

The gaps in the negotiations around the regulation of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict



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If you target the top of the tree, aim at the moon

What is the agenda of the Armenian side regarding the future of Artsakh people in the result of the negotiations? And most importantly, what is the perception of the Artsakh people themselves regarding their future? First, it is necessary to clearly perceive and present the fact that the least an Artsakhi has and wants is the minimally acceptable guarantee for his and his family's physical security, which is the only fragile but reliable factor ensuring the necessary balance during the times of conflict and war, and this guarantee is his son, the Armenian soldier at the border. Unfortunately, we have not succeeded in presenting this fact properly to the Azerbaijani society, mediators and the larger world. Though even us Armenians in general have quite a vague idea of the concerns and interests of the Artsakh people. This results in presenting the least as the maximum achievement both to the world and to ourselves. But what really should be the maximum achievement we could settle for ideally? Perhaps the NKR membership to the European Union in the near future? Why not? The old Indian proverb says, "If you target the top of the tree, aim at the moon."

When there is confusion between the least probable and the most probable of what you need

The diplomatic war initiated by Azerbaijan evolves in parallel with the intensifying arms race and regular and continuous violations of the ceasefire. The neighboring country is accumulating weapons while keeping the army weak: in an authoritarian country army is regarded first of all a domestic factor. At the same time Azerbaijani government has nourished and nurtured a serious tension regarding the conflict within its society. This is not surprising at all. Tension around the conflict has been and still is the major factor in keeping the power in Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani government tries to convince the mediators that the only possibility to decrease the tension is to get small though tangible concessions from Armenia. But how and why?

At various stages of the negotiations Azerbaijan has been presenting all its moves, even its participation in the process and the rhetoric of non-use of force which contradicts its actions, as a concession. Whereas the over-constructive manner of the Armenian side leaves an impression as if it were a party that acts as an impartial and ready mediator instead of pursuing its interests at the negotiation table. It seems as if the Armenian side has achieved its top priorities required for the satisfaction of its interests and is attempting to maintain those. At the same time there is a misperception that the Azerbaijani side does not have the required minimum for addressing its needs. Therefore, the negotiation process follows the logic of unnatural expectations, demands and tensions of unilateral concessions. Azerbaijan tries to prove to the world that the Armenian side has taken possession of the whole 'pie' of the negotiations. And often we have contributed to the Azerbaijani propaganda. Still, is the current situation the limit of our perceptions of what the future of Artsakh should be in the result of conflict regulation? Certainly, not. What the Armenian side has at the moment is actually the small piece of the pie of our wishes, which we are not able to adequately communicate to the world and even confess to ourselves. Perhaps the reason is that being hung up on the least we are challenged to outline the maximum extent of our expectations.

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In order for the society to adequately understand the moves in the negotiations process it is necessary for the parties of the negotiation and the mediators to at least differentiate between what the least necessary outcome is and what the maximal and the most desirable is. Only then will the societies appreciate and welcome the projects and proposals discussed at the negotiation table.

The issue of security in the margins of the negotiations

The current crisis in the perception of the negotiations, their format and the effectiveness of the mediators' activities and ideas is primarily caused by the fundamental gaps within the negotiation process. The key gap in the mediatory mission of the Minsk Group co-chairs is the fact that the major concerns of the Artsakh people are either not reflected at the negotiations table or are usually brought up as a residue.

Meetings of the mediators with the NKR government officials are not enough to properly express the concerns and priorities of the NKR residents at the negotiation table. The reality is that the NKR has been left out of the negotiation process. However, it is even more unfortunate that the concerns and major interests of the Artsakh people have appeared in the margins of the negotiation process. Various discussions with the Artsakh people demonstrate that they consider the security of their families a top priority. The major concerns voiced by the Artsakhi appear as a mere derivative in the proposals and initiatives of the mediators, whereas the issues that stand out as core problems during the negotiation process seem to be the ones about the territories and the NKR status, issues emphasized in the positions of both Azerbaijan and Armenia.

At present the security warrant for all the parties of the conflict and the crucial element of the current fragile balance is the established system with its territorial, military and other components. To breach this balance without forming a more conducive and viable security system is impermissible. The current system can be taken out from the old status of the balance only in case a more stable system is formed. And it should not be one that is anticipated or promised, but rather a functional one. Eventually the security warrants do not belong only to the Artsakhi. They equally belong to the Azerbaijani and the Armenians, as quite often the defense frontline is drawn through the Azerbaijani residential areas and Armenian villages. If the military actions restart, more than a hundred thousand refugees will pour into the streets of Baku and the whole situation will push the region into the edge of a humanitarian crisis.

The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion “From the Politics of Deterrence to the Negotiation Table: Gaps in NK Peace Process”, which took place on 16 June, 2011. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations.

The round table was organized within the framework of a BSPN project.

