

'Future Visions for the South Caucasus and its Neighbours'
Istanbul, January 2009

In early 2009 our Trustees agreed that conflict between Georgia and Russia, continuing tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and other regional disputes, required a response from the Trust and its alumni network. It was decided to launch 2009 as a **'Year of Action'** in which the Trust is doing all it can to encourage its alumni to act in two key areas – peace building and good governance.



Trustee Lord McCluskey opened the conference on behalf of the Trust

To launch the Year of Action a conference was held in Istanbul in January 2009 with the theme of *'Future Visions for the South Caucasus and its Neighbours'* – a two day event of workshops and meetings aimed at charting a new future for the South Caucasus region. Speakers included **Matthew Bryza** (US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Process), **Michael Carpenter** (Adviser to the US State Department), **Suat Kiniklioglu MP** (Deputy Chairman of the AK Party Turkey), **Peter Semneby** (EU Special Representative to the South Caucasus), **Jonathan Cohen** (Conciliation Resources), **Daniel Cousins** (Linklaters), and **Dennis Sammut** (LINKS). On the same panel were **Dimitri Medoev** Representative (Ambassador) of South Ossetia in Moscow and **Sozar Subari**, the Georgian Ombudsman– the first such contact since the August War.

Over thirty **John Smith Fellows** attended the event including panel speakers **David Magradze** (2004 Fellow, Georgia), **Maxim Chereshev** (2007 Fellow, Russia), **Fuad Hasanov** (2008 Fellow, Azerbaijan), and **Tevan Poghosyan** (2001 Fellow, Armenia). 2007 Fellow **Fariz Ismailzade** spoke on the theme of *"Armenia and Azerbaijan beyond the Karabakh conflict"*. He questioned the extent to which the continuous process of INGO peace initiatives, seminars and conferences actually made any difference to a region that was dominated Realpolitik. This was a theme repeated in other sessions by other Fellows and participants, but it was also challenged strongly by Dennis Sammut, Jonathan Cohen and other John Smith Fellows.



2004 Fellow David Magradze leads the panel discussion



Georgian Fellow Khatuna Kveselava (2007) and Russian Fellow Daria Dazidova (2006) during one of the break out sessions

The conference provided an opportunity for Fellows to discuss their projects with those from other fellowship countries and year groups. It was during the Istanbul Conference, that 2000 Fellow **Archil Bakuradze** (Georgia) presented his peace-building initiative to other Fellows and guests. In partnership with 'Peaceful and Business Caucasus', Archil and the IABP have since brought representatives from the Government of Georgia together with Georgian civil society representatives currently involved in peace-building activities with Abkhazian and South Ossetian communities. This initiative was funded by International Alert, the British Embassy (Tbilisi) through the UK Conflict Prevention Pool, and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This event was launched by Archil as part of the John Smith Memorial Trust's 'Year of Action'. Archil's conference supported an exchange of

views between policy makers and leading experts as well as practitioners from civil society and business. They adopted a Communiqué calling on the continuation of this dialogue and improved coordination between the Government and civil society – an important step towards the peaceful resolution of conflict between war-torn communities.

The Trust would like to thank the **British Council** in Turkey, **Dennis Sammut** and **Bahadır Ustaoglu** for all their help in making the conference a success. *Photos courtesy of Tetyana Monayeva (2003 Fellow, Ukraine)*