

Moscow Declaration: Caucasian Dialectics



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At the delta: gone with the wind

2008 will certainly remain a turning point in history, characterized with epochal events, such as the beginning of the victorious campaign of self-determination, the challenge thrown at the unipolar world polity, the unprecedented presidential elections in the US, and the beginning of the world financial crisis. The controversial 2008 has hauled us and our region into its whirlpool as well. The spring wind and the autumn rain of 2008 swept the historical stage and side-scenes of the country and the region clean, making room for new players, more audacious directors and more vivid productions. On November 2, 2008, in Moscow the presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia signed a document consisting of only five articles, which in a sense became the summary of all the previous efforts to settle the conflict of Nagorno Karabakh. It reflected the present challenges, projected the future tasks and marked the beginning of a new process.

The unity and struggle of contrasts

Russia, which aspires to a dominant role and influence in the South Caucasus has a clear incentive to speed up, if not the resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh issue, at least the reaping of the seasonal harvest from the regulation process. Each mediator in the resolution process of the Nagorno Karabakh issue or a party with mediatory ambitions has their own interests and they love "not the resolution itself, but their own selves in the resolution." These interests are often contradictory, at times directed at the mutual neutralization of the players in the region and may even impede the mission of mediation. Thus, the goal of the conflicting parties shifts from the beneficial resolution of the conflict to exclusion of the possibility of either dominance of one player in the South Caucasus, or the amalgamation of the interests of different players. It sounds strange, but if the resolution of the conflict will result in the exclusive dominance of one or the other player in the region, it seems that the best solution for the conflicting parties is to have the conflict unresolved. This is where the interests of the conflicting parties meet. It is significant that the Moscow Declaration does not have a slightest allusion to deployment of Russian peacekeepers in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict zone.

Still, it is again Russia that has reaped the harvest from the resolution process: the most crucial steps towards the regulation of the conflict were taken with the mediation of Russia both in 1994 and in 2008. However, one should not forget that the role of sowers of the negotiation field, as well as those providing fertilizers, cheering idlers and those occasionally and loudly complaining of hard work, when they have not really done anything, is also big. Eventually, it was due to the Minsk Group that the negotiation process has been maintained from 1994 through 2008, as an alternative to war. The sowers are actually left with one option only: to continue their painstaking, ungrateful and somewhat inconspicuous job, at least till the next harvest. The second and fourth articles of the declaration seem to support this inference.

Transformation of the quantitative change into a qualitative one

Presently the world leaders need stability and peace in the South Caucasus. It is not in their interests to see any instability following the examples of Kosovo, South Ossetia or Abkhazia, especially around the oil pipelines. It is important that the feedback of the regional heavyweights on the recent Declaration is exceptionally positive and encouraging. Moreover, the overall impression is that the heavyweights have hidden their sticks in the shelves and are offering carrots to the conflicting parties instead, just to avoid Nagorno Karabakh turning into another Kosovo, South Ossetia or Abkhazia. If the principle of self-determination has slipped away not from Pandora's box, but only from Aeolus's sack, then there is still hope for stuffing it back into where it belongs.

The world financial crisis has struck a blow to the economies of the conflicting countries. In the result of the unprecedented decline in the international prices of black gold, the budget revenues of the neighboring country keep shrinking, consequently the pace of armament is slowing down and the combat capacity of the army is weakening, particularly in terms of engaging in large-scale military attack operations. At the same time, it is quite possible that the flow of currency remittances from foreign countries will decrease as well, resulting in social tension and mass migration, which similarly strikes the security of the countries and the combat capacity of the

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armies both in attack and defense operations. Thus, apparently the conflicting parties should be equally interested in the resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict through negotiations.

Negation of negation

Obviously, the logic of the Declaration leaves out Nagorno Karabakh from the resolution process. Incidentally, the absence of the signature of the Nagorno Karabakh representative is not only a result of external pressures and the position of Azerbaijan, but rather the logical outcome of the approach that has lasted for over a decade. Indeed, the Armenian diplomacy, which was reluctant to give up the monopoly of the resolution process, in the last decade has single-handedly represented Karabakhi interests in the negotiation process and has essentially pushed away Nagorno Karabakh representation from the negotiation table, thus turning the Nagorno Karabakh issue into a bilateral conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. "There is no need for a third party, we are the negotiating party. There is no need for a Nagorno Karabakh representative: who can represent Karabakhi interests better than us, much like in the past? I am the Alpha and the Omega... and I remain thus. You will have to talk to me... L'Artsakh, c'est moi..." In the result in the process of resolving the Nagorno Karabakh issue, the application of the principle of territorial integrity may prevail over the principle of self-determination.

Over the last decade the Armenian diplomacy has adopted the principle that strengthening economic relations in the region will contribute to the resolution of the conflict, whereas the conflicting party claims that economic cooperation in the region is possible only and if the conflict is resolved. It is important that the Moscow Declaration directly points to the latter approach, noting that the resolution of the conflict and establishment of stability will promote economic development and multilateral cooperation in the region. On the other hand, encouraging implementation of activities aimed at building trust towards resolution efforts in the fifth article of the Declaration indirectly defends the first approach.

The Declaration first and foremost aims at excluding resolution of the conflict through military intervention. Furthermore, it attempts to identify warrants and counterbalances to prevent a future war in the second article. Still, the diplomatic war and the arms/combat capacity race continue from the second day of signing the Declaration, starting with various contradictory interpretations of the Declaration. Indeed, the sweet fruits of the Declaration will be reaped by the one who will manage to use it most effectively for its own goals, in particular for propaganda and PR. Unfortunately, the past reveals that such significant opportunities have not been used till the very point when the window of these opportunities has already been closed.

Beyond dialectics

The Declaration prompts a number of important steps to be undertaken. First, it is necessary to refresh the resettlement programs. It is an imperative to start vigorous academic and information campaigns within the framework of the commandment to implement activities aimed at trust-building towards resolution efforts. Furthermore, it is necessary to properly demonstrate the strength of the Armenian army, its combat capacity and military cooperation through involving local and international expertise on the state level. It is crucial to clearly outline a prospect that the resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict should become a precedent of resolving conflicts through negotiations, regardless of the invested effort and time. Still, first and foremost it is essential to respect the government of Nagorno Karabakh, in order to demand a similar respect from the others and make them heed to what they have to say...

The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion "Moscow Declaration: is it a New Stage for NK Issue?", which took place on November 4, 2008. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations. The round table was organized with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

DECLARATION

Between Republic of Armenia, Azerbaijani Republic and the Russian Federation (source: MEDIAMAX News Agency)

The Presidents of the Azerbaijani Republic, the Republic of Armenia and the Russian Federation, having met on November 2, 2008, in Moscow on the invitation of the President of the Russian Federation, having substantially and seriously discussed in constructive atmosphere the situation and the prospects of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement by political means, through continuation of a direct dialogue between Azerbaijan and Armenia at the mediation of Russia, the USA and France as the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs,

1. State that they will contribute to the improvement of the situation in the South Caucasus and provision of establishment of stability and security atmosphere in the region by means of the political settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict basing on the principles and norms of the international law and the decisions and documents adopted within the mentioned framework, which will create auspicious conditions for economic development and all-comprehensive cooperation in the region.
2. Confirm the importance of the continuation of mediatory efforts by OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs taking into account their meetings with the sides in Madrid on November 29, 2007, and the following discussions, aiming at further elaborating the basic principles of the political settlement.
3. Agree that the peace settlement should be accompanied by legally binding international guarantees of all its aspects and stages.
4. Note that the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia have agreed to continue work, including during the further contacts at the highest level, over the concordance of the political settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and have charged their Ministers of Foreign Affairs with stirring up the further steps in the negotiation process in cooperation with OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs.
5. Consider important encouraging establishment of conditions to realize measures on consolidating trust in the context of efforts on settlement”.