

HORIZON EUROPE • CLUSTER 2 • DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

DEMOCRACY AFTER WAR NEXUS (DAWN)

Preventing Fractured Transitions through Inclusive and Community-Led Reconstruction

Concept Description for Prospective Consortium Partners

Call	HORIZON-CL2-2026-01-DEMOCRACY-07
Topic	Supporting post-conflict democracy and reconstruction
Action	Research and Innovation Action • Lump-sum funding
Expected EU contribution	€3.5–4.0 million per project
Submission deadline	23 September 2026
Initiating institution	Caucasus University, Georgia

The opportunity

DAWN is being developed as a comparative, interdisciplinary and participatory research and innovation project examining why some post-conflict reconstruction processes strengthen accountable and inclusive democracy while others reproduce elite capture, inequality, distrust and social division.

The consortium will bring together research institutions, specialized service providers, local authorities, civil society and community organizations, media, and education and cultural actors. The scientific design and partner roles will be co-developed with the selected consortium.

DAWN will connect institutions, conflict legacies and lived experience—and will test community-led solutions that help prevent fractured democratic transitions.

1. Concept and Rationale

Post-conflict reconstruction is not only a technical process of rebuilding infrastructure and public administration. It redistributes power, resources, recognition and opportunities. Choices about reconstruction funding, institutional reform, public participation, memory and reintegration shape whether peace becomes democratic and sustainable.

Research and practice often examine institutional reform, social reconciliation and individual reintegration separately. This fragmentation obscures how corruption risks, unequal recovery, displacement, contested historical narratives, psychological harm and limited civic participation interact.

It also means that conflict-affected people are frequently treated as beneficiaries or respondents rather than knowledge holders and co-designers of reconstruction.

DAWN responds by integrating democratic governance and reconstruction integrity with social cohesion, intergenerational conflict legacies, socioeconomic inequality, and the reintegration of veterans, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other conflict-affected groups.

2. Aim and Research Questions

Overall aim: To generate and test comparative, actionable knowledge enabling European, national and local actors to design democratic reconstruction processes that are accountable, inclusive, trauma-sensitive and sustainable.

- When and how does reconstruction strengthen democratic accountability, inclusion and public trust?
- How do inequality, displacement, contested memory and intergenerational conflict legacies affect democratic recovery?
- When does international support reinforce local democratic ownership, and when can it contribute to distortion, capture or dependency? How do foreign authoritarian actors exploit these domestic distortions through hybrid threats and weaponized disinformation to derail EU-backed reconstruction?
- Which institutional and community-based mechanisms improve the civic, socioeconomic and psychological reintegration of conflict-affected groups?
- Which participatory practices can transfer across cases, and which must remain context-specific?

3. Comparative Scope

Case cluster	Comparative value	Proposed anchor
Georgia	Unresolved conflict, long-term displacement, contested narratives, democratic transition and EU integration	Caucasus University
Ukraine	Wartime democracy, large-scale reconstruction, veterans, displacement and local governance	Partners sought
Armenia	Recent displacement, democratic resilience and social cohesion after conflict	Partners sought
Western Balkans	Long-term evidence on divided governance, memory, reconciliation and institutional durability	Partners sought; Bosnia and Herzegovina preferred

The cases will be studied through a common comparative framework while retaining context-specific modules. The final case configuration will be agreed with partners and must remain analytically coherent and operationally feasible.

4. Research and Innovation Approach

Research stream	Purpose
Institutions and reconstruction integrity	Analyse accountability, rule of law, aid governance, local capacity, implementation gaps and elite-capture risks -specifically evaluating the democratic conditionality, local ownership pathways, and civil-society monitoring mechanisms built into active EU financing instruments, including the €50 billion Ukraine Facility, the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, and the EU-Georgia Association Agreement frameworks.
Social cohesion and contested memory	Examine historical narratives, cultural sensitivities, ethnic division, trust, education, media and intergenerational change.
Reintegration and equality	Assess livelihoods, services, psychosocial needs, civic inclusion and unequal recovery among veterans, IDPs and vulnerable groups.
Community agency and participation	Study local ownership, participatory governance, women's peacebuilding and youth participation.
Comparative synthesis	Identify the mechanisms and contextual conditions associated with inclusive and sustainable democratic reconstruction.

Methods are expected to combine institutional and policy analysis, comparative surveys, qualitative fieldwork, narrative and media analysis, historical research, service-system mapping and participatory action research. Sample sizes, instruments and precise country modules will be jointly developed and subjected to ethical, security and feasibility review.

5. Community Reconstruction Labs

DAWN's principal innovation will be a set of Community Reconstruction Labs: structured research and innovation environments in which affected communities, local authorities, service providers, educators, journalists, cultural actors and researchers co-design and test locally appropriate democratic-reconstruction practices.

1. Diagnose a locally defined democratic-reconstruction challenge.
2. Co-design a feasible intervention or institutional practice.
3. Pilot it with clear safeguarding, monitoring and learning arrangements.
4. Assess inclusion, feasibility, implementation and early outcomes.

5. Produce a replication brief explaining what may transfer, for whom and under which conditions.

Possible pilots include participatory reconstruction planning, community oversight of reconstruction resources, intergenerational dialogue on contested memory, civic reintegration pathways for veterans, and reconciliation-sensitive media–community practices. To mitigate Horizon Europe Lump-Sum financial risk, Work Package success and milestone completion are strictly bounded by the rigorous execution and documentation of the research methodology (i.e., the delivery of the Evaluation Report and Replication Brief), independent of the socio-political field success or volatile local outcomes of individual pilot interventions.

6. Indicative Work Structure

WP	Indicative focus	Leadership profile
WP1	Coordination, ethics, security and quality	Experienced EU coordinator
WP2	Comparative framework, methods and transition typology	Comparative/methodological research institution
WP3	Institutions, integrity and reconstruction governance	Governance, law, economics and anti-corruption expertise
WP4	Conflict legacies, narratives and intergenerational change	Caucasus University with specialist partner
WP5	Reintegration, services and inequality	Ukrainian/country partner with psychology and service-provider expertise
WP6	Community Reconstruction Labs	Country partners with civil-society/local-authority partners
WP7	Comparative synthesis and policy solutions	Scientific coordinator
WP8	Impact, capacity building and communication	Policy/impact partner

This structure is provisional. Work-package leadership will reflect demonstrated expertise, operational capacity and a balanced distribution of scientific responsibility.

7. Expected Results and Impact

- A Post-Conflict Democratic Reconstruction Framework explaining how institutions, inequality, memory, reintegration and community agency interact.
- A Reconstruction Integrity and Inclusion Dashboard for diagnostic and planning use, rather than a simplistic country ranking.

- Community Reconstruction Labs and a portfolio of tested, documented interventions.
- Practical guidance for veteran, IDP and conflict-affected-group reintegration.
- Guidance and training resources for civil society, educators, media professionals, public administrators and cultural institutions.
- Country and comparative policy roadmaps for EU, national and local decision-makers.
- Open and ethically governed data, methods and research outputs where security and consent permit.

Impact will be designed around use, not only dissemination. Each result will have defined users, adoption barriers, responsible partners, uptake activities and evidence of application. Engagement is envisaged with EU institutions, national and local authorities, civil society, service providers and conflict-affected communities throughout the project.

8. Partners and Expertise Sought

Partner profile	Contribution sought
EU coordinating university/research organisation	Scientific integration; Horizon coordination; lump-sum project management; comparative leadership and EU policy engagement.
Ukraine, Armenia and Western Balkan research partners	Country research leadership; stakeholder access; field coordination; local policy engagement.
Comparative and disciplinary specialists	Peace and conflict studies; democratisation; transitional justice; history and memory; sociology; psychology; law; public administration; economics; cultural/media studies.
Specialised service providers and civil society	Veteran/IDP services; women-led peacebuilding; psychosocial support; community engagement and implementation testing.
Local authorities or municipal networks	Co-design, policy piloting, local implementation and institutional uptake.
Media, education or cultural organisations	Social dialogue, narrative practice, learning resources and sectoral uptake.

9. Caucasus University's Proposed Contribution

Caucasus University, represented by its **Caucasus School of Governance (CSG)** research team, proposes to serve as the South Caucasus regional anchor and to lead or co-lead work on conflict legacies, contested narratives and community-based democratic reconstruction. Its indicative responsibilities include:

- Leading the Georgia case and coordinating Georgia–Armenia comparative learning.
- Co-developing methods for historical narratives, conflict memory and intergenerational democratic expectations.
- Establishing the Georgian Community Reconstruction Lab with local authorities, IDPs, young people, women peacebuilders, educators, media and civil society.
- Contributing to research on integrity, elite-capture risks and local accountability.
- Leading regional engagement with relevant EU, Eastern Partnership, national and local stakeholders.
- Hosting a regional policy and community forum in Tbilisi.

Institutional & Research Capacity (Caucasus School of Governance)

The project will be anchored within the **Caucasus School of Governance**, drawing on an interdisciplinary team offering:

- **Scientific & Macro-Institutional Leadership:** Senior faculty expertise in EU external governance, Jean Monnet research frameworks, Association Agreement monitoring, and Europeanization of the post-Soviet space.
- **Field Execution & Regional Management:** Experienced researchers with proven track records in managing large-scale regional research projects, conflict-adjacent fieldwork, and local municipal partnerships.
- **Democratic Integrity & Narrative Expertise:** Recognized civil society, electoral integrity, and human rights analysts specializing in civil society oversight, anti-corruption, and narrative manipulation analysis.

10. Ethics and Partnership Principles

- Trauma-informed consent, safeguarding and referral pathways.
- Data minimisation, secure storage and protection of vulnerable participants.
- Conflict-sensitive and adaptable fieldwork safety protocols.
- Meaningful community involvement in governance, interpretation and evaluation—not tokenistic consultation.
- Gender-responsive and intersectional research and leadership, including women as peacebuilders.
- Equitable intellectual leadership by institutions in conflict-affected countries.
- Scientific independence, transparency, open science and responsible communication.

11. Expression of Interest

Interested organizations are invited to send a concise expression of interest preferably by 7 August 2026, including:

- Organization name, country, type and Participant Identification Code (PIC), if available.
- The role or work area of interest and the organization's proposed contribution.
- Names and short profiles of two or three relevant experts.
- Up to three relevant publications, projects or implementation examples.
- Relevant Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe or other EU project experience.
- Whether the organization has the capacity and interest to coordinate or lead a work package.

Contact: Nino Imedashvili, Associate Professor, Caucasus University

Email: nimedashvili@cu.edu.ge

Because the partner search must be published in early August, coordinator outreach and portal publication should proceed in parallel. The consortium should not wait for open expressions of interest before contacting priority institutions directly.

Document status: Partner-search concept. The project design, consortium, work-package leadership, methods, budget and outputs remain subject to co-design, due diligence and the official call conditions.

12. Urgent Consortium-Building Timeline

Week	Required action and decision
27 July–2 August	Finalise and publish the partner-search notice and attachment on the Funding & Tenders Portal; begin targeted outreach to coordinator candidates and country anchors.
3–9 August	Receive expressions of interest; hold short scoping calls; assess coordinator capacity, scientific fit, country coverage and missing expertise.
10–16 August	Confirm the coordinator and core consortium; agree case anchors, principal investigator roles and provisional work-package leadership.
17–23 August	Run a consortium design workshop; lock the intervention logic, research questions, methods, Community Labs, tasks, deliverables and governance.
24–30 August	Complete the first integrated Excellence and Impact draft; agree partner contributions and the related-project and policy landscape.
31 August–6 September	Complete Implementation, the task-based lump-sum budget, person-months, risks, ethics and partner administrative information.
7–13 September	Conduct independent review against Excellence, Impact and Implementation; resolve weaknesses and inconsistencies.
14–20 September	Finalise scientific and administrative sections; complete partner validation, budget checks and portal validation.
21–22 September	Submit the validated proposal; retain 23 September only as contingency.

CAUCASUS UNIVERSITY • PARTNER SEARCH

INVITATION TO JOIN THE DAWN CONSORTIUM

Democracy After War Nexus

HORIZON-CL2-2026-01-DEMOCRACY-07

Topic	Supporting post-conflict democracy and reconstruction
Type of action	Research and Innovation Action • Lump-sum funding
Expected EU contribution	€3.5–4.0 million per project
Proposal deadline	23 September 2026
Portal publication	Week of 27 July 2026 • no later than early August
Expression of interest	Preferably by 7 August 2026

Dear Colleagues,

Caucasus University, **through the Caucasus School of Governance**, invites universities, research organizations, civil-society organizations, and specialized service providers to join the consortium being formed for DAWN—Democracy After War Nexus—under the Horizon Europe topic “Supporting post-conflict democracy and reconstruction.”

DAWN will investigate why some reconstruction processes strengthen accountable and inclusive democracy while others reproduce elite capture, inequality, distrust and social division. The project will connect institutional governance and reconstruction integrity with historical narratives, intergenerational conflict legacies, socioeconomic inequality, and the reintegration of veterans, internally displaced persons and other conflict-affected groups. It will evaluate democratic conditionality and civil-society monitoring within active EU instruments (including the Ukraine Facility, the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, and Association Agreement frameworks).

Its distinguishing feature will be a set of Community Reconstruction Labs through which researchers, local authorities, civil society, service providers, educators, media and affected communities will co-design and test locally appropriate democratic-reconstruction practices.

Proposed comparative focus

The initial comparative design covers Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia and the Western Balkans. The scientific design and final case configuration will be refined with the consortium.

We are particularly seeking

- An EU-based university or research organization with strong scientific and administrative capacity to coordinate a Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Action.
- University or research partners in Ukraine, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and potentially another relevant Western Balkan setting.

- Expertise in post-conflict democracy, peacebuilding, democratization, transitional justice, anti-corruption, public administration, history and memory, sociology, psychology, law, economics, cultural studies, media or participatory research.
- Non-academic partners working with veterans, IDPs, conflict-affected and vulnerable groups, women peacebuilders, local authorities, education, media or cultural institutions.
- Partners able to lead a substantive work package, contribute robust comparative evidence, or host and implement a Community Reconstruction Lab.

Caucasus University's proposed role

Caucasus University proposes to serve as the South Caucasus regional anchor, lead the Georgia case, support Georgia–Armenia comparison, and lead or co-lead research on conflict legacies, contested narratives and community-based democratic reconstruction. We intend DAWN to be built through equitable scientific leadership and genuine co-design with partners from conflict-affected settings.

How to express interest

Please send a short expression of interest, preferably by 7 August 2026, containing:

- Organization name, country, organization type and PIC, if available.
- Preferred role and the expertise or resources you would bring to DAWN.
- Names and short profiles of two or three proposed experts.
- Name of a contact person who will be engaged in proposal drafting and will be a main point of contact for the consortium
- Up to three relevant publications, EU-funded projects or implementation examples.
- Your interest and capacity to coordinate the consortium or lead a work package.

Fast-Track Note for Prospective Lead Coordinators: If your institution is interested in taking on the Lead Coordinator role, you do not need to submit a full EOI draft immediately—simply email us directly to request an initial 15-minute bilateral scoping call.

The attached DAWN Concept Description provides the initial research logic, comparative scope, expected outputs, provisional work structure and partner profiles. All roles remain subject to consortium discussion and confirmation.

We would welcome an initial online discussion with interested organizations as soon as possible.

Accelerated preparation schedule

The partner search will be published in the week of 27 July. Responses and scoping calls will take place in the week of 3 August; the coordinator and core consortium should be confirmed during the week of 10 August; project architecture should be locked during the week of 17 August; drafting and budgeting will run from the week of 24 August through 6 September; review and validation will run during the weeks of 7 and 14 September; submission is planned for 21–22 September, retaining 23 September only as contingency.

Kind regards,

Nino Imedashvili

Associate Professor, Caucasus University

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Attachment: DAWN — Democracy After War Nexus: Concept Description for Prospective Consortium Partners