts/>

3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EhfkelTgcGO>

4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iQKsnK3cR0>

5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vbp6I5Zqa5A>

6. http://epfarmenia.am/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/creative_game_faq.pdf

7. <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLze7VHI5SyYiOFapUxWRPaK9AIHpKhDj7>

8. <http://www.epfarmenia.am/en/current-programs/cso-depo/cso-management-school/>

9. <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLze7VHI5SyYii-l-zSPo59XF70sgHKfQA>

tional development, particularly via its CSO DePo¹⁰ project and Creative Games¹¹, is based on the understanding that correct and constructive orientation and capacity to act in conflict situations so that there is a positive impact is a sine qua none for any strategic endeavor and its protagonists, whom we call **The Strategic Who**. It is EPF's position that any development strategy—and particularly in the regions where we work—benefits from adopting a CT approach and using CT skills.

EPF learns CT and peacebuilding alongside its beneficiaries. We have developed large reading and viewing lists¹², as well as a series of online presentations¹³, which may help deeper engage in some of the aspects of peace and conflict, such as the language of peace and conflict¹⁴, etc.

EPF's peace work is also intrinsically linked to its other areas of work. Its link with civil society development has been mentioned above. Its link and relationship with Human Rights is visible from the fact that we expressly address the CT approaches in the methods of our Human Rights¹⁵ work, as well as periodically renewing the mutual understanding of the actors who work on peace and those who work on Human Rights, on their relationships, complementarity and tensions.

The vectors of state propaganda, situational developments, and peer and societal pressure create fertile grounds for people who acquire peaceful attitudes and interests to be either side-lined, or indeed reverse their attitudes, thus diminishing the peace projects' long-term impact. EPF's CTS is trying to address this issue, building capacities of select young people to: understand what conflict transformation is about, become a peacebuilder, and stay one. At the same time it also tries to engage the previous generation, giving them an opportunity to design their own dialogue processes and be in charge of the strategies of peace projects, which is the best educational tool for becoming a peace-builder.

You can also visit a selection of the opinions of participants in our CTS. If you would like to contact EPF for further discussions on possible CTS tailored to your or your target groups' needs, or any other relevant type of work of EPF, such as setting up consortia across the conflict divide¹⁶, etc., please go here¹⁷.

The CTS targets the following:

- » Equip the participants with knowledge and skills to counter the traditional narrative of nationalism and national history (to challenge the primordial/parochial concepts of history);
- » Provide them with means to deconstruct and counter the flood of propaganda messages coming via textbooks during traditional education process and/or from the media; students learn to critically deconstruct this propaganda (also called 'post-truth' today), devoted to enemy-image building;

10. <http://www.epfarmeria.am/en/current-programs/cso-depo/>

11. http://epfarmeria.am/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/creative_game_faq.pdf

12. http://www.epfarmeria.am/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/CTS_Recommended-literature_web_Eng.pdf

13. <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLze7VHI5SyYjc4pjdmiHjqjBAVjGryi-M>

14. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4syx-cg3C4>

15. <http://www.epfarmeria.am/en/current-programs/human-rights/>

16. <http://www.epfarmeria.am/en/current-programs/cross-border/armenia-turkey/support-to-the-armenia-turkey-normalisation-process/>

17. <http://www.epfarmeria.am/en/contact-us/>

- » Give students general knowledge about the conflict transformation and civil society peacebuilding paradigm, familiarizing them with such concepts as sustainable and just peace, the 'strategic who', etc. Students learn to 'put themselves in the shoes of the other';
- » Situate this new knowledge in the general picture of knowledge on international relations, conflict resolution, ethnic studies, geopolitics, etc. Provide them with state-of-the-art and cutting-edge information about developments in these spheres;
- » Familiarize students with the important events in the history of the Nagorny Karabakh (NK) conflict in an unbiased manner, including the international community's position on the conflict;
- » Give them opportunities to discuss these issues with state representatives and/or experts directly involved in the negotiations and/or other ways of addressing the conflict for its resolution;
- » Unleash their creative thinking capacities and generate ideas that, if accepted by the other side, could become a basis for confidence-building steps.

The traditional educational system raises specialists in conflict resolution and international relations in order to brew good 'soldiers' and 'diplomats' for defending their side's positions in negotiations and interactions. This leads to a dead-end, since it is impossible to achieve a compromise while defending one's side and not taking into account the views of the other side. The conflict becomes antagonistic, zero-sum, and therefore intractable. The CTS teaches students to become Conflict Transformers who suggest actions which generate and/or increase peaceful outcomes, benefitting all.

EPF has started to film some of the sessions. EPF offers a combined set of School sessions: online and offline. Online sessions will allow the participants to absorb information, and offline sessions will allow them to ask questions, criticize the information they have acquired, and build their own active attitude to the issues discussed, increasing practical skills of working for conflict transformation.