

# Caucasus Edition

## Journal of Conflict Transformation

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### **Analysis**

**Nagorno-Karabakh and Turkish-Armenian Relations: Which Should be Solved First?**

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**The EU's Changing Role in the Nagorno-Karabakh Negotiation Process: Realities, Limits and Perspectives**

*By Fidan Huseynli*

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## **ANALYSIS**

### **Nagorno-Karabakh and Turkish-Armenian Relations: Which Should be Solved First?**

*By Armen Grigoryan*

Before the June 2011 parliamentary elections in Turkey there was some hope that Turkish-Armenian relations might improve in the short-term. It seemed that after the elections Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's AKP party would not be under the threat of instantly losing the support of voters due to opposition criticism, so its leadership could ratify the protocols signed in 2009. Such a move, followed by opening the Turkish-Armenian border, would have changed the regional situation radically, opening the way for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and regional cooperation in the South Caucasus.

The Turkish opposition and Azerbaijan's government, which have been opposing the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations, do not believe that Armenia may become more willing to make concessions if the Turkish-Armenian border is opened. Such thinking does not take into account that Armenia's excessive dependence on Russia is the main issue requiring a solution. The possibility of transportation across Turkish territory would have reduced Armenia's dependence on Russia. Furthermore, an opened border would have relieved the economic hardship that Armenia's population is experiencing; thus, mutual trust would have been promoted. An improved economic situation resulting in reduced internal political tension in Armenia, together with an opportunity to maneuver more independently from Russia, could have stimulated President Serzh Sargsyan and the ruling coalition to be more flexible on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue.

Such a scenario seems quite realistic, as strong internal opposition questioning Sargsyan's legitimacy already persuaded him to seek international support and financial assistance. In 2008-2009, during the period of rapprochement with Turkey, Sargsyan enjoyed the image of a politician trying to overcome a decades-long enmity. Quite significantly, although ratification of the protocols by Armenia's National Assembly was suspended in 2010, Sargsyan has not withdrawn his signature despite the opposition urging him to do so.

At the same time, it would be very naïve to consider Sargsyan a politician with truly progressive views. His approach is rather opportunistic; the readiness to make some concessions showed previously was aimed mainly at getting international support. As there has been no progress in relations with Turkey (instead, failed negotiations in Kazan, new militaristic threats made by Azerbaijani officials, and Erdogan's harsh reaction to Sargsyan's remark made at an Armenian youth camp have only made the situation worse), while the opposition continues demanding early elections, Sargsyan will be motivated to use more hardcore nationalist rhetoric. The 20th anniversary of Armenia's independence in September seems a convenient starting point for that. It should also be remembered that sensitive issues such as Turkish-Armenian relations and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are unlikely to progress in pre-election periods. Campaigning for the May 2012 parliamentary elections will begin in a few weeks, which will be followed by the presidential campaign for the February 2013 elections. Political expediency will also induce both government and opposition to use sentiments in competition for a more "patriotic" image while moving towards 2015 – the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

Unfortunately, in the near future the global economic crisis may remain the strongest preventive factor in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It prompts the US and EU to keep Azerbaijan under pressure, in order not to permit large-scale fighting that would be followed by a sharp rise in the price of oil. But in order to break the status quo and reach an agreement, one of the sides has to make the first concession, and Armenia may not be persuaded to do so, as Russia counterbalances any international pressure. As I noted before, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict may not be solved by negotiations as long as the mediators have their different stakes in the issue. That is why the recent developments have been so depressing, with diminishing chances to move towards normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations.

I foresee the counterargument that Turkey is not a side of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, Turkey openly declared its support for Azerbaijan and mentioned the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution as a precondition for the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations, connecting two issues. Therefore, a concession and progress on one of the issues would help solve the other, and vice versa. Armenia will not have to make concessions, as long as Russia agrees with that. For Azerbaijan, making a concession first is too difficult, as control over parts of its territory is at stake. Turkey faces the least obstacles for taking the first step and, again, a move strengthening Armenia's safety and reducing dependence on Russia could change Armenia's attitude.

However, as hopes for opening the Turkish-Armenian border and other possibilities of reducing tension in the region seem too idealistic now, keeping the status quo may be the lesser evil. The possibility of renewed fighting aside, repeated threats to use force and the armaments race are enough to provoke the realization that the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and regional cooperation in the South Caucasus may be impossible. As the well-informed Russian military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer recently told RFE/RL, "If Russia has to station its peacekeeping forces in the conflict zone, that will be good for Russia – [it] has wanted that since 1994."

Overcoming the traditional way of thinking is necessary for changing the status quo in the Armenian-Azerbaijani-Turkish triangle. In the foreseeable future, Turkey will remain the only party involved capable of making a decisive move, as it is the most democratic, most developed, and least dependent on foreign powers. The next few months will show whether there is still room for hope, or if closed borders and dividing lines may remain in the region, perhaps for decades.

## **The EU's Changing Role in the Nagorno-Karabakh Negotiation Process: Realities, Limits and Perspectives**

by [Fidan Huseynli](#)

Regional conflicts seized a solid place in the European Union (EU) foreign policy agenda since it increased its involvement in the Eastern Neighborhood. The adoption of one of the top EU security documents, the European Security Strategy, in 2003 heralded the EU's new foreign policy goals globally. It called for "... a stronger and more active interest in the problems of the Southern Caucasus..." which signaled an emergence of new priorities of the Union in the neighboring region. This interest was triggered by the EU's expansion in 2004, which brought an institutionalization of its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

The launching of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), which urged "to avoid drawing new dividing lines in Europe and to promote stability and prosperity within and beyond the new borders of the Union" marked another start in the Union's relations with the regional countries. In the South Caucasus the EU's interest to be more visible in conflict management and promotion of political developments was reflected in bilateral documents (Action Plans) with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia as top priorities. Additionally, a Special Representative for the South Caucasus has been appointed for the first time to keep an eye on the negotiation process and support the efforts of participating parties.

But so far, the EU's attempts to contribute effectively to the resolution and management of the regional conflicts have been assessed by the stakeholders as insufficient and weak. As argued by regional and European scholars and policy researchers, the EU is inexcusably reluctant when it comes to the real business. Shortage of institutional power complemented by strategic interests pursued in bilateral relations with regional countries make the EU's possible contribution to conflict management extremely difficult.

In this brief paper I will give a quick overview of the EU's institutional capabilities and experience in conflict management. On this basis, I will try to assess the Union's potential and role it can possibly play in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict negotiation process.

The EU as a political union has comparably modest experience in crisis management and conflict resolution. While being conceived as purely economic organizations meant to help European countries

cope with the economic consequences of the Second World War, the European Communities (EC) were very reluctant to be involved in the resolution of politically sensitive conflicts. Among the main reasons usually listed are weak legal and institutional bases, complication in set up and implementation of common foreign policy, and contradicting approaches demonstrated by the member states towards various conflicts across the globe.

Challenges the European continent faced after the collapse of the USSR, with the eruption of devastating wars in the EC's immediate neighborhood, triggered the political maturing of the Union. Emerging in 1992 under its new name, the EU has been conferred more political functions and power.

But implementation of the provisions seemed to take more time, and time was something that the Union lacked. That led to the EU's failure to enact constructive conflict management during the so-called Yugoslav wars in the mid 1990s. Another fiasco was the inability to prevent genocide and war atrocities in the Western Sahara region. Thus, the EU's conflict management strategy has been developed and widely impacted by these historic periods. The lesson learned was obvious — applying only a pre-emptive and quick conflict management strategy can reduce the number of victims and degree of destruction in conflict zones. After the Kosovo war, the Union's top officials, led by the former High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, worked out the so-called strategy of rapid reaction in conflict prevention.

Currently, the EU's involvement in conflict prevention is guided by two key documents – Communication of the European Commission on Conflict Prevention of 2001 and the EU Program on Prevention of Violent Conflicts of 2001. Both documents underlined the importance of ensuring effective multilateralism, strengthening the existence of conflict prevention tools, and maintaining active engagement of the EU member states as essential for the successful implementation of tasks assigned. In its conflict prevention strategy, the Union pays special attention to the support of civil society, academic circles, and the private sector in the conflict areas.

New challenges for the EU in terms of political development have been brought after the 9/11 attacks in the US. The threat coming from the advanced international terrorism network (although this was not the only security challenge to cope with), and need to respond in a prompt and coherent way, forced the emergence of the European Security Strategy (ESC) in 2003, a key security document stipulating the main objectives of EU foreign policy as well as those issues which pose ultimate threats to the well-being of European nations. Time to pay double attention to its neighborhood was clear — 2004, the year that would bring the unprecedented enlargement of the EU, was approaching. The Union's borders would soon approximate such troubled regions as Moldova, Belarus, and in perspective, the South Caucasus.

Explicit stipulation of the regional conflicts in the EU's neighborhood as having a great potential to affect regional and European stability was a clear indication of priorities to be pursued with the neighboring countries. While elaborating on the conflicts the ESC put forward the notion of "effective multilateralism" as a basic part of its conflict prevention strategy. This means direct participation of such international organizations as the OSCE, CoE, and the UN as primary ways for the EU to get involved in conflict management overseas.

However, shortage of institutional and political capacity accompanied with insufficient knowledge of the realities on the ground significantly downgraded the EU's capabilities to participate effectively in the conflict management process. The Union is constantly being criticized for the lack of a coherent approach while addressing sensitive ethno-territorial conflicts in its eastern neighborhood. When it comes to the South Caucasus, there are many reasons for this, where historical and geopolitical issues seized a particular place.

Traditionally, the region has always been under the influence of Russia, Iran, and Turkey. After the dissolution of the USSR, the US took a lead, actively participating in the conflict management process.

European countries, particularly member states of the EU, have almost no experience and no history of constant relations/cooperation with the countries of the South Caucasus. However, they do have (as well as the EU) an experience of distinct and comprehensive cooperation with the countries that play a decisive role in the region. Hence, from one side any attempt of the EU to get involved is challenged, first of all by the major regional policy actors. From the other side, it makes harder to seek a political consensus among

the member states towards the sensitive regional political issues when future intergovernmental relations with Russia or the US are at stake.

Another point might be of particular interest. Issues and problems present in the South Caucasus are new not only for European politics, but for essentially the European public. Hence, to seek public support or otherwise, to be pushed by the people to carry out crisis management in countries whose peoples are fairly new for the Europeans, is much harder.

When it comes to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the EU's stance has passed several stages. After the collapse of the USSR, the Union's first engagement with the regional countries was based on a pure economic and technical assistance basis. More active engagement has been prompted by institutional and political changes within the Union itself, which took more than a decade. The ENP's introduction in 2004 launched a completely new phase of cooperation with the countries of the South Caucasus. The so-called Action Plans signed with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia identified participation in the resolution of regional conflicts among the priorities and foresaw deeper political cooperation. Alongside, the appointment of Peter Semneby as the EU's Special Representative (EUSR) to the South Caucasus has been highly welcomed by the regional stakeholders as evidence of the EU's growing interest in the regional conflicts.

But so far, the EU's contribution to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been extremely small and almost invisible. Action plans signed with both countries includes two conflicting principles — “territorial integrity” when it comes to Azerbaijan and the “right of nations for self-determination” for Armenia, which drastically reduces the chances to apply any coherent strategy in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Furthermore, the EU's timorous attempts to get some space within the format of the OSCE Minsk Group have been strictly opposed by all parties.

Even more questions have arisen with the launching of the Eastern Partnership in 2009. Seen as a successor to the ENP, this policy put a stronger emphasis on the EU's bilateral relations with the participating countries in the economic area, yet presents less explicit wording when it comes to conflict management.

While contradictions between Russia and Ukraine on gas transit continue, the notion of the “energy security” accompanied with the urgent need to diversify the European energy suppliers received primary attention from the EU policy-makers' side. Thus, in this context, the upgrade of bilateral relations with Azerbaijan to the level of strategic partnership in the energy realm is of particular interest. So far, numerous meetings between EU and Azerbaijani high-level officials within the framework of the Eastern Partnership are mainly concentrated on perspectives of the Nabucco pipeline and underline importance of Azerbaijan as a transit country for the EU's energy supply. This visibly overshadows the Union's attempts to play a more assertive role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process.

Steps undertaken by the newly established European External Action Service (EEAS) and, particularly, its chief Baroness Catherine Ashton, are another concern. Despite numerous calls to get more engaged in the region, given the vulnerability of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and radicalization of both parties, she opted to abolish the mandate of the EUSR for the South Caucasus, which has been perceived by the regional stakeholders as an alarming sign.

Meanwhile, some reshuffling of priorities has occurred within the OSCE Minsk Group itself. After years of the US being a key driver of the peace process, Russia took an active role as mediator. The place for the EU to take a lead in this format is even farther than before.

Failure of another breakthrough in Kazan last July contributed to an intensification of the debate over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in Brussels and Strasbourg. In her speech on Nagorno-Karabakh during the plenary session of the EP in Strasbourg held almost immediately after the unsuccessful meeting of three presidents in Tatarstan, Ashton made a number of strong statements. Calling for the parties “to redouble their efforts to find an agreement before the end of this year,” she urged that outcomes of these negotiations “will play a role in the way we shape our policy towards the countries concerned.” In the debates launched by the MEPs after the speech, issues of territorial integrity and liberation of the surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh territories have been particularly highlighted. MEPs have also expressed great concerns in the repercussions, which would bring militarization and change of the status quo in the region.

It is still hard to predict whether the EU will take a more consistent and active part in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Despite significant changes in the Union's common foreign and security policy spanning more than a decade, it still lacks leadership and coherence. The will of member states to give more political power for the EU to lead in foreign policy is the basic element here. The events of summer 2008 between Georgia and Russia have demonstrated that national interests of the member states considerably hinder the possibility to put forward a single strategy and approach. While Georgia's conflicts with its breakaway regions used to get more attention and involvement from the EU, it failed to show a strict and coherent approach when the military activities unfolded. Attempts undertaken by France as a mediator proved the Union's inability to take a lead and establish itself as an active political actor in the region.

On the other hand, the EU's current internal, mainly financial problems might question its will to strengthen its foreign policy agenda across the world. If so, the Union's involvement in conflict management in the South Caucasus will be significantly decreased. This means an extensive drawback and new challenges to reestablish itself in the region in the future. To lose what has already been gained is not a good option. The EU is gradually getting visibility and recognition in the region, and what is more important, there is a call from the in-region stakeholders to see the Union as a proactive and decisive power.

Alongside primary concerns over the investments and lost opportunities which have triggered development of its conflict management strategy in Balkans and Africa can possibly matter for the Union to keep and intensify its efforts in the resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Association Agreements to be concluded with the regional countries envisaged more financial assistance and demands the EU to be more protective of its long-term investments and interests. Another key point is to ensure its energy security which would be seriously challenged if this fragile status quo would not be changed. The EU certainly has no time "to wait for peace to act".

## ***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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