

# **What Future for Nagorno-Karabakh in the wake of the 2020 Six Weeks War? Consequences for Conflict Settlement in the South Caucasus Region**

## **SECTION 1: State of Play in Armenia, Azerbaijan and in NK and Consequences for Conflict Settlement; What Future for Nagorno-Karabakh?**

- On 27 September 2020 the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) entered a new phase featuring heavy military clashes along the line of contact between the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh Republic and Azerbaijan. After having resulted in many thousands of soldiers and civilians killed or wounded, as well as in large numbers of civilian and military equipment and infrastructure destroyed or seriously damaged, this new war appeared to have exhausted itself in the wake of the Azerbaijani military advances over, and recapturing of, several districts around Nagorno-Karabakh, culminating with the town of Shusha/Shushi.
- At that time, Presidents V. Putin of Russia and R.T. Erdogan of Turkey called up the terms of a joint Statement providing for a ceasefire and a set of guidelines for a future peace deal that has eventually been signed on 9 November 2020 by the Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russian leaders. This trilateral Statement has provided for the:
  - ✓ deployment of Russian peacekeepers
  - ✓ return to Azerbaijan of the last three Armenian-controlled districts neighboring to Nagorno-Karabakh
  - ✓ establishment of a (Russian-Turkish) Peacemaking Centre
  - ✓ return of displaced persons to their homes
  - ✓ exchange of prisoners of war, hostages, and dead bodies
  - ✓ unblocking of all economic and transport links
  - ✓ establishing of two secure transit corridors: Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh, and Azerbaijan to Nakhichevan (and farther to Turkey).
- Since then, the cease fire has largely held, while the Russian peacekeepers have been deployed to Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the trilaterally signed Statement is far away from a peace agreement. It leaves open key issues, such as:
  - the (interim and final) status of Nagorno-Karabakh

- what happened to the status if the initial five-years mandate of the peacekeepers was not prolonged?
  - the future role of the OSCE Minsk Group and of other international organizations and actors (other than Russia and the UNHCR) in its implementation
  - the conditions for the return of the displaced persons to Karabakh
  - how existing mistrust and animosities between the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities would be overcome.
- All those open issues might sooner or later become bones of contention to the signatories or might be disputed with third parties, and would eventually make for “A Precarious Peace for Karabakh”<sup>1</sup> and an uncertain future not only for the population of Nagorno-Karabakh itself, but also for the wider South Caucasus region.

The aim of this first section consists of:

- reviewing the current state of play in Armenia, Azerbaijan and in Nagorno-Karabakh, and their implications for the resumption of the conflict settlement process,
- discussing the future of Nagorno-Karabakh, and the role different regional and international actors might play in conflict settlement in the foreseeable future.

To this end the co-Chairs have proposed the following questions to spur thinking among invited speakers:

- What are the key trends of the political, socio-economic, and security/military developments in Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan over the short term?
- What were the positions of key political players and of the civil society over the implementation of the trilaterally signed Statement?
- What elements of the Statement have been / were likely to be implemented in the foreseeable future, and what are the elements whose implementation might remain pending on further developments?

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas De Waal, “A Precarious Peace for Karabakh”, published on November 11, 2020 by Carnegie Moscow Centre, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/83202>.

- What prospects are there for the resumption of the Track-1 and Track-2 diplomatic process?
- How well prepared were the populations of Armenia and NK to accept the implementation of the provisions of the Statement, and what were their reactions to it?
- How well prepared is the population of Azerbaijan to further negotiate a compromise solution to the NK conflict?
- How likely is a resumption of the military operations in NK?
- What future for Nagorno-Karabakh would satisfy both Armenian and Azerbaijani interests over the medium and longer terms (2025-2030)? How to reach there?

## **Conclusions**

How could the conflicting parties, the peace-enablers (Russia and Turkey), and other local, regional and external actors move past the current “*precarious peace*” towards a stable, and long-lasting peace?

- a) The main responsibility for drawing the peace process forward and for resuming Track 1 and Track 2 diplomacy will rest with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia. Turkey might also step up its contribution to setting in a stable, long lasting peace, and undertake the role of an honest broker in the conflict.
- b) A deal that Armenians viewed as a capitulation would hardly be a reliable foundation for stable and long-lasting peace. On the contrary, it might fuel more inter-ethnic mistrust, tensions, and eventually lead to another war.
- c) The stakeholders of the current peace process might sooner rather than later turn towards the international community (UN and/or OSCE) to ensure the international legality, and legitimacy of any future peace deal, which should be negotiated to cement and clarify the provisions of the trilateral Statement. They might also need to ask for international humanitarian help, as well as for assistance on reconstruction, demining, facilitating the resettlement of displaced persons, protection of cultural heritage. Sectorial/governmental, business, youth and other forms of economic, social, and cultural inter-community dialogue and interaction might also help overcome existing mistrust and animosities.

d) The OSCE, the EU, the US, the relevant UN agencies, as well as other international actors could, upon request, help the key stakeholders to build up an effective mechanism for conflict resolution and a strong, comprehensive foundation for ensuring a lasting peace.

If one or more of those principles for a long-lasting peace were ignored or fudged, the largest geopolitical risk stemming from the new pattern of “balance of power” conflict management applied to Nagorno-Karabakh is that it might end up entangled with the ongoing Russia-West unmanaged geopolitical confrontation.