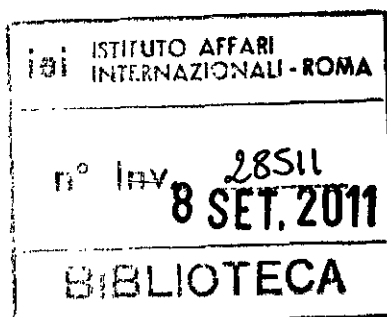


## THE FUTURE OF MEDIATION ON NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Istituto affari internazionali (IAI)

Rome, 11/VII/2011

- a. Agenda
- b. List of participants
- 1. Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: current trends and future scenarios / Fariz Ismailzade (7 p.)
- 2. After Kazan, a defining moment for the OSCE Minsk process / Dennis Summut (3 p.)





# IAI

*Istituto Affari Internazionali*

**Seminar**

## **The future of mediation on Nagorno-Karabakh**

**11 July 2011**

**3:00 pm – 5:30 pm**

**- PALAZZO RONDININI, VIA DEL CORSO 518 -  
ROME**

### **AGENDA**

**2:30 – 3:00PM WELCOME COFFEE**

**3:00 – 3:15PM WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS**

- *Ettore Greco*, Director, Istituto Affari Internazionali

**3:15 – 4:30PM THE FUTURE OF MEDIATION ON NAGORNO-KARABAKH**

Moderator: *Nathalie Tocci*, Deputy Director, Istituto Affari Internazionali

Paper-givers/Speakers:

- *Fariz Ismailzade*, Political Analyst, Baku
- *Dennis Sammut*, Executive Director, London Information Network on Conflicts and Statebuilding

Discussant:

- *Valeria Piacentini*, Director of the Athaeneum Centre of Research on the Southern System and the Wider Mediterranean, Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan

**4:30 – 5:30PM OPEN DEBATE**

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*Special thanks to Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena for kindly making the seminar room available*

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**Outline of the paper**  
**NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT: CURRENT TRENDS**  
**AND FUTURE SCENARIOS**

by

**Fariz Ismailzade\***

**Introduction**

Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh province, an internationally recognized territory of Azerbaijan, is one of the bloodiest and most complicated conflicts in the post-Soviet area. More than 30,000 deaths and over 1 million refugees and internally displaced persons as well as billions of USD in damaged economic and social infrastructure are all painful consequences of this long-protracted conflict. More importantly, the broken human links and lack of communication between the two countries result in growing mistrust and misunderstanding between the two nations and further distance them from peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The unresolved conflict and thus continued tense relations between these two countries hinder the regional economic development, integration of the South Caucasus countries into a common trade and commerce zone, development of transport infrastructure and most importantly poses an increasing threat to the security of the region. International observers and local pundits keep pointing out to the growing number of cease fire violations and deepening frustration among the public of both countries. The chances for the resumption of military activities remain high, leading to speculations about the uncertain nature of stability and security in the whole region.

OSCE's Minsk group has led the mediation process between Azerbaijani and Armenian Presidents in the past two decades, albeit with no concrete results to show. To many in the region, the conflict seems to have entered a deadlock stage with neither side willing to make a necessary compromise towards a breakthrough.

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\* Fariz Ismailzade is Executive Dean at Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy. Views expressed in this article are solely of his own and do not represent the official position of his employer.



What will be the future trends in the negotiation table and resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict? Under what conditions is the resolution possible at all? And who and what are the main hurdles to the peace in the region? This article will attempt to shed light to these questions by analyzing the current state of the deadlock in the peace talks, identifying important obstacles and offering three most likely scenarios on this issue for the next ten years.

### **Peace talks: Complete deadlock**

The cease-fire agreement was signed in 1994, after significant portion of Azerbaijani territory (some 20%) were already under Armenian military control. Since then, both sides engaged in intensive peace negotiations, mediated by the OSCE's Minsk group, more specifically by its three co-chairs: Russia, France and the US. Although the peace talks have been held with regular frequency and varying degree of success, no substantial breakthrough has been possible so far. Armenians continue to hold on to the occupied regions of Azerbaijan, using them as a bargaining chip in the negotiation table and demanding full independence for Nagorno-Karabakh in return for the liberation of the surrounding regions. Azerbaijan continues its offer of highest level of autonomy to Nagorno-Karabakh and demands full withdrawal of Armenian military forces from the occupied regions.

Lack of trust and growing frustration with the deadlocked peace talks further antagonize the situation. Cease-fire violations have increased, so has the military rhetoric on the part of Azerbaijan. This further increases the insecurity of Armenia and makes it more stubborn on the bilateral talks. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, is angered by the attempts of Armenia to populate the occupied territories by moving Armenian families from Armenia proper and even from abroad. Both sides engage in harsh diplomatic rhetoric and continue to attack each other in public diplomacy fronts.

Past several peace proposals by the Minsk group have been rejected by one or another party for various reasons. The first proposal to resolve the conflict in "step by step" way (meaning first the liberation of the surrounding regions of Azerbaijan, return of displaced persons, resumption of trade and human contacts and then eventual decision on the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh) was rejected by Armenia due to the perception that it will lose important bargaining chip without gaining much on the crucial issue of Nagorno-Karabakh's status (actually, the idea was first accepted by then Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian, but the bloodless coup in Armenia in 1997 and the subsequent departure of Ter-Petrosian from the power buried chances for this proposal). The followed up proposal was called a "Package deal", which envisaged the resolution of the conflict's all thorny issues in one package deal. This was rejected by Azerbaijan, which did not feel ready to discuss the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh without the return of Azerbaijani population there. Third proposal was called a "common state" proposal, which suggested that Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh form a common federative state. Azerbaijan rejected the offer.

The current stage in the peace talks (past 5-6 years) centered around the so-called "Basic Principles" or "Madrid principles", which attempt to combine these above mentioned first two proposals and present such a scheme that would satisfy both sides by addressing their chief concerns. As political analyst at the International Crisis Group Tabib Huseynov points out, the "The

advantage of the Basic Principles over previous proposals is that they avoid a false choice between package and step-by-step methodologies preferred respectively by Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>1</sup>”

The Basic Principles propose that the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh must be put on hold, while other issues, such as liberation of surrounding territories, return of Azerbaijani IDPs, repair of the crucial social and transport infrastructure, resumption of trade and commerce and other confidence building measures are taken care of. At the same time, all of these actions will start after the sides agree on the mechanism for the determination of the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The proposal met solid support from the American, Russian and French governments, expressed by their leaders during G8 summits, held in Italy and Canada. In 2007 the proposal was officially presented to the governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia during the OSCE summit. Later, minor amendments were made to the proposal and the so-called “updated Madrid principles” were offered to both sides.

Azerbaijan expressed its general consent with the proposal, yet Armenia, despite its active engagement in the gradual, time-taking yet steady formation of this proposal, suddenly took another approach. In January 2009, during a meeting in Sochi between Presidents Aliyev and Sarkisian, the latter asked for two weeks to respond to the peace proposal: which never came. It is unclear what motivations are involved in this prolonged silence. Is Yerevan trying to intentionally prolong the peace process? Or is the Armenian government uninterested in a lasting peaceful resolution?<sup>2</sup>

Azerbaijan’s Foreign Minister, Elmar Mammadyarov, stated in his speech in NATO forum in Brussels on October 1, 2010: “We have now a very delicate situation. It is not only about whether Armenia accepts the proposal by the OSCE Minsk Group. It is whether Armenia is sincerely willing to change the status-quo in any way and under any condition. We are having our doubts. There are too many worrying signals that suggest Armenia is not interested in a peaceful solution to the conflict”<sup>3</sup>.

Lack of response from Yerevan also puts the mediators in a strange situation, due to the fact that they have put their credibility and reputation behind this proposal. The summit of OSCE in Astana in December 2010 was a vivid example of the peace talk’s fiasco. The OSCE summit’s final statement on Karabakh stated: “the time has come for more decisive efforts to resolve the Karabakh conflict. The three OSCE co-chair countries pledged their support for the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia to make the necessary decisions to reach a peaceful settlement. They urged the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan to focus with renewed energy on the issues that still remain in the Basic Principles, and instructed their co-chairs to continue to work with the parties in the conflict to assist in these efforts”<sup>4</sup>.

Failures to reach a compromise on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have happened in the past as well. It is noteworthy to remember that in two occasions, the two sides seemed extremely close to a peace deal: in 1999 when then US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot came to the region to seal the

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.c-r.org/our-work/caucasus/documents/2014/Karabakh\\_web\\_03\\_huseynov.pdf](http://www.c-r.org/our-work/caucasus/documents/2014/Karabakh_web_03_huseynov.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Alman Mir Ismail, “Karabakh Deadlock: Future Uncertainties”, Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor, January 20, 2011 [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=37384](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=37384)

<sup>3</sup> [www.mfa.gov.az](http://www.mfa.gov.az), October 2, 2010

<sup>4</sup> [www.osce.org](http://www.osce.org), December 3, 2010

deal, only to find out that gunmen mysteriously entered Armenian Parliament, killing Prime Minister, Speaker of the Parliament and several other officials, thus putting an end to the hopes for the peace breakthrough. The second instance related to the intensified peace talks in Key West, US in 2001 when both President Heydar Aliyev and Robert Kocharian, in presence of then Secretary of State Colin Powell, seemed very close to a compromise, yet pulling back from their positions a week later.

Thus, the current fiasco in the negotiation table should not come as a surprise. Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev, who has become extremely active in the negotiation process, in many ways even putting his own reputation at stake, seemed very frustrated with the lack of progress in the talks and after Kazan summit on June 24 reportedly said that he would not host such a meeting anymore, unless the parties agree to sign a deal.

Yet, it is Armenia's 180 degree turnaround in the negotiation process that raises significant questions and leaves the mediators in disrespected situation. It is after all, Armenia who was an active side in the formulation and elaboration of the Madrid principles. Ignoring them at this point and even refusing to send an official rejection answer raise fears that the country is simply trying to drag the process indefinitely.

## **Obstacles to Peace**

### 1) Maximalist positions of the public

According to some experts, one of the main reasons for the absence of breakthrough on the negotiation table is the inability of the warring sides' leadership to make painful compromises. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan for two decades have been advocating for their maximalist positions. The public has become used to these demands and thus see the resolution of the conflict only through the concession and compromise by the other side. Azerbaijanis do not accept the idea of independence for the region. Armenians never want the region to be back under Azerbaijani control and sovereignty. Thus, any departure from these maximalist positions might portray the respective leaders of these nations as "traitors", risking their power base and causing political instability in the country.

Opposition in both countries is rather weak, yet looking for an opportunity to gather masses against the ruling party. Compromises on this sensitive issue might be that galvanizing moment, which the opposition would like to utilize and build upon. President Aliyev looks more comfortable in terms of his popularity ratings than President Sarkisian, who came to power as a result of contested elections and mass killings on the election night in 2008, yet neither President would want to give this trump card to the opposition to destabilize the political situation in the country and mobilize the protest electorate.

In this respect the lack or weakness of public diplomacy efforts in the past twenty years contribute and further aggravate the problem of trust between the two nations. Azerbaijanis and Armenians hardly know each other these days, especially the younger generation. The older generation still remembers the days of mutual co-existence during the Soviet times. Some even have personal friends and soft memories. Yet, the majority of the population in both countries is raised and educated by the mass media of the last two decades, which significantly relies on the "enemy image", scapegoating and angry nationalistic rhetoric.

Some pundits believe that should the public diplomacy efforts be encouraged by the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan, this would lead to softer and warmer relations between the two nations, thus paving the way for mutual understanding and eventual possibility of the painful compromises on the negotiation table. Yet, the harsh reality of the real-politics is that neither government is willing to encourage track two diplomacy without gaining major victory on the official diplomatic talks. It is widely believed in the political circles in Azerbaijan and Armenia that encouraging public diplomacy might weaken the negotiation position of the country and diminish the chances for the political settlement of the conflict under the maximalist terms of that respective country.

Thus, one can conclude that the governments in Azerbaijan and Armenia would prefer to maintain the status quo and therefore a political stability in their countries than risk for necessary, but painful compromises on the negotiation table. The fate of former Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian is another good reminder to the current leaders what can happen to those who are willing to go against the maximalist positions of their respective nations. Political coups, revolts, instability, civil war and even political assassinations are not excluded in such cases.

## 2) Foreign Factors

On the other hand, there is a general fear that the conflict is protracted due to the foreign factors. Some optimistic analysts believe that Armenian and Azerbaijani governments would have reached an agreement long time ago, should they be left alone. Caucasus, however, is too of an important region to be left alone. Major global and regional powers have vested interest in this region due to rich energy resources and geo-strategic location. Thus, maintaining the status quo of the balance of forces is perceived as one of the motivations for the foreign powers to prevent a peace deal.

Russia is traditionally mentioned as one of the outside powers which is hindering the peace process. It maintains a strong military and economic power in Armenia. Two Russian military bases and several large Armenian economic and transportation projects and enterprises owned by the Russian state controlled monopolies put Armenia in near-vassal situation. Some political and military circles in Russia believe that the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will open a way for Armenia to rid itself from the Russian influence and further integrate into the Euro-Atlantic structures. Thus, dragging the peace process and preventing any substantial breakthrough is seen as a way for Russia to continue exerting pressure on both Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Some analysts have been looking for ways to offer a peace solution without damaging Russian interests in the region. One of these options could be the settlement of Russian peacekeepers in the cease fire line, an offer rejected by Azerbaijan. Another idea is to phase out the settlement process (Madrid principles), so that Russia maintains its powerful influence in the region and doesn't feel insecure about the loss of leverage. In any case, Russian factor continues to loom over the conflict irrespective of active mediation efforts by the Kremlin.

On the other hand, the events of post-Zurich protocols have shown the powerful role of Armenian Diaspora as an obstacle to the peace process. Usually driven by single "genocide" issue, the Armenian Diaspora communities in the US, France and other European countries present a more nationalistic, uncompromising stance. They treat Nagorno-Karabakh issue as part of their anti-Turkey drive, thus putting a personal agenda and even identity twist on it. Armenians can not exist

without the “genocide” issue. This is what identifies the nation. This is what unites the nation. This is what mobilizes it.

The financial remittances and assistance from the Diaspora make Armenia very dependant on it. At least, publicly, the Diaspora organizations can exert a lot of pressure on the Armenian government and form a negative opinion about it among the masses. Lack of financial support will put Armenian regime in a very difficult situation, and the economic stability in the country, already seriously shaken by the global financial crisis and the Russian-Georgian war, will not sustain such a punch from the Diaspora. Thus, managing Diaspora relations, keeping it satisfied and preventing Diaspora-Regime rift is one of the foreign policy priorities of Armenian government.

It is not a secret that the Diaspora representatives oppose any compromises on Armenia-Turkey and Armenia-Azerbaijan issues without the recognition of “genocide” question. And even though this issue has nothing to do with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the real-life linkage by the Diaspora make it almost impossible for the Armenian government to make any moves towards a peaceful breakthrough. Massive demonstrations and significant political pressures from the Diaspora after the Zurich protocols were signed is an obvious indicator of this serious obstacle.

### 3) Sovereignty, borders, nation-building

Both Azerbaijan and Armenia are in early stage of the nation building process. Having re-gained independence from the Soviet Union, they are eager to strengthen their statehood and show to the international community that they deserve to be on the political map of the world. Thus, for both countries, developing statehood attributes, such as borders are very important. They feel insecure when they are asked to compromise on borders. They will that their national security will be weakened if borders change. Especially in the case of Azerbaijan, such fear exists because of presence of so many ethnic groups on the territory of the country. The legitimate question that Azerbaijanis are asking is why should we grant independence to Armenians if tomorrow Lezgin or Talysh minorities can demand the same? How will Azerbaijan survive as a state then?

Thus preserving territorial integrity, borders and sovereignty over its internationally recognized territory are characteristics of states. Neither Azerbaijan no Armenia are post-modern states yet to be able to compromise on these issues.

### **Three scenarios for the future.**

After the frustration in Kazan summit of three Presidents, it is clear that the negotiation process has entered a dead end. In this situation, three likely scenario for the future of the conflict is seen:

#### 1) Continued peace talks without much tangible results

Both Azerbaijan and Armenia prefer to talk at this point. War would be costly and detrimental to the economies of both nations. Besides, it can be risky and in the case of heavy military losses, the political leadership of both countries will be at risk of loosing power. Thus, even though not much progress is made in the negotiation table, the sides will continue the peace talks and try to show to the domestic and international audience that the chances for the peaceful resolution of the conflict still remain.

## 2) Gradual, unwanted transition to the war

Azerbaijan and Armenia feel extremely frustrated with the lack of progress on the peace talks. This frustration is reflected on both political leadership and ordinary citizens. Hatred and antagonism toward each other are high. Therefore, it is likely that some sporadic violations of the cease fire agreement might become more frequent and more intensified. Despite the desire of the governments, the soldiers on both sides might engage in uncontrolled shoot-out and this could gradually expand and transform into a full-scale military warfare. In this case, it will be difficult for the governments to stop this spiral-type development of the shootings and the war might break out despite the needs and desires of the respective governments. Such case almost happened in the summer of 2010 when Azerbaijani soldier Mubariz Ibrahimov crossed into the Armenian side and killed several Armenians. Azerbaijanis treated him as a national hero. Yet, the incident shows that the chances for such escalation of the conflict are not excluded.

## 3) Planned war

Azerbaijan recently held a military parade, in which President Aliyev once again mentioned that war remains a last option for the liberation of the occupied territories and that if peace talks fail, Azerbaijan might resort to a war option to preserve its territorial integrity. He also mentioned that the military might of Azerbaijan is growing and the military budget of the nation overpasses 3 billion USD which is even higher than the total state budget of Armenia. Armenian politicians understand that the economic boom in Azerbaijan results in massive growth of its army potential.

Meanwhile, President Medvedev has signed a decree about the prolongation of the presence of Russian military bases on the territory of Armenia until 2044. This and other forms of Russian military assistance to Armenia raise concerns about the neutral mediation by the Kremlin and point to the growing arms race in the region<sup>5</sup>.

Although unlikely, but planned military warfare on the part of Azerbaijan or provocative start of the war by Armenia to prevent the economic development of its arch-rival are also possible future scenarios of the conflict.

## Conclusion

Azerbaijani Member of Parliament, Musa Gasimli, summed it up well in his interview to Public TV on June 28, “Armenia’s actions are encouraged by the international community. If the latter does not make a distinction between the occupant and occupier, if the international community does not punish the aggressor, the peace deal will never be reached and Armenia will never free the occupied territories”<sup>6</sup>

It looks like unless the international community puts a unified pressure on Armenia, the peaceful resolution of the conflict is not in the immediate future.

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<sup>5</sup> “Kazan Summit Breaks Hearts In Baku”, Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor, June 30

<sup>6</sup> “Kazan Summit Breaks Hearts In Baku”, Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor, June 30

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**Outline of the paper**  
**AFTER KAZAN, A DEFINING MOMENT FOR THE OSCE MINSK PROCESS**

by

**Dennis Sammut\***

This is a defining moment for the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process that has since 1994 been mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group, and particularly by its three co-Chair: France, the US and Russia.

There was much expectation that the meeting in Kazan on 24 June, hosted by the President of Russia, Dimitri Medvedev would result in a breakthrough – namely the agreement of both Armenia and Azerbaijan to the basic principles (the so called Madrid Principals) that would then open the way for proper peace negotiations to start, and for changes to take place on the ground. Despite the fact that there was much hope and optimism in the run up to Kazan the sides failed to agree.

The whole international community expressed disappointment and president Medvedev -who has spent a lot of time and political millage pushing the peace process – (Kazan was the 9<sup>th</sup> meeting that he had hosted for the two Presidents in two years), was reported to be deeply frustrated.

The peace process has not collapsed, but it is in danger.

At this stage three things need to happen.

- The first is to ensure that what has been achieved so far in the negotiating process is consolidated. Since the expected public document has not materialised the responsibility is now on the Minsk Group co-Chair to somehow find a way of doing this. Part of this can happen through work with the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan in private and

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through diplomatic channels. Both the Russian government and the co-Chair have already been in intensive contacts with the sides and the statements from both Armenia and Azerbaijan indicate that they remain committed to the peace process.

The peace process however has been damaged in the public perception. For long many observers have considered that the way the negotiations were taking place were too secretive. There is a need for greater transparency and at this particular moment the co-Chair need to be courageous and with or without the acquiescence of the parties give a clearer picture of what has been discussed and agreed so far to the public. Not to do so at this point is to expose the peace process to further derision.

- The second thing that needs to happen is to consolidate the ceasefire. The delays in achieving progress in the negotiations will inevitably increase the tension on the line of contact. Here the international community needs to put its foot down and push for a larger and more permanent observation regime.
- Thirdly the present approach to the peace process needs to be opened up for more scrutiny and the sides: Armenia and Azerbaijan, but also the OSCE Minsk Group co-Chair countries, need to consider if there are other ways in which the Karabakh Peace process can be pursued in the future. There are issues that need to be addressed regarding the composition of the Minsk Group, the role of Russia that has emerged as a *primus inter pares* in the mediation process, and questions regarding how to involve the representatives of the Armenians living in Karabakh, organised in the de facto Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, and the Azerbaijanis of Karabakh displaced by the conflict.

Many feel that if there is not a significant breakthrough before the end of the year the credibility of the Minsk process would be seriously compromised. Baroness Ashton, the EU High Representative for foreign Affairs and Security Policy stated in the European parliament on 6 July “The parties need to redouble their efforts to find an agreement before the end of this year. This would then happen before domestic priorities take over in 2012: elections in Armenia in 2012 and in Azerbaijan in 2013”.

There is therefore it seems, a last window of opportunity which should not be missed again.

### **The international and regional context**

An issue that has as yet not been properly tackled is the wider regional and international context that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as indeed the conflicts in Georgia and in Moldova are embedded in. An approach to the resolution of these conflicts that is based solely on the assumption that these are home grown ethnic or historical conflicts that can somehow be resolved through mediation and grass root confidence building measures is unsatisfactory. None of these conflicts can be solved unless the solution is consolidated in wider framework that addresses a number of security concerns, many of which involve Russia, and the perception of Russia.

There are already a number of ideas in circulation

- A draft European Security Treaty still appears on the website of the President of Russia. It is a statement of where Russia wants to go with the future of European Security, of which the conflicts in the post soviet space are an integral part. The west has not picked up the challenge in a significant way. Instead of the comprehensive approach it has chosen to engage with Russia with regards to the unresolved conflicts in an ad hoc case by case manner, with, in the case of Georgia, disastrous results, and in the case of NK and Transdniestr, far from satisfactory conclusions. In proposing the European Security Treaty Russia has indicated it wants something from its Euro-Atlantic partners and this needs to be looked at. The Corfu process, started in June 2009 has been a half hearted way of doing this.
- Turkey in 2008 launched an initiative for establishing a Caucasus Security and co-operation platform but the idea has not taken off, primarily due to Turkey's failure to bring its rapprochement with Armenia to a successful conclusion
- Some think tanks and the European parliament have been talking about the need for a broad Caucasus Security and Co-operation Conference, modelled on the original CSCE, and one that would take an inclusive and comprehensive approach to the many issues affecting the region.

### **The role of the European Union**

In her speech to the European Parliament last week Baroness Ashton stated that the peaceful settlement of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict is a key strategic interest of the European Union: it would transform the South Caucasus region; it would pave the way towards political and regional stability, and new economic opportunities; borders could open not only between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but also between Armenia and Turkey; roads, railways and pipelines could take the shortest route, and tie the countries of the region more closely together; and the South Caucasus could finally become what it should have been already – a gateway between Europe and Asia.

The EU has been only indirectly involved in the Karabakh peace process so far. This may be about to change. The appointment of a new EU Special representative with a specific mandate to engage with the conflict issues is only one way in which the EU is upping its game. If the long expected breakthrough does happen then it is likely that the EU will be the key player in the implementation of any peace deal: through peacekeeping operations, post conflict rehabilitation and overall through the strengthening of the democratic process and the rule of law that are so essential if a peace process is to succeed.

But we are not there yet. There are some who are saying that the Karabakh conflict and other similar conflicts like Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transdniestr are not solvable and are best left frozen. I disagree. To say so is an insult to the people who continue to suffer from these conflicts that continue to exist on the European continent; an insult to the refugees and displaced; to those who live on constant fear of war or under siege conditions. The only option that we have is to continue and increase our efforts for the peaceful solution of these conflicts for the benefit of all the sides concerned.

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