

What Future for Nagorno-Karabakh in the Wake of the 2020 Six-Weeks War?

Consequences for Conflict Settlement in the South Caucasus Region

Frederic Labarre and George Niculescu (Eds.)

Study Group Information



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Consequences for Conflict Settlement in the South Caucasus Region

**2nd Virtual Roundtable of the PFP Consortium Study Group
Regional Stability in the South Caucasus**

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Disclaimer

The policy recommendations presented in this booklet are the result of the collective work of the Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group members who were present at the virtual roundtable. As such, the recommendations do not represent any individual or national point of view, and thus, may not reflect the positions or policies of the Austrian National Defence Academy, the PfP Consortium, or the co-chairs' respective affiliations.

Having received a few voluntary written contributions while drafting the policy recommendations, exceptionally, the co-chairs have agreed to publish particular points of views which could not be summarized without fear of losing richness and detail. Neither the co-chairs, nor their respective affiliations, nor the Austrian National Defence Academy, and nor the PfP Consortium necessarily share the positions presented, together or individually. However, they were made available to the public out of courtesy and, in the hope of stimulating constructive debate.

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PART I:

SPECIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Introduction

George Niculescu and Frederic Labarre

This Study Group Information (SGI) mini-booklet reflects a few special contributions to the extended list of Policy Recommendations which have been submitted in the aftermath of the 2nd Virtual Roundtable of the Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group (RSSC SG) of the PFP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes on “**What Future for Nagorno-Karabakh in the Wake of the 2020 Six-Weeks War? – Consequences for Conflict Settlement in the South Caucasus Region**”, held on 4th December 2020, and powered by @BigBlueButton. A copy of the ensuing Policy Recommendations drawn up from the debates and agreed by workshop participants was also added at the end of this mini-booklet.

On 27th September 2020, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) entered a new phase featuring heavy military clashes involving air and land operations along the line of contact between the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh Republic and Azerbaijan. After having resulted in many thousands of soldiers and civilians killed or wounded, as well as in large numbers of civilian and military equipment and infrastructure destroyed or seriously damaged, this second Karabakh war appeared to have exhausted itself in the wake of the Azerbaijani military advances over, and recapturing of, several districts around NK, culminating with the town of Shusha/Shushi. Presidents Vladimir Putin of Russia and Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey called up the terms of a joint statement providing for a ceasefire and a set of guidelines for a future peace deal that has eventually been signed on 10th November 2020 by the Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russian leaders. Since then, the cease fire has largely held, while the Russian peacekeepers have been deployed to NK.

The aims of the virtual roundtable consisted of:

- reviewing the current state of play in Armenia, Azerbaijan and in NK, and their implications for the resumption of the conflict settlement process;
- assessing the influence of the regional instability potentially spilling over from the NK conflict into the neighboring countries, as well as across the South Caucasus region;
- discussing the future of NK, and the role different regional and international actors might play in conflict settlement in the foreseeable future.

In terms of modalities, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia had two representatives each at the virtual roundtable: one speaker and one discussant. Neighboring countries (Russia and Turkey) had one speaker each, while a discussant from Germany and one from Russia had also participated in the discussion. The speakers were invited to present a one-page outline including key points and possible concrete policy recommendations. The virtual discussion focused on those presentations under the moderation of the co-chairs. Discussants were invited to kick off the interactive discussions by providing an initial set of comments and questions for the speakers, followed by the other participants. Building upon the outcome of the virtual discussion, the co-chairs wrapped-up and finalized a four-page draft policy recommendations document that was subsequently agreed by all participants via a short silence procedure (see Part II).

During the elaboration of the draft policy recommendations, the co-chairs were pleased to receive most welcome, and well appreciated written contributions from Dr. Elkhan Nuriyev (Azerbaijan), Dr. Alan Whitehorn (Canada), Dr. Benyamin Poghosyan (Armenia) and Ambassador Michael Schmunk (Germany) outlining an extended list of policy recommendations.

As the content of those contributions could not be completely matched with the four-pages approved policy recommendations document, while they were thought to add value to advising political-military leaders and other high-level officials from interested countries and international organizations, the co-chairs decided to gather them into this Study Group Information (see Part I).

The editors would like to take this opportunity to express their gratitude to the four authors who voluntarily contributed this mini-booklet. They are pleased to present the valued readers with this extended list of policy recommendations from the 2nd Virtual Roundtable of the RSSC SG/PfPC, and would be happy if it could help mitigating the consequences of the second Karabakh war, and advising conflicting parties, the peace-enablers, and other local, regional and external actors on how to move past the current “precarious peace” in Karabakh towards a more stable, and long-lasting peaceful future.

Bullet Points and Strategic Recommendations from Azerbaijan

Elkhan Nuriyev

Introductory Assessment

On 27th September 2020, a fragile ‘negative’ peace in Nagorno-Karabakh easily collapsed,¹ predictably leading to the bloody 44-day war, which was halted by the Kremlin-brokered ceasefire deal signed on 9th November 2020 by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia.² A trilateral statement has put an end to the years-long occupation of Azerbaijani lands by Armenian forces, hence restoring territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. At the same time, Moscow and Ankara did very well with coordination of their activities, resulting in the deployment of Russian Peacekeeping Contingent to Karabakh and establishment of a joint Turkish-Russian Monitoring Center on Azerbaijani soil.

Obviously, the Russia-Turkey-Azerbaijan trio has created a completely new geopolitical reality in this still troubled region.³ The adoption of a new status quo between Armenia and Azerbaijan with the participation of Turkey as an observer, but with the leading role of Russia through military presence in Karabakh will for sure complicate Western strategic thinking on the South Caucasus.⁴ But perhaps most important, the November 2020 armi-

¹ Elkhan Nuriyev, “Why Did the Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Process Just Fail? *EUobserver*, Brussels, 2th October 2020, available online at <<https://euobserver.com/opinion/149603>>.

² For more details, see <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384>>.

³ Vladimir Putin’s key role in ending the six-week war has moved Russia to the forefront, whereas Ilham Aliyev has managed to make Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s Turkey a party to any future final peace settlement.

⁴ The failure of Western powers to design a realistic road map to peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan has enabled Russia, via “smart power” diplomacy, to consolidate its geopolitical standing in the South Caucasus, whilst closing a deal with Turkey through unofficial talks behind the scenes. The author’s opinion draws on personal conversations with senior Russian and Turkish officials during online communication in October-November 2020.

stice is far away from a lasting peace agreement. The trilateral statement does not spell out what future for Karabakh will be in the long term.

Bullet Points

Peace is not simply the absence of war. It is also a process in search of socio-economic recovery, reintegration of conflict-affected communities, and successful knowledge-based economy benefiting all the countries in the region. Even notwithstanding numerous complications, difficulties and challenges facing the South Caucasus today, there are sensible forces ready to think strategically about their shared future and to add value to final peace settlement. They strongly advocate investment in information peace fare and often argue for economic incentives that can most effectively contribute to creating conditions of mutual consent and advancing reconciliation.

A start is needed on small steps that can enable Yerevan and Baku gradually moves towards normalizing their relations with the eventual purpose of signing a comprehensive peace agreement in the future. This is possible and feasible if all parties involved take a constructive approach to achieve a sustainable 'positive' peace built on justice and filled with positive content aimed at restoring trust and confidence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. The best way for the future of the entire Karabakh is to live in peace, concord and harmony and to strive to rebuild good neighbor relations between the two countries. Based on the conclusions above, the following section outlines several specific recommendations that could help Azerbaijan and Armenia achieve an internationally-just and final peaceful settlement respectful of two nations, their territorial integrity, national interests, and inherited traditions.

Strategic Recommendations

a) To the conflicting parties – Armenia and Azerbaijan:

Promote reconciliation, confidence building and mutual understanding through governmental and nongovernmental channels:⁵

- Launch innovative projects that focus on building bridges between estranged communities through local dialogues on opportunities for cooperation. These projects, involving the two communities in Karabakh as well as returned internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, will have manifold effects, such as the restoration of the economy in war-torn areas, and the encouragement of human contact through joint business activities, thus facilitating conciliation.⁶
- Establish a dedicated group of experts that could work hand in hand with government circles in Armenia and Azerbaijan to provide policy advice and well thought-out recommendations to decision-makers on how to restore trust and understanding between the two countries. The main goal would be to shape new narratives, use modern tools, mobilize additional resources and prepare public opinion for a comprehensive peace agreement. By doing so, relations between the conflicting parties would evolve into a ‘warm peace’ that could include things like mutual trade, business interaction, cultural exchanges and educational communication.
- Include women in confidence building to bring their constructive role in peace dialogue to the agenda. Evidence indicates that women participants in peace process are usually focused less on the spoils of the war and more on reconciliation, economic development, education and transitional justice – all critical elements of a

⁵ Novel ideas are now required to foster trust and reconciliation between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

⁶ Each project and initiative devoted to peacebuilding activities can modify perceptions and expectations, which in turn can change relations and behaviors, and thereby alter the context of peace process.

sustained peace.⁷ Women's increased engagement is indeed essential because their greater involvement in a long-term perspective will create good and powerful people-to-people contacts that can help break negative stereotypes, create new friendships and unite former colleagues. This may contribute to laying the foundations of an eventual reconciliation and lasting peace.

b) To the OSCE Minsk Group:

Foster post-war rehabilitation and facilitate future final peace agreement:

- Establish Peace and Reconciliation Centers (PRCs) in both Yerevan (Armenia) and Baku (Azerbaijan). If taking into account a joint statement by the Minsk Group co-chairs countries at the 27th OSCE Ministerial Council from 3rd to 4th December 2020, they seem to have no new ideas or proposals for the post-war situation in Karabakh.⁸ Russia acts separately, France behaves almost as a party to the conflict, and the United States makes just routine statements. This troika alignment leaves little chance for the revival of the Minsk Group format in Karabakh, especially since Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey have already complied with the OSCE Minsk Group-proposed Madrid principles and four UN Security Council Resolutions on Karabakh. But still, the Minsk Group co-chairs can have a positive impact on post-war peacebuilding process. To that end, PRCs in both capitals can serve as Minsk Group's new instruments for post conflict rehabilitation and reintegration.
- PRCs should work closely with all relevant actors, including partnering international and regional organizations, such as the United

⁷ The contributions that women's organizations make to peacebuilding efforts are recognized, as is the important role of women in peacebuilding. See, for instance, UN Security Council document, S/RES/1325/2000, 31th October 2000, paragraphs 14 and 15.

⁸ See, for example, "Joint Statement by the Heads of Delegation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair Countries," Tirana, 3th December 2020, available online at <<https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/472419>>.

Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU). The activities of the PRCs should focus mainly on capacity building for national actors aimed at assisting with peace dialogue facilitation and lasting reconciliation.

- Establish a Peacebuilding Support Office for Karabakh – through closer collaboration with the UN and the EU – to help the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan to devise new peace strategies and economic development plans with a view to thinking strategically about the necessity of a common regional approach.

c) To the European Union (EU) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP):

Develop a reinforced and effective role to respond to diverse new challenges in the EU's eastern neighborhood:

- Develop new mechanisms that will help to prevent the deterioration of human security in the post-war Karabakh. The EU should offer some kind of humanitarian program for the rehabilitation of all returned IDPs and refugees.
- Establish Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Karabakh to help define long-term programs of peacebuilding support for Azerbaijan and Armenia currently emerging from the 2020 six-week war. The main goal is to provide advice to Yerevan and Baku on integrated strategies for post-conflict recovery. This initiative could form a new EaP tool that aims to promote informed dialogue and foster reconciliation, linking capacity building and cooperation with peace activities in an innovative way.⁹
- Implement an integrated coherent and coordinated support to Azerbaijan and Armenia, consistent with their national priorities and through their participation in the EaP activities, focusing

⁹ In fact, previously proposed initiatives by the author of this paper (see the RSSC Study Group publications) have been revisited and supplemented by new ideas/proposals and recommendations.

mainly on concrete projects that deal, inter alia, with environmental issues, water management, human security, health care, and agriculture.

Recommendations from Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora

Benjamin Poghosyan and Alan Whitehorn

- UN and its member countries, international agencies, the EU, along with France and the United States, as fellow OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs, should work closely with Russia to alleviate the urgent humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and the region of the South Caucasus.
- UN/international access to all Prisoners of War (PoW). A need to fully list all names and condition of POWs. Ensure humane treatment.
- Recognize a shared history of the region. For example, historic monasteries and mosques, grave sites and key cultural locations need to be respected. This is important locally and globally in terms of world heritage.
- Stop hate narratives fuelled by intolerant nationalism.
- Recognize recent past massacres on both sides, not just one side (e.g. Sumgait and Khojaly).
- In terms of escalating conflict spirals, each side needs to be sensitive to historic mass deportations and killings and how they can significantly affect perceptions of an existential national threat in the contemporary clashes and conflict.
- Develop conflict resolution centres in both Yerevan and Baku and, in so doing, tap global expertise for advice on understanding of conflict spirals and de-escalation approaches.

- Russian peacekeeping troops should remain in place to guarantee safety and security for the civilian population.
- Given the current Armenian political scene is quite tense and volatile, experienced international advice suggested.
- Efforts should be made to continue trilateral “track two” diplomacy to foster contacts and dialogue between Armenian, Azerbaijani and Karabakh experts. Tap also regional neighbours for input.
- The OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs should explore new basic principles for a long-term settlement. The six-week war has challenged aspects of the 2007 “Madrid Document” and its Basic Principles.
- The states of the South Caucasus need to realize that in focusing on a winner vs. loser zero-sum conflict usually results in a minus-sum scenario where death and destruction of war affect all sides. What are needed are new forms of regional cooperation generating a greater sense of security and social/economic development. A positive-sum game is possible.
- Azerbaijan, with its 2020 military victory, should seek to be generous in peace negotiations or the cycle of conflict will continue with even more advanced and deadly weapons. As much as the technological impact of drones affected the 2020 war, it seems likely that scientific advances in cyber warfare and artificial intelligence will make future wars even more problematic for the South Caucasus.

Policy Recommendations from Germany

Michael Schmunk

Short Term Recommendations

a) To the parties in conflict:

- Accept and respect that the physical war is over and a binding, enforceable ceasefire agreement has been signed.
- Refrain from any triumphant statements (as the “winner”) or hidden threats (as the “loser”) to upgrade your armed forces and acquire new arms to prepare “revenge”. Instruct your people at home correspondingly: the time of wars must be over for good!
- Refrain from anything that the “other side” could understand as a provocation or offense, included hate speech and false (historical) narratives.
- Parties to the conflict should, with the necessary empathy, acknowledge the suffering of expelled and returning refugees /displaced persons: they are *all* human beings! Respect and actively support their right for life!
- Respect and help to protect the other side’s cultural and religious heritage, e.g. monuments, buildings, art objects, etc.

b) To the international community:

- Make it clear to Russia and Turkey that the handling of the post-conflict situation in the region concerned, already because of the serious humanitarian problems, lies not only and not exclusively in their hands.

- The international community, together with the Russian Federation and Turkey, should establish quickly an interim mechanism to tackle jointly the most pressing humanitarian and security challenges – there seem to be reasons to believe that at this stage, the Minsk Group may not be the appropriate forum for such an endeavour.
- Winter is just around the corner: both expelled and returning refugees/displaced persons badly need shelter/housing, heating, food, health supplies (Covid19!), and other basics. Provide quick, non-bureaucratic help to the needy on both sides (UN family, EU, USA, NGOs, etc.). Germany has already donated 2 million Euros of emergency aid, Austria 1 million. The ICRC has asked for 9 million Euros so far.
- Still before the beginning of the upcoming holiday season, an ad hoc-donors’ conference should be convened to help mitigate the biggest humanitarian problems.
- Help (ICRC; UNHCR) the conflicting parties to get full and safe access to their prisoners of war; make sure that POWs are treated according to international law; facilitate the exchange of POWs.
- The international community (OSCE; Council of Europe (CoE); EU) should offer rapid assistance to help protect those ethnicities and religious groups that are threatened to be expelled or not to return (what in other contexts and with other populations used to be called “protection of ethnic and religious minorities”).
- The international community (UN; UNESCO; OSCE; CoE; EU) should offer rapid assistance to help protect the cultural and religious heritage of both parties to the conflict (see above).
- The international community, in accordance with the Russian Federation and Turkey, should provide the parties in conflict with a preliminary forum or mechanism, on neutral grounds, or in locations accepted by both sides. These fora should offer post-conflict

fora to meet and discuss humanitarian and other practical questions, also preliminary approaches to de-escalate the conflict.

Medium Term

a) To the parties in conflict:

- Be open and learn from the settlement of similar conflicts and wars in the OSCE area, e.g. from Serbia/Kosovo.
- Who are the parties to the long lasting conflict? Armenia and Azerbaijan? And the Armenian population from Karabakh? And the Azeri population from Karabakh? All four?! Answer this basic question realistically!
- Under mediation accepted by all parties to the conflict: reappraise what has happened in the 44 days-war, if helpful behind closed doors.
- Try to go back to the beginning of the conflict – including the first war that ended in 1994.
- The parties to the conflict should agree to an analysis being written by renowned international scholars, political scientist, economists, specialists for international law and military experts, perhaps even with the contribution of some experts from this PfP group.
- With the help of the international community: develop a wide range of confidence building measures that could, for the first time, make a *real* difference.
- Look into possibilities to cooperate with each other from now on to improve the daily life of all!

b) To the international community:

- Large additional funds will be needed for post-conflict rehabilitation (infrastructure: from housing to schools, from hospitals to roads): second donor conference?!
- The investigation of war crimes must be started visible to all parties to the conflict.
- Soberly review (UN/OSCE) if the Minsk Group in its present composition and with its present mandate can (still) be the appropriate forum to handle the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia regarding Karabakh.
- Sound out if a different, geopolitically more balanced composition of the chairmanship could make a difference: Russian Federation, Turkey, USA and EU (e.g. the EU's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy) – the present composition of Russia (pro Armenia), France (pro Armenia) and USA (strong influence of the Armenian diaspora) cannot be acceptable to Azerbaijan and Turkey).

Long Term (End of the 5 Year-Term of the First Peacekeeping Contingent)

a) To the parties in conflict:

- Discuss the conditions and elements for a long-term, sustainable peace settlement, if necessary, from scratch (“fresh start”).
- Given the outcome of the 44 days-war: Work on what could facilitate good neighbourly relations for good, within a joint organization, associated to (a) common organization(s), or even without any of such.
- Find a status for the remainder of Karabakh and a permanent safe and secure access to it (shared responsibility and administration?)

Autonomy within Azerbaijan, with reserved, guaranteed seats for Karabakh Armenians in the local parliament and for self-government positions? Shared police?)

- Work on standards for a peaceful, healthy, fruitful and sustainable collaboration that can be trusted, before the status of Karabakh can be discussed.
- Make the people of your countries and of Karabakh, as soon as this will be possible, a sustainably part of any political, economic, social and cultural decision, whenever it will be of concern to all sides involved.
- Establish a Mini-Schengen area, including Georgia. Share infrastructural installations to the benefit of all, including energy, water and medical (Corona!) resources.

b) To the international community:

- Find an alternative to the present Russian Federation peacekeeping contingent, latest by November 2025 agreed by all parties to the conflict.
- Check the future viability of the “Basic Principles” for a final peace settlement
- Check possibilities to form Karabakh into a UN guaranteed semi-protectorate, remaining formally (international law) an integral part of Azerbaijan, however open both to Armenians and Azeris, who want to live and settle there, with equal rights and chances.
- Facilitate mediated reconciliation as soon as psychologically possible.

- Consider a larger conference (Vienna Congress 1814 type?) for the overall region, not to leave everything to the Russian Federation and Turkey alone. No tinkering with borders, though, no land swaps.

PART II:

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
(AS AGREED BY ROUNDTABLE
PARTICIPANTS)**

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

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

Executive Summary of Recommendations

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

Summary of the Workshop

The 2nd Extraordinary Virtual Workshop of the RSSC SG was held on 4th December 2020 exceptionally in lieu of the annual Reichenau workshop. Its occurrence was made all the more timely in view of the historical

changes at work in the South Caucasus, as a result of the recent military confrontation over Nagorno-Karabakh, between Armenia and Azerbaijan. A dozen speakers and discussants, mainly from the South Caucasus, but also from Russia, Turkey, and Europe met virtually to consider the implications of these changes.

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

We also thank the Partnership for Peace Consortium and the Austrian National Defence Academy for providing the platform for these discussions, and Ms. Lisa-Maria Tagwercher for ensuring the formatting and production of this document. The presentations and discussions indicate that the second Nagorno-Karabakh war has been prompted in significant degree by the deadlocked negotiations within the OSCE Minsk Group, also noted in the Policy Recommendations of the RSSC SG 20th workshop in November 2019 (www.bundesheer.at/publikation-996).

On 27 September 2020, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh entered a new military phase generally known as the “war of fall 2020/44 days war”. The outcome of the war has facilitated the application of the so-called Lavrov Plan (a Russian version of the OSCE Minsk Group’s Madrid/Basic Principles), enshrined in the Trilateral Statement signed by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Russian Federation on 9 November 2020.

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

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

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

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

In response, some wondered aloud if Russian peacekeeping could be relied on to maintain impartial order, in view of its already significant presence in the region, including on the national territory of not only Armenia, but of others' as well. Prudence would demand that a more “Western” security footprint be established to provide balance. The latter is a palpable demand from the Georgian civil society, as the OSCE Minsk Group and other multilateral agencies have shown their inadequacies. At the very least, say some participants, the OSCE Minsk Group would be justified in reviewing its role, if not composition.

The participation of Turkey was also discussed. Its participation in regional stability may make some countries uneasy, but, to Russia, it is not necessarily a bad thing. In the absence of effective multilateral conflict management by the OSCE, and in view of the Council of Europe's silence, some advocate the re-involvement of Russia in the G8. Thus, the matter of re-

gional stability would be a question that would concern large and regional powers more or less exclusively. The implications of this potential outcome are also reflected in policy recommendations.

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

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

Consolidated Policy Recommendations¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

Short Term Recommendations

- There must be an immediate halt to aggressive, nationalistic, triumphalist, provocative and xenophobic rhetoric. Hate narratives fuelled by intolerant nationalism should also immediately cease.
- The conflicting parties (called here below “the parties”) are strongly encouraged to assess the outcome and results of the combat phase realistically and constructively with an eye towards building a common peaceful future. They are reminded that the political commitment of the Trilateral Statement signed by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation needs to be fully implemented for the mutual benefit of all parties in the conflict. Parties are urged not to tarnish their international reputation by allowing the ceasefire to be broken or leave unmet any of their political commitments under the Trilateral Statement.
- The humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh must be handled as a matter of utmost urgency by intergovernmental organizations in coordination with the parties, the Russian Federation and with the appropriate involvement of the neighbouring states, as necessary.
- The international community, including the UN, the OSCE, and the ICRC (intergovernmental organizations), should offer (to the

parties, for their consideration and acceptance) their respective agencies' emergency humanitarian assistance. The primary focus should be on war refugees/displaced persons, and on other people who were directly affected by the warfighting or its consequences.

- Access to the UNHCR, IOM, ICRC must be guaranteed for the purpose of the care and return of prisoners of war the remains of the fallen, and to investigate extra-judicial killings.
- The OSCE Minsk Group should redefine its role, mandate – and perhaps adjust its composition – in view of the current realities.
- The Russian peacekeeping mission should fulfil its mandate to guarantee the safety of the populations in their areas of operation. This mandate should be shared and coordinated with the relevant bodies/agencies from the intergovernmental organizations.
- Given the current Armenian political scene is quite tense and volatile, relevant experienced international advice should be made available.

Medium Term Recommendations

- The parties should cooperatively promote reconciliation, confidence building and mutual understanding through governmental and nongovernmental channels.³
- As soon as practicable, an international post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation donors' conference under UN auspices should be convened.
- The signatories of the Trilateral Statement (with the help of intergovernmental organizations) should elaborate a roadmap for “Track 1” diplomacy to achieve a lasting peace in Karabakh. The

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

aim should be to resolve all potential stress points in the Trilateral Statement which might prevent the drafting and signature of a final peace agreement.

- The OSCE Minsk Group should foster post-war rehabilitation and facilitate a future final peace agreement.⁴
- The international community (OSCE, Council of Europe, EU, ICRC) should offer the parties assistance on protection of human rights, including the rights of people belonging to the ethnic and religious minorities, and on verifying existing complaints of breaches of international humanitarian law during and after the military conflict.
- Access to intergovernmental organizations must be guaranteed for the purpose of monitoring and protection of historic monasteries, churches, mosques, gravesites and archaeological sites (in territories which have seen sustained military presence or action over the last decades).
- Refocus and reinforce “Track 2” diplomacy efforts, especially people-to-people contacts and civil society dialogue across borders and ethnic identities. (See prior recommendations from the RSSC SG in that regard). Developing a concrete “Joint Action Plan for Peace Building in the Postconflict Period”, with support from the European and Euro-Atlantic institutions, has been suggested as a means to streamline work and help coordinate future international assistance in this area.

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

Long Term Recommendations

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

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

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This Study Group Information (SGI) consists of an Extended List of Policy Recommendations from the 2nd RSSC SG/PfPC Virtual Roundtable, held on December 4th, 2020. In the wake of the second Nagorno-Karabakh war, these special contributions anchor on the new reality and look to the new challenges of regional peace-building.

On November 10th, 2020 the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia signed a Trilateral Statement providing for a ceasefire and a set of guidelines for a future peace deal. However, this Statement is far away from a peace plan. It left open key issues, such as: the final status; the future role of the OSCE Minsk Group and of other international actors, the conditions for the return of the refugees and IDP's, and how the growing mistrust and conflict-driven animosities between the two communities would be overcome. This booklet aims to help filling in the gaps in the Trilateral Statement and paving the way towards peaceful conflict resolution.

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