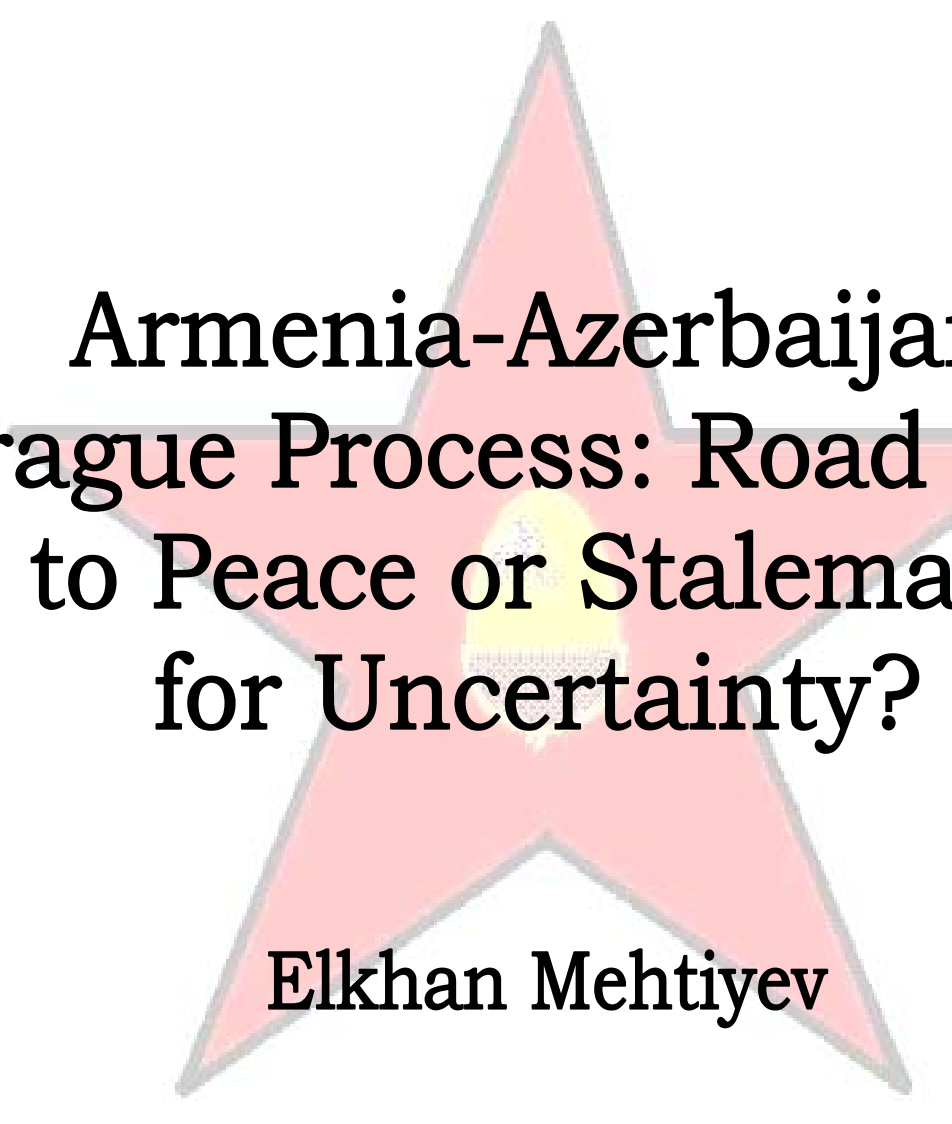


**Conflict Studies Research Centre**



**Armenia-Azerbaijan  
Prague Process: Road Map  
to Peace or Stalemate  
for Uncertainty?**

**Elkhan Mehtiyev**

**May 2005**

# **Armenia-Azerbaijan Prague Process: Road Map to Peace or Stalemate for Uncertainty?**

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## **Key Points**

- \* Nagorno Karabakh (NK) is fully integrated into Armenian military and economic infrastructure. The armed forces are ruled from a single military headquarters in Yerevan. The areas occupied are heavily militarized and ethnically cleansed. The Azerbaijani government has no relations with rebel NK authorities.
- \* The OSCE sponsored Prague process is still far from an interim agreement. Neither country is trying to enforce change in an environment conducive to peace. Much is being dictated by internal politics. There is a sense that both sides are playing to emotions rather than to real settlement.
- \* Corruption, monopoly over resources and consequently lack of business opportunity have forced millions of people to emigrate to Russia and Western Europe. Authoritarianism, lack of independent media in both countries prevents public debate of options for peace.
- \* Propaganda of hatred and military solution to the conflict dominates in Armenia's approach. Uncertainty and lack of political will, dominance of slogans prevails in Azerbaijan's approach. Establishing an international war crimes tribunal for Caucasus may promote reconciliation and peace in the region.
- \* There is no common vision for the region. Polarized integration into Euro-Atlantic and Russian dominated security structures is determined by military confrontation.

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# **Armenia-Azerbaijan Prague Process: Road Map to Peace or Stalemate for Uncertainty?**

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## **Background of Hostilities**

The conflict dates back to February 1988, while both republics were part of the Soviet Union, when Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous oblast (NK) and in Armenia started mass rallies for the incorporation of this part of Azerbaijan into Armenia,<sup>1</sup> appealing to central authorities in Moscow to meet their demands. Since the change of borders of union republics was the prerogative of the union republics, the Soviet authorities said they were powerless to act in the matter, citing unconstitutionality and stating that “perestroika does not mean change of borders”. Further violence was the only means for attracting attention, since the rebellious side had no solid economic and political arguments for its claims.

The separation demands were accompanied by violence in the region. Local groups and experienced Armenian militant and terrorist groups allegedly from the Middle East<sup>2</sup> initiated terror and violence against Azerbaijani civilians and government agencies, intimidating the local Armenian population and blocking any contacts with other parts of Azerbaijan. They spread enmity and hostility, smashing cars, organizing mob assaults, abducting people and terrorizing local people, including Armenians loyal to Azerbaijan.<sup>3</sup> By the break up of the Soviet Union, the area was a centre of military training for Armenian, local and diaspora dominated militants, including the ASALA terrorist organization (the military wing of the diaspora based Dashnak party).<sup>4</sup> Local radical elements, partly financed by the diaspora, took the initiative and formed local self-proclaimed executive organs and armed forces.

An ethnic cleansing campaign of the Azerbaijani population of NK was launched in late September 1991 and by early May 1992, by capturing Shusa and Lachin, the entire Azerbaijani populated areas in NK had been burned, looted and the population expelled from their native lands. Soviet (then Russian) tanks, armoured vehicles and officers stationed in the regional capital Stepanakert were part of this process,<sup>5</sup> accompanied by brutal atrocities in Azerbaijani villages which culminated in the town of Khojali,<sup>6</sup> where up to 640 people were massacred by the local Armenian militants with the support the 366th Motor Rifle Regiment of the Russian Federation.<sup>7</sup> The Khojali massacre is still the main traumatic factor in the psychology of Azerbaijanians and consequently in conflict resolution efforts. The core of the Armenian armed forces constituted career soviet officers and weapons “captured”<sup>8</sup> from the bases in NK.<sup>9</sup>

The expulsion of Azerbaijanis was a planned policy of Armenian radical groups in an effort to secure non-Azerbaijani NK as a first step in further extraction of this land from Azerbaijan<sup>10</sup>. In March 1993 Armenian forces advanced into the areas

beyond NK, capturing Kelbejer district, which led to the greater involvement of the United Nations. In June 1993, taking advantage of the political turmoil in Azerbaijan, Armenian forces launched a wide scale military offensive, capturing six other regions of Azerbaijan and causing hundreds of thousand of refugees, burning and looting occupied areas. The occupied areas beyond NK are twice the size of NK itself and are equal to half of Armenia. All residents of the occupied areas (around 700,000) were driven out of their homes and the occupied areas are heavily militarized. 120 km of Azerbaijani international borders with Iran and more than that with Armenia is still out of Azerbaijani control. The UN Security Council adopted four resolutions demanding immediate and unconditional withdrawal of occupying forces but did not take decisive steps for implementing them.

## **OSCE Activities**

The OSCE was involved in Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict resolution in early 1992 after the Khojali massacre and on 24 March 1992 decided to convene a conference in Minsk<sup>11</sup> in an effort to settle the problems facing the conflicting parties. OSCE involvement was welcomed by Azerbaijan at that time since the OSCE principles and mediation guaranteed Azerbaijani sovereign rights and precluded any unilateral mediation which was unpopular in Azerbaijan.

For the Armenian side, the OSCE was considered undesirable due to the principle of inviolability of borders and excluded Armenia's territorial claims in any form. Initially the chairmanship of the OSCE Minsk group was rotated by states like Italy, Finland and Sweden but later Russia took permanent chairmanship at the Budapest summit of the OSCE in December 1994, where the decision was made to send multilateral peacekeeping forces to the area.<sup>12</sup> The OSCE Lisbon summit in December 1996 put forward principles for NK conflict resolution which stipulated a high degree of autonomy within the Azerbaijan republic.<sup>13</sup> In 1997 co-chairmanship was set up comprising the USA, France and Russia.

The OSCE co-chairmen proposed two peace plans<sup>14</sup> in 1997 known as the 'package' and 'staged' plans, which envisaged greater autonomy for NK and diminishing Azerbaijani sovereignty over the region, both of them accepted by Azerbaijan. Armenian president Levon Ter-Petrosyan accepted the second plan, trying to foster peace and cooperation with both Azerbaijan and Turkey, but was forced to resign as a result of the power ministries and the current president R Kocharyan disrupting peace efforts. A third plan called "common state" was proposed in late 1998,<sup>15</sup> fundamentally different from the Bosnian common state plan, and was rejected by Azerbaijan as it aimed at division of Azerbaijan into two independent states.

The stalemate continued until 1999 when then Azerbaijani president H Aliyev initiated the Geneva meeting with Armenian president Kocharyan, trying to make a deal without distancing OSCE from the process. This one to one meeting yielded some hope domestically and internationally by the autumn of 1999, but later the shootings in the Armenian parliament produced a power vacuum in Armenia and the peace process again stalled until Russian president V Putin's visit to Baku in January 2001. President Putin's efforts in coordination with French President J Chirac stimulated the Paris meetings in February and March 2001, allegedly with territorial exchange between Azerbaijan and Armenia and deep decentralization as the content of the negotiations, which were kept confidential.

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To push forward the Paris talks the US government initiated the Key West meeting in the United States involving conflict resolution experts rich in ideas and possible options for resolution, but failed to produce agreement. The widely speculated Key West “agreement” or “principles” mentioned by the Armenian side have been confirmed neither by mediators nor with the Azerbaijani side. The situation stalled.

## **The "Prague Process"**

The hope for immediate negotiations and a kind of resolution were widely debated among the diplomatic community in Baku as well as in the Minsk Group as a result of dynastic succession in Azerbaijan. The expectations were encouraged by the I Aliyev-Kocharyan meeting on 11 December 2003 where the sides pledged to continue the dialogue.<sup>16</sup> Aliyev *Père* and R Kocharyan had met 21 times at various occasions.

Despite the French envoy's too optimistic expectations,<sup>17</sup> the United States was suggesting new approaches and ideas to enrich the previous options, while Russia favoured direct dialogue between the two leaders,<sup>18</sup> offering its assistance.<sup>19</sup> The Armenian side launched a campaign to press to continue the negotiations on the ground of the alleged Paris and Key West “principles”, claiming that the principles for settlement were laid out and agreed by H Aliyev in Key West for further negotiations. Azerbaijan faced these allegations with surprise, stating that that there was no agreement achieved in Paris or Key West but different options had been discussed as always between the two presidents and negotiators. The Armenian foreign minister went as far as saying that he was ready to present or gift<sup>20</sup> those Key West “agreements” to Azerbaijan when he faced direct questions from the Azerbaijani foreign minister for those “agreements” in a Bratislava meeting.

The new Azerbaijani leader I Aliyev and his foreign minister did not exclude starting the negotiations from scratch, asserting that the previous options did not yield a basis for further negotiations and in fact rejecting the “principles” discussed by H Aliyev. "I am not in favour of making compromises" and "I am in no hurry" for settlement, he said.<sup>21</sup> In response, Armenia claimed that NK is an "integral part" of Armenia and their goal was “to win international recognition of this”.<sup>22</sup>

I Aliyev accused the Minsk Group of ineffectiveness, urging them to present new proposals where Azerbaijani territorial integrity would be preserved. These statements were also a sign that the previous negotiations and proposals discussed cast doubt on Azerbaijani integrity. The Minsk Group co-chairman rejected the accusations, stating that “over 10 years the Minsk Group proposed several variants of the settlement, all these however have been rejected either by Armenia or by Azerbaijan ... each party is guided by its own interests only”.<sup>23</sup>

In response Armenian President Robert Kocharyan stated that he did not intend to resume the settlement process from the very beginning as Ilham Aliyev proposed, stating that “a certain field has been created for several years and we do not intend to give up this work”.<sup>24</sup> Armenia threatened to withdraw from negotiations if they had to start from scratch. The period was also characterized by anti-Azerbaijani hysteria in Armenia, starting from president Kocharyan's statement before students in Moscow State University about the "ethnic incompatibility of Azerbaijanis and Armenians", and continued by the Armenian Deputy Defence Minister saying that "murder is characteristic of the entire Azerbaijani nation", and by the Deputy

Speaker of the Armenian parliament (National Assembly) Vahan Hovanesian's infamous interview: "I am proud that in the Karabakh war we killed 25,000 Azerbaijanis". The TV and press campaign of hatred and slander did not forecast a favourable environment for good intentions and caused outrage on the side.<sup>25</sup>

State controlled television in Azerbaijan was also active in terms of a propaganda war against Armenia, protesting against the arrival of any Armenian representatives at international conferences in Baku and accusing the rebel territory of being a transit for narcotics and terrorists.<sup>26</sup> By this propaganda the ruling regime tried to avert the attention of people from the internal situation as well, where massive arrests and torture of internal opponents protesting against the rigged presidential elections were taking place.

In light of this propaganda war OSCE co-chairman from Russia Yuri Merzlyakov blamed both sides for the failure of dialogue between them, stating that OSCE mediators had prepared new proposals but "there is simply not a good environment for discussions ... Now we are trying to define the place and time of new negotiations."<sup>27</sup>

The situation changed after the visit of US assistant secretary of state R Armitage to the region, who pressed both sides for continuation of negotiations and for dialogue. Newly appointed energetic Azerbaijani foreign Minister Elmar Mammedyarov met his Armenian counterpart in Prague on 16 April 2004, which was fact finding in character and signalled hope for change.<sup>28</sup>

Before the start of the dialogue both sides tried to express their confronting positions again: "Azerbaijan will not agree neither to the independent state status of NK or to NK being part of Armenia. New proposals of the OSCE Minsk group for the settlement of the conflict must be based on these principles," said the Azerbaijani foreign minister.<sup>29</sup> "Azerbaijan is ready to grant the highest possible status of autonomy to NK as national minorities have in various parts of the world," said Ilham Aliyev in his interview to Turkish "Hurriyyet".<sup>30</sup> Aliyev reiterated his position during his visit to Turkey, stating that Azerbaijan would never accept Armenian demands for Karabakh's union with Armenia or for independence from Baku,<sup>31</sup> securing Turkish assurances not to open the Turkish-Armenian border. Turkey also agreed that transport communication with Armenia cannot be restored until the occupied territories are released.<sup>32</sup>

"The Nagorno Karabakh problem can be resolved only by the self determination of NK people. This can be achieved by unification of Armenia and NK and by the recognition of the world community and Azerbaijan. There is no other way," said Armenian Foreign Minister V Oskanyan before the start of the Prague meeting.<sup>33</sup>

The meeting of Azerbaijani and Armenian leaders in Warsaw on 28 April only produced their reciprocal commitment to resolving the conflict peacefully and agreement for continuation of the foreign ministers' meetings, now called the "Prague process".<sup>34</sup>

Prior to the next (12 May) Strasbourg meeting within the Prague process the Azerbaijani foreign minister outlined Azerbaijani key points for swift resolution, namely withdrawal of Armenian troops from seven occupied areas beyond NK and the restoration of communication routes and relations with Armenia, saying that there was general feeling that Armenia was ready to discuss the stage-by-stage plan insisted on by the Azerbaijani side.<sup>35</sup> The key points were reaffirmed by I Aliyev

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stating that "We will exchange opinions on the possibility of liberating seven regions of Azerbaijan in exchange for opening transport communications with Armenia".<sup>36</sup> The idea figured in Ilham Aliyev's talks in mid April in Ankara, which stipulated that in parallel with Azerbaijan, Turkey would also open its border with Armenia.<sup>37</sup>

The Armenian Foreign Ministry denied the statement that "the issue of liberating the seven occupied districts of Azerbaijan and opening transport communications with Armenia in return" would be discussed at Strasbourg, saying that there was no clear or fixed agenda in the negotiations and calling the statement a misunderstanding.<sup>38</sup> They wanted to push forward an interim deal which would reduce tension between the two sides, and "create a possibility for negotiations to go forward in a freer atmosphere to find some sort of compromise".<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile the European Union indicated clear interest in resolving the ongoing conflict. Its Rapporteur on South Caucasus Per Gahrton prepared a report demanding as a first step withdrawal of Armenian troops from five occupied regions adjacent to NK in return for opening communications and cooperation. "Armenia does not support separate initiatives which are different from the package of Karabakh settlement initiated by OSCE", said Armenian Foreign Minister Oskanyan to the EU special representative, rejecting the proposal. Azerbaijan welcomed the initiative.<sup>40</sup>

The EU parliament in its session on 26 February 2004 under pressure from Armenian lobby groups removed the part of the report concerning the opening of communications with Armenia in response to return of the five occupied regions which had been approved by the Committee on defence, security and foreign policy.<sup>41</sup> The Gahrton report specifically advocated an increase in EU aid to the South Caucasus and called on the EU to solicit the cooperation of Russia and Turkey in resolving regional conflicts.<sup>42</sup> In terms of NK settlement Rapporteur Per Gahrton was specific, stating that "the Armenian party must be ready to withdraw its armed forces from the occupied territories" and must abstain from Armenization (settlement) of the occupied territories. "International law bans this and it is unfavourable for the future," Gahrton said.<sup>43</sup>

Inclusion of all south Caucasian countries into the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy prompted the EU to take a closer interest in the resolution of frozen conflicts in the Caucasus. EU commissioner R Prodi recognized the necessity for swift solution of the NK conflict, expressing his willingness to assist the OSCE Minsk Group in its efforts to push this issue forward. The EU could help "speed up the solution," he told the visiting Azerbaijani leader.<sup>44</sup> EU Chief for foreign political affairs Javier Solana proposed Turkey to take part in the settlement process, while pointing out "EU itself would consider the possibility of participation in the search for a settlement," which was supported by Azerbaijan.<sup>45</sup>

Turkey for her part proposed a trilateral meeting of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey in an effort to discuss the bilateral and NK issues in one package, playing a catalyst role in achieving solution to the conflict.<sup>46</sup> A trilateral meeting on the sidelines of NATO's Istanbul summit focused on NK as well: special attention was paid to the active involvement of Turkey in the peace process. Turkey agreed to develop a special mechanism for that and to continue the trilateral meetings.<sup>47</sup> This Turkish initiative triggered intolerant messages from Moscow, questioning the Turkish mediation role and indicating the extent of rivalry over the issue, in fact inviting the Armenian foreign minister to Moscow for explanations.<sup>48</sup>



After the June 22 meeting of foreign ministers the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmen formulated both sides' approaches into one single formula which, as was disclosed by Russian Co-chairman Yuri Merzlyakov, aimed to reconcile the opposing strategies of Armenia and Azerbaijan on ending the conflict. He said a synthesis of a "step-by-step" settlement of the conflict pushed by Azerbaijan and a single "package" accord demanded by the Armenian side was the only realistic way of breaking the decade-long deadlock in the peace process. "The co-chairs are now trying to propose a variant of the settlement which would literally allow us to synthesize incompatible proposals, namely, those two approaches," Merzlyakov said. Armenia, calling the formula realistic, tried to address first the status of NK.<sup>49</sup>

The mid July 2004 meeting of co-chairs with leaders of both nations clearly illustrated deep division between the positions of the sides and the unacceptability of the elements of the formulated document to the parties. So in his meeting with co-chairs Azerbaijani leader I Aliyev once again explained Baku's official position on the issue, drawing their attention to the UN SC's four resolutions and saying that the "OSCE knows very well Azerbaijan's position on the issue and that this position remains unchangeable".<sup>50</sup> At a reception organized by the US Embassy in Baku in honour of the Co-chairs with the participation of Azerbaijani policymakers, the co-chairs tried to persuade them to agree to compromises, having said little on the essence of those compromises, which might be the reason for the failure of the meeting and the subsequent converse effect. Public reactions to perceived OSCE ineffectiveness made them react sharply, that the conflicting sides bear responsibility for the stalemate, being frank and straightforward as never before: "The progress or lack of progress, whatever it is, rests in Yerevan and Baku, and that is an important fact," the group's US co-chairman Steven Mann said at a news conference in the Azerbaijani capital Baku. The Minsk Group's French co-chairman, Henry Jacolin, said, "Instead of blaming those who are negotiating, it is always easier to look for a scapegoat. We know that we have to play this role."<sup>51</sup> "The solution of the conflict will demand compromises from the conflicting sides and they themselves will have to define the level of the complexity of these compromises," Steven Mann said in Yerevan.<sup>52</sup> For the Azerbaijani public the insistence of the co-chairs on compromise has been perceived as losing sovereignty over NK in return for the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the areas beyond NK. Public reactions were high, claiming to reject OSCE mediation and identifying the co-chair countries, especially France and Russia,<sup>53</sup> as biased towards Armenia. The public outrage was expressed by both I Aliyev and the parliamentary speaker respectively that "he regrets the OSCE did not produce results" and "the activity of the OSCE Minsk Group does not suit the Azerbaijani side".<sup>54</sup>

In light of the distrust of the OSCE US co-chairman Steven Mann made a statement that "We support Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and I believe that to resolve the conflict, first of all, one of the sides must make concessions".<sup>55</sup> He had earlier made comments that "the situation requires Azerbaijan to make concessions on a peaceful settlement to the Karabakh conflict," and "the US position on this issue is that the sides should make concessions to each other, which are acceptable to both sides".<sup>56</sup>

Armenia decided to show "muscle", launching ten days of military training in occupied areas of Azerbaijan on the eve of the next meeting of Azerbaijan and Armenian heads of state and foreign ministers. A joint Armenian-Russian military exercise near Yerevan again raised concern in Azerbaijan over Russia's role as a mediator and guarantor.<sup>57</sup>

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Foreign Minister E Mammedyarov condemned those exercises as running “counter to the purposes and spirit of the talks held with the OSCE Minsk Group’s mediation”. “Some staff exercises and illegal local government elections have been held on the occupied territories. In addition, resettlement is under way on the occupied territories. It is difficult to hold peace talks in these conditions,” he said. Regarding Russia’s role, before leaving for Moscow he said, “Russia is playing a major and even a key role in settling the conflict ... Growing numbers of people believe that if Russia is interested in settling the conflict, peace will be established in our region very quickly.”<sup>58</sup>

In his turn Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told reporters he was sceptical about the effectiveness of international mediation in settling the conflict in NK; Russia “is ready to lend its aid but no one can resolve the problem in the place of the two parties,” confirming the earlier remarks of Minsk Group co-chairs.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the bellicose statements coming from both sides the fourth meeting of foreign ministers in Prague produced initially encouraging statements from both ministers. V Oskanyan was quoted as saying they were “the most important”<sup>60</sup> and E Mammedyarov as saying that “for the first time we have made progress and real step forward”.<sup>61</sup> Though the confidential details agreed between the ministers were not disclosed, the overall picture was that the basic elements of a new peace plan combined the two approaches preferred by Azerbaijan and Armenia. The achievement at that meeting was to be presented to both leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan who met in Astana, Kazakhstan on 15 September to negotiate the main points of disagreement which might point to decisive negotiations to end the confrontation. I Aliyev called the Astana meeting a watershed in his meeting in Barda (a regional centre adjacent to NK): “A lot depends on the meeting in Astana ... Now there is a chance to determine the road map for achieving an agreement. This is the main thing: real, fundamental negotiations will start only after that.”<sup>62</sup> He noted the absence of agreement on principles for comprehensive settlement, which were supposed to be negotiated with Kocharyan in Astana. The two leaders commented after their talks in Astana and Kocharyan stated “there is need for time out to assess the existing ideas and to make decisions for our next steps”. Russian co-chair Yuri Merzlyakov said that the heads of state exchanged their own views on resolution and discussed issues “agreed in the Prague talks” including “return of territories adjacent to NK, return of refugees and guarantees to their security”.<sup>63</sup>

The long pause for Armenia learning the details discussed in Astana was later explained by the Armenian foreign ministry again as “Armenia needs time to study the issues that have been raised in detail ... the determination of the status of NK is the main issue in the Karabakh conflict”.<sup>64</sup> The statement was made mainly due to growing public fury in Armenia that Kocharyan was going to withdraw from the areas occupied beyond NK which was considered as a major bargaining chip for Armenia and the nationalist agenda. The delay in responding to the Azerbaijani side was explained by many observers as a disagreement between Kocharyan and Oskanyan, who once confessed that he was more optimistic for the agreed formula with Mammedyarov than with Kocharyan. Contrary to expectations, the presidents did not give the foreign ministries any orders “in order to begin the second stage that is far closer to settlement of the problem,” Oskanyan said. However, this does not mean that the presidents rejected the groundwork laid by the foreign ministers in Prague, Oskanyan stated at news conference in Yerevan.<sup>65</sup> Russian co-chair Merzlyakov also affirmed that after the Astana meeting the presidents of both states were to make statements by the end of October or beginning of November.<sup>66</sup>

The reluctance of the Armenian side to go forward within the Prague process was obvious and was periodically expressed by the Armenian Foreign Minister mystifying the Key West “principles” on various occasions,<sup>67</sup> and most interestingly after the Astana meeting in his interview to Armenian TV as “the only way” for resolution, which faced sharp reaction from the Azerbaijani foreign ministry, assessing it as a retreat from the agreed framework. “The Azerbaijani side stated more than once, and today we once again suggest Mr Oskanyan find better application of his persistence and stop playing Key West games; we hereby reaffirm that no agreements were reached on the issues discussed in Key West,” the Foreign Ministry statement said. It referred to “rich and useful European experience” in defining self-government for NK.<sup>68</sup> Kocharyan also expressed his pessimism at a press conference in Yerevan: “At present I am not very optimistic about that, but we keep trying, together with Azerbaijan, to search for a mutually acceptable solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem”.<sup>69</sup>

Later the negotiations were stalled by clashes of Azerbaijani and Armenian diplomacy over the introduction of a draft resolution to UN General Assembly's 59<sup>th</sup> session called “Situation in the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan” with the purpose of debating Armenian settlement activities in the occupied territories.<sup>70</sup> Commenting on the UN debate E Memmedyarov said that “Baku doesn't link debating in the UN to the talks within the Minsk Group and is ready to resume the talks any moment and at any place,” reminding that the talks were suspended at the request of Armenia, which needed to “comprehend” the situation. In his words, “Armenia is attracting settlers by extending them loans, credits and other financial aid”.<sup>71</sup>

The Armenian side believed that the debate could cause international condemnation and weaken Armenian arguments and for that reason tried to block the debate at the UN, stating that in that case Armenia would withdraw from negotiations with Azerbaijan.<sup>72</sup> Yerevan's open concern regarding the debate was clear. Armenia was trying to hide its illegal activities in occupied areas due to international condemnation of settlement policy in occupied areas in general and all in all not to give wider knowledge to the international community about the occupation itself.

Ilham Aliyev similarly argued that raising the Karabakh issue in other international forums will not jeopardize the ongoing search for a solution under the aegis of the OSCE Minsk Group, nor does Baku seek to replace the Minsk Group by another mediator. Aliyev said Baku simply wants international organizations such as the UN, the EU, and the Council of Europe to “recognize unequivocally that Armenia has occupied part of Azerbaijan's territory”.<sup>73</sup> The Armenian foreign minister insisted that “UN resolution would be an obstacle to the settlement process” and accused Azerbaijan of trying to involve other international organizations in settlement process.<sup>74</sup>

The OSCE Minsk group was also not happy for the adoption of such a resolution, consequently mobilizing co-chair countries to oppose it. In a 22 November interview with RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service, US Minsk Group Co-chairman Steven Mann expressed implicit disapproval of the Azerbaijani initiative. Mann stressed that “traditionally it has been the OSCE that handles Karabakh,” rather than the UN, and he asked rhetorically “How does this [Azerbaijani initiative] bring us closer to a settlement?”<sup>75</sup> The OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs issued a statement on October 27, noting that “introducing this issue to the United Nations General Assembly may have two negative consequences. In light of the situation we have

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outlined, this will be detrimental to the efforts to find a just and lasting settlement of the issue, particularly at this time. Secondly, it will fail to achieve consensus, a situation that will not be helpful. We advise avoiding this situation."<sup>76</sup>

However V Oskanyan in his interview to the Armenian service of RFE/RL said that "Armenia was ready to start Prague negotiation on NK settlement and continue until the achievement of final settlement," adding that "in the first stage of the Prague negotiations important results have been achieved and we may deepen them in the second stage of the negotiations". The press secretariat of the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry stated that Yerevan had not informed them about her readiness for the restoration of negotiation and "we heard about this from the press," doubting the sincerity of Oskanyan.<sup>77</sup>

In New York, Minsk group chairmen and their respective UN SC member countries came to a compromise agreement with Azerbaijan on forming an OSCE fact finding mission for monitoring settlement activities in occupied areas instead of debating the issue at UN. "Our main goal was to draw the attention of the international community to the artificial settlement of Armenians in Azerbaijan's occupied territories," deputy foreign minister A Ezimov said in Baku, stating that Armenian foreign minister Vardan Oskanyan said at a meeting in Berlin that Yerevan understood Azerbaijan's concern and would take measures. The Armenian side also said it was ready to resume the talks "at the ministerial level".<sup>78</sup>

E Memmedyarov met V Oskanyan on the sidelines of the OSCE Sofia ministerial meeting and they decided to hold another round within the format of the Prague process on the sidelines of a Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council session in Brussels on 9 December. Though co-chairs joined the talks no new proposals were made. The meeting mainly focused on the presidents' positions on the Prague talks. "We have already received relevant instructions from the heads of states and from now on will discuss those details," Oskanyan said after the meeting. "We conduct discussions and talks, but finally we cannot make a specific decision."<sup>79</sup> Both sides agreed to restore the Prague negotiations.<sup>80</sup>

"As a result of our talks with Azerbaijan and due to very positive proposals by the Minsk group, the recent obstacles to the (next round of) Prague talks have already been eliminated," Oskanyan said in Yerevan on 14 December. "I think we will be able to start a new round of the Prague talks between the foreign ministers early next year."<sup>81</sup> The obstacles in fact were related to the fact finding mission: "The determinant factor that made this mission possible - despite Armenia's earlier objections - was a compromise reached recently by the two countries under the aegis of the Minsk group co-chairs. The main provision of the compromise was that Azerbaijan would suspend its action at the United Nations in return for - among other things - Armenia's consent to that mission, the technicalities of which were agreed to by both parties," said France's co-chair, Bernard Fassier.<sup>82</sup>

"On the one hand, we are negotiating, but on the other, Armenia is building illegal settlements in the occupied lands (of Azerbaijan). One cannot talk about serious negotiations in this case," said E Mammedyarov, confirming Armenia's consent.<sup>83</sup> Co-chairs were also included in the monitoring mission but they did not represent their respective countries as Y Merzlyakov asserted. The composition of the fact finding mission comprised representatives of co-chair countries and four other OSCE members: German, Italian, Swedish and Finnish representatives headed by the German representative.<sup>84</sup>

The fact finding mission visited Karabakh and seven other occupied regions of Azerbaijan from 30 January to 5 February 2005. A statement by co-chairs to the OSCE Permanent Council said: "The mission found evidence of the presence of settlers in the territories examined. There was little disagreement between the sides on the number of settlers in the occupied territories and the nature of the settlements." The mission did not determine that such settlements resulted from a deliberate policy by the government of Armenia, which caused criticism from Azerbaijan, concluding that NK authorities are primarily responsible. The OSCE called on Armenian authorities that "any further settlement of the occupied territories should be discouraged" to "avoid changes in the demographic structure of the region". The co-chairs specifically indicated that the "prolonged continuation of this situation could lead to a fait accompli that would seriously complicate the peace process". The independent daily Zerkalo, however, quoted deputy foreign minister A Azimov as saying that the fact-finding mission achieved two results. It "slowed down further settlement of the occupied territories by Armenian families and showed Azerbaijan's warning that it would never agree with the occupation of its territories".<sup>85</sup>

Concerning NK, the OSCE ministerial summit in Sofia made a statement on behalf of the ministerial council "commending the progress achieved in the settlement of NK conflict in 2004" and expressing its support for the activities of co-chairs and foreign ministers. The statement welcomed the Prague process which "allowed the methodical re-examination of all parameters of a future settlement". "We note that building on the results of the 'Prague process' the co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk group presented in September in Astana a framework that could serve as a basis for a settlement. We invite the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to take that framework into account and to go forward based on it."<sup>86</sup>

On the eve of the January 2005 Prague meeting the sides and especially the press again tried to interpret the discussion of the stage-by-stage plan or package plan as a victory of one side or another. That was especially intensive in Armenia, based on former president Ter-Petrosyan's acceptance of the stage-by-stage plan which led to his ouster by the current ruling clan in early 1998. Commenting on Azerbaijani reports that the stage-by-stage settlement option was allegedly discussed in the negotiations, V Oskanyan said that "talking about the stage-by-stage option discussed in the negotiations, they are backing themselves into a tight corner," indicating the extent of sensitivity of this issue in Armenia.<sup>87</sup>

"The Azerbaijani and Armenian foreign ministers discuss at talks issues pertaining to a staged solution to the Karabakh conflict," Russian co-chair Yuri Merzlyakov said. He noted that Armenia had already agreed to a stage-by-stage solution principle. "Now we have to work out certain details,"<sup>88</sup> describing the forthcoming Prague talks as "a decisive moment" the Russian co-chair hoped that the dialogue could be continued towards a final end should there be any specific results in Prague. "We do not rule out agreement on some options proposed by Baku. But for this purpose mutual steps should be taken, desire should be demonstrated and coordinated," Merzlyakov said. Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov said that Yerevan's position had not changed in principle but "there is desire for rapprochement".

Azerbaijani experts were not optimistic about the Prague process: "Although the new settlement plan envisages a stage-by-stage solution there are some dangerous tendencies," warned former foreign minister T Zulfikarov. "The Armenians aim to include certain items in the proposals which will allow for a stage-by-stage solution.

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... At the talks Yerevan calls for the prior resolution of issues such as the status of Nagorno- Karabakh, a referendum among the Armenian community and other legal issues ... The main discussions and problems are related to it at this stage. Therefore, the co-chairmen are now more inclined to a stage-by-stage solution, and specific progress in the resolution of the problem depends on international pressure on Armenia," he said.<sup>89</sup>

Former state advisor Vafa Quluzada believed that the fate of the Prague talks depended not on the parties to the conflict, but on the co-chairmen. "The main dialogue is now between the USA and Russia. If the USA manages to explain the existing realities to Moscow and Paris, there will be no problems. We should know that the USA holds the key to the problem and it will be used soon. The Prague talks and any talk of recipes just aim at diverting the attention."<sup>90</sup>

Commenting after the fifth Prague meeting Armenian Foreign Minister V Oskanyan revealed that there was a general framework of issues to be discussed, "but as this meeting showed they need to be further consolidated". Oskanyan also brought some clarity to the formula discussed, saying that the peace process had become so intricate that there is no longer a clear distinction between Armenia's "package" and Azerbaijan's "step-by-step" approach, denying speculation in both countries that Armenia had accepted the stage-by-stage plan. "The 'Prague process' is fairly difficult and complex and it will remain such at further meetings," he said.<sup>91</sup>

At the beginning of 2005 international support for the Azerbaijani cause was impressively expressed in Secretary Powell's letter to foreign minister Mammedyarov, where he reaffirmed that the "United States unequivocally supports Azerbaijani territorial integrity ... and is glad to take part in a monitoring mission on the occupied territories".<sup>92</sup> Assistant secretary of state Elisabeth Jones speaking about Russia's role in the conflicts remaining in the post soviet space said, "It is in Russia's interests for the self-proclaimed republics of South Osetia and Abkhazia in Georgia, Trans-Dniester in Moldova, and Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan to be stable, for corruption to end there, for criminal secessionists who rule there to be removed". In response to a campaign against the US position and Ms Jones personally in Armenia,<sup>93</sup> the US Embassy in Yerevan issued another statement reiterating that the United States "does not recognize Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent country, does not recognize its leadership, and supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan,"<sup>94</sup> which was unprecedented.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) approved a long awaited resolution, ignoring protests raised by Armenia's representatives. The PACE resolution condemned unambiguously the ethnic cleansing in strongly worded language, stating that "Considerable parts of the territory of Azerbaijan are still occupied by Armenian forces and separatist forces are still in control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region". It expressed its concern that "the military action, and the widespread ethnic hostilities which preceded it, led to large-scale ethnic expulsion and the creation of mono-ethnic areas which resemble the terrible concept of ethnic cleansing".<sup>95</sup>

The PACE resolution expressed the unacceptability of acquisition of land by force, condemning armed aggression: "The Assembly reaffirms that independence and secession of a regional territory from a state may only be achieved through a lawful and peaceful process based on democratic support by the inhabitants of such territory and not in the wake of an armed conflict leading to ethnic expulsion and the de facto annexation of such territory to another state". The Assembly reiterated

that “the occupation of foreign territory by a member state constitutes a grave violation of that state's obligations as a member of the Council of Europe” and reaffirmed “the right of displaced persons from the area of conflict to return to their homes safely and with dignity”. The assembly’s resolution called on Armenia to comply with the four UN SC resolutions and to establish contacts without preconditions with the political representatives of both communities from the Nagorno-Karabakh region regarding the future status of the region.

This PACE resolution, the position of the US government reaffirming Azerbaijani territorial integrity three times within one month, and the dispatch of the OSCE fact finding mission into the occupied areas cornered the Armenian side and prompted the Armenian parliament to convene a special session to address the situation and work out a common strategy to oppose the international community. Armenian defence<sup>96</sup> and foreign ministers, making statements at the session, tried to promise the public that “the solution will not be found through the creation of documents and resolutions in international forums,”<sup>97</sup> offering nothing constructive except anti-Azerbaijani hysteria.

R Kocharyan in his turn tried to calm the public with radical statements with a nationalistic agenda: "The optimal status for Nagorny Karabakh is independence in the near future and part of Armenia in the long-term prospect," he said in his interview to the readers of Golos Armenii. “As long as there is no practical solution to the Karabakh conflict the talk about stalemate in the negotiating process is inevitable.” Kocharyan commented on the opposition accusations that his policy led to the isolation of NK from negotiations, noting that he represented NK interests in his meetings with I Aliyev as well.<sup>98</sup>

In response to a question regarding the debates in Armenia, I Aliyev said “the only thing his government could do was to guarantee the security of the Karabakh Armenians, as well as the Azerbaijanis who would return there,” rejecting any other compromise with Armenia. "The sides have made their positions clear. There has been no change in our position. And there can be none."<sup>99</sup>

Meanwhile the round of meetings between Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers have failed since January 2005. They did not take place on 2 March, due as the Armenian side claimed to Oskanyan’s illness. Since then the format of negotiations has changed. The next meeting was scheduled in London on 17 April, where co-chairs met only with foreign ministers separately to introduce clarity into some issues discussed within the Prague process.

In a statement issued on 15 April, US, French, and Russian mediators said the peace process had reached a "sensitive juncture, where a first step towards an agreement ... could be at hand". Underscoring their renewed optimism about peace prospects, the mediators urged the conflicting parties to "prepare their populations for a balanced negotiated agreement that will require compromise on both sides".<sup>100</sup> At the 17 April press conference at the Azerbaijan foreign ministry, the officials spoke in this spirit, urging Azerbaijani people to treat NK Armenians as their own citizens, saying that they should live in peace together putting aside the past hostilities.<sup>101</sup>

V Oskanyan did not arrive in Frankfurt, Germany for the scheduled meeting on 27 April, which caused arguments that Armenian side had tried to avoid a face to face meeting. But the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister revealed that a specific peace plan was discussed at the meeting in Frankfurt with OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs and

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“Azerbaijan stands firm on its position”. The minister said that the peace plan was a very ‘sensitive issue’ and disclosing its details would cause tensions in the South Caucasus, as there are forces opposed to the establishment of peace in the region.<sup>102</sup> The next round of meetings might take place on the sidelines of the Council of Europe summit in Warsaw on 16-17 May, Mammedyarov said. V Oskanyan, commenting on his absence, said on 5 May that “there were no ulterior motives” to skip his encounter with Mammedyarov, stressing that he was too busy to travel to Frankfurt on 27 April. “There was no need for a meeting of ministers,” he said.

"There was a breakthrough at one point," Defence Minister S Sarkisian told reporters on 19 April. "But I don't find it appropriate to talk about it today because time for doing that hasn't yet come. Push hasn't yet come to shove. Once it comes, we will talk." He said that "the conflict must be resolved through mutual concessions," but stressed that the population must choose that compromise.<sup>103</sup>

Mammedyarov, commenting on the upcoming meeting of Aliyev and Kocharyan in Warsaw, gave some clarity to the latest meetings in London and Frankfurt. "We did not work on a specific agreement during the last talks. Both London and Frankfurt negotiations were a continuation of Prague process. We met Minsk group Co-chairs separately and formulated the concrete framework for further negotiations. In Warsaw the heads of state will assess our work under the 'Prague process' and give us instructions how to go ahead."<sup>104</sup>

Ilham Aliyev and Robert Kocharyan met on the sidelines of a Council of Europe summit attended by the Minsk Group co-chairmen as well as Russian and French Foreign Ministers Sergey Lavrov and Michel Barnier.<sup>105</sup> "Azerbaijan's position in the Karabakh conflict settlement remains unchanged ... the details of the talks are not disclosed under mutual agreements,"<sup>106</sup> were what Aliyev told reporters after the meeting. Speaking about possible settlement scenarios, in his summit speech Aliyev stated that Azerbaijan "is ready for a compromise, for granting a high level of autonomy to Nagorno-Karabakh and ensuring security of the citizens of the region".<sup>107</sup>

The Armenian foreign minister was quick to reject the Azerbaijani proposal to give NK "the highest status of autonomy", stating that autonomy is "a stage which is over" for the Armenians of NK, as NK had an autonomous status within Azerbaijan in the soviet period.<sup>108</sup> The idea of autonomy was reiterated after the summit by Aliyev in Baku: "Our position remains unchanged - our lands must be returned and our territorial integrity restored. Our greatest concessions are security guarantees for Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians and our readiness to grant [the enclave] the highest degree of autonomy that exists in the world," Aliyev told reporters.<sup>109</sup>

In response, Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanyan said “For us there can be only one solution of the conflict – the recognition of Nagorno Karabakh self-determination,” he told the national TV late on 19 May. The discussion of the principle that Nagorno Karabakh cannot be an enclave on the territory of Azerbaijan is out of the question, he added.<sup>110</sup> It should be noted that such confusing statements distort the principle of self determination, since the world does not recognize “self-determination” accompanied by occupation, destruction and ethnic cleansing (expressed most recently by the PACE document)<sup>111</sup> thus leading the settlement process again to deadlock.



The highlight of the Warsaw meeting was E Mammedyarov's statement that Armenia is ready to give up seven regions of Azerbaijan it occupied beyond NK itself. "They have agreed to give up all the regions, but they are thinking when they should do this," Mamedyarov said in Warsaw.<sup>112</sup> The statement was not confirmed by the Armenian foreign ministry spokesman: "We have no such information. I am highly doubtful that it corresponds to the real situation," whilst he described the Warsaw meeting as "positive".

Russian co-chair Yuri Merzlyakov disclosed some details: "During the negotiations Ilham Aliyev and Robert Kocharyan discussed issues presented by the co-chairs". In his words, the agenda was rather expanded. "They discussed not only the return of seven territories. This issue was not a priority but was just included in the list of other issues".<sup>113</sup> The Armenian foreign minister in his turn asserted that the issue of status was mostly figuring in the talks: "Although small, the progress reached at the meeting is within our settlement ideas. This progress does not concern a return to Azerbaijan of occupied territories, but rather concerns the most important issue for Armenia – the status of Nagorno Karabakh," Oskanyan said.<sup>114</sup> Merzlyakov assessed the recent talks as "conveying a political impulse to further talks. It is very important, these will be continued in the direction set by the presidents by their discussion."<sup>115</sup>

Regarding further meetings of foreign ministers, Oskanyan said the foreign ministers of both countries "have exhausted their possibilities" in the framework of the Prague process,<sup>116</sup> which included their consultations on Karabakh settlement. However, after the meeting of the presidents the ministers have to meet again," he said.

Azerbaijani expert, former negotiator on NK settlement Vafa Qulizada believes that the situation is not yet ripe for settlement. "Because Russia is not yet ready for that. Russia spares no effort in trying to stay in the region, so the signing of a peace agreement by Yerevan and Baku would mean the pull-out of the Russian military bases from Armenia in the near future," he said.<sup>117</sup> Recent Russian plans to move part of armament withdrawn from Georgia to Armenia strengthens such an assessment, raising doubts for peaceful settlement and the mediation efforts.<sup>118</sup>

## Conclusions

The meetings of foreign ministers seemed to have some autonomous character distinct from previous years' negotiations. Armenian Foreign Minister Oskanyan once acknowledged that he was more optimistic on the course of his negotiations with the Azerbaijani foreign minister than with Kocharyan. The two foreign ministers have formulated a framework which was not disclosed for the public but supported by OSCE Minsk group and OSCE Council of Ministers in Sofia. The OSCE foreign ministers meeting in Sofia urged the heads of state of both countries to follow the framework formulated by the foreign ministers, which has caused surprise since the foreign ministers themselves could not act independently.

Although the essence of negotiations has been kept secret, some details were disclosed by both sides which could be formulated as follows. Azerbaijan came to terms that the conflict should be settled stage-by-stage, which in fact is right from a conflict resolution approach and the existence of deep hostility between the sides; while the Armenian side insisted on accepting the package solution where the status of NK will be determined first within a comprehensive peace settlement. The

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course of negotiations has shown that the sides have been trying to combine both arguments and elements of settlement into a wider phased one. Azerbaijan is negotiating in the first stage the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the areas beyond NK itself, which would allow the return of refugees to their homes in return for opening communication, establishing bilateral relations with Armenia and engaging in economic development in NK. The final status of the region could be decided within the context of trust and cooperation without any hostile environment.

There is a general view in Azerbaijan that within the territorial integrity and state security of Azerbaijan there can be granted a high degree of self rule for the entire population of NK. The local entity may enjoy full right of administrative independence except for major functions of central government and state, such as military-security issues and foreign policy functions. Demilitarization of the area, free movement and economic development should be basic elements of a comprehensive peace agreement.

The Armenian side excluded any final status of NK as part of Azerbaijan, referring to horizontal relations with Azerbaijani central government, which is considered unacceptable by Azerbaijan on the ground that such a solution would lead to the division of Azerbaijan into two states. Azerbaijan argues that the horizontal relations can not be excluded, except the powers for preserving the unity of the state. Armenia in fact is pursuing the principles they formulated in early 1998 for NK settlement which envisage the land route between NK and Armenia, exclusion of vertical relations with Azerbaijan and security guarantees for NK Armenian population, which served partly for the Paris and Key West negotiations. Azerbaijan argues that free movement embraces the land route while Armenia under the land route tries to connect NK with Armenia, annexing Lachin into Armenian control. Regarding security guarantees, Azerbaijan expressed its readiness to guarantee the security of Armenians in NK, arguing that the security of 700,000 Azerbaijanis has been violated.

Azerbaijani policy for the past ten years of the ceasefire regime has been focused on getting international recognition of Armenia as an aggressor state and in this way pressuring Armenia to leave the occupied areas. Azerbaijan hoped for similar actions towards Armenia to those taken by the international community in former Yugoslavia, but the geographical remoteness of the Caucasus and Russia's heavy presence in the region has always caused doubts for similar involvement. Blaming international organizations and great powers, the Azerbaijani ruling regime has done little to strengthen its army, economy and democratic institutions for gaining successful negotiating positions. On the contrary, corruption of governmental structures, monopoly over resources, non-transparency, rigged elections, violence against political opponents and establishing authoritarian systems and consequently the worst form of dynastic succession has weakened international support and sometimes caused ignorance of its vital problem.

Azerbaijan managed to isolate Armenia from regional transport and energy projects, but failed to make visible economic progress, resulting in unemployment and emigration of millions of Azerbaijanis to Russia and Western Europe.

Armenia has come to the conclusion that it cannot achieve a military solution to the conflict. Within the past ten years of the ceasefire regime the whole philosophy and approaches were based on the results of military gains, hoping that by maintaining the status quo for more years they may achieve the desirable outcome in a changed

environment. The old thinking, absence of vision for the future of the region, propaganda of hatred, lack of pluralistic debate on peace with Azerbaijan, authoritarianism, former warlords' rule of the country are the major elements of stalemate from the Armenian side.

In words both countries expressed their commitment to peaceful resolution, but neither side embraced the rules of peaceful settlement in terms of changing the atmosphere of hatred and enmity dictated by mistrust and absence of clear vision for the future relations of the two nations.

Azerbaijan believed that cooperation and the end of enmity would lead to strengthening the Armenian side and the toughening of their position. Armenia believed that the end of enmity and propaganda of hatred would slow the nationalist agenda and weaken their arguments to keep the occupied territories.

Armenia by its lobby groups in the United States and France and being in military alliance with Russia has managed to oppose the creation of any international coalition against Armenia so far. The monopoly of the OSCE Minsk group has also played an essential role for localizing the situation and preventing international reflection on the ethnic cleansing and military occupation. Recent PACE and EU involvement has produced hope that the current status quo will not be maintained for long.

On the mediation efforts of the OSCE Minsk group, there should be noted that co-chair countries have in fact taken into monopoly the whole issues of settlement, isolating the other 13 Minsk group countries. Intervention by the Council of Europe, EU and the UN General Assembly has faced similar opposition from Minsk group co-chairmen.

Armenia accepts the OSCE Minsk group as the best format for negotiations as the past 13 years mediation history have shown it has become an "island" isolated from the international community, which restricts and prevents any international involvement, serving indirectly to continue the stalemate and hiding the consequences of Armenian military aggression. From the other side, the Minsk group chairmen have always tried to diminish their role in the settlement process, reiterating that their only mandate is to act as a mediator. Azerbaijan was desperate to involve various international organizations into the case in an effort to free her from the burden of occupation.

Although there was no official displeasure about the composition of the Minsk group co-chairmen, there is distrust of the mediating team among Azerbaijani society since the co-chair countries lean directly and indirectly towards Armenia. Azerbaijan believed that Russia played a pivotal military and diplomatic role in supporting the Armenian occupation. Russia still re-equips and rearms the Armenian army with modern weapons and is in military alliance; it has a military base in Armenia. There is consensus in Azerbaijani society that such a position is only encouraging Armenia, and the armament of one side is not compatible with mediation efforts.

United States, being co-chairmen, had also been perceived by the Azerbaijani public for years as biased since the US government had Restriction 907 imposed by US Congress on Azerbaijan which was in force until 2002. Armenia is the second largest recipient of US aid in the world. But the United States is trying to involve the regional states into Euro-Atlantic structures to change the regional landscape

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and push for settlement based on democracy and cooperation, which is hopeful. Azerbaijanis could not trust French mediation watching France's president embrace R Kocharyan and awarding a high medal to this man, who led the occupation and destruction of part of Azerbaijan and headed NK separatist forces in the early 1990s. The Azerbaijani public is much more supportive of having Turkey as co-chair, at least to create some balance.

In the current circumstances part of the peace process should be establishing an International War Crimes Tribunal for the Caucasus, bringing to justice the leaders of ethnic cleansing and war crimes perpetrated in occupied areas. That could be a driving force for swift settlement and for reconciliation of the people in the region. The Yugoslavian option clearly showed the effectiveness of such tribunals for reconciliation and justice.

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Telephone: (44) 1276 412995  
Fax: (44) 1276 686880  
Email: [csrc@da.mod.uk](mailto:csrc@da.mod.uk)  
<http://www.da.mod.uk/csrc>

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