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Analysis

EU's Current and Possible Role in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Resolution Process

By Anna Poghosyan

This paper examines the European Union's (EU) contribution to conflict resolution in the South Caucasus. We will examine the EU's performance in two key areas of conflict resolution activity: mediation and peace building. Finally, we ask whether the EU is a coherent actor in conflict resolution. While policy analyses on the EU's new role in conflict intervention abound, there have been fewer attempts to import ideas from the field of conflict resolution to studies of the EU as an international actor. **Read more on Page 2**

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By Gayane Novikova

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Blog

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By Afa Alizada

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Aland Islands Model: Pro et Contra

By Erik Grigoryan

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Two Alternative Takes on Armenian-Azerbaijani Relations

By Ayan R. and Marine Ejuryan

We live in a region called the South Caucasus, region with three neighboring countries, countries with similarities in culture, mentality and traditions. One would say it is the best condition for these countries to live peacefully and in security, to cooperate.... **Read more on Page 11**

ANALYSIS

EU's Current and Possible Role in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Resolution Process

By Anna Poghosyan

This paper examines the European Union's (EU) contribution to conflict resolution in the South Caucasus. We will examine the EU's performance in two key areas of conflict resolution activity: mediation and peace building. Finally, we ask whether the EU is a coherent actor in conflict resolution. While policy analyses on the EU's new role in conflict intervention abound, there have been fewer attempts to import ideas from the field of conflict resolution to studies of the EU as an international actor.

By drawing on conflict resolution literature, we can measure EU activity in conflict resolution against definitions and standards established in this field, and thereby reveal new insights about the EU as an international actor. The EU has adopted the language of conflict resolution, but what exactly does it mean if the EU claims to be contributing to "conflict resolution" in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and other programs? The EU has recently pledged to step up its role in this area, but what does, and should, this entail? An attempt is made to step beyond the rhetoric employed by the EU and to examine the substance of EU policy and programming.

For understanding the EU's current and possible role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process, first we should underline the EU's interests in solving the South Caucasus's conflicts. Nagorno-Karabakh is the one of the dangerous and important conflicts in the South Caucasus. The likelihood that the conflict will degenerate into war is the highest in the region, and this unsolved conflict is a serious obstacle to regional stability and cooperation. It is also the greatest impediment to whatever hopes there are to transform the South Caucasus into a transportation hub between East, West, North, and South.

The South Caucasus is one of the very few energy transit corridors that can allow the EU to diversify access to energy resources from the Caspian region as well as use it as a transit region. The three possible alternative gas transit routes from the Caspian Sea to the EU — the Nabucco, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum, and trans-Black Sea pipeline projects — all depend on stability in the South Caucasus.

So we can say that the EU has strong interests in the South Caucasus and the stability in this region is very important for the EU. Geographic proximity, energy resources, pipelines, and the challenges of international crime and trafficking make stability in the region a clear EU interest. A possible war over Nagorno-Karabakh would destroy the region's fragile stability and would undermine and seriously threaten the security of energy supplies from the Caspian to the international markets, including the prospects of the southern gas corridor connecting the EU gas market with Caspian producers. The price of the unsolved conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh would be extremely high for the EU, as it has been in the case of Georgia. The current situation of conflict in the region is neither acceptable nor viable; there is a concern over the recent increases in military spending. So frozen conflicts and instability in the South Caucasus is a threat to EU security. Yet, the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazian, and South Ossetian conflicts have the potential to ignite into full-fledged wars in Europe's neighborhood.

How did the role of the EU as a security actor evolve, and what are the concrete capabilities and instruments that the EU can use to influence the resolution of the conflicts in its Eastern neighborhood? How well suited is the EU to perform the role of a third party intervener, and what added value can it bring?

Since 2003, the EU has become more of a security actor in the South Caucasus. It has appointed an EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus and launched a European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) mission. It has included Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in the ENP and started

Action Plan negotiations due at the end of 2006. Brussels believes that Action Plans will encourage the South Caucasus governments to establish neighborly relations and regional development cooperation as a basis for the peaceful resolution to the conflict. With the launch of ENP and the development of a European Security and Defense Policy, the EU has not only the reasons, but also the instruments necessary for involvement in conflict resolution. The ENP Action Plans for the countries of the South Caucasus include a host of objectives that contribute to peace building, such as strengthening the rule of law and democracy, the protection of human rights, encouraging economic development, cooperating in security and border management, and regional cooperation. Nevertheless, the EU can do more to help resolve conflict in the region, in particular through the Action Plans currently being negotiated with each country. For the EU, these instruments are opportunities to create stability and cooperation in the South Caucasus if the negotiated Action Plans are tied to the conflict resolution process and include specific democratization, governance, and human rights benchmarks. For the region they may be an opportunity to map out the reform process concretely. But there is a long way to go.

The EU's relations are not strong with either Azerbaijan or Armenia. It does not participate directly in negotiations on Nagorno-Karabakh. In and around Nagorno-Karabakh, it has done little for conflict resolution. To become more proactive, the EU must increase its political visibility and develop plan for its involvement in the conflict resolution process. For example, instead of waiting for an agreement on the principles of resolution to the Nagorno- Karabakh conflict, mediated by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, the EU should begin contingency planning to assist in peace implementation now. Whether or not a peace agreement is eventually signed, the EU should move forward in implementing confidence building programs or — in a worst scenario — prepare a range of options in case of an outbreak of fighting. The EU should also contribute funding to assist non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media sources, and others to promote public debate on resolutions to the conflict within the societies of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Nagorno-Karabakh. This could help develop alternatives to the belligerent positions of the political elites, who frequently use state media control to manipulate opinion. The EU could support media that neutrally benefits the South Caucasus as a whole, for example, by an EU-sponsored independent regional media initiative serving television, radio, and print media (Barnes, Cohen, & Lynch, 2004, p. 25).

When asked how the EU could increase support for resolving the conflict, most senior diplomats respond, "It is the OSCE Minsk Group's role" (Crisis Group interviews, EU member state diplomats, 2006). Without addressing here the usefulness of that format, the EU could give more support through programs which help create a better environment for the negotiations but do not duplicate them.

However, when interviewed, the European Commission staff said, "No one has allowed us to do anything in Nagorno-Karabakh... we would do something there if we were asked by the sides." (Crisis Group interview, European Commission staff, 2006).

If international peacekeepers are called on to provide security guarantees and support implementation of a peace agreement, many recognize that the EU would be expected to provide them (Lobjakas, 2005). ¹ The composition of a peacekeeping mission is politically sensitive, and the sides to the conflict may accept EU forces as the most politically neutral.

In conclusion, we can mention that the EU has expressed its strategic interest in contributing to the resolution of the frozen conflicts. The EU is getting closer to the affected countries geographically and also in terms of values and aspirations. The EU has been providing support and has been trying to collaborate and influence the countries in the South Caucasus. Its contributions so far have been considerable: rehabilitation efforts, assistance to reforms, and sorting out the border and customs issues. Delivering the message about Europe to the breakaway regions and restoring the ties between the countries and their breakaway regions are among the additional priorities. The EU does well to advise the countries affected by the conflicts to concentrate foremost on reforms, and not to allow the frozen conflicts to disrupt this agenda. As the European Neighborhood Policy will be developed further, it is right to pay attention to increased trade, travel, political contacts, regional cooperation, and people-to-people contacts between the EU and its Eastern neighbors. These efforts will contribute to conflict resolution.

In addition, the EU has the potential to figure stronger also in the sphere of political dialogue with all affected parties and in the search for the best format of stabilization operations. The EU's political profile should match its role as a donor and also its ambition as a leading actor in resolving regional security issues. The EU's contribution is needed in both processes — incremental changes that prepare ground and create the right conditions in the regions and efforts to find the political will necessary to take the decisive steps and reach an agreement.

The EU has over the past years expressed greater ambition to cooperate in addressing regional security issues. Working constructively to resolve the frozen conflicts is the best way to prove that these ambitions are in earnest.

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1. According to an EU member state diplomat in a 2005 Crisis Group interview, the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman in Office, Ambassador Kasprzyk, requested EU support for implementing a peace agreement. Since 1994 the OSCE High Level Planning Group (HLPG) has been tasked to develop plans for a multinational OSCE peacekeeping force in Nagorno-Karabakh. In early 2006, the OSCE Chairman in Office reaffirmed the organization's commitment to send observers or even peacekeepers if Armenia and Azerbaijan come to an agreement. Yet, in view of the OSCE's capacities and past failures in peacekeeping operations, it is likely to turn to the EU for help.

Implications of the Russian-Georgian War in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Limited Maneuverability

By Gayane Novikova

The main indicators of the new status quo established in the South Caucasus after the August 2008 war are the emergence of two partly recognized states — Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia's changed status from negotiator/mediator/neighbor into direct regional actor, and the increased strength of the Russian-Turkish partnership.

The sharply changed situation in the region has provoked activity along two tracks: It intensifies the Armenian-Turkish process of reconciliation and stimulates some asymmetric activity in the process of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement. Further developments in the area of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should be analyzed against the background of the following factors:

- The Russian and Turkish activity since August of 2008 and their overlapping/contradicting/coinciding interests in the South Caucasus. Both regional powers are trying to reshape the region in terms of the **Realpolitik** and to confirm the strong priority of their bilateral strategic partnership. [\[i\]](#)
- Some reduction of US, NATO, and EU activity in the region against the background of the world economic crises.
- Internal political and socio-economic developments in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Nagorno Karabakh.

All of the above-listed factors have narrowed the space for strategic manoeuvring for all three main actors in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This article is focused on the limitations in manoeuvrability [\[ii\]](#) of Azerbaijan, Nagorno Karabakh, and Armenia.

The outcome of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts, as well as the recognition of two secessionist republics by Russia (and the most likely long-term, if not final, withdrawal of these territories out of Georgian jurisdiction), have sent signals of caution to Azerbaijan: It must demonstrate more restraint in implementing its foreign and domestic politics.

It has become obvious that:

- Following Georgia's example in the one-sided orientation to the West and ignoring Russian interests in the region will inevitably lead to a confrontation with Russia.
- Azerbaijan owing to its capacity to energy supply could be considered by the Western democracies as a key regional actor if Baku undertakes even slight democratic transformation.
- Future trends regarding the search for new routes for energy supplies from the Caspian region has required from Azerbaijan substantial flexibility concerning the building of its relations with Russia and Iran, as well as with Kazakhstan and the Central Asian states.

In this qualitatively new, post-five-day-war situation, Azerbaijan will likely continue its balanced policy in respect to Russia and the United States. It will conduct a somewhat complementary policy that aims to achieving understanding and guarantees from the international community both in regard to security for the pipelines' operation and for the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The problem of settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict for Azerbaijan, as a former "metropolitan state,"^[iii] remains a key issue. The Azerbaijani leadership has blamed the OSCE Minsk Group^[iv] for the alleged ineffectiveness of its mediation efforts, and tries to reformat the negotiating process. It makes statements about the readiness to reinstate the territorial integrity of the country by force in the event that negotiations fail.^[v] Hence, the frequency of the militaristic statements has increased.

Moreover, significant shifts inside the country are allowing the Azerbaijani leadership to prepare appropriate ground for unleashing a new war against Nagorno Karabakh and Armenia in the medium-term, one that would redirect the public disappointment from serious domestic political problems to the external enemy. Among them it is necessary to mention:

- The presidential elections in October 2008 and the more restrained behavior of the opposition in comparison to the previous elections.
- The constitutional amendments of spring, 2009.
- Existent latent conflicts in those areas densely populated by ethnic minorities, in particular Talyshes in the south and Lezgins in the north.^[vi]
- Growth of the role of the army in the internal political processes, which is inevitable for the authoritarian regime, especially against the context of the unresolved conflict.
- Increase of the significance and role of political Islam.^[vii]

Finally, social polarization, a high level of corruption, and a severe limitation upon democratic freedoms are apparent. Thus, there are no internal factors or forces to challenge or prevent the unleashing by Azerbaijan of a new war in the region.

The main external prevention factor is the military and political balance of forces in the area of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and in the overall region. This factor can prevent Azerbaijan from being tempted to start a war and seeking a quick and guaranteed military victory.

Several secondary factors can be considered in some circumstances as temporary inhibiting factors: a) awareness that the Azerbaijani pipelines might be damaged, b) Armenia's membership in the Common Security Treaty Organization and active participation in the creation of its Quick Response Forces, and c) any positive developments concerning Armenian-Turkish rapprochement.

The developments in the area of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and in Azerbaijan itself make for a high probability that Azerbaijan will restart military actions in the medium-term perspective (5-8 years). In addition to the incorrect identification of the conflict as only a territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan that neglects its ethno-political component and ignores Nagorno Karabakh as a party to the conflict, there is also cultivation in Azerbaijani society of the enemy image of Armenians.

It is possible to conclude that, in the case of Azerbaijan, its field for maneuverability is limited mainly by the internal situation in the country. This implies that the political behavior of the Azerbaijani leadership during the negotiations will be toughening and aimed at justifying the war against Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.

For Armenia, as a party to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the situation has changed substantially since the August 2008 war in Georgia.

Firstly, the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia had a direct impact on the settlement process of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: It stimulated not only the activity of Russia and

Turkey in the conflict settlement, but also intensified their cooperation in the economic and political spheres. It also indirectly increased their pressure on Armenia as a party to the conflict.

Secondly, the initiation of the process of Armenian-Turkish rapprochement against the background of the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict enhanced the interdependence of the conflict settlement process and the resolution of a complex of problems in bilateral relations with Turkey.⁶ It also strengthened Turkish support of Azerbaijan.

Thirdly, the unsuccessful attempt by Armenian authorities to separate the process of normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations from the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement process complicated the intra-state situation. It shattered the ruling coalition and increased a gap between the authorities and the opposition. It also influenced the relationships with the Diaspora and developed mistrust in Nagorno Karabakh.

Fourthly, the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia provoked some speculation regarding the possibility for Armenia to recognize Nagorno Karabakh.

The interrelationship of all these external and internal factors has limited the manoeuvrability of Armenia both in respect to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenian-Turkish rapprochement. To increase or restore its position, Armenia needs to exert every effort to re-include Nagorno Karabakh into the negotiations. This will involve, first of all, overcoming the intransigence of Azerbaijan. In order to achieve any progress, the major external actors must convince the Azerbaijani government that the direct participation of Nagorno Karabakh in the negotiations is indispensable.

The Russian recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as another precedent, after Kosovo, that changed the status of state entities as well as the borderlines in Europe, has some impact on the situation in Nagorno Karabakh itself. There are two positive shifts. First, the mediators realize the necessity for re-inclusion of Nagorno Karabakh into direct negotiations “in the future.” Second, during the state-building process the authorities of this unrecognized state entity have chosen a pathway aimed at implementing democratic developments. Their pragmatic approach, and the support of society, resulted in the evaluation of Nagorno Karabakh as “partly free” by Freedom House in its report for 2010 of the states and “disputed territories.” Azerbaijan, on the other hand, was included on the list as a country “not free”.^[viii] This pathway has provided Nagorno Karabakh with some maneuverability against the background of growing authoritarianism in Azerbaijan.

It is also obvious that the position of Nagorno Karabakh is critical for the success of any interim and final conflict settlement decisions and resolutions. The idea of a possible return to the Azerbaijani jurisdiction remains unacceptable for Nagorno Karabakh. In the meantime, hostile statements by the Azerbaijani leadership, and their unwillingness to negotiate with Nagorno-Karabakh, force the latter to continue bolstering its defensive capacities.

Because the threat of war is still very high, for Nagorno Karabakh re-inclusion into direct negotiations is crucial. This is in all likelihood the only avenue to avoid the resumption of war in the area of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

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[i] Refer to the speeches of Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Abdullah Gül on the occasion of the official visit of the Russian President to Turkey in May, 2010.

[ii] The term “manoeuvrability” is used to indicate the framework of flexibility and independence in the decision-making process against the background of the external and internal factors.

[iii] The term “metropolitan state” was used first by Dov Lynch to refer to Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova as states with territories populated by national minorities, fighting for their independence. See Dov Lynch, *Engaging Eurasia's Separatist States. Unresolved Conflicts and De Facto States*. United States Institute of Peace. Washington, D.C., 2004.

[iv] The speculations about an appointment of Matthew Bryza, former Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, as the US Ambassador to Azerbaijan has raised some suspicions in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh as well.

[v] In an April 23, 2010 speech made at a meeting on army construction issues at the Ministry of Defense, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev stated that, “Azerbaijan is at war. The war is not over, only its first stage is. We must be able to liberate our lands in a military way at any moment.” Retrieved from the official website of the President of Azerbaijan: http://www.president.az/articles.php?item_id=20100427112955884&sec_id=11.

At a previous speech he made on March 20, 2010, Aliyev said, “We will be increasing our expenses on the defense industry every year; we will be strengthening our army, buying new weaponry. We will do everything for the Azerbaijani Armed Forces to be able to fulfill the order of the commander-in-chief at any moment and in a short period of time. This is our sovereign right and we don't need any advisers in that.” Retrieved from the official website of the President of Azerbaijan: http://www.president.az/articles.php?item_id=20100329023521366&sec_id=11.

[vi] See: Paul Goble. **Azerbaijan's Other Ethnic Minorities: Between Politics and Geopolitics**. Azerbaijan in the World Vol. I, No. 9 (June 1, 2008). URL: <http://ada.edu.az/biweekly/issues/149/20090327123147200.html>.

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[vii] See, in particular, **Azerbaijan: Independent Islam and the State**// ICG Report #191, Europe, March 25, 2008; Tadeusz Swietochowski, **Islamic Trends in the Post-Soviet Azerbaijan**. // *Regional Security Issues: 2008*. Yerevan, Center for Strategic Analysis Spectrum, Amrotz Group, 2009, pp. 90-97; Arif Yunusov, **Islam in Azerbaijan**. Baku, Zaman, 2004.

6 Armenia and Turkey have asymmetric strategic interests in normalization of the bilateral relationship. As a multidimensional regional power, Turkey has its scale of priorities, the main part of which stem from domestic considerations. The normalization of relations with Armenia is not a priority — even less so, against the background of Turkish public opinion in regard to Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijani losses in the aftermath of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in particular. It is difficult to expect accelerated positive developments in Armenian-Turkish rapprochement.

[viii] Freedom in the World 2010: Global Data. http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw10/FIW_2010_Tables_and_Graphs.pdf

BLOGS

Negotiation without (due) Representation

By Afa Alizada

It is amusing seeing car plates in Washington, DC, where the residents do not have voting representatives in Congress. They boldly state, “Taxation without Representation.” I am not amused when I think of the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations and the fact that the parties most affected by the conflict – Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians and Azerbaijanis – are grossly under-represented.

Reasons for under-representation are numerous, but it effectively boils down to the zero-sum mentality of the conflicting parties and how they see the process itself. Each side sees the inclusion of the other not as a means to reaching a peaceful solution, but as conceding to a solution they cannot accept. The government in Baku believes that including the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians in the talks would legitimize their de-facto independence and seal the fate of the negotiations. Meanwhile, Armenian officials (both in Yerevan and Nagorno-Karabakh) view the inclusion of Nagorno-Karabakh Azerbaijanis (as representatives on their own right) as legitimizing the claims that they have the right to return to their homes and have a say in determining the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The absence of Nagorno-Karabakh Azerbaijanis and Armenians at the negotiating table, however, presents a big problem. Whatever agreement Yerevan and Baku reaches runs the risk of failing in the implementation stage, because it isn't truly reflective of the needs and concerns of the Nagorno-Karabakh people. Not surprisingly, for example, Georgi Petrosian – foreign minister of the de facto Nagorno-Karabakh Republic – has said that Nagorno-Karabakh “bears no responsibility” for the Madrid Principles or any outcome based on that framework, since the process does not include Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians.^[1]

This also contributes to a bigger problem of deepening distrust between the parties. By refusing to include Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, Azerbaijani officials solidify their belief that Armenians cannot live under Azerbaijani rule no matter what security and cultural and political freedoms that the Azerbaijani government may promise. If they are not allowed, while in a position of advantage, to participate in the process determining their future, how can they trust that Baku will allow them these freedoms under the greater autonomy as proposed by the Azerbaijani government? Similarly, how can Azerbaijanis accept living under Armenian rule in Nagorno-Karabakh when Yerevan and Nagorno-Karabakh officials signal – by their unwillingness to include them as representatives on their right – that they will not be able to safely return home and exercise their right to determine the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh?

As suggested by the International Crisis Group, to abate the fears associated with the inclusion of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the process, Baku and Yerevan officials can adopt a “multi-layered, issue-based” format. Issues pertaining to IDP returns and interim status of Nagorno-Karabakh would include Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians and Azerbaijanis, while issues concerning refugees and withdrawal of Armenian forces from the seven Azerbaijani districts can be discussed bilaterally between Yerevan and Baku.

No matter the specific format the sides decide on, it is obvious that a productive dialogue cannot take place in the absence of the parties most affected by the conflict. Many Armenians as well as Azerbaijanis rightfully call Nagorno-Karabakh their home. Regardless of the final status of the region, Nagorno-Karabakh Azerbaijanis and Armenians will have to relearn to live together and “clean up the mess”

left behind the prolonged and destructive conflict. To do so, they need to start talking and collaborating today – no matter how uncomfortable the thought might be.

^[1] International Crisis Group (2009). **Nagorno-Karabakh: Getting to a Breakthrough.**

Aland Islands Model: Pro et Contra

By Erik Grigoryan

Parallels with other ethnic conflicts are frequently being drawn to try to understand the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and to identify possible similarities, useful lessons, models, techniques, and expertise which may be of help in finding a solution to this protracted ethnic conflict. The Aland Islands conflict resolution model, known as the Aland model, which successfully solved a protracted conflict over a group of islands populated by Swedes but put under Finnish control is probably the most quoted in such contexts. This model has even been revisited by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Mediators, which resulted in a resolution package called the “Common State Plan” put forward by them in 1998 and then with minor amendments was officially handed to the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents in 1999. Armenia expressed general agreement with 10 out of 12 points in the resolution proposal, while Azerbaijan rejected it.

The Aland Islands have been contested by Sweden and Finland. First the islands went to Russia as part of those territories that were surrendered by Sweden in September 1809 by the Fredriksham Agreement. As a result, those territories became part of a larger semi-sovereign dukedom. In 1832, Russia started the fortification of the islands by building the huge Bomarsund fortress, which was occupied and destroyed by Franco-English joint naval forces in 1854 during the Baltic Campaign of the Crimean war. With the Paris Agreement of 1856 the islands were de-fortified and demilitarized and eventually annexed to Finland.

The conflict was put for consideration at the League of Nations, with the latter deciding to appease Finland’s claims and ruling to keep it under Finnish jurisdiction, while putting forward clear requirements that the islands be given a high level of autonomy and secure conditions for preservation of linguistic, cultural rights, and traditions.

The foundations and guarantees for the Special Status of the Aland Islands lie in a number of international and national agreements and national legislature. The Sovereign status started with the Finnish authorities pushing for The Autonomy Act passed by the Finnish Legislators in 1920. The status was affirmed by the League of Nations in 1921 and was further amended and adopted with Finland joining the European Union. By law the Aland Islands are politically neutral and entirely demilitarized.

The Aland Islands are the smallest out of six regions of Finland (Number 6 on the map) with a population of 26,200. The population of Finland is 5.3 million: The population of the islands is Swedish speaking, while the rest of the five regions are Finnish speaking. Despite the huge difference in the number of speakers, both Finnish (95% usage) and Swedish (5% usage) are official state languages of Finland. Unlike the other five regions of Finland, the Aland Islands enjoy a Special Status. The territory has 30 legislators in their own parliament called Lagting, which deals with internal affairs. The Aland Islands have their own police force, national flag, postmarks, and a governor who is appointed by Finland and affirmed by the Lagting. The territory is a sovereign member of the Nordic Council and does not have its own armed forces. Entry of Finnish armed forces into the Aland Islands is forbidden. The population of the Aland Islands is exempt from compulsory service in the Finnish army. The authority to grant rights of domicile, purchase of lands and regulations for domicile and lands is exclusively under the jurisdiction of the Aland Islands’ authorities. The Aland Islands are given mechanisms to impact Finland’s foreign policy and international agreements with reference to the rights and affairs of the islands. Overall, the legislative and executive bodies of the islands are given vast sovereign authority. The Lagting’s authority includes local taxes, development, construction, and environment. The Finnish Government has control over the legislature that regulates foreign affairs, foreign trade, family and inheritance issues, and penal code.

Today, the Aland Islands enjoy vast benefits from the Special Status, and the living standards and general benefits on the islands are somewhat better than in the other five regions of Finland. Some politicians on the islands do promote cessation from Finland and complete sovereignty, yet these forces are a minority and are only getting stronger due to certain EU-enforced restrictions and regulations, where Finland has no stake.

Neither side has had any history of violence in the Aland Islands of any significance. Whereas in Karabakh, both ethnic groups have past and recent memories of interethnic violence and the legacy of a full-fledged war, further backed by continued state propaganda of intolerance and hatred on both sides. The Swedish and Finnish cultural, political, and value systems have a lot in common, while differences between the two groups in conflict over Karabakh are immense and include cultural, historical, and religious differences as well as dominating myths, stereotypes, selected memories over past clashes, traumas, and victories, which fuel intolerant attitudes and sense of ethnic incompatibility.

With all its crucial shortcomings, the Aland model offers a good “out of the box” solution, which could well have been implemented to bring about an end to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Unfortunately, more than 15 years of cease-fire and mediation processes were wasted, and no reconciliation and co-existence is seen as an option to the societies or the representatives of the nations in conflict today. Should the sides seriously reconsider promoting hostility and intolerance, and should they develop their own social justice and development programs as well as policies of equality and inclusiveness, the model could well serve to bring peace to the region. Co-existence and cooperation among Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the territories of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Nagorno-Karabakh would be possible, as such peaceful and beneficial coexistence among Armenian and Azerbaijani communities exist in many countries today.

Two Alternative Takes on Armenian-Azerbaijani Relations

By Ayan R. and Marine Ejuryan

We live in a region called the South Caucasus, region with three neighboring countries, countries with similarities in culture, mentality and traditions. One would say it is the best condition for these countries to live peacefully and in security, to cooperate and create close ties with each other. Yes, it could have been like this. But unfortunately when it comes to reality, we have 2 countries (Armenia and Azerbaijan) with a gap that sometimes seems irreplaceable, with mutual hatred, envy, and societies full of stereotypes and pessimistic approaches towards the future. On the other hand, everything is not as hopeless as it might seem at first glance. There are those who live in these societies, even if they are the minority, but are able to step forward of that established stereotypes, and make their ways to the future without that huge burden in their backpacks.

These people can set good examples for the others, examples of friendship and cooperation. We picked up two persons, one from Armenia and another from Azerbaijan, which belong to that minority and want to share their stories here with you.

‘I am proud to have Azerbaijani friends and they are very important people in my life’

“History is rubbish,” once told me one of my friends in Armenia when we had a conversation about Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and historical facts around it. He is also one of those people whose opinion about Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijani nation has been notably changed after face-to-face meetings with them. His first experience with Azerbaijanis is especially special and impressive. That is why I asked his permission to write a post about it and luckily for me, he didn't mind.

I studied with him for four years at university and among our other friends, I dare say, he had the most radical, sometimes even nationalistic views on history and conflicts. “Azerbaijanis are a barbaric, old-fashioned (primitive) and very cruel nation,” this was his opinion about our neighbors some years ago. But then something happened out of the blue, which made him change not only his stereotypical attitude towards the other side, but also his general outlook on life.

Here’s his story: “In the summer of 2007 I was participating in a regional youth project in Tskhneti, Georgia. The first day we were doing some introductions and ice breaking activities, and one Azerbaijani girl especially drew my attention when she said that she’s an atheist. I was really surprised to hear that from an Azerbaijani girl. She was criticized by the Azerbaijani group for her out of the ordinary way of thinking, but this instead stirred a great desire in me to get to know her better. I found many common things in our characters and views when we were talking later that evening.

I felt that there is something very special in this girl and yes, I liked her. But I was doing my best to get rid of that idea. That was the time when I especially had controversial and conflicting feelings inside me. Falling for a girl from a rival nation, I thought then, is a betrayal towards my nation and my own ideology.

While I had a big fight with myself, luckily for me she was courageous enough to take initiative and say the magic words ‘men seni cox sevirem’ (‘I love you very much’ in Azerbaijani). It took me more than 10 minutes to respond and I put it in this way: ‘Being still devoted to my national ideology, I also confess that I love you.’”

...

To my question, “What exactly did your personal relationship with that Azerbaijani girl change in you and in your attitude towards her nation,” my friend gave three concrete answers:

- I learned several things about the history that I didn’t know before or knew only their one-sided implication. I started to understand their pain, their loss and sufferings.
- As a human being I started to ache for them, for their loss notwithstanding their nationality.
- I realized why Karabakh is especially important for Azerbaijanis: Shushi (Azerbaijanis call it Shusha) is a cultural heart of the whole Azerbaijan. Can a nation live wholly without its heart?

In the end, he added that “I am proud to have Azerbaijani friends and they are very important people in my life.”

...

You are probably interested what happened to this couple later. So, they spent a wonderful week together in Georgia during that project. Then after some time they met once again in Tbilisi. I remember my friend repeatedly telling me that those several days were the happiest days in his life and cursing the current situation that didn’t allow them to be together and share much more happy moments that they could have shared.

‘We should stop pretending being the only victim in this conflict’

I had a talk with an Azerbaijani young person who was sharing the opinion of the majority of the Azerbaijani population about Armenians before having a chance to meet them in person and to check whether this opinion was right or wrong through their own experience. Here’s the story:

“Before having a chance to meet with Armenians, I always had that stereotype of ‘enemy’ in my mind. I was thinking that Armenians were dangerous — you never know what to expect from them, and the best thing to do was to avoid having any kind of relations with them.

The main reason to think so, for sure, was the ongoing conflict between the two countries and the changes that the conflict brought to our lives – the war of 1991-1993, casualties, occupied territories, IDPs and refugees and so forth.

When I first met them, I was scared. I couldn't predict the way we would greet each other or our attitude towards each other during the first meeting. My feelings were a mixture of anxiety and mistrust."

As it happens to mostly all people when they meet the "other side" in person, my friend also went through different, sometimes even contradicting feelings, but in the end his opinion about Armenians wasn't the way it was before.

"After we met and talked for about a few minutes I actually started to wonder whether those guys were real Armenians. They were nice and we also had the same attitude towards them. The reason of this behavior (being nice) was, probably, that we forgot about our nationality and, for a few days we behaved not like normal Azerbaijanis and Armenians would do, but as human beings. It was obvious that we had preferred not to touch the issue of conflict and problems we had between our countries since we all knew that even mentioning something related to the conflict could bring about contradictions."

When I asked, "How do you see or how would you like to see the future with Armenians," my friend preferred to answer the second question and the answer was rather inspiring:

"I would, definitely, like to see the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolved and peace being established between the two countries. I want people to live together as it used to be before. I want both sides to be satisfied with the results of the negotiation process and start trusting each other. None of the sides will ever forget the changes conflict brought to our lives but we (Azerbaijanis and Armenians) should bear in mind that we have to look to the future, we should stop digging into history and changing it, we should stop proving that the opposite side is wrong, we should stop pretending being the only victim in this conflict, we should stop playing for the others and with the help of others. People are tired of war on both sides. It's time to be ourselves. It's time for peace to be achieved."

...

Fortunately there are more people with this kind of different thinking in both societies.

Hopefully their number is increasing with time. Because this is what we need for the peace solution, for a peaceful future: alternative approaches, alternative ways of thinking.

About The Journal of Conflict Transformation

The Journal of Conflict Transformation is an independent online publication that provides a forum for scholars, practitioners, policy analysts, starting researchers and bloggers to analyze as well as discuss the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and issues related to it. The purpose of the publication is to contribute to sustainable resolution of the conflict by expanding scholarship on the subject and encouraging diverse perspectives and analysis.

The Journal welcomes contributions from established researchers and is also committed to include the voices of emerging analysts and writers within the peace process. This inter-disciplinary online publication accepts scholarly and analytical articles, as well as reflective writings, that contribute to the better understanding of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenian-Azerbaijani relations and suggestions for improvement of the peace process and positive transformation of inter-societal relations. The articles can analyze the conflict as a whole or any factor that potentially has implication for the conflict and/or its resolution from the perspective of political science, economy, sociology, anthropology, social psychology, collective memory studies, comparative history, ethnic conflict, identity-conflict, conflict resolution, peace studies, mediation and facilitation, conflict transformation and comparative case studies.

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