

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Study Group Regional Stability in the South Caucasus (RSSC SG)

“What Future for Nagorno-Karabakh in the Wake of the 2020 Six-Weeks War? Consequences for Conflict Settlement in the South Caucasus Region”

2nd Virtual Roundtable RSSC SG
4th December 2020

PfP Consortium of Defense
Academies and Security
Studies Institutes



“Shattering Hate: *If we are to lessen the hate narratives, we must find the stereotypes and prejudices and begin to break them down. Conversely, we need to build up the shared positive experiences. And if we have none, then search for one. And if we cannot find this, we must create it.*” By Alan Whitehorn

Executive Summary of Recommendations

1. There must be an immediate halt to aggressive, nationalistic, triumphalist, provocative and xenophobic rhetoric. Hate narratives fuelled by intolerant nationalism should also immediately cease.
2. The parties are strongly encouraged to assess the outcome and results of the combat phase realistically and constructively with an eye towards building a common peaceful future.
3. The parties should cooperatively promote reconciliation, confidence building and mutual understanding through governmental and nongovernmental channels.
4. The parties should actively look for and develop new opportunities for long term reconciliation and re-integration of the conflict-affected communities, socio-economic recovery, good neighbourly relations, as well as sub-regional economic, commercial and infrastructural integration projects.

Summary of the Workshop

The 2nd Extraordinary Virtual Workshop of the RSSC SG was held on 4 December 2020 exceptionally in lieu of the annual Reichenau workshop. Its occurrence was made all the more timely in view of the historical changes at work in the South Caucasus, as a result of the recent military confrontation over Nagorno-Karabakh, between Armenia and Azerbaijan. A dozen speakers and discussants, mainly from the South Caucasus, but also from Russia, Turkey, and Europe met virtually to consider the implications of these changes.

What follows is a synthesis of the topics discussed, punctuated by policy recommendations developed by the speakers and discussants. The co-chairs of the RSSC SG congratulate the participants for setting aside their differences and coming together in making these recommendations.

We also thank the Partnership for Peace Consortium and the Austrian National Defence Academy for providing the platform for these discussions, and Ms. Lisa-Maria Tagwercher for ensuring the formatting and production of this document.

The presentations and discussions indicate that the second Nagorno-Karabakh war has been prompted in significant degree by the deadlocked negotiations within the OSCE Minsk Group, also noted in the Policy Recommendations of the RSSC SG 20th workshop in November 2019 (www.bundesheer.at/wissenforschung/publikationen/publikation.php?id=996).

On 27 September 2020, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh entered a new military phase generally known as the “war of fall 2020/44 days war”. The outcome of the war has facilitated the application of the so-called Lavrov Plan (a Russian version of the OSCE Minsk Group’s Madrid/Basic Principles),



enshrined in the Trilateral Statement signed by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Russian Federation on 9 November 2020.

From an Armenian perspective, emboldened by Turkey's political and military assistance and involvement, Baku has decided to unilaterally alter the deadlocked conflict resolution process by using military means to change the territorial status quo. Although the end result is decisively advantageous to Azerbaijan, Armenia and Armenians of Karabakh prefer to see the portion of Nagorno-Karabakh which has resisted fall under the protection of Russian peace-keeping forces rather than under the aegis of Azerbaijan. The general feeling in Armenia is that the new status quo cannot endure.

Other participants recognize that the situation on the ground surpasses the Lavrov Plan; it restores international law by ensuring greater concordance between the territory recognized as Azerbaijan's and the actual land it controls. The ceasefire agreement creates a new geopolitical reality, especially thanks to the adroit coordination between Russia and Turkey. As far as Azerbaijan is concerned, the results are far better than any deal of a now-discredited OSCE Minsk Group could have secured.

The discussion turned on the need to promote renewed efforts for peacebuilding, reconciliation, development of future-oriented narratives, and taking practical steps to ensure access to humanitarian organizations for local populations and to protect cultural heritage. Many of these questions are reflected in policy recommendations below.

Some commentators argued that Russia – not the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) – has the historical background and the power to assume responsibility for regional stability. Accordingly – although this point of view is not unanimous – “collective” solutions are of little help in the present circumstances. Moving forward, Russia would like to see a sort of cooperative regionalism, if not a completion of a Greater-Eurasia Project.

In response, some wondered aloud if Russian peace-keeping could be relied on to maintain impartial order, in view of its already significant presence in the region, including on the national territory of not

only Armenia, but of others' as well. Prudence would demand that a more “Western” security footprint be established to provide balance. The latter is a palpable demand from the Georgian civil society, as the OSCE Minsk Group and other multilateral agencies have shown their inadequacies. At the very least, say some participants, the OSCE Minsk Group would be justified in reviewing its role, if not composition.

The participation of Turkey was also discussed. Its participation in regional stability may make some countries uneasy, but, to Russia, it is not necessarily a bad thing. In the absence of effective multilateral conflict management by the OSCE, and in view of the Council of Europe's silence, some advocate the re-involvement of Russia in the G8. Thus, the matter of regional stability would be a question that would concern large and regional powers more or less exclusively. The implications of this potential outcome are also reflected in policy recommendations.

Discussions thereafter considered the need to urgently deploy assets for humanitarian aid and the protection of cultural heritage, the role of diasporas in regional development, and the sustainment of civil society in the South Caucasus.

The policy recommendations were hatched in a collaborative way. They were synthesized by the co-chairs, and were enlarged by the substantial contribution of particular participants, to whom gratitude is owed. The complete recommendations were submitted for review following the usual silence procedure.

Consolidated Policy Recommendations¹

The following points were condensed by the co-chairs from recommendations compiled by Dr. Alan Whitehorn, Dr. Benyamin Poghosyan, Mr. Alexander Mikhailov, and Mr. Ahmad Alili, with substantial inputs by Amb. Michael Schmunk, and supplemented by a note from Dr. Elkhan Nuriyev.

¹ The co-chairs would like to thank Prof. Alan Whitehorn, Amb. Michael Schmunk, Dr. Elkhan Nuriyev, Dr. Benyamin Poghosyan, Dr. Nilufer Narli, Mr. Alexander Mikhailov, Mr. Ahmad Alili, and Mr. Jonathan Odom for their input.

The current Policy Recommendations should “enable Yerevan and Baku to gradually move towards normalizing their relations with the eventual purpose of signing a comprehensive peace agreement in the future. This is possible and feasible if all parties involved take a constructive approach to achieve a sustainable ‘positive’ peace built on justice and filled with positive content aimed at restoring trust and confidence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. The best way for the future of the entire Karabakh is to live in peace, concord and harmony and to strive to rebuild good neighbourly relations between the two countries.”²

On the other hand, it has been well understood by most (if not all) participants to the roundtable that a peace deal that one party viewed as “a capitulation” would hardly be a reliable foundation for stable and long-lasting peace. On the contrary, it might fuel more interethnic mistrust, tensions, and could eventually lead to another war. The long term risk of a continued arms race and the ongoing instabilities created by new technologies of destruction are inherently dangerous.

As advised by Amb. Schmunk, we distinguish between recommendations which should be observed as a matter of urgency (short term), medium term and long term recommendations.

Short Term Recommendations

- There must be an immediate halt to aggressive, nationalistic, triumphalist, provocative and xenophobic rhetoric. Hate narratives fuelled by intolerant nationalism should also immediately cease.
 - The conflicting parties (called here below “the parties”) are strongly encouraged to assess the outcome and results of the combat phase realistically and constructively with an eye towards building a common peaceful future. They are reminded that the political commitment of the Trilateral Statement signed by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation needs to be fully implemented for the mutual benefit of all parties in the conflict. Parties are urged not to tarnish their international reputation by allowing the ceasefire to be broken or leave
- unmet any of their political commitments under the Trilateral Statement.
 - The humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh must be handled as a matter of utmost urgency by intergovernmental organizations in coordination with the parties, the Russian Federation and with the appropriate involvement of the neighbouring states, as necessary.
 - The international community, including the UN, the OSCE, and the ICRC (intergovernmental organizations), should offer (to the parties, for their consideration and acceptance) their respective agencies’ emergency humanitarian assistance. The primary focus should be on war refugees/displaced persons, and on other people who were directly affected by the warfighting or its consequences.
 - Access to the UNHCR, IOM, ICRC must be guaranteed for the purpose of the care and return of prisoners of war the remains of the fallen, and to investigate extra-judicial killings.
 - The OSCE Minsk Group should redefine its role, mandate – and perhaps adjust its composition – in view of the current realities.
 - The Russian peacekeeping mission should fulfil its mandate to guarantee the safety of the populations in their areas of operation. This mandate should be shared and coordinated with the relevant bodies/agencies from the intergovernmental organizations.
 - Given the current Armenian political scene is quite tense and volatile, relevant experienced international advice should be made available.

² Elkhan Nuriyev: Bullet Points and Strategic Recommendations from Azerbaijan. In: Frederic Labarre and George Niculescu (Eds.): What Future for Nagorno-Karabakh in the Wake of the 2020 Six-Weeks War? Consequences for Conflict Settlement in the South Caucasus Region, Vienna 2021, p. 13.

Medium Term Recommendations

- The parties should cooperatively promote reconciliation, confidence building and mutual understanding through governmental and nongovernmental channels.³
- As soon as practicable, an international post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation donors' conference under UN auspices should be convened.
- The signatories of the Trilateral Statement (with the help of intergovernmental organizations) should elaborate a roadmap for "Track 1" diplomacy to achieve a lasting peace in Karabakh. The aim should be to resolve all potential stress points in the Trilateral Statement which might prevent the drafting and signature of a final peace agreement.
- The OSCE Minsk Group should foster post-war rehabilitation and facilitate a future final peace agreement.⁴
- The international community (OSCE, Council of Europe, EU, ICRC) should offer the parties assistance on protection of human rights, including the rights of people belonging to the ethnic and religious minorities, and on verifying existing complaints of breaches of international humanitarian law during and after the military conflict.
- Access to intergovernmental organizations must be guaranteed for the purpose of monitoring and protection of historic monasteries, churches, mosques, gravesites and archaeological sites (in territories which have seen sustained military presence or action over the last decades).
- Refocus and reinforce "Track 2" diplomacy efforts, especially people-to-people contacts and civil society dialogue across borders and ethnic identities. (See prior recommendations from the RSSC SG in that regard). Developing a concrete "Joint Action Plan for Peace Building in the Post-conflict Period", with support from the European

and Euro-Atlantic institutions, has been suggested as a means to streamline work and help coordinate future international assistance in this area.

Long Term Recommendations

- The parties, with international assistance from intergovernmental organizations, should negotiate, conclude, and ratify in accordance with their national laws a final peace agreement on Karabakh.
- The EU should make use of the existing Eastern Partnership cooperation framework to develop a reinforced and effective European role in responding to diverse new challenges in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood.⁵
- The parties should develop Conflict Resolution Centres both in Yerevan and in Baku with the aim of addressing past events, developing common historical narratives, educational material, and sustain long-term reconciliation efforts.
- With a clear understanding that positive-sum games are most rewarding for the peaceful resolution of conflicts, the parties should actively look for and develop new opportunities for long term reconciliation and reintegration of the conflict-affected communities, socio-economic recovery, good neighbourly relations, as well as sub-regional economic, commercial and infrastructural integration projects in the energy, transports, telecommunications, tourism, agriculture and hydrographic sectors.

³ Detailed recommendations in Elkhan Nuriyev: Bullet Points and Strategic Recommendations, p. 14.

⁴ Detailed recommendations in Elkhan Nuriyev: Bullet Points and Strategic Recommendations, pp. 14-15.

⁵ Detailed recommendations in Elkhan Nuriyev: Bullet Points and Strategic Recommendations, p. 15.