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TWO OPINION PIECES PUBLISHED IN THE EU OBSERVER - Europe Needs a Policy for Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh (by Nicolas Tavitian - 28.07.2017) & EU's Role in Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Possibility of Peace (by Rovshan Rzayev - O3.09.2017)

AVİM

Blog No: 35
04.08.2017

Europe Needs a Policy for Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh (by Nicolas Tavitian - 28.07.2017) and **EUs Role in Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Possibility of Peace** (by Rovshan Rzayev - O3.09.2017)

AVIM republishes two related opinion pieces on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict penned by an Armenian and an Azerbaijani commentator to disclose the perspectives of the sides on the issue.

EUROPE NEEDS A POLICY FOR PEACE IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH – by Nicolas Tavitian

EU Obserser – 28.07.2017

War is brewing on the fringes of Europe. Earlier this month, there was more fighting on the contact line between the unrecognised republic of Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) and Azerbaijan.

Some 23 years after the end of a bloody war between the Armenians of NK and the newly independent Republic of Azerbaijan, peace remains out of sight.

There have long been regular skirmishes and sniper fire on the contact line, and there are now occasional large-scale offensives on the border as well, involving artillery and tanks.

In spite of the numerous casualties, fighting remains contained for now, but the risk of military escalation is high. Should it materialise, an all-out war would certainly devastate Armenia and Azerbaijan, and it could also spill over to involve Russia, Iran or Turkey.

The situation is worrying, to say the least, and the EU urgently needs to decide how it

wants to contribute to peace in the region.

The Minsk Group

The EUs current policy on the conflict over NK is to express verbal support for the Minsk Group of French, Russian and US diplomats mediating between Armenia and Azerbaijan under OSCE auspices.

Additionally, whenever serious fighting occurs on the border, the EU occasionally reacts with a call for restraint, in purposefully vague and brief statements. For the rest, the EU is pointedly doing nothing.

Unfortunately, there is quite simply no chance at all that the Minsk Group, as it is currently set up, might achieve peace without outside help. The Republic of Azerbaijan has long refused to talk with the leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh, which it views as a puppet state, and only accepts negotiating with the Republic of Armenia.

The resulting configuration bilateral negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan was designed for failure, however.

If the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is an interstate conflict, as Azerbaijan would have it, then Armenia must be an invader; Azerbaijan therefore demands Armenias unconditional withdrawal.

Armenia, for its part, is unable to explore solutions or take risks on behalf of NK (its government tried in the late 1990s and paid a heavy price for it). It nevertheless accepts to remain in the talks, for fear that their collapse would be worse than the current deadlock.

After two decades, NK still has no partner with which it can try to build trust or explore paths to peace. Nor can it speak out in the wider world to promote or explore solutions to the conflict – it has instead opted to hunker down and, quite literally, hold the fort.

Rising frustration

In frustration at the lack of progress, Azerbaijan is now trying to intensify pressure on NK and Armenia in the hope of forcing them to yield. It is exercising pressure through more frequent military offensives, more intense harassment on the frontline, and by seeking to further isolate NK.

Excluding the population of NK from any external contact has thus helped ensure that the peace talks fail, and it is increasing the likelihood of war.

In spite of this, the EU seems happy to go along with the NKs exclusion from any discussion on its own future. It currently forbids EU representatives from entering the territory of NK or officially meeting NK representatives, and it supports no activities on the territory.

It is well understood that resolving protracted conflicts involving non-recognised entities ought to involve engaging with their local population and with their de-facto authorities.

In fact, the EU already implements a policy of engagement without recognition in the other non-recognised entities on its periphery, such as Abkhazia, Transnistria and Northern Cyprus. NK is the exception.

Peace is possible and the EU can and must help. If not Europe, then who? Putins Russia? Trumps America? Erdogans Turkey?

It will take more than ritual support for the Minsk Group to achieve it, however.

Engagement without recognition would make sense in NK to help prepare the ground for peace. In NK, as everywhere else, the EU should talk to all parties, build trust, reduce tensions and put people first.

Nicolas Tavitian is the director of AGBU Europe, the European branch of AGBU, the largest Armenian organisation worldwide. AGBU Europe is conducting a campaign called "We Want Europe in Nagorno-Karabakh", featuring a public appeal signed by more than 60 (non-Armenian) opinion leaders around Europe.

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EUS ROLE IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT AND POSSIBILITY OF PEACE - by Rovshan Rzayev

EU Observer – 03.09.2017

A notorious saying by Prussian king Frederick, "occupy then legalise", is a vivid illustration of the current policy pursued by officials in Yerevan, in relation to the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

I do regret that, as an Armenian diaspora representative, the op-ed by Nicolas Tavitian titled EU needs a policy for peace in Nagorno-Karabakh, published 28 July on EUobserver, supports the same line of argument, and attempts to divert attention from the real situation on the ground.

The author omits the key fact that the occupation of Azerbaijans territories by Armenia with the use of force constitutes the fundamental basis of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Armenia's military occupation was also accompanied by a bloody ethnic cleansing in the seized lands of more than 700,000 of the indigenous Azerbaijani population, including the Azerbaijani community of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Despite the demands of UN Security Council Resolutions 822, 853, 874 and 884 - on immediate, unconditional and full withdrawal of Armenian troops from the seized territories - Armenia has sustained the occupation for more than 25 years.

Peaceful resolution

The physical presence of Armenian forces in the sovereign territories of Azerbaijan represents an immediate threat to regional peace and security, and undermines the efforts towards the peaceful resolution of conflict.

In the article, the author also somehow contradicts himself. While talking about the people first approach, he ignores the rights of one million Azerbaijanis, including the Azerbaijani community of Nagorno-Karabakh, and perceives the occupation as a fait-accompli.

Such an archaic attitude is a road to eternal war, not to sustainable peace. Nowadays, as a result of this policy, Armenia is a self-isolated country in the region, with limited sovereignty.

It is very well known that the only possible way towards resolving the conflict is the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, and the return of Azerbaijani internally displaced persons (IDPs), as well as the Azerbaijani community of Nagorno-Karabakh to their homes.

This step-by-step approach towards the conflict settlement also envisages the opening of borders and communications between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

How can the EU support this process? We should be realistic and seek a more comparative advantage of the EU.

EU support

First, it is of paramount importance that there is a strong and unified commitment by EU to the principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty and the inviolability of borders of states, as is also asserted by the new EU security strategy, in respect of all protracted conflict in post-soviet areas.

Some lessons could be drawn from the EU-initiated Stability Pact for South-East Europe in 1999. With this pact, it was made clear that EU will never accept attempts to change internationally recognised borders through use of force.

Proceeding from the current proposals on the negotiation table, the EU exerting diplomatic-political pressure on Armenia to withdraw its troops could complement ongoing efforts by the co-chairs of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group.

Based on the experience from other conflict zones, humanitarian and institutional support from the EU, by assisting in the process of the dignified return of Azerbaijani IDPs to their homes, would be an invaluable contribution.

In parallel, the EU can also support the ethnic reconciliation process of the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan through confidence-building measures.

Speaking as a member of the Azerbaijani community of Nagorno-Karabakh, we would be glad for the resumption of dialogue with the Armenian community, to facilitate ethnic reconciliation.

Finding reconciliation

Denmark and Sweden hold the world record for the most wars fought between two countries. But today they are best friends and partners.

Therefore, on behalf of our community, I completely reject such groundless ideas about ethnic incompatibility of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, as if they cannot live together ever again.

The EU and its individual member states can also share their best experiences on successful models of autonomy, such as the Aaland Islands in Sweden, the Trentino-Alto Adice region in Italy, and others in the context of finding a suitable autonomy model for Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijan.

In the face of rising military rhetoric, the resumption of substantial talks for a settlement on the conflict, in good faith, is more than necessary. Along with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs, the EU also supports this process.

I do agree with the author on one point: peace is possible. Peace will bring enormous benefits to Armenia and its people.

To make peace possible, the Armenian diaspora can help as well. Instead of pushing Armenia towards enmity, the diaspora should urge moving Armenia towards peace with its neighbours.

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To cite this article: AVİM. 2026. "TWO OPINION PIECES PUBLISHED IN THE EU OBSERVER - Europe Needs a Policy for Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh (by Nicolas Tavitian - 28.07.2017) & EU □□ Role in Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Possibility of Peace (by Rovshan Rzayev - O3.09.2017)." Center For Eurasian Studies (AVİM), Blog No.2017 / 35. August 04. Accessed November 22, 2026. https://avim.org.tr/public/Blog/TWO-OPINION-PIECES-PUBLISHED-IN-THE-EU-OBSERVER-Europe-Needs-a-Policy-for-Peace-in-Nagorno-Karabakh-by-Nicolas-Tavitian-28-07-2017-EU-s-Role-in-Nagorno-Karabakh-Conflict-and-Possibility-of-Peace-by-Rovshan-Rzayev-O3-09-2017

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