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INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY NEEDS TO BE MORE COMMITTED TO KARABAKH CONFLICT'S SOLUTION - EXPERT

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By Anakhanum Hidayatova - Trend

The status quo in Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh that existed before the recent escalation in Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict no longer exists, Amanda Paul, analyst at the European Policy Centre (EPC), told Trend Apr. 29.

On the night of Apr. 2, 2016, all the frontier positions of Azerbaijan were subjected to heavy fire from the Armenian side, which used large-caliber weapons, mortars and grenade launchers. The armed clashes resulted in deaths and injuries among the Azerbaijani population. Azerbaijan responded with a counter-attack, which led to liberation of several strategic heights and settlements.

"Azerbaijan had its first victory since the 1994 ceasefire agreement was signed and the psychological impact of this should not be underestimated," said Paul.

The expert noted that the new situation under the new "ceasefire" that Russia negotiated on Apr. 5 remains very precarious with ongoing skirmishes with a real danger of a resumption of hostilities.

Military operations were stopped on the line of contact between Azerbaijani and Armenian armies on Apr. 5 at 12:00 (UTC/GMT + 4 hours) with the consent of the sides, Azerbaijan's Defense Ministry earlier said. Ignoring the agreement, the Armenian side again started violating the ceasefire.

There is an urgent need to return to peace negotiations to avoid a further escalation of violence, added Paul.

"The international community needs to be more committed and creative in terms of its efforts to push for a solution of the conflict including rallying the leaderships of Azerbaijan and Armenia," she said.

Paul went on to add that this means more than simply saying they support the good work of the OSCE Minsk Group and the three co-chairs.

"More meetings of the full Minsk Group would be useful and more focus from other international actors because so far Russia is running the show, taking charge of everything including coming-up with new initiatives to solve the conflict," said the expert.

She also noted that the most recent set of ideas of the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reflects the strategic importance of the region to Russia and the investment that Moscow is making into it both in terms of hard and soft power.

Moscow certainly does not want to see a full scale war in its backyard, said Paul adding that by continuing to sell arms to each side Russia is fueling the conflict in order to manage the situation.

Russia wants to demonstrate that it is the only actor that is able to handle the leaderships of Armenia and Azerbaijan and prevent a full war, according to Paul.

"By doing this Moscow hopes to minimize the influence of other international actors," said the expert adding that despite the undeniable influence that Russia has, Moscow's ability to prevent or end a fully blown war is far from certain.

Furthermore, allowing Russia to dominate the process is not in the interests of the region or the peoples of Azerbaijan or Armenia, noted Paul.

The international community needs to step up in this issue, she added.

The expert thinks that the US could play an important role in resolving the conflict, but the country is currently so preoccupied with the forthcoming presidential elections and developments in Syria.

The conflict between the two South Caucasus countries began in 1988 when Armenia made territorial claims against Azerbaijan. As a result of the ensuing war, in 1992 Armenian armed forces occupied 20 percent of Azerbaijan, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region and seven surrounding districts. The 1994 ceasefire agreement was followed by peace negotiations.

Armenia has not yet implemented four UN Security Council resolutions on withdrawal of its armed forces from the Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding districts.

Kaynak/Source: