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Three Reasons the Nagorno- Karabakh Conflict Must be Resolved

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The turmoil and subsequent combat over the disputed area of Nagorno-Karabakh has brought much havoc and turned into a frozen, smoldering or napping conflict, as it has been variously worded. With more than two decades having passed, the dust hasn't begun to settle, and the Karabakh conflict is still faring worse... **Read more on Page 8**

ANALYSIS

Right Ideas, Right People, Right Time

By Gegam Bagdasaryan

The Stepanakert Press Club, since the very beginning of its activity at the end of the 1990s has been engaged into the orbit of journalist cooperation, becoming a participant of the peace-building process and people's diplomacy. As the head of the Karabakhi journalist organization, I have taken part in many peace-building projects and accumulated some experience, letting me come to some conclusions.

The first and most important conclusion, I think, is the vital necessity of the people's diplomacy. Bilateral contacts on the public level are all the more valuable for one simple reason: the lack of official contacts (I mean, the Karabakhi and Azerbaijani sides). These contacts are not always useful and fruitful, but at least, they are more preferable than the information war.

I think that one of the main mistakes of the political settlement process of the Karabakh problem is the fact that the role of the societies in conflict has been underestimated. Mediators have not paid any attention to this aspect of the problem. Meanwhile, it is a very important factor. However, it is good that recently the societies themselves have started to pay more or less serious attention to it. In this connection, I would like to quote the well-known Karabakhi figure, editor-in-chief of the newspaper "What to do?" Murad Petrossyan: "If the erection of the building of peace has been started (with the active authority of the third parties) without deep-rooted changes in the public consciousness, such a building, even with a completed roof, will sooner or later have the fate of the Palestinian peace... The key of real peace for Armenians is hidden in the Azerbaijani public consciousness; it is not in the hands of the ruling elite. In the same way, the key for Azerbaijanis is hidden in the Armenian public consciousness... The way to success in the negotiating process passes through the moral and spiritual improvement of society." (*газета "Что делать?"*, 21, 2008)

However, the dialogue between the societies in conflict faces political problems. In particular, Karabakhi non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work much quieter in this field. The point is that the opinions of the authorities of the parties to the conflict are completely different on this issue. The Azerbaijani leadership by all means avoids any contacts and cooperation with the Karabakhi side, putting forward two conditions: settlement of the problem and then contact. The position of Karabakhi Armenians is quite contrary and is more constructive; it is just contact. Cooperation can promote the conflict's settlement. And while in Azerbaijan the organizations cooperating with the Karabakhi (and as a whole, with Armenian) NGOs periodically find themselves under the "fire" of the authorities and pro-governmental mass media, the situation is much quieter in Karabakh, although at times the "excessively peaceful policy" of the Karabakhi NGOs is criticized here, too.

There is another problem as well. All spheres of life in Karabakh are, in fact, in the phase of establishment, including its third sector and public organizations. Available difficulties here are typical for the whole post-Soviet space, but there is a local specific. On the one hand, as in Armenia and Azerbaijan and the rest of post-Soviet space, the Karabakhi authorities are not very interested in independent civil society and strong NGOs, and they mainly support NGOs controlled by them. On the other hand, Karabakhi NGOs have found themselves "between two fires" — since Nagorno-Karabakh is not recognized, many international organizations and NGOs avoid contacts with Karabakhi public organizations. It leads to the isolation of Karabakhi society, which does not contribute to the dialogue between the societies in conflict. It is good that in recent years the situation has been gradually changing. The executive body of the EU, the European Commission, earlier in the year signed a contract with a consortium of European organizations called the "European partnership for peace settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict" to interact with Karabakhi, Azerbaijani, and Armenian societal structures. So, for the first time the EU, not substituting for the OSCE, will realize some projects in Nagorno-Karabakh through that new consortium.

The people-to-people diplomacy is very important, but first of all it needs correct and useful ideas in order not to make the meetings of the representatives of the parties to the conflict just long-lasting acquaintance visits. Even just the “collection” of the representatives of the parties to the conflict at the round table could be considered an achievement in the first post-war years, but now, 16 years later, a new quality is required. New ideas are needed.

Yes, ideas are important, but who will be occupied with making these ideas come true is much more vital. Any good idea can be spoiled and fully crippled if it is not dealt with by the right people. Likewise, it is possible to create something useful from any useless idea if it is in the right hands. Most importantly, it is necessary to save the peacemaking process from interference of the “hawks.” Here we have a clear example. The Armenian and Azerbaijani Ambassadors to Russia, Armen Smbatyan and Polad Bul-Bul Ogly, respectively, (former Ministers of Culture of their countries) with their suites have visited Nagorno-Karabakh twice in recent years. Even a section of the contact line of the parties to the conflict was demined for them (<http://www.regnum.ru/news/850145.html> , “К миру — через минные поля” журнал Огонек, № 8, 06 июля 2009) . But following each visit, the Azerbaijani ambassador gave a lot of interviews for quite a long time, and the main message of them was the necessity of war (<http://www.lenta.ru/news/2009/08/05/polad/>). The military rhetoric, as a rule, increases after each “peace-building” action. So the peace-building process and people’s diplomacy has been severely damaged.

An important condition of the peacemaking process is the publicity of the process and activity of the peace-building actors. Peacemakers should be maximally transparent and open. Society should know everything about their activities, projects, and events. Society should trust them, and it is an obligatory condition. The peace-building process itself should be open and transparent. Meanwhile, the above-mentioned visits of the ambassadors (more precisely, the representatives of the Armenian and Azerbaijani intelligentsia) to Baku, Yerevan, and Stepanakert were carried out as special operations. It seems that they want to reconcile the peoples in secret, in order to not let anybody know about it, including the peoples themselves.

The role of the mass media is very, very important. It can play a huge role for the objective coverage of the Karabakh problem and the peace settlement process by giving up the information war and eliminating the “enemy image” so they could exert influence on their governments to intensify the talks and adopt mutually acceptable decisions. Meanwhile, the leading mass media, especially TV channels, are controlled by the authorities. They make politics just by means of such mass media, which reflect the moods of the political elites, not those of the public. The mood of the political elite is presented as public opinion, but the real public opinion becomes “underground.” If they have an appropriate intention, the authorities can change public moods by means of their controlled mass media. More precisely, by relying on public opinion, they can prepare some ground for the required compromise. But on the other hand, by developing the third sector and strengthening the fourth power, it is possible to get a contrary effect: the underground public opinion can somehow impact the moods of the political establishment as well.

And the last conclusion: International NGOs have already worked quite a long time in the region; they did not start yesterday. There are concrete positive results, so I think the time has come to gather the stones, to work, not separately, but within a coordinated program. I think that the time has come for the collective responsibility of civil society and public organizations. And international organizations and funds could greatly support that process, by financing those projects and organizations envisaging responsibility for the normalization of relations, democratization, and problem settlement.

Inconclusive Negotiations- is There a Light at the End of the Tunnel?

By Gulshan Pashayeva

The thorny path of negotiation around the peaceful resolution to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh started in 1992, almost twenty years ago. Despite the introduction of the OSCE Minsk Process at the OSCE Budapest Summit (the OSCE Minsk Group itself was created to find a political solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1992) in 1994 and the creation of the triple co-chairmanship in 1997 (including Russia, France, and the US), no tangible results have been achieved in the conflict resolution process so far.

Nevertheless, during these years the negotiation process itself has had its ups and downs and the last two years provide an excellent example of this striking discrepancy. If 2009 was considered by politicians, representatives of international organizations, and the expert community as quite successful from the perspective of intensification of the negotiation process and the introduction of a number of concurrent initiatives by regional and non-regional actors, contrary to all expectations 2010 has not yet brought any positive change and the parties have not finalized their agreement on basic principles for a settlement to this conflict in order to reach a comprehensive peace agreement.

There is a certain perception that “peace settlements that enjoy high level of third-party assistance and support during the entire course of the peacemaking and peacebuilding process are arguably more likely to succeed than those that do not” (Hampson, 1996, p. 13). In this context, while concentrating on the current status of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict let’s analyze the mediation efforts and local dynamics of this particular conflict.

On the one hand, the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group have been closely engaged in shuttle diplomacy between the conflicting parties in 2009/2010, and the Heads of Delegation of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chair countries, including Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergei Lavrov, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, and US Deputy Secretary of State of James Steinberg, intervened in this process as necessary. Two Joint Statements on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were issued by the leaders of the OSCE Minsk Group’s co-chair countries — Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, US President Barack Obama, and French President Nicolas Sarkozy — at the l’Aquila Summit of the Eight in Italy on July 10, 2009 and the Muskoka G8 Summit in Canada on June 26, 2010. In both documents, the presidents affirmed their commitment to support the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan as they finalize the basic principles for a peaceful settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which consists of six elements. They include a call for inter alia return of the occupied territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control; an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh guaranteeing security and self-governance; a corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh; the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh to be determined in the future by a legally-binding expression of will; the right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their homes; and international security guarantees, including a peacekeeping operation.

The presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan were also urged to resolve the few differences remaining between them and complete the work on the updated version of the basic principles to enable the drafting of a peace agreement to begin.

On the other hand, by President Medvedev’s initiative Russia’s mediation efforts were intensified after the Moscow Declaration was signed in November 2008 by the Russian, Azerbaijani, and Armenian presidents. As a result, six trilateral meetings took place over the past two years. Two of them were held in 2010 – on January 25 in Sochi and on June 17 in St. Petersburg. The parties agreed on the wording of the preamble of the basic principles during the Sochi meeting, shortly after which Azerbaijan accepted the updated version of the basic principles with a few reservations. However, Armenia has not expressed either a “yes” or “no” response on this document so far.

On June 17, 2010, the second meeting was held in St. Petersburg within the framework of the 14th St. Petersburg International Economic Forum. According to a statement issued by President Medvedev’s

office, “the three leaders discussed the main problems in reaching a settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Discussions on a draft text setting out the main provisions for a settlement resulted in rapprochement on a number of disputed points.”

A month later, on July 17, 2010, the Heads of Delegation of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chair countries met on the margins of the OSCE Informal Ministerial with the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov and the Foreign Minister of Armenia Edward Nalbandian in Almaty, Kazakhstan. However after this meeting, the joint statement in the “3+2” format of five foreign ministers became impossible as the Azerbaijani and Armenian foreign ministers did not agree on the Joint Statement and it was issued on behalf of the ministers of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries.

Thus, in this Joint Statement it was “reiterated that the elements articulated by Presidents Medvedev, Sarkozy, and Obama on July 10, 2009 at L’Aquila and repeated at Muskoka on June 26, 2010 must be the foundation of any fair and lasting settlement to the conflict. These proposed elements have been conceived as an integrated whole, and any attempt to select some elements over others would make it impossible to achieve a balanced solution. Foreign Minister Kouchner and Deputy Secretary Steinberg expressed appreciation for the efforts of President Medvedev and Foreign Minister Lavrov to bridge the differences between the parties, taking into consideration the positions discussed during the meetings in Sochi on January 25, 2010 and in St. Petersburg on June 17, 2010.” It was also underlined in this statement that “the efforts made so far by the parties to the conflict have not been sufficient to overcome their differences,” and “a greater spirit of compromise to reach agreement on a common basis for continuing the negotiations” is needed.

One of such issues, for example, seems to be that the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs proposed a five-year deadline for the return of Kelbajar and Lachin districts to Azerbaijan’s administrative control. According to Mammadyarov as reported by News.Az, this issue was discussed in St. Petersburg as well as supposedly in Almaty. Baku accepted this proposal; however the Armenian side dismissed it later on, making the condition that the return of these two districts could be realized only if Azerbaijan agreed to accept the results of a referendum on the status of Karabakh. Summarizing this situation, Mammadyarov said at a press conference held in Baku that “we find it difficult to hold talks when Yerevan again raises decisions that have already been coordinated on these two districts.”

Thus, some differences still exist between the conflicting parties that make the negotiation process inconclusive, putting serious obstacles in the way of achieving a long-awaited breakthrough. It is also laying a foundation for a downbeat prognosis on the possible future rapprochement between Armenian and Azerbaijani positions at the negotiation table. At the same time, according to Lavrov, one of the reasons it seems that there are no visible results on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is that the work is carried out confidentially. But as a participant in this work, he also indicated that there are results, which are not visible to a wide audience. The parties have almost reached a compromise formulation on a significant part of the text; however, there are two to three concrete problems, which require further efforts. By underlining that upon the completion of the work on the basic principles as a political document, it will be necessary to develop a legal document — a peace agreement, which “would require much greater penetration into the details, but the devil lies in the details.”

In this context, information on the activation of mediation efforts in the months leading up to the OSCE Summit in Astana on December 1-2, 2010 could be considered a positive sign. The statement released on September 6 of this year by the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs, summarized their activities in this period. It envisaged discussion on additional actions necessary to strengthen the cease-fire, promotion of a spirit of compromise by all parties, and finalization of modalities for further action during the meetings to be held in Baku, Yerevan, and Nagorno-Karabakh on September 6-10. “During the third full week of September, the co-chairs will travel to Washington, D.C. and then to New York to work with the sides on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly,” the statement read.

Visits by the co-chairs to the region have also been planned to conduct a field assessment mission together with a team of high-level advisors and experts, including representatives from the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and others, to observe the humanitarian situation in the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh between late September and mid October. It will be the first

international mission in these territories since the OSCE fact-finding mission in early 2005. "Shortly thereafter, the co-chairs will brief the OSCE Minsk Group in Vienna on their findings. Then the co-chairs will present their annual activity report to the OSCE Permanent Council and actively prepare the OSCE Summit in Astana with the sides," the Minsk Group statement released on September 6 read.

Therefore, if these wide-ranging mediation efforts will be successfully combined with the positive local dynamics, perhaps it will be possible to solve the few remaining issues and complete the basic principles for a peace agreement before the OSCE Summit in Astana in 2010.

Finding Alternatives

By Arzu Geybullayeva

The war in Nagorno Karabakh ended 16 years ago- on paper the least. In reality, the war ended in minds of only very few, while for many it remained alive as ever. It is in the hands of these people that the conflict and post- war period became leverage; a bargaining chip used anywhere and everywhere.

This has been the case in Azerbaijan, especially on an international scale, where over the years, every report notwithstanding its nature would have a paragraph at least, a page or two the most on the war and its consequences on the general public.

Every government statement on holidays and every official speech at international events touch upon the issue of Karabakh war, its devastating effects and results on the country, its economy and population.

The war rhetoric is taught at schools, the massacres are embedded into memories of new generations, making it hard to fight and replace with something more valuable, something positive.

And yet, there are also those, who have managed to resist, opting for an alternative. Re-connecting with people that were once neighbors, friends, acquaintances and partners have become another way to deal with the conflict and what was and is left of it.

Occasional meetings among NGOs, individual cross- border initiatives, new ideas for communication and reconciliation became hopes for those wishing an end to the hostiles and never- ending negative rhetoric hunting every single person living on both sides of the border.

It is the result of such initiatives that today, Armenians and Azerbaijanis engage in dialogue, share their grief and anger, and most importantly frustration with unresolved conflict. In fact, I have seen more interaction in cross- border projects and initiatives I have been involved over the last two years than any kind of progress in dialogue as a result of any of the official talks between the two countries over the last 16 years.

Sadly, our world of dialogue occupies only a tiniest fraction of a bigger world- where governments preach their own agenda, media rant more hatred day-by-day, and public at large believes what they are told and turns a deaf ear on any alternative rhetoric that is not focused on war and aggression.

And so, looking to the future, finding alternatives to existing war prone agendas, is the only way out. As naïve as it might sound, it took sixteen years not to reach any conclusion on the conflict and in fact, make the situation worse. Let us hope we don't lose track of time and find ourselves in the same position as we are now another sixteen years later, exhausted and lost, still talking of war and no reconciliation. I was a child when the war ended. I lived with this war as an adult. I don't want to grow old with this war still on-going...

Three Reasons the Nagorno- Karabakh Conflict Must be Resolved

By *Sasun Khachatryan*

The turmoil and subsequent combat over the disputed area of Nagorno-Karabakh has brought much havoc and turned into a frozen, smoldering or napping conflict, as it has been variously worded. With more than two decades having passed, the dust hasn't begun to settle, and the Karabakh conflict is still faring worse, causing intermittent and irreversible losses and, what is worse, claiming human lives and distorting fates.

Unfortunately this issue isn't fait accompli yet as long as Azerbaijan and Armenia still have claims — no matter whether or not they fit the bill. Attempts to take a deeper look into the history in an effort to clarify the ins and outs of the issue and, therefore, identify the roots of the conflict have proved unproductive with both sides filling in the blanks with their own story, distorting and excluding the other side's version of things, and shifting the battle also into a war of information.

In point of fact, Armenians and Azerbaijanis are implicated in this conflict despite their will. The more we talk at cross purposes with each other, the deeper we will get stuck in this standoff. Because this is not a sink or swim situation — as long as human lives are concerned, the quickest possible resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict obtains utmost importance. Suffice to say, any delay can have unforeseeable consequences. But given the negotiation process is moving at a snail's pace — at least based on the information made public after every round of talks — the settlement of this issue gains far more significance and, naturally enough, runs in accord with the interests of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Karabakh, too.

Unfortunately, there are not any ready-made solutions to offer, given the sensitivity of the conflict and the complexity of the current geopolitical situation. But here are some reasons why the Karabakh issue must be resolved as soon as possible.

Politics

Politics is the front-line aspect of the Karabakh conflict that has seen much speculation. A final settlement of this conflict will deprive the authorities both in Armenia and Azerbaijan of the long-lasting chance to use the conflict as a tool to retain power. The Karabakh issue is especially problematic for the Azerbaijani authorities as a party that has lost the war and some territories, including districts outside of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the non-stop belligerence both by the Azerbaijani and Armenian leadership is proof of the speculation. The resolution of the Karabakh conflict will result in more favorable conditions for democratic governance, as the authorities in both countries might instead of war-related issues engage in other vital ones essential for the general welfare of their respective countries.

Economy

The economy is perhaps one of the important aspect that suffers most from this protracted conflict. Just imagine how much the economy in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Karabakh would grow if all the money currently being used for the arms race and army modernization were injected into their economies.

This doesn't necessarily mean Armenia, Karabakh and Azerbaijan shouldn't have armies, but suppose how many students could get scholarships to study in their countries or abroad with the money spent to buy a fighter plane? Just imagine how many young families would get their own shelters with the money used to buy tanks, how many people would have complete access to proper healthcare, and how many retirees could in their old age live a happy life if that money was spent to improve healthcare and raise retirement benefits instead of buying various kinds of weaponry.

Needless to say, how well the Armenians and Azerbaijanis would do business together had it not been for this current situation. There might of course be some skeptics who would deem that to be unrealistic. But that should not be problematic as Armenians and Azerbaijanis were once trading with each

other in the Sadakhlo market in Georgia, even after the Karabakh war, to earn a living. Let alone, some even developed small-scale trade into successful businesses.

Open Borders

When an Azerbaijani colleague once said at a workshop in Georgia that she wanted to live what she called a “full life” — meaning to be able to travel freely — it occurred to me that we are all but the living victims of a partial blockade and isolation with the borders closed due to the Karabakh war and the closure of the other border with Turkey happening by the same token.

Those who had to leave their homes when the turmoil started unraveling have not — for 19 years now — had the chance to go and see them (among them also my relatives who used to live in Nakhichevan). And some of them have probably passed away by now with the unbearable homesickness haunting, lacerating, and killing their souls before any age-related or other illnesses or diseases would take hold of their physical existence. Simply put, this conflict and its entailed consequences should be resolved, as life is too short to undergo such ordeals, and no single human being deserves exposure to such disadvantageous situations that are second to none when it comes to causing frustration, pain, and anguish. In other words, inaction here is more than a crime and is equal to hammering a nail in one's own coffin.

Many of those living in the South Caucasus or just the Caucasus in general are kind of envious of the European Union, or of the Schengen zone, as it gives far more favorable conditions for people to live a normal life, to have good jobs and to travel freely — conditions that really deserve due recognition. But I still wonder why can't there be such a union in the South Caucasus, say the Caucasus Union or the Caucasus zone, for the Caucasians to enjoy equally favorable conditions? This may sound like a utopia, but it is still not impossible. Europe walked down a long way down that path and underwent crueller battles and unendurable hardship before it became what it is now. Why can't we learn through others' examples and on others' mistakes to make our lives more decent and enjoyable without necessarily passing through all the painstaking and time-consuming processes?

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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***Featured next on
November 1:***

Analytical issue:

Experiencing
displacement and
gendered exclusion

By **Lale Yalçın-
Heckmann and Nona
Shahnazarian**

Internally displaced
persons: the case of
Azerbaijan

By **Turana Baghirova**

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