

## ***New Challenges in the Process of the NK Conflict Resolution***

“The President went to negotiate, and we don’t even know what has been discussed. To whom and about what shall we complain? We don’t know anything. There is a lack of information.” “The government officials are too far away from the people. No one asks us, “What shall we do?” “I am not certain that, for instance, the President will read the opinions we expressed today at this discussion and consider those later while negotiating. When have they ever taken into account the public opinion?” “There should be discussions amongst the people more often. People at various social layers should get clarifications, in order for us to be ready for a compromise.” “The state authorities do as they like. There is no connection between these authorities and the people.” “The public should regularly learn of the truth about the negotiation process, in order for them to define their positions, trust and support.”

These are the concerns of the common RA citizens expressed at the public discussions held in Ijevan, Gavar, Kapan and Meghri, where there were more than 500 participants of various professions and ages. They were very ordinary Armenians who above all - above their routine troubles, economic situation, etc. - were concerned about the peaceful resolution of our priority issue in the foreseeable future. This concern compelled them to speak out, even if not being heard: at least they should have a chance to speak out. One has to agree: this is a very human need...

Something suggests the Azerbaijani society experiences similar concerns.

### **Unveiling 1.**

The statement of the co-chairmen of the Minsk Group at the OSCE Permanent Council and the several interviews with Matthew Bryza presented to the public the general outlines of the negotiated package which is on the discussion table today. Undoubtedly, in the past the public was more or less informed of the previous scenarios that were being negotiated. This is the first time ever when secrecy is being at least partially unveiled from a package which is not yet history or which has already been declined, but is the one that is on the table at the moment and about which the negotiations continue.

In fact, the curtain of secrecy has been raised, and the people of Armenia and Azerbaijan can already see the essence of the proposal. In particular, in the statement of the co-chairmen it is noted that the mediators are certain they have done everything they could and from now on the major burden is primarily on the Armenian and Azerbaijani sides. Finally, the co-chairmen are calling for a larger involvement of the public in the process, considering public participation to be a more democratic and healthy approach to the resolution of the conflict.

### **What issue do the co-chairmen want to address?**

What is behind the statement of the mediators? This is the question that is currently being discussed by various analysts. Opinions differ, but three major directions can be distinguished:

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1. The co-chairmen's statement is just a form of pressure, a mechanism to alert the parties. After Bucharest, the goal to ensure significant progress in the resolution of the conflict in 2006 started to seem unattainable and with this step the Co-chairmen try to rouse a feeling of urgency regarding the conflict resolution among the parties;
  2. Mediators try to involve the societies into the discussions. This can lighten up the huge responsibility the two presidents have to carry and provide them with a wider framework of flexibility at the negotiation table;
  3. This is a litmus test to understand the reaction of the societies. Not only are the people in the both countries insufficiently informed of what their presidents negotiate, the very presidents themselves seem not to be well-aware of what their people are ready for and to what extent.

## **Conclusion: unveiling 2**

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Thus, we have a situation when people want to become a part of the resolution process of an issue very vital for them, when the presidents need public support and the mediators have called for initiation of public discussions. Then what do we wait for? Is it difficult to conclude that the current phase of the NK conflict resolution is the phase of active public discussions? It seems there are no other alternatives.

The NK issue is the most "popular" issue both in Armenia and Azerbaijan in the sense that the issue touches everyone and can interest all. Therefore, it is quite possible to walk onto the path of representative participation of ALL.

It is not difficult to notice that the package currently on the negotiation table includes several groups of issues. It is certainly possible to effectively narrate each group within half a page, come up with 4 or 5 possible options written in an understandable language, take those and if need be visit every single village, community and district, bring together representative focus groups, impartially present the existing options and open up a discussion. In the end, it is certainly possible to summarize all the outcomes and say that these are the results of the "public discussion"; this is what our people are ready for. Thus it is possible to find out what the "public opinion" is and to understand what we eventually want and on what dimension, how we should "work to include the people". This is equally true of both Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

An expensive treat? Certainly not more, than just sitting and waiting for the gradually hardening atmosphere of the next meeting of the two presidents.

*The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion on "The format of the NKR issue resolution after the statement of Co-chairmen", which took place on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2006. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations.*

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