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DISCUSSION PAPER

Nagorno-Karabakh: Is it time to bring peacekeeping and confidence building back on the agenda?

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1. Introduction

The "four-day war" fought between the Armenian and Azerbaijani armed forces from 1-5 April 2016, has forced the international community to take a fresh look at the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The escalation of hostilities, which ended with a truce reached under Russia's auspices, exposed risks of further violence and raised the stakes for the sides in the conflict. It also challenged the sense of complacency within the international community, which had hitherto been based on a belief that the *status quo* of not much war and not enough peace could be contained.

Changes in territorial control took place for the first time since 1994 with Azerbaijan retaking some 800 hectares of its territory that had been under Armenian control for more than two decades, including at least two strategic heights. While this shift of the Line of Contact (LoC) was marginal, it had a significant psychological impact on both sides. In Azerbaijan, there was a huge outpouring of patriotic support from every part of society. Azerbaijanis were delighted to see changes in the two-decade-old *status quo* and to have exposed weaknesses in Armenia's military capabilities and the fragile nature of its strategic alliance with Russia, already strained by Moscow's decision to sell arms to Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, the mood in Armenia was more sombre, with broad disappointment over the response of the military forces and anger over the approach of Yerevan's strategic ally, Russia. Armenian media was full of reports that it was Russia's arming of Azerbaijan that had fuelled the outbreak of violence. There is now an understanding that enough has changed as a result of the events in April to render a return to business as usual practically impossible. Going forward, there are now two likely scenarios: a more serious negotiation process which may lead to the start of substantive negotiations and an eventual peace agreement, or further serious incidents of violence which could be similar to the April incident or possibly much worse, and with the risk that neighbouring states might become directly involved.

The Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Serzh Sargsyan and Ilham Aliyev, have met twice since the April fighting, in Vienna on 16 May under the auspices of the three Co-Chairs of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Process (France, Russia and the US), and subsequently in St Petersburg

on 20 June on the initiative of Russian President, Vladimir Putin. At these meetings, the sides were reported to have made commitments on practical measures for avoiding further escalation and taking the peace process forward, although, as has been the case in the past, ambiguity in the language of what was supposed to have been agreed has left both sides with room for interpretation.¹

Furthermore, in St Petersburg, the trilateral Russia-Azerbaijan-Armenia negotiating format, used since the Moscow meeting in November 2008, was for the first time described as a supplement to the work of the Minsk Group (MG) Co-Chairs, and not as part of it. The final statement reads "The presidents noted the importance of their regular contacts on the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and agreed to continue them in this format **in addition to** the work of the OSCE Minsk Group..." who were invited to then attend only the very last part of the meeting.²

All sides emerged from the St Petersburg meeting claiming it was a positive development³, and the possibility of a potential breakthrough began to look more possible than it had for years. The Russians were hoping to move forward quickly, but developments in domestic Armenian politics, including the violent seizure of the Erebuni police station by a group of Karabakh war veterans in July 2016, made President Putin more sensitive to the risk of destabilizing the government of President Sargsyan. He found it necessary to assert that Russia was not pushing its own solution on the sides, but sought "a solution developed by the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan that is accepted by the societies of both countries".⁴ Even so, the cautious optimism generated by the Russian initiative has put consideration of the role and value of confidence-building measures (CBMs), along with the composition, mandate and deployment of peacekeeping forces, back on the agenda.

Even in the most optimistic scenario, any agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan will only constitute the start of a long and arduous process likely to last for many years, involving not only problems related to the technical execution of any agreement and post-conflict reconstruction, but the even more difficult challenges of healing damaged societies that have been kept on a war-footing for decades. If a comprehensive peace deal is agreed, it needs to be accompanied by CBMs of a civilian and military nature, as well as a comprehensive security arrangement, in particular a substantial international peacekeeping force. Those that engage with these processes must be ready to do so for a number of years at least. Furthermore, the mechanism of the OSCE MG that has so far spearheaded the mediation between the sides will, as a minimum, need to be overhauled if not completely reinvented, as its mandate will need to be adjusted to include a role in the multifaceted process of conflict settlement.

If the past is a mirror of the future, the international community will muddle along rather than offer decisive and timely leadership. On this occasion, sleepwalking into peace can be as dangerous as sleepwalking into war. It is going to take huge effort and political commitment, and not inconsiderable resources, for any Nagorno-Karabakh settlement to last more than a few weeks, and the sooner all concerned realise this the better the chance for success.

The process of disengaging the tens of thousands of Armenian and Azerbaijani troops on the LoC, clearing the area from mines, and returning internally displaced Azerbaijani citizens to territories that have been under Armenian occupation since the early 1990s will probably last for years and, given the current state of lack of trust between the parties, will require a substantial peacekeeping force on the ground. The even more difficult task of returning internally displaced Azerbaijanis to within Nagorno-Karabakh, where they will always constitute a minority, will be an even more complex challenge requiring both long-term peacekeeping and community policing. Despite the fact that Yerevan has already agreed to this within the framework of the Basic Principles⁵, such a step is likely to meet strong resistance from the Armenian Karabakh population.

A peacekeeping force to support a Karabakh peace settlement has been under consideration since the early 1990s, and a High Level Military Planning Group (HLPG), under the auspices of the OSCE, has been active in the Vienna Secretariat of the organization since 1994. The HLPG is composed of military experts seconded

from member states and has been mandated to make recommendations for the Chairman-in-Office (CiO) on developing a plan for the establishment, force structure, requirements and operations of a multinational OSCE peacekeeping force for Nagorno-Karabakh; making recommendations on, inter alia, the size and characteristics of the force, command and control, logistics, allocation of units and resources, rules of engagement and arrangements with contributing states. With peacekeeping in Karabakh now back on the agenda, even in the public discourse, many feel it is time for the planning group to come out of the shadows.

In parallel, a process of building trust at all levels – from the military commands of the two sides to political parties, parliaments, special interest groups and ordinary people of different ethnicities in villages and settlements – will require an extensive, imaginative, long-term programme of confidence building. These two processes will need to complement one another.

CBM was a term initially coined during the Cold War to describe measures in the military sphere that helped to reduce misperception and, thereby, the risk of accidental war, and/or measures that complimented negotiations of complicated arms agreements by developing dialogue and transparency between military officials who often perceived each other with great distrust. CBMs were part of complicated arrangements within the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) and its various offshoots. After the end of the Cold War, it was recognised that CBMs had greatly contributed to the reduction of tensions and had lessened the danger of unintended war on the European continent. The lessons were thus transposed to other areas of the world, including Asia and Latin America, and examined in the context of different regional scenarios.⁶

In the early 1990s, the concept was taken a step further with the emergence of civilian confidence-building measures (CCBMs), here targeted not primarily at reducing tensions in the military sphere, but at extending the process of building trust to different aspects of civilian life between sides in conflicts or where tensions are high.

An important factor when considering CBMs is timing. Some measures are useful to help the sides come to the negotiating table; some for supporting the sides whilst negotiating; others for consolidating any agreement that may be reached. The biggest problem with CBMs is that they are often perceived as separate, isolated measures by the wider public. They are not, and they cannot be designed or implemented in a vacuum or be detached from political processes.

CBMs in support of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process have been under consideration for decades, although few have been implemented successfully. This is largely due to the positions of the parties in the conflict. Both sides are nominally in favour of CBMs, yet every time the subject is discussed they immediately introduce a number of caveats that make taking the issue forward difficult at best. The Armenians are nominally the most supportive of CBMs, yet this support is very selective, and their engagement quite cursory and focused to ensure and entrench the continuation of the *status quo*. This approach re-enforces their view that, as the victor of the 1989-94 conflict, time is on their side. The Azerbaijanis, on the other hand, have been very open about the fact that they are against anything that would prolong or strengthen the *status quo*, or extend the legitimacy of the *de facto* authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh. An additional complication is that, whilst the Azerbaijanis want to promote relations between the Armenian Karabakh community and the Azerbaijani Karabakh community who were displaced by the conflict, the Armenians reject this "community" approach and demand arrangements that would see Armenians, and Azerbaijanis and Armenians from Karabakh meeting on an equal basis as three sides, something which is not acceptable for Azerbaijan.

Most discussions on CBMs usually quickly end up bogged down in these issues. These markers are artificial, by and large, since they try to prejudge the outcome of the negotiations. When it suits them, both sides are happy to put aside such issues and focus on substance, and they must be encouraged to do so more often. These markers have been adopted by the respective sides partly as a way of managing the engagement of their own civil society in the process, and partly to ensure that the focus of all talks is kept on their respective fixed positions. However, this mutual intransigence has also reduced the flexibility of the sides,

limiting their chances of advancing their own positions in front of international public opinion and lessening the opportunity of engaging with the other party.

Because of its experience in other conflict zones, not least in the Western Balkans where it has previously deployed both military and police missions, as well as having played a key role in reconstruction work and confidence-building efforts, many look to the EU to play a similar role in the Karabakh conflict settlement process. While it is unlikely that the EU will deploy a military or police force to Nagorno-Karabakh, individual member states have already indicated that they are ready to contribute troops to an international mission.

However, whilst planning for a military peacekeeping force in Nagorno-Karabakh has taken place since 1994, the same cannot be said for either CBMs or post-conflict reconstruction. Whilst the sides in the conflict, and many in the international community, see the benefit of the EU playing a key role in this sphere, there is so far no mandate for such a role that could trigger at least a preparatory process, even within the EU itself. With the prospect of a breakthrough in the negotiations securing this mandate, starting the planning and preparation process is now essential.

The time to talk about peacekeeping and confidence-building measures is now

Over the last two decades, there have been many moments when a breakthrough in the negotiations seeking to find a peaceful solution to the Karabakh conflict seemed imminent. The Key West negotiations in 2001 and the process leading to the Kazan Summit in 2011 are perhaps the best known cases, yet there have been many others. However, on each occasion peace proved to be elusive, with either one of the sides, or sometimes both, backing away.

Since 2004, the two sides have been negotiating the Basic Principles, later known as the set of "Madrid Principles", which constitute, more or less, a roadmap for a settlement. The Madrid Principles foresee the following: the return of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control; an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh providing guarantees for security and self-governance; a corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh; future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding expression of will; the right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their former places of residence; and international security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation. However, different interpretations of the Madrid Principles, along with a disagreement over the final status of Karabakh and how this would be decided, have mired the prospects of settlement.

These difficulties have left the peace process looking distinctly tired and embattled. Nevertheless, the framework has endured despite this because, in some ways, it suits both sides in the conflict, the three mediating states and indeed the international community. The latter, already fatigued by too many other crises, has been happy to delegate responsibility to the three Co-Chair countries. They, in turn, find the process useful to keeping a foot in the door of the Caucasus, whilst being able to eye one another at close quarters. For the sides too, having three permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) as mediators confers some prestige and, more importantly, the process has proved convenient since it allows them to push on the brake whenever it suits them, which has been quite often. Russia has made full use of being a Co-Chair. Moscow is the main security actor in the region, and the most dominant and assertive external power. Hence, right from the start, Russia wanted to take the lead role in negotiating a peace deal and has continued in this vein since. Russian diplomacy has run a nuanced strategy, engaging with, and supporting the Minsk Process, whilst running a parallel process that emerges and fades as necessary.

Since the Moscow meeting in November 2008, Russia has self-assumed a role of *primus inter pares* in the negotiation process on Karabakh, and this role was further accentuated in 2015 when it put forward what have since been termed the "Lavrov ideas" – essentially a rehash of the Madrid Principles with some additional details and nuance regarding timing and sequence. However, it was only in St Petersburg in June that this supplementary process was finally fully acknowledged. The statement from the St Petersburg

meeting was light on detail, and does not explain or justify the optimism voiced by both Armenia and Azerbaijan after the meeting, so we must conclude that it is what was not stated that is important. Whatever the circumstances that brought it about, however, the feeling is that a breakthrough could happen and the Russians are positioning themselves to take the credit.

If a breakthrough is achieved one can only applaud, regardless of who brought it about, or how. However, clearly such a breakthrough can only be achieved as a result of Armenia agreeing to return territory to Azerbaijan, and for Azerbaijan to accept a security regime on the ground in return. Additionally – beyond security guarantees for Nagorno-Karabakh – Armenia may demand that the international community take steps to reduce its international isolation, including being included in a number of regional infrastructure projects. Such a breakthrough would open the way for the deployment of international peacekeeping forces, CBMs, and post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation. If that is the case, then discussions must start immediately regarding the pieces of the jigsaw that would be required to quickly fall into place if a peace deal was secured, even if not in totality.

2. Confidence-building measures will be required at every stage of the process

In the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it is widely recognised that building confidence is necessary – and possible – in both the civilian and the military spheres. Whilst some measures have been enacted in the civilian sphere, none have yet been successful in the military sphere. Additionally, national processes are required in both Armenia and Azerbaijan that could lead to agreement of the major political forces on where they see their countries in the future.

Military CBMs

Contacts between the militaries of Armenia and Azerbaijan have been a taboo on both sides. NATO tried to develop some frameworks by which it could cajole the two militaries into talking to one another, and at one point even entertained the idea of having an Armenian military contingent participating in a NATO peacekeeping training exercise in Azerbaijan – an idea that proved too much for the Azerbaijanis. NATO has, in recent years, become much more aloof from the Karabakh issues, whilst seeking to develop bilateral ties with the military of both sides. Since Russia is the main arms supplier for both parties, the framework within which Russia engages the military of each may encourage segregation rather than contact.

The issue has also been explored in the framework of the OSCE Minsk Process. The need for CBMs is recognised due to the highly volatile situation on the LoC. From time to time, the Co-Chairs have tried to put forward suggestions for CBMs. For example, a proposal by the Co-Chairs for the withdrawal of snipers from the LoC was rejected by the Azerbaijani side, as Baku believes that such a move would consolidate the *status quo*.

The regular monitoring of the LoC by a small six-man team of the OSCE CiO Special Representative, Andrzej Kasprzyk, can be considered as a CBM since it requires both sides to coordinate to a certain extent during the monitoring, but its value is largely symbolic. Similarly, the Co-Chairs have decided, on a few occasions, to cross the LoC on foot. Doing so is no easy task, since the area is heavily mined, but the exercise is considered worthwhile since it requires a certain amount of coordination between the sides. During such a crossing recently, somebody opened fire, but even though the Co-Chairs were physically present on the ground they could not determine which side had fired. This goes to show how difficult the situation is. The increase in the number of monitors from the present six to between 12 and 14 has now reportedly been accepted by both sides.⁷ However, this number will hardly change the present reality and, in any case, unless there is also a change in the present modus operandi of the monitoring, its significance is merely symbolic.

Simultaneously, the Armenian side, supported by the international community, has for some time been proposing an "incident investigation mechanism" that would allow incidents to be investigated and, one assumes, blame to be apportioned. This was a point mentioned during the recent Vienna and St Petersburg meetings. However, on 26 June, the President of Azerbaijan stated that there was no concrete proposal as to how such a mechanism would work and that, in any case, Azerbaijan would only accept it once the withdrawal of Armenian forces from Azerbaijan's occupied territories adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh has started.⁸

Civilian confidence-building measures (CCBMs)

There is wider scope for implementing CCBMs, and the sides have shown some flexibility in this direction over the years. They have, however, also displayed an attitude that they could switch CCBMs on and off at will, and neither side has had to pay any political price for doing so. For example, a dialogue involving members of parliament from Armenia and Azerbaijan – the South Caucasus Parliamentary Initiative (SCPI) – was successfully conducted between 2002 and 2006, but the Armenians subsequently stopped attending meetings. Similar attempts at parliamentary diplomacy within the framework of the Council of Europe (COE), the EURONEST framework of the European Parliament (EP) and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly have similarly stalled due to the intransigence of one or other side. On the Azerbaijani side, a number of NGOs engaged in people-to-people contacts with Armenian counterparts were put under investigation and accused of being traitors, seriously weakening efforts at people to people contacts.

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan have been obliged to make some friendly gestures to one another in the framework of international cultural and sporting events – largely because they risked exclusion from regional or international governing bodies unless they did so. Thus, whilst the Armenians refused to participate in the Eurovision Song Contest in Baku, they did participate in the first European Games, as well as various other sports competitions. Azerbaijanis participated in the 2009 European Judo Championships in Yerevan. The lesson learnt is that, when it suits them, both sides are ready to show flexibility.

There is an urgent need for CBMs in the context of the Karabakh conflict settlement process. This will require, as a minimum, acquiescence on the part of both governments. The space has narrowed rather than broadened over the years, but there are still some possibilities. Neither side wants to be seen to close the door on CBMs completely.

Following on from the re-engagement of the sides in discussions in Vienna and St Petersburg, the time is right to bring CBMs to the fore and to test the willingness of the sides to engage in their implementation. In doing so a number of considerations must be taken into account:

- (i) The international community – in particular the EU and US – must show that it values and is ready to prioritise CBMs in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement context, putting them on the agenda in discussions with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Commitment should be secured whenever possible in final communiques at both bilateral meetings and multilateral frameworks. This can be a commitment to the principles, rather than to specific CBMs, since such measures are not likely to be acceptable to either or both sides if not presented as a package from which each can see some advantage, and this will require detailed work and preparation.
- (ii) Some technical discussions with the sides can start immediately, without prejudice to ongoing negotiations, in order to identify acceptable parameters. Discussions on CBMs can constitute a CBM in themselves. The sides may have different views in terms of when specific CBMs can be implemented, and this should be respected as much as possible, as long as both sides show genuine engagement.
- (iii) CCBMs can be designed and implemented by both state and non-state actors, and there have been some modest examples of success with both in the past. It is important that the two tiers move in parallel and that unnecessary obstacles be eliminated.

(a) At the level of non-state actors, the sides must be persuaded to take a flexible approach regarding format, allowing individuals from across the conflict divide to participate in meetings and providing space for a modest amount of activity to take place across the divide. The international community must strongly condemn harassment of persons or organizations participating in CBMs that the international community initiates and supports.

(b) Developing the capacity of non-state actors is an essential prerequisite for successful CCBMs. In this regard, the European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (EPNK), has been operating successfully since 2010, albeit with some gaps and the occasional setback, usually due to internal politics in Baku and Yerevan. However, EPNK now needs to engage with a wider spectrum of local civil society actors, with an emphasis on the younger generation.

(c) Early flexibility is unlikely to be achieved on the level at which state actors are engaged. Here, formats in the framework of existing international organizations of which both Armenia and Azerbaijan are members should be used.

(iv) In the absence of not only a peace agreement, but even of a meaningful peace process, one should not expect it to be possible to implement many significant CCBMs, but this should not stop efforts to implement some. Viable CCBMs are likely to be related to issues in which both sides have an interest, and can be divided into those relating to Armenia, and Azerbaijan, and those relating to the conflict zone. Involvement of stakeholders, must include "interested parties" referred to in the OSCE document of 24 March 1992.⁹ This will, by necessity, have to include engagement, even if informal, with the self-declared "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic" (NKR), which exercises *de facto* control over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh – regardless of whether or not it is a proxy of Yerevan, as is claimed by Azerbaijan, or the political expression of the Armenians of Karabakh as is stated by Armenia. It is to be recognised that this is hugely problematic for Azerbaijan, and the principle of engagement without recognition must be not only accepted, but clearly stated. The leadership of "NKR" sees all international engagement through the prism of increasing its international legitimacy. This has often created unnecessary complications for CCBMs and people-to-people contacts. Whilst international engagement with "NKR", as with all other stakeholders, is necessary, this must clearly align with the objective of supporting a peaceful solution, not of supporting the position of one of the sides against the other. Such engagement must also respect the principle of inclusiveness. The voices of different stakeholders, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, Karabakh Azerbaijanis, and Karabakh Armenians, should be pulled out of anonymity.

(v) International involvement in supporting and facilitating CBMs is not only necessary but inevitable under the present circumstances. In this regard, the EU, with its huge experience in the area of CBMs and good contacts with civil society across the conflict divide, is expected to play a significant role. It is not enough for the EU to pay lip service to such a process. The EU must show that it has the capacity and the will to move in an efficient and timely manner, and the agility to exploit windows of opportunity as they arise. Such EU involvement is likely to be resisted by Russia, but can still be realised if the sides understand its benefits.

Neither the parties to the conflict, nor the international community, should be under any illusion that CBMs are a panacea that can solve the Karabakh conflict or, even worse, that they are somehow an alternative to such a solution. CBMs are simply a tool to assist and accelerate the process of resolution, to avoid misunderstandings, promote dialogue and help create the most conducive conditions for successful negotiations. Whilst for some this is stating the obvious, there has, in the past, been too much opaqueness between conflict management and conflict resolution in the Karabakh context, and the point must therefore be constantly repeated.

3. Peacekeeping in Nagorno-Karabakh

There are currently no peacekeeping forces in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone. The 1994 ceasefire agreement did not include the deployment of a peacekeeping force because it was considered to be a

temporary agreement that was to be the precursor for a full and quick political settlement. While Russia wanted to deploy peacekeepers unilaterally, both Azerbaijan and Armenia were opposed to this as it would have given Moscow a key role in the conflict zone – which was the case at the time (and still is) in neighbouring Georgia, where Russia deployed soldiers in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. However, ahead of the CSCE summit in Budapest in December 1994, consensus was reached to establish a planning group to prepare for the deployment of a peacekeeping force once a political settlement was achieved.

At one point, the planning group asked the member states to indicate how many soldiers they were willing to commit to such an operation. The response was mixed, with some of the larger countries disappointingly not wanting to commit to more than one or two, yet it was and still is thought possible that a force of several thousand could be mustered, even if neighbouring countries, such as Turkey and Russia, are excluded, as seems to have been the thinking at least until recently. Optimistically, the OSCE had even bought yellow caps for the new peacekeeping force (PKF). Some of these are used during the monitoring of the LoC.

In the event that the two sides agree a peace deal that would allow for the immediate return of a number of Azerbaijan's occupied territories (most likely Kubatli, Jebraïl, Zangelan, Agdam and Fuzuli), an international PKF would need to be quickly deployed to these territories, as well as to Nagorno-Karabakh itself, once the Armenian armed forces have withdrawn their troops and heavy weapons. There are concerns about the length of time it may take for the OSCE to deploy such a force. Furthermore, an agreement over those territories that would not be immediately returned to Azerbaijan (most likely Kelbajar, which borders Armenia and Lachin, which acts as land corridor between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia) would need to be reached to allow the PKF to patrol such an area additionally.

Arrangements regarding the size, mandate and composition of the mission should already be agreed and this will require a strong political commitment. The type of mission deployed would need to evolve over time, requiring different components at different stages. Given the current highly volatile situation on the ground and the level of mistrust between the sides, a large military and police mission would need to be deployed eventually. The mandate of the force is likely to be very similar to operations carried out by a number of successful EU-led missions in the Western Balkans in the 1990s, and the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) following the division of the island in 1974: to supervise the new ceasefire lines and investigate all violations, to maintain a buffer zone, and to undertake humanitarian activities such as clearing minefields, over and above the delicate process of return of displaced persons. Surveillance would be carried out through a system of observation posts and air, vehicle and foot patrols. The structure, strength and concept of operations would have to be reviewed and adjusted over time in light of developments on the ground, including those related to the return of displaced persons. While this will not take place immediately – not least because of the lack of infrastructure and trust – it will be a very difficult, traumatic and sensitive process and will thus require a carefully formulated timetable.

There are two possible scenarios for a PKF: an OSCE-led force authorised by the UNSC or a UN peacekeeping mission. While the OSCE has been working on the conflict for the past two decades, there are lingering questions over its capacity to carry out a mission of the scale required for Karabakh. Although the OSCE has a mandate for peacekeeping, it has seldom operated within this mandate and it remains questionable whether the OSCE would be capable of mustering enough forces for such a big deployment. Undoubtedly the UN has more experience in peacekeeping operations and will not have a problem finding enough forces from its larger pool of member states, however the instinct of the UN in recent years has been to delegate peacekeeping to regional security arrangements, such as the EU or the African Union.

Regardless, the big elephant in the room when it comes to peacekeeping in Nagorno-Karabakh is Russia. There are strong indications that Russia wants to lead, or at least be the main part of, a peacekeeping force in Nagorno-Karabakh. While Armenian and Azerbaijani official sources, and indeed the Russians themselves,

say that the matter has not yet been discussed, none of the three countries has dismissed this scenario outright, despite the historical opposition of both Armenia and Azerbaijan to its possibility. However, for such an operation to take place, the acquiescence of the international community would be required. Turkey would likely pose a challenge in this regard, with Ankara unlikely to welcome Russian troops into Azerbaijan with open arms given the already significant presence of Russia in the Black Sea region and, more recently, Syria. However, the recent rapprochement between Ankara and Moscow, after nine months of crisis following Turkey's shooting down of a Russian jet over the Syrian-Turkish border on 24 November 2015, may have an impact as Turkey has adopted a more pragmatic approach towards Russia in the region, not least in Syria.

By contrast, a number of pro-Moscow experts and journalists have been speaking openly about a Russian peacekeeping force. This is likely a way of testing the waters in terms of public opinion in Armenia and Azerbaijan. If that is the intention, the result will not have been encouraging for Russia as public opinion in both countries seems to be overwhelmingly against such a Russian deployment.

Yet, despite optimism regarding an imminent breakthrough, reaching this point will not be easy. Given that, for the past two decades, Yerevan has increasingly shifted its narrative from labelling the Azerbaijani territories under its control as a buffer zone which will one day be returned to Baku as part of a negotiated settlement, to sometimes describing them as liberated land which will remain under Armenian control, Yerevan is unlikely to accept the idea of returning land to Azerbaijan without significant pressure from the international community – in particular from Russia – and only if it is able to secure important concessions from Azerbaijan, especially on the issue of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. President Serzh Sargsyan, who is a native of Karabakh and well aware that he will almost certainly face a huge backlash from society if he is seen to bow to pressure, recently drew a red line on the issue, stating in a television interview that even if the whole world was united in pushing for Nagorno-Karabakh to be returned under Azerbaijani jurisdiction, this will never happen.¹⁰ In Karabakh itself, the idea of foreign peacekeeping forces is viewed very negatively – a risky proposition that, rather than securing the safety of Nagorno-Karabakh, may actually herald its demise as a separate political entity.

In Baku, President Ilham Aliyev may also find himself in an uncomfortable position if he accepts a deal that does not include Karabakh, or that may make the return of Karabakh to Azerbaijani jurisdiction an even more remote possibility than it is today, despite the fact that a number of Azerbaijan's territories would be returned. Azerbaijan's negotiating position seeks the immediate return of five territories, leaving the fate of Kelabajar and Lachin, along with the status of Karabakh itself, to be decided at some point in the future.

4. The role of the European Union

Given that the EU does not have a standing army and in view of all the political sensibilities in the South Caucasus, the EU is unlikely to play a key role in the establishment and deployment of a PKF. This notwithstanding, the member states will be called upon to commit troops to such a force.

However, it has always been understood that, if a political settlement is on the horizon, the EU would be an important source of support for post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation, and for the development of CBMs, working closely with the OSCE.

To this end, the EU should be ready to take a major role in working on a roadmap for supporting the reconstruction of the Karabakh conflict zone, including the territories of Azerbaijan that have been under Armenian control since 1994, the development of institutions in Nagorno-Karabakh itself, as well as the restoration of physical communications and infrastructure, including railway links.

However, if the OSCE has been planning for peacekeeping in Karabakh for more than 20 years, one cannot say that the EU has been doing the same for CBMs and post-conflict reconstruction. Part of the problem is the lack of a mandate for the EU to engage in such activity, either from the parties to the conflict or from the international community. This serious shortcoming must be addressed soon because, if there is a political

settlement and peacekeepers are deployed, both CBMs and post-conflict reconstruction need to follow within a matter of days, not months or years. The current EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus, Herbert Salber, has done sterling work over the last two years in securing the goodwill of both the Armenian and the Azerbaijani sides. Now, as an immediate next step, his mandate must be expanded by the European Council in order that some of the preparatory work on CBMs and post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation can begin in earnest. There is also a need to secure a formal role for the EU in the next phase of the negotiation – through membership of the wider MG and as a participant in a supporting role to the work of the Co-Chairs.

5. Conclusion

The next steps in the peace process will be crucial, and timing is no longer on anyone's side. A scenario whereby Azerbaijan launches an offensive in an effort to retake more of its territory will result in Armenia putting up significant resistance in order to hold onto its defensive positions, possibly by launching counter-attacks. Both sides have for years been probing one another's defences to identify vulnerable points. As was seen very clearly during the April conflict, both sides now possess very sophisticated weaponry. This is no longer a war fought with old tanks and Kalashnikovs. The danger of further violence is now well understood by the international community.

Nagorno-Karabakh is not a problem that is going to go away, nor is it one that can be contained within strict parameters, as the events in April proved. With prospects of a resolution once more on the horizon, it is important that the momentum of any breakthrough is quickly consolidated. Peacekeeping and confidence building are an essential part of this process and the international community, most particularly the EU, must move fast to ensure that such measures are in place as soon as they are needed.

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Endnotes

- 1 For the full text of the St Petersburg Statement, issued by the three presidents on 20 June 2016, see the Russian version on the Kremlin website: <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5093>
For the statement issued by the foreign ministers of the three OSCE Minsk Group countries following the 16 May 2016 meeting in Vienna, see <http://www.osce.org/mg/240316>
- 2 <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5093>
- 3 <http://commonsplace.eu/eng/news/6/id3673>
- 4 http://commonsplace.eu/index.php?m=23&news_id=3835
- 5 "The Madrid Principles", or "Basic principles" were originally presented to the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers at the OSCE ministerial conference in Madrid in November 2007. <http://www.osce.org/mg/51152>
- 6 For an early example of agreement on confidence-building measures in Europe see "Document of the Stockholm Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe", Stockholm, 19 September 1986; <http://www.osce.org/fsc/41238?download=true>
- 7 In a speech on 26 June 2016, President Ilham Aliyev indicated that Azerbaijan would be ready to agree to such an increase. http://en.apa.az/nagorno_karabakh/azerbaijani-president-disclosed-details-of-the-st-petersburg-meeting.html
- 8 President Ilham Aliyev was quoted by the news agency APA as saying that if the purpose of an investigative mechanism meant to 'freezing the conflict' Azerbaijan will not accept it, and Azerbaijan will only be willing to consider this measure in the context of "positive dynamics in the negotiation process, so that we can see concrete results, so we know the terms of liberation of our territories". http://en.apa.az/nagorno_karabakh/azerbaijani-president-disclosed-details-of-the-st-petersburg-meeting.html
- 9 In the summary of conclusions of the Helsinki Addition Meeting of the CSCE [Ministerial] Council, held on 24 March 1992 it was stated in paragraphs 8 and 9. <http://www.osce.org/mc/2912>
- 10 Speaking to the leaders of the Armenian political, religious and cultural elites in the aftermath of the Erebuni crisis, on 1 August 2016, President Sargsyan said: "I would like to speak about another issue, which we have spoken about on many occasions. It is about the Karabakh issue and so called 'surrender of lands'. My personal statements with regard to our clear-cut position on that are probably numberless. I repeat once again: there will be no unilateral concessions in the resolution of the NK issue. Never. Nagorno Karabakh will never be part of Azerbaijan. Never. I repeat once again: it is out of question. I have given my entire adult life to this. To get to the solution acceptable for my nation, I have always been ready to sacrifice any position, and also my life. It is like that today, it will like that tomorrow." <http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2016/08/01/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-meeting-with-government-civil-and-spiritual-representatives>

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