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Analysis

Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Searching for Peace By Artak Ayunts

For more than fifteen years after the ceasefire was signed between the parties of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the societies strive towards a peaceful resolution. Nevertheless, there is no complete confidence in the stability and irreversibility of the peace by peaceful means. The societies living in the condition of **no-war-no-peace** significantly differ from the ones living in peace or war and have to be carefully examined in order to make certain conclusions from the current peace process and understand whether it is possible to transform the situation of enduring
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A moment of truth in the Nagorno-Karabakh talks? By Tabib Huseynov

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Between Amnesia and Vengeance: A Path to Reconciliation

By Afa Alizada

“We can never live side by side in peace after the atrocities have perpetrated against **our people**.” This is the sentiment that dominates the discourse in conflict-ridden societies, where the violent conflict has left deep wounds. The sentiment is acutely felt especially in ethnic conflicts that resulted because of the carefully crafted symbolic politics. Kaufman refers to symbolic politics to describe any sort of political activity focused on manipulating people’s emotions and invoking the “ghosts” of the past rather than addressing the current concerns. It works to divert people’s attention from the lack of economic or political opportunities to less tangible ideas of ethnic pride and **glorious past** of one’s group. Emotions such as the fear of group extinction help mobilize people and drive ethnic violence.

Once violence reaches the point of atrocities, the old symbols and myths are reinforced and the vicious cycle begins. These fresh memories of massacres and bloody violence provide new myths and symbols, which are, in turn, used to further demonize the enemy, justify further fighting and delegitimize any compromise or peace talks. These myths and symbols serve as the only truth especially to those born and raised after the violent period.

As a result of the physical separation of the warring parties, most of these young people never come in contact with people from the opposite side, which further reinforces their images of the enemy as a monstrous creature incapable of civility and compassion. It, therefore, becomes very easy to fear or hate this faceless creature. It also becomes incomprehensible to imagine sitting across the same table, let alone living side by side, with this monstrous creature, if one even dares to imagine such a thing in the fear of being labeled a traitor.

I was once again reminded of these realities when the Azerbaijani community throughout the world came together in commemoration of the 18th anniversary of the Khojaly Massacre. The tragic event of February 26, 1992, where 613 innocent civilian Azerbaijanis were brutally killed in the heat of the escalating Nagorno-Karabakh War, has become lodged in the collective memory of the Azerbaijanis as unseen brutality and a sign of Armenian aggression. For the generation of Azerbaijanis who grew up in the wake of the Nagorno-Karabakh War, the Khojaly Massacre offered the only understanding of the neighboring Armenia: blood-thirsty aggressors who want to annihilate Azerbaijanis and occupy our lands. So as schoolchildren, we drew pictures that depicted mothers weeping over the bodies of their slain children, corpses scattered all over the ground, burning homes, and blood. We did not fully grasp the idea of genocide or massacre, but year after year, we drew these pictures thus keeping the memory alive and hatred growing.

Can there be reconciliation when the memories of such atrocities are vividly alive? Some suggest that, in fact, choosing to forget is the way to peace and reconciliation, since keeping the painful memories alive prods the old wounds and prevents the “healing” process. However, if history has taught us anything it is that unaddressed and suppressed grievances have a tendency of bottling up and surfacing in the most explosive and violent ways. Furthermore, by choosing to forget Khojaly and countless other atrocities around the world carried out in the name of religion, ethnicity, or motherland, one runs the risk of overlooking an important lesson: A human being, regardless of creed, race, ethnicity, or nationality **is** capable of inflicting unfathomable pain to a fellow human being. Others, on the other hand, suggest that there can be no reconciliation without **justice**.

Justice, however, is an ambiguous term, especially in the context of violent conflicts. For some, justice simply means an official apology from those responsible for the crimes, while others demand monetary compensation. Although often logistically difficult, there is also the possibility of bringing such crimes before the International Criminal Court. Yet for others, justice means retaliation or getting even with the perpetrators of such crimes.

This kind of an “eye for an eye” attitude, however, is counterproductive to any peace process, since violence begets more violence and perpetuates a vicious cycle. Therefore, true reconciliation can be achieved by finding a middle ground between forgetting and vengeance. Finding the middle ground is not easy. It requires adopting a future-oriented remembrance and, however uncomfortable it might be, sitting across the table with the **enemy** and listening to his side of the story.

Karabakh Settlement: In Need of Public Diplomacy

By Anahit Shirinyan

More than 15 years of negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict do not seem to produce tangible results. The mediators’ optimism for a soon-to-come breakthrough is not shared among Armenians and Azerbaijanis. They know it better: they are not ready to make concessions. And while everyone’s attention and endeavors are now directed towards the interstate political resolution of the conflict, no one cares about reconciling people first.

Armenian and Azerbaijani societies have been subjected to state propaganda, with nationalistic and war rhetoric encouraging hatred and animosity towards each other for decades. Thus, it is natural that any kind of concessions is not popular at all on either side of the border. The whole negotiation process is viewed as a zero-sum game rather than a road to peace.

With this regard, public diplomacy could be quite an effective way out of the situation.

People-to-people contacts, discussions among different sectors of the societies on the conflict and other concerns that the two nations share in common could boost tolerance, trust and understanding between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. In a long-term perspective this would let people get involved in peace building and even influence the decisions of their governments on the resolution process. However, due to a high level of distrust and intolerance between the two nations, even rare public diplomacy initiatives are faced with skepticism and/or enmity among the people. Neither of the two governments seem to support and encourage people-to-people contacts of their citizens. Yet, a state-supported public diplomacy initiative was taken about two years ago, when a group of Armenian and Azerbaijani intellectuals headed with their ambassadors to Russia paid visits (once in 2007, and then in 2009) to Karabakh, Yerevan and Baku, met with the presidents and held discussions on the topic.

This initiative was actually possible thanks to the personal friendship between Azerbaijan’s Ambassador to Russia Polad Bulbuloghli and Armenia’s then-Ambassador to Russia Armen Smbatyan: professional interest in music and art has built friendship between the ambassadors of two hostile countries. Other public diplomacy initiatives, even though they do take place, are still not encouraged. Ironically, public diplomacy has recorded considerable achievements in moving forward another reconciliation process, one between Armenia and Turkey. Public diplomacy was the key to the recent rapprochement process. And even though the official rapprochement process is now stalled, Armenian-Turkish public diplomacy continues to break stereotypes, challenge government actions and reconcile people.

In addition to the state-implemented “football diplomacy,” there have been numerous visits, exchanges and discussions between Armenian and Turkish intellectuals, journalists, artists, political scientists, businessmen, and so forth. These became possible on a large scale after the Armenian and Turkish governments became rather supportive of these initiatives and dialogues, or at least refrained from creating any obstacles for them.

As an example to the contrary, **the International Crisis Group’s Europe program director Sabine Freizer, in her [article](#),¹ gives an example of how** Azerbaijan and Armenia could not agree on locations to

play qualifying football matches for the European Cup. Eventually, the two matches were canceled, and the countries received no points. A typical lose-lose outcome, in contrast to Turkish-Armenian “football diplomacy.”

Turkish-Armenian relations have been at a stalemate for almost a hundred years, and it became possible to move forward only after the large-scale efforts on the public diplomacy front registered success. How long will it take for Armenians and Azerbaijanis to see the need for it, two countries that have been negotiating for 15 years but can't agree on a venue for a football match?

The two processes are different. The stakes are different too, but when you put aside all those “justifications,” it becomes obvious that Armenia and Azerbaijan have made a “losing game” of this whole negotiation process by not letting their citizens communicate and be engaged in dialogue. Any political resolution of the Karabakh conflict is going to be a “lose-lose” game for both sides unless it is accepted by the people. The Karabakh settlement is in urgent need of public diplomacy. It's time to give it a chance.

The reference link in case it does not open:

<http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=190222>

My First Armenian Friend

By Arzu Geybullayeva

“I'm really glad I got to know you, because you're one of the most outgoing people I've ever met. I had the coolest time with you laughing and singing....” Before sitting down to write this post, I thought for a while as to where I should start. I thought of my encounters with Armenians, our conversations, and what not. Luckily, it didn't take me long to remember a diary I kept between 1999 and 2000 during my stay in the US. I was 16 years old then and I was attending the FSA/FLEX exchange program.

Her name was Susanna and we both were exchange students in the same state— California—but in different cities. We met during our first student gathering and we bonded straight away. The quote above is what Susanna wrote into that very diary during one of our trips.

Susanna was the same age as I and we had so much in common. I remember us walking in Chinatown in San Francisco, singing, laughing and telling each stories of our childhood. I remember the moment we met. We didn't think of where we were from, we didn't think that our countries were at war. For us, all that mattered was to spend the time we had together and enjoy it. A year later, I returned home, back to Azerbaijan, hoping that perhaps one day I would see Susanna again. I never did, but without knowing it, I began a long journey of meeting new people, making some new Armenian friends among them.

Five years later, I met another girl from Armenia—this time, in London, where I was doing my masters degree. She had a vibrant personality and warmth. Once again, it didn't matter where we were from. Our friendship, our similar attitudes mattered the most. Her name is Isabella. And we are still friends, following each other on Facebook. Since then, I have met many young, bright Armenians, sharing the same values and ideas, wanting same things as peace, stability, freedom and democracy.

For this, I consider myself lucky, because I have had the chance to meet people from Armenia and talk to them, see how similar we are and how much we look alike. I have had the chance to work with them and get pleasure from working together, playing games together, talking and laughing together and most importantly, becoming friends.

And now, I truly believe that dialogue between the two countries is possible. One must only find the right way, the right approach, and make the first step. You see, things like stereotypes and comfort zones are tricky things. Once you step into the comfort zone and adopt a certain stereotype, you find yourself sucked

into a surreal world, made up of false premises, wrong judgments, overstatements, and lack of trust. You start looking around you and frantically search for the look-alikes, and that's when it all ends. Unfortunately, many in Azerbaijan as well as Armenia live in these "worlds of surreal personal existence," detached from any means of possible communication, collaboration or anything along these lines.

We built high walls around ourselves, feeding ourselves as well as our children on at times unsubstantiated norms and values, turning into robots. We shut down at a time when we should all be turning on and looking for a better, brighter future. It is time to wake up, it is time to start breaking the stereotypes and leaving our comfort zones.

Moderating Effects of Shared Regional Identity?

By Irina Ghaplanyan

In the past two decades the term "South Caucasus" has been used merely as a way of geographically grouping three countries that happen to neighbor each other. In political terms the concept of regional identity could hardly be applied to Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, all with strikingly different foreign policy agendas, strategic alignment patterns and regional cooperation, or lack thereof. So can we really talk of regional identity in the case of the South Caucasus, moreover, of its possible moderating effects?

Well, simply put, yes, if we choose to. What the countries of the region do share in common is history, social transitional culture and mentality, common borders and common neighbors. Let's take a brief look at those.

The Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Georgians, having lived for centuries side by side, share the common history of being consecutively under the rule of one or another empire, whether Ottoman, Russian, or Persian. Interestingly, according to a number of historians, the concept of modern nationalism was absent in the psyche of the then-rulers of Transcaucasia – the Armenian meliks, the Azeri khans, and Georgian kings, who for pragmatic reasons would have more of an allegiance to one another, while occasionally handing over their own kind.

The Sovietization of the region was a bittersweet period: on the one hand, all the current regional conflicts are direct byproducts of Stalin's irrational, to say the least, redrawing of the borders within the region. But on the other hand, the Soviet era and the concept of one nation brought the people of the South Caucasus ever closer. Despite the fact that during 70 years of Soviet rule the Armenians continued to dispute the Nagorno-Karabakh's vertical subordination to Baku, this period witnessed a high number of inter-ethnic marriages and an overall inter-ethnic social cohesion. This could also be explained by the fact that the practicing of religion was banned in the Soviet republics, and it was one less factor differing Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the leadership of the countries constructed national identities of their respective peoples designating one another the role of the enemy. This, however, did not stop the countries from sharing the same economic, social, cultural, and political hardships of the transition from planned to market economy, and from an autocratic government to a democratic one.

Moreover, the countries of the South Caucasus all have borders with one or the other powerful neighbor, whether it is Russia, Turkey or Iran. This, undoubtedly, stresses the security perceptions of the small states of the region, and hypothetically could be a driving factor towards a deeper and stronger cooperation between the three if the existing conflicts could have been taken out of the equation.

A common history, common post-Soviet socio-cultural transitional mentality and lifestyles, common geopolitical positioning – all of these can be constitutive factors of common regional identity and moreover,

can have moderating effects, if the leadership of the countries concerned choose to articulate those as such.

The power and weight of a cohesive South Caucasus from economic, political and military perspectives could be unprecedented on the global scale, as it is one of the most significant geopolitical crossroads between Europe and Asia. The region's social cohesion is more likely to be a top-down development, only if the ruling elites will see possible political dividends in such policies, in which case, this development would potentially be bottom-up as well. Where do we start?

ANALYSIS

Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Searching for Peace

By Artak Ayunts

For more than fifteen years after the ceasefire was signed between the parties of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the societies strive towards a peaceful resolution. Nevertheless, there is no complete confidence in the stability and irreversibility of the peace by peaceful means. The societies living in the condition of **no-war-no-peace** significantly differ from the ones living in peace or war and have to be carefully examined in order to make certain conclusions from the current peace process and understand whether it is possible to transform the situation of enduring uncertainty towards long-lasting peace. This distinction is widely manifested in the socio-psychological aspects of group identity strengthening selective perception, negative stereotypes, tunnel vision and overall dim prospects for peaceful resolution of conflict.

The **conflict potential** allows determining the transformation of a dormant conflict both in **negative** (possible escalation of conflict) and **positive** (conflict resolution by peaceful means) directions. Analysis of conflict potential requires identification of the causes and functions of conflict as well as prospects for peace.

Basic Human Needs – Identity and Security

There are different interpretations in the analysis of the root causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, such as historical injustice, territorial dispute, and Soviet-era wrongdoing. However, the analysis can be sustained with another solid proposition related to the failure of basic human needs of a certain group and its subsequent socio-economic deprivation.¹ The Basic Human Needs (BHN) theory² in conflict resolution was introduced by John Burton where he argued that when needs, such as identity and/or security, are denied a person or a group, they can either die, demonstrate other manifestations of denial, or rebel. The key causes of violent conflicts in the post-Cold War conflicts, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, were substantially related to the deprivation of identity and security as a basic human need making them more complicated, less subject to concessions and negotiations.

Another theory supporting the BHN argument is Ted Robert Gurr's theory of Relative Deprivation (RD)³ where he suggests that there can be an accepted discrepancy between expectations — resources the person (group) aspires to have — and opportunities — resources the person (group) is able to have and preserve. The higher the level of accepted discrepancy between expectations and opportunities, the greater the RD and the intensity and scope of that perception among the group members. Thus, it brings to a higher potential for collective violence and destructive conflict. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh strengthened the ethnic element among the other social characteristics in the Armenian identity. Armenians' ethnic belonging became a significant component of identity, in fact, becoming one of the crucial elements of group integration since other elements of group identity had gradually disappeared with the end of Soviet Union.

The problem of security is another crucial factor defining the potential of conflict. One of the main causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was the perception that the need of security for the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh was not satisfied. Currently, the problem of security is still the cornerstone of the peace process. The inability to meet the satisfaction of these needs by traditional means of negotiations and diplomatic efforts has made the peace process more intractable.

Social-psychological Dimension

The **image of enemy** and **negative stereotypes** between the parties are among the main negative factors of conflict potential. The lack of communication and contact between the conflicting sides on both local and regional levels makes the negative gap even greater. Instead of making attempts to come out from the

tunnel vision and selective perception, the media continues to label **the other** as merely **the enemy**. Azerbaijanis and Armenians are predominantly represented as **barbarians, aggressors, traitors**, and so forth.

'Trigger-issues'

"Incidental" issues can be discerned as another factor capable for the escalation of conflict. Such factors cannot be underestimated, especially in the **no-war-no-peace** society as they can play the role of a trigger for the resumption of violence. The number of casualties across the conflict lines amounts to several dozen every year on each side. There are other factors as well, such as the official statements of leaders, statements in media, and issues raised in the negotiation process. The preservation of fragile peace directly depends on the efforts of the parties at conflict to prevent incidents since they solemnly are responsible for maintaining the ceasefire agreement.

Third Parties

One of the most important factors determining conflict potential is third-party countries having certain interests in the region. These are the countries involved in the mediation process, namely the Minsk Group states Russia, US, and France. They also include neighboring countries – Turkey and Iran have both mentioned their interests in the conflict's resolution and regional development.

Russia's role in the preservation of peace is crucial. Nonetheless, it is not always necessarily perceived as positive regarding the final resolution of the conflict and establishment of long-lasting peace. Turkey's negative role in pursuing a one-sided position (in favor of Azerbaijan) in the conflict resolution process does not make it a constructive mediator in the peace process. Iran's interests in mediation and the consequent peace process is determined with the desire to exclude Western mediators from the region who would approach closely to their borders in case they broker peace. And, finally, the West – represented by the US and France in the Minsk Group – is interested in democratization and stability in the region, which means it is interested in the resolution of the conflict. However, the only negative aspect for conflict potential connected with the West's role lies in the fact that it wants peace much more than conflict resolution. It needs the result of the peace process – the establishment of peace and stability.

Political Aspect (Internal Politics)

There are several political factors of conflict potential: the level of democratization, political will, public support and the negotiation process.

There are serious issues in terms of democratization processes in both Armenian and Azerbaijani societies. The leaders are not recognized by the wider public as legitimate, which means that any agreement reached between them regarding the resolution of the conflict will somehow be challenged by the societies. That is why the leaders do not exercise strong political will for mutual concessions and compromise. The current stage of negotiations between the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents are seen as crucial since it seems there is a mutual agreement for taking things forward based on the Madrid principles. But the impact of such a deal within the societies is not obvious since it largely refers to the consequences of war rather than the roots of conflict.

Another issue is the politico-economic interest by some parties in power, which helps preserve owned authority in a **no-war-no-peace** situation. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has become the most important element for manipulation in the political life of both societies. Up to now, internal political problems of the two states are very much connected with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

A one-sided approach in the negotiation process is another factor of unsuccessful attempts to resolve the conflict. The official negotiation process alone cannot bring the mutually acceptable solution to the conflict since the societies are polarized and do not trust each other. In this situation, **non-official** or **public diplomacy** could play an important role in finding ways to support the resolution of the conflict.

Non-official Diplomacy

Public diplomacy has had a rather great influence on various conflict resolution processes worldwide. This component of the peace process encompasses civil society and grassroots leaders. The involvement of NGO, business and community leaders in the peace process is extremely important to promote conflict transformation and overcome negative experience aimed at bringing just and positive peace. Public debates on widely diverse opinions and approaches toward the current **no-war-no-peace** situation are activities the NGO sector can initiate.

The business component of non-official diplomacy would seriously improve socio-economic conditions by opening the communications bridging Armenian and Azerbaijani economies. Even though the fear towards each other is still present in the minds of ordinary people, the need for peace, development, and well-being of future generations is even more alive and sensitive, which gives hope that specific measures of conflict transformation through economic initiatives and trust-building measures between previously embittered entities could be fruitful for the peace process.

Sustainability of the peace process is determined with the active involvement of the public sector. In turn, the institutionalization of peace is the main factor for positive peace meaning not only security but also welfare and prosperity for the people. The need for peace becomes a specific need particularly important in the conditions of a **no-war-no-peace** situation. It is the only long-term alternative to war and violence for the people living next to each other for centuries who strive for sustainable development and economic prosperity.

Cooperation and Peace Perspectives

Cooperation itself does not resolve conflicts but creates preconditions for their settlement and resolution in the long-term perspective. The higher the level of democratization and economic development of the societies, the greater the possibility of conflict resolution by peaceful means.

There have been various ideas for cooperation/integration, such as Common Caucasian Home, Caucasian Parliament with representatives from recognized and unrecognized states, Peace Zones, and so forth. However, these ideas are considered elusive since in order to initiate at least one of them there should be some kind of formalized peace agreement. Even the supporters of these ideas say that common principles for normalizing relations between the nations need to be elaborated first.

Free Economic Zone (FEZ) or Qualified Industrial Zone (QIZ) ideas seem to be more real even for those who deny their possibilities because of the influence of geopolitical factors and the states' struggle to increase their own influence in the region. However, these ideas could be interpreted differently. The existence of QIZ, for instance, would make conflict resolution more feasible. Somehow the trade between Armenians and Azerbaijanis is happening even at this stage, so why not formalize it?

To sum up, it is important to understand that the containment-oriented conflict settlement strategies that were used in the Cold War era, like enforcement mechanisms of crisis management, cannot be applied in deep-rooted identity conflicts connected to the peoples' self-identification. Today new, flexible and adaptive approaches of conflict resolution through transformation are required which would make possible tackling contemporary conflicts that are strengthened by complex needs and interests between confronting sides. From this point of view, it is also important to develop a transformational approach in the conflict resolution and peace process where the concepts of confidence and trust between the confronting sides are being prioritized.

¹ For details see Ayunts, A. **Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in Its Current Stage: Functional Role and Possible Solutions**, Unpublished Dissertation, Yerevan State University, Armenia, July 2004 (in Armenian)

² Burton, J., **Conflict: Human Needs Theory**, Macmillan Press, London, 1990

³ Gurr, T.R., **Why Men Rebel**, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1970

A moment of truth in the Nagorno- Karabakh talks?

By Tabib Huseynov

The Nagorno-Karabakh peace process has reached a “make or break” point. There is a real opportunity for Armenia and Azerbaijan to achieve a breakthrough in the protracted conflict in the coming few months by formally signing the framework agreement on the basic principles outlined by the OSCE Minsk Group mediators. However, as negotiations have gained momentum, expectations of an imminent breakthrough in the talks have been called into question as the Armenian and, to a lesser degree, Azerbaijani leaderships deal with domestically entrenched maximalist forces opposed to a compromise. If the talks fail now, Armenia and Azerbaijan may find themselves trapped in a spiralling military escalation which will have unpredictable consequences for both countries and for wider regional security.

Most of the optimism still present about a possible breakthrough in the talks stems from the fact that the international climate today is arguably more favourable to a peaceful resolution than at any time in the past. The US, Russia and France, as co-chairs of the Minsk Group, have joined efforts to facilitate a negotiated solution, sharing a similar vision based on peaceful resolution of the conflict within the framework of the “basic principles” document (also known as the “Madrid proposals”). Importantly, both the Armenian and Azerbaijani sides have largely accepted the basic principles as a framework for negotiations, which make it harder and politically more risky than before for either party to the conflict to reject it and expect to start negotiations on different grounds.

Two major regional developments – the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008 and the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement – have increased international attention on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the sense of urgency to achieve a breakthrough in the stalemated talks.

The August 2008 war in Georgia demonstrated that the regional status quo is fragile, unsustainable and threatening, not only to the South Caucasus, but also to wider European security. Facing seemingly insurmountable differences on Georgia, the US/EU and Russia have shifted their focus to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a more promising area for common action in the Caucasus, thus helping them to “reset” their relations.

Russia retains its desire to dominate the region and keep it within its “sphere of influence”. However, it has also come to understand that its long-term interests are better served by leading the international effort to peacefully transform the unsustainable Nagorno-Karabakh status quo. In this sense, Russia also views its mediation efforts within the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) Minsk Group as a means to promote its regional influence.

The Turkey-Armenia normalization process has further focused international attention on the Nagorno-Karabakh talks. Turkey has made it clear that it will not improve relations with Armenia at the expense of damaging relations with Azerbaijan. According to Ankara, reopening the Turkish-Armenian border, which is a key element of the protocols signed by the leaders of the two countries in October 2009, will require some sort of a parallel progress in the Nagorno-Karabakh talks. To sustain the Turkey-Armenian normalisation, the Minsk Group mediators face a new sense of urgency to achieve parallel progress in the Nagorno-Karabakh talks.

However, while there exist implicit connections between Turkey-Armenia normalisation and the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations, both these processes are quite complex in their own right. If they are tied together too much, both may be further complicated which is in nobody’s interest. Given the differing complexities of the issues (opening of the border and withdrawal) it would be wrong to assume that Turkey will open its border with Armenia only after a final resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict or withdrawal from most of the occupied territories by Armenian forces. Opening the Turkey-Armenia border is a quickly

implementable measure, while an Armenian withdrawal and agreement on the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh is a much more complex, long-term process.

Therefore, it seems that the “progress” that Ankara is looking for does not necessarily have to be an actual start of Armenian withdrawal from Azerbaijani occupied territories, as it insisted in 1993 when it closed the border due to Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territory, but could rather be an agreement on the framework agreement on the basic principles proposed by the Minsk Group. If Turkey wants to reopen borders with Armenia without burning its bridges with Azerbaijan, it is important that Baku also accept that a framework agreement is sufficient to accept Turkey-Armenian border opening. Yerevan’s cooperation on, and acceptance of, the basic principles document is key for both processes to move forward.

In contrast to the favourable international environment, the domestic circumstances in both Armenian and Azerbaijani societies remain the biggest obstacle to a resolution. Contrary to some arguments, the source of the problem is not the general public and their alleged “unpreparedness” for peace. Rather, the problem lies with the political elites, both within the government and the political opposition, which have fomented public fears and concerns in order to gain/retain political power and also to gain more trump cards at the negotiation table by using segments of their power base as political pawns. This is a vicious circle, however. By perpetuating maximalist expectations within their populations, the elites push themselves further into a corner. They are becoming hostage to their own maximalist rhetoric and are increasingly unable to reconcile domestic and international pressures.

Most importantly in the immediate future, the leadership both in Armenia and Azerbaijan need to gain public support for this phase of the peace process – agreeing on a document on basic principles – by explaining to their publics that the principles in themselves do not represent a final peace deal, but are rather a first step in a negotiation process with no predetermined decision on the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Because of deliberate misrepresentation and a lack of public discussion, the basic principles have been largely viewed as a plot to legitimise Nagorno-Karabakh’s secession in Azerbaijan, while many Armenians believe the principles would lead to Nagorno-Karabakh’s reintegration with Azerbaijan against the will of the people who live in the region. As a result of these perceptions, the dynamism in the peace process and talk of an imminent agreement on the basic principles do not resonate well with the wider population. On the contrary, they are regarded with suspicion and increase the sense of insecurity. Without bridging this gap between the international and domestic perceptions of the peace process, it will be impossible for the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments to sign the basic principles agreement.

At this crucial time, it is of utmost importance that the international mediators keep up their concerted efforts to encourage the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments to agree on the framework document on basic principles that would form a basis for an eventual peace agreement. Most importantly, the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments should engage their populations in a genuine debate about the existing options on the negotiation table and make a genuine effort to persuade them that the gains to be achieved from a peaceful and gradual change in the status quo far outweigh any perceived advantages of clinging to the status quo. Greater public awareness on the issues and options and their implications would diminish feelings of insecurity which, in turn, would untie the hands of the negotiators and allow them to move forward.

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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