

Caucasus Edition

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ANALYSIS

Religious Component as a Tool for Reconciliation of Armenian and Azerbaijani Populations

by Hovhannes Hovhannisyan

In specialized scientific and academic literature the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been discussed and analyzed from the point of general approaches to ethnic or territorial conflicts, and the other components which might have played even a small role in the conflict or post-conflict era have been ignored by the researchers and practitioners. It is well known that any conflict has its own specifics and particularities, and from this point the solution of the conflicts cannot be similar--approaches to the conflict resolution should be diversified.

While discussing and analyzing the role of the religious factor in the Azeri-Armenian conflict it should be stated that the religion can be a source for inter-group conflict as well as for conflict resolution. In the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, we would like to discuss the religious factor as a tool for peaceful resolution making a great emphasize on the moral aspects of religion because notwithstanding of religious belief or belongings the moral values are connected with human values and they are universal for all mankind. In this sense the religions and their formal representatives in the countries should become the essential bearers of moral values and try to root these ideas among the peoples of both parties assisting and promoting the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

In this article we analyze other small elements that might not play a direct role in the conflict or might not be a cause for the conflict but indirectly has its influence on conflict escalation, misunderstanding, the rise of intolerance, and may have a major role in conflict resolution through approaching the point of views of two confronting ethnic groups or try to spread the ideas of tolerance among the common people. During the Armenian-Azeri conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh such kind of indirect influence could play a religious factor but not as a reason, cause, or consequence, but only as a factor which not only emphasized the differences between the parties but also somehow created lot of hindrances, obstacles, and difficulties on the way to approach the fighting nations and societies.

During the first period of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict Azerbaijan made lots of attempts to represent the conflict under the light of religious conflict, but the engagement of Iran into the peace establishment process and reconciliation of two parties showed that the conflict is mostly based on ethnic problems then on religious ones.¹ The Armenian side's agreement on the mediation of Iran² (which interrupted when Armenians took control over the city of Shushi in 1993) showed the world that despite some religious components the conflict is based on ethnic (Armenian approach) and/or territorial problems (Azerbaijan approach). During the Armenian-Azeri conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and after the signing of the ceasefire agreement, the Conference of Islamic Republics condemned the Armenian policy against Muslim Azerbaijan and demanded to resolve the conflict as soon as possible. Though any practical steps for implementing the resolutions of the conference have not been taken, the union of the countries on the religious basis discussed the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh and tried to have influence on its resolution, which gives some religious aspects to the conflict. Also, both parties in the conflict belong to different religions – Christianity and Islam make the religious aspect more evident and actual to discuss. From this point of view the representation of the Armenian-Azeri conflict under the religious light was quite profitable for a Muslim country with a Muslim population because in that case Armenia will become a rival not only for Azerbaijan but also for the Muslim world, which could become decisive factor during the conflict and for conflict resolution. If the world recognizes the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as religious, Armenia would be surrounded from three sides (Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Iran) because of the ethnic factor in the case of Turkey and religious factor in the case of Shi'a Iran. We should convincingly state that the Iranian factor

¹ From Nonsense to Nationhood: A Dangerous Trajectory of Azerbaijani Nationalism. Retrieved from <http://www.cilicia.com/Convenience.htm>.

² Iran always tried to keep neutrality between Armenia and Azerbaijan because the escalation of the conflict could have the worst influence on Iran and also Iran always tries to be the main player in regional politics. The agreement of the Armenian side during the conflict on the mediation of Shi'a Iran could become possible only if the Armenian side has been convinced in non-religious and neutral approaches of Iran. See <http://www.turksam.org/en/a255.html>

played a vital role during the conflict, especially the neutral role of Iran although Iran declared many times its position about the maintenance and restoration of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. But at the same time it is evidently observed that Iran did not impose any kind of pressures (economic, political, cultural, etc.) on Armenia and always kept the amicable relationships with its neighbor and even deepened its relationship with strategic cooperation. The vivid evidence of such kind of cooperation is the newly built Iran-Armenia gas pipeline and the cost of the gas Armenia pays by the supply of energy to Iran which can be deemed as mutual profitable project.

But before going deeper into the conflict resolution process let's describe some of the religious symbols used during the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. It is evident that from Azeri side many mohjaheds and vahabists³ have taken part in the conflict and Armenians used Christian symbols to show the religious confrontation. Some extremist Sunni groups in Azerbaijan many times tried to announce religious war (jihad) against Armenians to gain the financial, physical, and spiritual support of Muslim countries but could not mobilize all these forces against Armenians.⁴ From the other side it was quite evident during the liberation of Shushi that Armenians made white crosses on their clothes to show the religious aspect of their struggle.⁵ It was conditioned also by the fact that the main church in Shushi, St. Ghazanchetsots, had been used as a weapon warehouse that made the Armenian population and fighters to be more aggressive and goal-oriented.⁶ During the Shushi campaign the Armenian fighters and soldiers became crusaders (they made white crosses on their clothes) to liberate "the tomb of Jesus Christ"--the synonym of which was St. Ghazanchetsots Church--and to liberate one of the cradles of their Christianity (though it was not well understood and the campaign was done on a sensitive-irrational basis).

At the same time several political actors tried to exaggerate the religious factor and show the conflict under a religious light. Of course many of the political actors try to use religion for political reasons and to abuse the role of religion in society. From this point of view in Armenian reality there were some actors who also used the force of religion to enhance the spiritual feelings of believers and to present the conflict under the light of maintenance of ancestors' culture and heritage. From the Azeri side there were many attempts to use the force and rules of Islam to consolidate the Muslim believers against the "unbelievers" to preserve the ancestors' land and culture. Such kind of approaches during the conflict enhanced the hostile attitude toward each other and could enhance terrible consequences.

The other point is the project of "Great Turan" headed by Turkey, having the purpose to join all Turkish-speaking nations and create a huge alliance under the presidency of Turkey. On the Armenian side, political and societal actors considered this project a strong threat for the Armenian state because on the way to creating such a space, the only hindrance is Armenia with its territory. Such fears were enhanced by the announcements of some Turkish or Azeri public actors aiming to show that Armenia should be eliminated from the earth, and an ethnic group under the light of Islam would establish the "Great Turan." The Armenian newspapers always analyze the issue of "Great Turan" especially during the Uygur problem in China when Turkey announced the Uygur as his brothers and condemned the policy of China against one of its national minorities. These political steps were evaluated as the renaissance of the mentioned project, and people became more careful towards such announcements. This is also very interesting and challenging from the religious point of view because all mentioned nations that are to be involved in "Great Turan" project are Muslim nations and the implementation of the project should be done also under the religious light of Islam.

The religious component in the identity determination of both nations should also be mentioned. Traditionally, religion in the face of the Armenian Apostolic Church played a crucial role in the maintenance

³ Taarnby, Michael (2008). The Mujaheddin in Nagorno-Karabakh: A Case Study in the Evolution of Global Jihad. Elcano Royal Institute Working Papers, Issue 20. Pashayan, Araks (2009). Mujahideen in War in Karabakh. Noravank Foundation. Retrieved from <http://www.noravank.am/en/?page=analitics&nid=1735>

⁴ Willaert, Rita (2009). Nagorno-Karabakh: Overture to the War on Terror. Retrieved from <http://www.the-vibe.co.uk/2009/07/14/bensnook/nagorno-karabakh-overture-to-the-war-on-terror-shame-no-one-noticed/>

⁵ Armenians mention many times that in 1913 they had 222 functioning churches and places for worship and their number during the Soviet times sufficiently decreased. See Bishop Makar Barkhudariants. Artsakh. Baku. 1895.

⁶ Арсен Мелик-Шахназаров, Нагорный Карабах: факты против лжи. Информационно-идеологические аспекты нагорно-карабахского конфликта. Глава 4. Война с храмами. Retrieved from <http://sumgait.info/caucasus-conflicts/nagorno-karabakh-facts/nagorno-karabakh-facts-4.htm>.

of the Armenian nation and nowadays it continues to emphasize its role in society and public life, though its role in identity matters essentially decreased. From this perspective during the war between Azeris and Armenians, such issues were also touched because some churches and mosques and also cultural monuments reflecting the religious traditions were destroyed, and the religious issues were automatically legitimated and given rise. Also, Armenians identified the Azeri population with Turks and the propaganda was mostly made against the Muslim Turkish ethnos due to the ethnic cleanings that happened in Ottoman Turkey at the beginning of the 20th century. Among the Armenians, a crucial role played the consciousness that by fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh, they were fighting for their ancestors who were killed or who were pressured to convert to Islam in order to preserve their lives and their families and assimilated during the time.

Considering all the above-mentioned points we should conclude that religion is often used by the political actors for political and material benefit and for enhancing the nationalistic and religious feelings among the population for negative purposes. The religious factor may be used for reconciliation of both nations and tolerance towards each other. It is already evident that during the conflict the religious factor is mostly playing a role to raise and to deepen the mutual hostility and nationalistic approaches. But during the peaceful periods religion, its structures, and religious actors may play a great role for bringing the parties around the table.

One of the contemporary tools of religious pluralism and religious tolerance taught that states, people, and individuals should overcome the concepts of "other," "the outsider," and being "different." For both conflicting parties this is one of the main problems because the Soviet propaganda and also the war in Nagorno-Karabakh created a huge gap between two societies living in the same region and made it very difficult to find practical means and ways for approaching both nations and societies. As soon as the individuals, groups, and people notice the similarities between the two societies, it can become possible to overcome the current hostile situation and take further steps towards reconciliation. Of course, it is impossible without the assistance of official state and religious authorities who can prepare both societies for dialogue and tolerance.

After the war in Nagorno-Karabakh there were some attempts to find common solutions by the spiritual leaders of the Armenian Apostolic Church and Muslim Community of Azerbaijan, but such attempts have remained on paper or were ended by oral disputes. Recently, the Catholicos of All Armenians Garegin II was invited by Spiritual Leader of Azerbaijan Hachi Alashukur Pashazade to Baku to take part in the meeting of spiritual leaders of some post-Soviet countries which could have been a very good opportunity to discuss the common problems and try to find general ways for approaching both societies and eliminate the religious superstitions. Unfortunately, the announcements of Alashukur Pashazade on the Armenian Genocide may become a hindrance on the commencement of dialogue between two spiritual centers and their followers.

Inter-religious dialogue and engagement are the paths that both sides should use for relating to one another and to heal the antagonism among themselves. During the dialogue there should not be any emphasis on absolute truths or truths of one religion or any dogmatic or pure religious issues because they can be exploited to incite religious hatred as well as violence and deepen the conflict and hostility between the parties. Religion and its possibilities are the basic tools for enabling people and civil society members from both parties to commence the dialogue emphasizing the essential values shared by the world's religions such as love, compassion, equality, honesty, and the ideal of treating others as one wishes to be treated himself.

ANALYSIS

The Karabakh Conflict: From Tactics of «Enemy Neighbors» to the Strategy of «Partner Neighbors» by Rauf Rajabov

The resolution to the Karabakh conflict is dependent on many factors, both at the regional and geopolitical levels. In an effort to solve the conflict, OSCE MG Co-chairs see no objective grounds for solving the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in the short term perspective due to serious differences in Armenia and Azerbaijan over views on fundamental items (granting of a temporary status to Nagorno Karabakh and terms of referendum in the region to define this status with the participation both of Armenians residing there and Azerbaijanis to return to the region).

It is true that Russia as one of the Co-Chairs of the OSCE MG recognizes the right of the United States as OSCE MG Co-Chair as well as the EU with France as the OSCE MG Co-Chair to actively collaborate with the countries of the South Caucasus on all the issues, including regional security. Thus, a joint Declaration signed in May 2002 between Presidents George Bush and Vladimir Putin proclaims: «As for the Central Asia and the South Caucasus, we recognize our common interests in promoting stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the states of the region...» and further, «Russia and the United States will collaborate in solving regional conflicts, including Nagorno Karabakh.»⁸

Official Moscow does not conceal its interest to normalize Turkish-Armenian relations and open borders between the two countries. This political stance in Kremlin is entangled with new geopolitical realities of the region after the Georgian-Russian armed conflict in August 2008. Nevertheless, Kremlin is showing a growing interest in settling the Karabakh conflict within the context of the «August 2008 precedent».

It is obvious that recognition of Kosovo's independence (by approximately 70 countries) only to be followed by the Russian «August2008 precedent» in Georgia has enabled the Armenian community of Nagorno Karabakh to advance their arguments with reference to the international practice. The impact of the «Kosovo precedent» on geopolitical developments proved to be so great that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (on July 9, 2007 in Kiev) passed a Declaration that warned against exploiting the settlement of some conflicts as a precedent for resolving other conflicts.⁹

«THE KARABAKH GORDIAN KNOT »

In recent months, there has been an intensification of activities by the OSCE MG and Turkey toward the resolution of the Karabakh conflict. The OSCE MG is guided by the principle that it is primarily left to the governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia to make a final choice. Co-chair countries are poised to endorse a variant of the conflict's resolution that suits all the parties concerned and upon reaching a compromise agreement they would act as settlement guarantor. This type of approach is correct. At present, it would be wrong to speak about a radical breakthrough. The probability remains that a regular document will be adopted in the short-term (for instance, a preamble to the Madrid principles agreed by the parties) to regulate some issues, though no complex resolution to the Karabakh conflict is expected to take place.

In dragging out the ratification of the protocols, Turkey and Armenia should take into consideration some aspects of the matter. First, the lost time may increasingly aggravate both the settlement of the conflict and the Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. Thus, this will create both time and opportunity arise for political forces inside Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as «external actors» that opposed the signing of the protocols and normalization of the Armenian-Turkish and Azerbaijani-Armenian relations. Second, Turkey

⁸ Press Release, #13, 31 May 2002, Unofficial translation from Russian. Joint Declaration by President George W. Bush and President Vladimir V. Putin on the New Strategic Relationship Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation. Moscow May 24, 2002. <http://www.great-britain.mid.ru/pressrel/pres13-02.htm>

⁹ Kyiv declaration of the OSCE parliamentary assembly. And resolutions adopted at the sixteenth annual session. KYIV, 5 to 9 JULY 2007. http://www.oscepa.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=207:sixteenth-annual-session-kyiv-2007&catid=36:annual-sessions&Itemid=64

has to take into account new realities in the South Caucasus region. To note, radical changes within Turkish foreign policy can also result in changing attitudes to this country from its traditional partners.

It would be wrong to expect any immediate resolution to the Karabakh conflict for these reasons: 1) there continues to be a high level of mutual mistrust in the Azerbaijani and Armenian societies; and 2) a lack of culture of compromise among South Caucasus elites. For these reasons, it would be very dangerous to artificially accelerate the Karabakh resolution, as it may risk unleashing military operations in the South Caucasus region.

At the same time, the OSCE MG is urging the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia to sign an agreement this year. Such an agreement would be based on the so-called renewed Madrid principles that include all the principles of interest to the parties of the conflict (territorial integrity of states, right of peoples to self-determination and resolution to conflicts without use of force) and thus mark some progress in the negotiation process. For all intensive purposes, that progress would be enough to ratify the Armenian-Turkish protocols at the Turkish Parliament.

MEASURES OF TRUST

To regulate the Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, experts from both countries should take specific steps aimed at consolidating mutual trust in the Azerbaijani and Armenian societies. It is essential to ensure that Armenians and Azerbaijanis regard Azerbaijan and Armenia as a caretaker country, not a fearsome one. In this respect, the «Meindorf Declaration» signed in Moscow on November 2, 2008 and a meeting between the USA President, Armenian President S. Sargsyan and the Turkish Prime Minister R. T. Erdogan in the Washington Summit Nuclear Security on April 12-13 this year all make it possible to implement the given strategy. A text of the Declaration repeatedly refers to the OSCE MG as the basic format for conflict resolution, and under Clause 5 of this document both parties consider it crucial to encourage conditions for implementation of measures directed to strengthening the trust between them. The Clause above is of paramount importance, since it lays an emphasis on measures of trust and preparation of societies to a pragmatic compromise.

There is no doubt that representatives of civil society cannot replace the negotiation process. However, the point is that sooner or later a political agreement between the parties to the conflict will be signed, and direct participants of the conflict will have to co-reside! In the meantime, the peoples of the South Caucasus have lost the ability of coming to terms through the many years of enmity!

Another crucial aspect is that subjects to the conflict are Azerbaijanis and Armenians who have historically populated the territory of the Caucasus. The regional experts from both communities would be able to elaborate a long-term strategy of co-existence as «partner neighbors», not «enemy neighbors» within a unified social, cultural and economic area of the South Caucasus.

BLOG

Peace Talks behind the Closed Doors: Facilitating Progress or Ensuring Stalemate?

By Afa Alizada

After every high-level negotiation on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict ambiguity about what was discussed or what was agreed upon ensues: officials on both sides reassure their populations that there is progress and that “we are standing firm on our position”. I usually have two immediate reactions to these statements. First, I am very skeptical of the simultaneous use of “progress” and “standing firm on our position”: how can there be progress in peace talks between conflicting parties without any concessions made by either side? And, when some details are revealed to the public, it always seems like one side is making all the major concessions, which is not realistic. I, therefore, perceive the situation as the lack of real progress or our leaders’ deliberate effort to mislead us. Second, I can’t help but feel that I, as an Azerbaijani citizen, have the right to know what *really* goes on behind those closed doors.

Some experts point out that secrecy is absolutely necessary to ensuring successful negotiations. First, secrecy is usually imperative to initiating negotiations, because such talks and their outcomes are nonbinding and parties can back out at any moment without jeopardizing their public standing. Negotiations that take place away from the public eyes and media scrutiny also allow leaders to abandon the counterproductive and rigid rhetoric that is meant for their constituents and engage in sincere talks. It is also a way to keep spoilers, or those who are opposed to peace process, in the dark and prevent them from manipulating and derailing the process. Furthermore, considering media’s propensity to sensationalize news, which can distort people’s perceptions about the peace process, keeping the talks secret serves to ensure efficiency.

Nevertheless, secrecy surrounding these talks has its own costs. First of all, because the talks are nonbinding and officials cannot be held accountable for what they propose or reject, they have the liberty of changing their stances and renegotiating continually. This drags out the negotiations and precludes any tangible solutions. Second, it allows leaders to hold on to their belligerent rhetoric when they face their constituents, since the constituents are not aware of any concessions that might have been made on their part. Third, since the public is not aware of the process, when and if there is an agreement, the public is caught off guard. Because the public is unprepared, the prospects of successfully implementing an agreement are therefore very bleak.

This is exactly the situation with the Nagorno-Karabakh peace talks. Fifteen years of negotiations have resulted in virtually no progress and the conflict is stalemated. Any concessions that leaked out of these secret talks in the past were swiftly denied by officials of either government. Meanwhile, the Azerbaijani leadership continues presenting war as a viable option to the public and the Armenian leadership reassures its populace that it is ready for such a war. Majority of the population in both countries, therefore, continues to believe that the resolution of the conflict is possible without making any real compromise on their part.

However, if there is a breakthrough it will be a result of substantial compromise from both parties. Whatever an agreement is reached on the paper behind the closed doors, however, will be impossible to implement if the Armenian and Azerbaijani people’s expectations are too high and do not reflect the realities of what a peaceful resolution can achieve. Therefore, gradually opening these talks to the Azerbaijani and Armenian public by inviting media and civil society representatives to the negotiation rooms would help close the gap between the people’s expectations and the reality. In the meantime, the leadership in both countries should move away from the belligerent rhetoric and facilitate people-to-people contacts between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in an effort to prepare them for potentially uncomfortable concessions.

BLOG

Where To Start?

By Edgar Khachatryan

People involved in peace activism may at times during their work encounter the problem of a lack of demand for peace activities and peace building in societies of countries involved in conflicts. This situation is the norm in the Caucasus. This article tries to reveal and analyze the roots of the current societal passivity toward peace activism. For this, I will apply the conflict theory of Cordula Reimann, who designed the model of the gender triangle based on the "dynamic triangle of violence (The ABC Conflict Triangle) of famous Norwegian conflict expert Johan Galtung.

Galtung posits that there are three linked elements that trigger conflict: attitudes (the way people think or identify), behavior (the way parties are acting in a given instance of conflict), and contradiction (differences or incompatibilities between parties in defining a conflict).

Reimann's model defines three interlinked angles of gender: individual gender identity (how individuals define for themselves their gender in a given society), gender symbolism (how the culture itself defines both masculinity and femininity), and gender structure (how gender interactions are institutionalized and organized in society, both publicly and privately).

The main aspect of these triangles shows three dimensions of violent culture in societies and consists of three angles--individual, cultural, and structural. Summarizing the content of each of the angles, we can indicate that:

- The individual dimension includes personal approaches, visions, self-identity, and as a consequence, decisions made by a person.
- The cultural dimension includes the traditional approaches (social identities) of the societal group, such as religion, traditions, customs, and perceptions of different groups within the societal group.
- The structural dimension includes institutionalized social, economic, and political constructs.

In every society these linked and sometimes merged dimensions show the behavior and nature of any given society. While trying to understand the roots of the lack of demand for peace building, we will look through these three dimensions using the example of conflicting countries in the South Caucasus.

We can indicate general societal passivity and apathy toward most political developments and lack of civic or grassroots participation in decision making.

- This situation on the individual/personal level creates an absence of democratic values, marginalization of society, and a rejection of other societies.
- In parallel, in the cultural level it raises the cultural demand to protect societal identities from outside influences. With this background nationalistic ideas become a part of the culture; several fears--of losing identity, traditions, and religion--rise up.
- As a consequence, this creates a structural dimension of the society in which laws are created to protect against these fears, and limit outside influence in the culture. The structures and institutions of the society consist of people who live in the above-mentioned cultural environment and end up further marginalizing members of society from the outside world.

Those who are born into this kind of society are raised with these cultural conditions, and become more ingrained into this thinking, continually spiraling downward. Just to indicate the circular nature of this problem, when we are trying to understand the roots of the above-mentioned problems on the individual and personal level, we can see that they have their own roots in the cultural and structural levels. For example, we can point to abject poverty, unfair governance, tragic history, and so on as roots for the passivity of society.

Based on this, trying to come to a conclusion on what should be done--and moving from theoretical considerations to practical, concrete proposals--for transforming the existing reality--which can be described as containing warlike societies--into a peace-like society, we can conclude that there is a great need for titanic work on all three directions.

Only a broad policy that includes the needs and different perspectives of different layers of society has a chance of succeeding and can respond to the individual, cultural, and structural challenges mentioned previously.

Only after understanding the needs of our society toward peace can we demand that they be active in peace work, and only after understanding their needs can we declare that our work fits the needs of our societies and challenges toward creating peace.

BLOG

Vicious Circle in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

By Erik Grigoryan

Since the very first days of mediation efforts by the OSCE (called CSCE initially) in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the approach has been top-down and not very effective. The societies in both sides, including in Nagorno-Karabakh, have rarely been updated or consulted with. The negotiation format is closed-door, otherwise called Track I. It is not backed by Track II and societal support at large. Yet solutions to conflicts may be lasting only if they are acceptable to all parties, which has not be the case in the Karabakh talks up to the present. This is due to a lack of trust at all levels (including Track I) and the lack of general ripeness. The societies are not ready to accept agreements, which do not correspond to exclusivist ends propagated by the regimes throughout the last 15-20 years.

There were speculations that the then American co-mediator Carry Cavanaugh put a hold on the negotiations at one point, stating that the public was not moving as quickly as the negotiators. There are many similar cases worldwide. With the Cyprus mediation for example, in 1992 UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali put a hold on the ongoing negotiations and urged the sides to show goodwill and accept the “8 Trust-Building Measures” instead. Yet in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, the international pressure and rapid geopolitical changes in the region are pressuring the parties to come to an agreement in a reasonable time-frame, while, no serious efforts are made to work with the societies and to create platform for a lasting solution.

One might question why to invest in Track II efforts, if the negotiating sides themselves are not ready to accept any resolution. Yet the status quo does not satisfy any of the sides anymore, and the rapidly changing international and regional developments require breaking the vicious circle created by the parties (including the mediators). One vicious circle has regimes on both sides not letting societies transform. Thus, the societies are kept as slaves to the conflict, and the mediation process is a victim to the lack of public support for a possible resolution.

Apparently, the regimes in Armenia and Azerbaijan alike were the main stumbling blocks in initiating cross-border initiatives (though Azerbaijan is seen as being more aggressive on this), perhaps for their narrow political ends, and the lack of will to help bring the process to a possible resolution. It should be noted, however, that the mediators themselves have never actively initiated or supported such measures. The vast peace-building expertise and capabilities of the OSCE, the largest international player in the greater region have never been actively supportive of trust building between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

In a conflict where many refugees and IDPs will eventually be returning back, while every segment in society, including those who have co-existed together in the past, believes that co-existence is no longer possible, major confidence-building measures are needed to support the mediation process and help bring negotiating parties closer to finding a mutually acceptable resolution. Therefore, it is of utmost urgency for all the sides to show goodwill by openly supporting confidence-building measures and for the mediators to help employ the wide arsenal of capabilities of the OSCE and other European structures at hand.

BLOG

Good Mourning *By Fatalin*

There is this game called Mafia. It's played in groups--the more, the better between an informed minority and an uninformed majority. Some players get Mafia cards, others Citizen ones and they play. The Mafia pretends not to be the Mafia, while the Citizens try to guess who's the gang. The main point of the game is to fool everyone.

Can you guess two countries in which this game is the most popular? Right, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

There are many common things between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Culture, mentality, temper and drama are only some of them. But for me, the main thing that proves the presence of genetic likeness between these two nations is the maniacal obsessiveness they suffer from.

While reading this article and especially the first comment under it, I couldn't stop thinking about the processes we have going on this side of the border.

"Genocide," say Armenians, "is our tragedy and it has to be recognized."

"Khojali," we reply, "and our losses are what matters."

And it's not about who's right or wrong, what's fake and what's not. It's about "priorities and proportions" as well as goals and the ways of reaching them.

Tragedies should become lessons (as they do in civilized societies), respected and remembered as part of history. However, for our obsessive cultures our tragedies become *idée fixe*, which keep TODAY, its problems and tragedies in the background.

Therefore, beaten, killed, or jailed journalists, terrorist attacks in universities, health care tragedies (not afraid to call it so), total corruption, unemployment, lowest rates in education, ignored law violations and other things that actually matter, are forever destined to be number two on the list of priorities. And in a best-case scenario, if they're lucky, they can get compared or linked to the Tragedy Number one.

For some unknown reason we don't find building democracy, educating people, fixing economy or actually implementing dusted laws as important as the recognition of some issues and preventing the recognition of others.

I'm not saying there were no attempts to do anything. My point is--if the attempt doesn't lead to a positive result, then it's not being done right or, in other words, it's useless.

Recognition of past tragedies and losses, the return of Karabakh or it's recognition as an independent republic will make us prove ourselves right, rise up and look around. But what are we going to see? The mess we forgot to clean while protesting in front of the embassies, writing articles, proving each other's lies, looking through uncountable amount of photos of murdered children. Will any of that show us the way to fix things or give us a chance to start over? That's the question we should ask ourselves.

Humanity has always been inventing things with one main goal--to make life easier. Whether it's a lamp that makes our home bright, or a car which brought more comfort to our lives and used to save time, or a cell phone that allows us to call/text/note/record/take pictures and, well, an uncountable amount of other things. Games were invented to make our lives easier as well--they're supposed to make us laugh, or run, think, or pretend. But what they are definitely not supposed to do is make us forget about the REALITY, which today is not heartwarming in the least, on neither side of the border.

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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