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Introduction

The resolution process of the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict contains many factors which require detailed discussion and a forward-looking as well as a static evaluation of the conflicting parties' positions.

This article will focus on the parties and factors which are directly or indirectly associated with the negotiating process. We will consider their influence on the process, possible ways they may change over the next five years and the different scenarios we may face in 2014. Our aim is to identify the challenges resulting from each particular scenario and determine the likelihood of achieving the best-case scenario – lasting peace.

We have chosen not to focus on the history of the conflict or address questions such as how long NK was part of a particular state, how long it enjoyed independence, the nature of historic justice and what historic injustices there have been in the history of NK. One could discuss 'whose justice is more just' and which side's rights are more 'justified' but these issues have already been debated at length.

The positions of the parties to the conflict are radically different and, in some cases, are at opposite ends of the spectrum. There is one important issue, however, which is rarely addressed by our own public or by the international community. We are talking about honesty in our dealings – both within our societies, between the negotiating states and in relation to the international community. Many critics say that honesty and politics do not mix. We believe, however, that without a certain degree of honesty built into it, the negotiating process becomes a mere imitation of itself.

Actors in the peace process

We have divided parties directly or indirectly linked to the peace talks into the following groups:

1. Direct participants in the conflict: the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) and Azerbaijan
2. Parties closely linked with the conflict: Armenia
3. Parties which officially have an indirect link with the conflict, but in practice are more closely involved: Turkey
4. Parties which are geographically near the conflict area (but do not necessarily border it): Iran and Georgia
5. Parties which act as mediators in the conflict resolution process and maintain a presence in the region: Russia, the US and EU.

Direct participants in the conflict: the NKR and Azerbaijan

Nagorno-Karabakh

Although the NKR is a key party to the conflict, this fact is often 'overlooked' by others associated with the conflict, which begs the question: what is the real situation in the NKR?

Society

We will not quote statistics on citizenship, population or society because we consider 'talking numbers' amoral, and we think it unrealistic to draw conclusions from figures and quantities.

In order to have a clear picture of prevailing public opinion, we need to consider two main age groups:

- Thirty years and under. Their attitude to conflict resolution can be summed up as follows: there is no question of choosing between living as 'citizens of an independent state or being part of another country'. They have always lived and continue to live their adult lives as citizens of an independent country and, although they have grown up with the perception of their neighbours as enemies, they do not have their own 'emotional experience' of hatred towards Azeris or Azerbaijan. Most of them have learnt about the nightmare of war from their parents' stories so their approaches differ considerably from the perceptions of those who have first hand experience of the war.

- Over thirties. They still remember the hardships of war, they are quite radical and can barely imagine a future co-existence with the Azeris. They have a heightened sense of personal security/insecurity and they will not consider the possibility of rejoining Azerbaijan.

The authorities

Their expressed opinions largely reflect the prevailing ideas in society. Since the authorities are not direct participants in the negotiating process, they are not responsible for its outcome. This gives them resources to interrupt and end the process if they are not happy with its development. This feeling is shared to some extent by the wider public.

Political forces

Their attitudes to the NKR's domestic situation, economy and the social sphere are quite varied, but they are united in their stance on the status of Karabakh, the negotiating process and its actors, and contacts with the outside world.

It is incorrect to think that Armenia has a strong influence over the NKR and even dictates certain decisions. This widely-held view is similar to the myth that Turkey can dictate certain policy decisions in Azerbaijan.

We have tried to outline the situation in the NKR without attempting to characterize political positions. We consider the issue in the following terms: unless we have a grip on the reality on the ground, we cannot plan next steps – just as it is impossible to outline the parameters of someone's future without their participation.

Azerbaijan

We must stress that we cannot describe the situation in Azerbaijan as comprehensively as that of the NKR or Armenia. It is not possible to describe a neighbouring country and its society simply by reading about it, and any contacts we have with our Azerbaijani colleagues outside the region, in third countries, cannot provide us with a full understanding of the situation there. (Unlike Azeri experts, analysts and journalists who often visit Armenia, their Armenian counterparts have not been able to visit Azerbaijan recently.)

Society

Azeri society has many different attitudes to NK and its neighbouring districts.

Refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) have a strong influence on public opinion, and have radicalized it. There are both subjective and objective reasons for this state of affairs. Objectively, they bore the brunt of the war and lost everything they had. Naturally, their attitude is quite different from that of some other members of society.

The subjective factor is the long-standing use of the refugee card by the Azerbaijani authorities as a means of achieving their political aims by artificially delaying the process of refugees' naturalization and full integration

into society. At the same time Azerbaijan has received considerable financial assistance from international organizations, donor states and other sources to improve the situation of its refugees.

The authorities

The Karabakh issue and its resolution create both challenges and new opportunities for the Azerbaijani authorities.

The challenges include:

- an almost complete 'defeat' syndrome with all its implications, that is to say, the emotions and mind-set associated with having been defeated in war
- a need to 'save face' in the national arena – one of the reasons for its ongoing military rhetoric
- a need to 'save face' in the international arena which results in aggressive tactics
- the next point is a challenge for the society and the country, but an opportunity for its leadership: maintaining the unresolved status of Karabakh – by creating and elaborating the image of the 'enemy' – gives the leadership a chance to distract people from their daily problems and other important issues in society, and hampers the country's democratic development.

The opportunities include the following:

- The authorities have used the Karabakh issue to consolidate their position and, against a backdrop of a poor state of democracy, have succeeded in tightening the elite's control over the country's major resources. However, a spontaneous change in the NK peace process might deprive the Azerbaijani leadership of its levers of control.
- The Karabakh issue and its resolution are the main factors linking Azerbaijan with Europe and opening opportunities for its integration into Europe. This point requires some clarification. Since independence Azerbaijan, in terms of its political value system, has most closely followed the development model of Central Asian states: imitating democratic processes while maintaining dynastic power in the literal sense of the word, and featuring an economic system typical of energy-rich countries. The idea that the process of 'Europeanization' of Azerbaijan derives from and serves Europe's own interests is greatly exaggerated. (Europe has been able to cooperate with Azerbaijan and dozens of other non-democratic regimes outside Europe without attempting to address the issue of conflicting value systems or the so-called 'Europeanization' issue.) At the same time there has been an increasing number of declarations by Azerbaijan that it does not need Europe (or 'Europeanization'). This brings us to the conclusion that the process of European integration (whether real or declaratory) is mainly

affected by the fact that European institutions are actively involved in the conflict resolution process around NK. One could say that Azerbaijan is being integrated into Europe in order to prevent bias in Europe's position in its role of direct or indirect mediator in the Karabakh conflict resolution process.

Political forces

Differences in opinions, positions and approaches to the issue of the NK conflict resolution are not very apparent. It is therefore difficult to decide which forces play a constructive role and which do not.

Parties closely linked with the conflict: Armenia

The international community and Azerbaijan do not fully understand Armenia's position and attitude *vis-à-vis* the NK peace process. Many from Azerbaijan and the international community suggest that Armenia might have a legal right and/or ability to represent the NKR and to achieve all kinds of agreements on the Karabakh issue. However, this approach does not reflect the situation on the ground. It is true that Armenia has some influence over Karabakh but that should not be overestimated. Even if the Armenian authorities wanted to act with complete disregard for the NKR, it could result in a situation whereby the NKR people or leadership might seek direct help from the Armenian public. This could lead to a high level of social consolidation which no leader could resist. The Armenian state leadership is fully aware of this dilemma and it is difficult to imagine that they would allow such a development.

Naturally, Armenia is not indifferent to the negotiating process and it plays an active role as:

- a guarantor of security in the NKR
- a guarantor of the NKR's self-determination (this is seen to be the only effective guarantee of lasting security for the NKR).

Unlike other parties to the Karabakh conflict – direct and indirect – Armenia has itself borne the full brunt of the hardships and losses of the war. During the hostilities Armenian towns and villages bordering Azerbaijan found themselves drawn into the conflict.

The Azerbaijani-Turkish policy of blocking and trying to exclude Armenia from regional processes cannot be considered effective for the following reasons:

- Armenia's society has not shown any willingness to sacrifice its national interests or to see either a better economic life or the well-being of their compatriots in the NKR as trading chips.
- Armenian society is becoming more radicalized because of the threat of war from Azerbaijan and its militaristic rhetoric, and by the Turkish-

Azerbaijani blockade. Azerbaijan continues to state that when it reaches a certain stage in its economic development and increases its military spending it is going to resolve the Karabakh conflict by force. Some parts of Armenian society have responded to this, saying Armenia must carry out preventive strikes before Azerbaijan achieves this level of economic strength.

- In reality a new war is not in Armenia's interests. The fact that Armenia has not yet recognized the NKR as an independent state is seen by its political elite and public as a good-will gesture to ensure the continuation of the negotiating process. However, they also insist that the moment they finally lose faith in the effectiveness of the negotiations, Azerbaijan's tough stance might force Armenia to recognize the NKR's independence.

It is worth noting that even in the very thick of internal political battles, attitudes to the Karabakh issue never become a source of major disagreement between forces at different ends of the political spectrum.

Parties with no official link to the conflict, but closely involved in practice: Turkey

Turkey does not have a formal role in the NK negotiations, despite being a member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group which oversees the negotiating process. Turkey has proved itself incapable of developing a balanced position and has come down wholeheartedly on the side of Azerbaijan. The Turkish-Azerbaijani principle 'one nation – two states' has been fully applied by Turkey in the Karabakh conflict itself, and in the process of its resolution. It is worth remembering that the Turkish-Armenian border remains closed (on the Turkish side), there are no diplomatic relations between the two countries and Turkey has openly tried to use a policy of enforcement towards Armenia since its declaration of independence.

Turkey gives several reasons for its behaviour:

- As a country committed to international norms, Turkey cannot accept a violation of the territorial integrity of a UN member state, Azerbaijan, and for this reason has taken the necessary steps towards the country violating this territorial integrity. (We shall not discuss here the objectivity of calling Armenia's actions 'a violation', but it is difficult to accept that these are the explanations given by the state which initiated the well-known actions in Cyprus and which met Russia's recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence with a large degree of tolerance, to say the least.)
- The problems of Azerbaijani refugees and IDPs have not been addressed for reasons of war. The rapid and unhindered return of refugees should be given the highest priority.

You could argue that Turkey is acting on humanitarian principles (so long as it includes the return of Armenian refugees). But the reality is that this is the same state which in 94 years has not resolved the issue of the return of Armenian refugees to their homes in Turkey and the rights of their descendants.

We could continue to list the reasons given by Turkey but the fact remains that Armenia does not consider Turkey's approach to be genuine or constructive.

The current Armenian-Turkish talks could, given a positive outcome, have a positive impact on the Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations. This process, however, is still in its infancy and may be quickly aborted if Turkey again tries to force onto the agenda a discussion of Armenia's role in the NK talks as a kind of precondition.

Parties close to the conflict zone:

Iran and Georgia

Iran

Iran has tried to take a balanced approach to the conflict both during and after the NK war. It has played a role in several mediation attempts and tried to help bring about a ceasefire. This balanced approach has been difficult for Iran, if we consider the fact that on the one hand Azerbaijan has repeatedly tried to add a religious subtext to the conflict and thus draw Iran in indirectly and, on the other hand, the part of Iran directly bordering the conflict zone consists mostly of ethnic Azeris.

Iran has repeatedly called for regional problems to be addressed only by regional actors. One gets the impression that Iran is interested in a speedy and peaceful solution achieved without the involvement of forces outside the region.

Iran's active involvement in tackling regional issues and promoting peaceful co-existence greatly diminished during its stand-off with the US under President George W. Bush. However, given recent developments in US-Iran relations, it is quite possible that Iran will embark on more decisive steps.

Georgia

Georgia is going through a difficult period, dealing with the fall-out of the five-day war in 2008, Russia's subsequent recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the country's ongoing internal political crisis.

Georgia has an interest in the resolution of the NK conflict which would create opportunities for regional development. The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict propelled Georgia to a dominant position and gave it a leading role in the region until the events of 2008. Georgia has been worried about the emergence of an Armenian-Russian military and strategic alliance, and at the same time has contributed, directly or indirectly, to Azerbaijan

and Turkey's attempts to isolate Armenia economically. Armenia's only access to the west and north is via Georgia, increasing Georgia's influence.

Nevertheless, we should note that Georgia has maintained a relatively balanced position on the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and the negotiating process.

Mediators in the peace process who maintain a presence in the region: Russia, the US and EU

The Russian Federation

For years Russia has used the NK conflict as leverage to preserve and increase its influence over Armenia and Azerbaijan. According to many experts, Russia continues to exercise the same approach, albeit more subtly than before.

In reality, however, recent developments in the region show that Russia's approach is undergoing some change. This is happening for several reasons:

- After the events in Georgia, Russia feels the need to restore its reputation in the eyes of the international community and appear as a more constructive force/actor in the region
- Since Barack Obama's election as president of the United States there has been a slight thaw in Russian-American relations. Given the existence of so many Russian-American controversies in the international arena, there have to be some issues, or at least one issue, where they can demonstrate to the rest of the world their potential for cooperation. The resolution of the NK conflict could be one such issue.
- Turkey aspires to be the principal (perhaps the only) military and strategic partner of the United States in the region, and in this regard America's direct presence in the region runs counter to Turkey's interests. Russia has also sought to prevent active American involvement in the region. On that score their interests converge, and for this overlap to find practical expression they need to show cooperation in the resolution of regional problems including, say, the NK conflict.
- Russia may also benefit economically from at least a partial resolution of the NK conflict because of a shift in Russia's economic policies in the South Caucasus. It appears that Russia is becoming aware of this fact.

At the same time Russia occasionally resorts to 'old (at times, outmoded) methods' to achieve its goals. In this respect there is a danger that the Meindorf Declaration, which played a positive role in the NK resolution process, may monopolize the process. On the other hand, Russia's over-reaction to the EU's Eastern Partnership Policy also testifies to the inertness of its old-fashioned policies.

As a result, Russia's approaches to the conflict resolution process show some positive and constructive changes but it is too early to say whether these are irreversible.

The European Union

The European Union's involvement in the South Caucasus has grown in recent years, but many of its actions can seem ambiguous.

The parties to the conflict have always considered the EU to be an embodiment of 'soft power' which enjoys a certain degree of trust and confidence in the region. This is partly because the EU acts as a buffer in the US-Russia confrontation and clash of interests in the South Caucasus.

The European Neighbourhood Policy, which suggests a rather theoretical involvement of the EU, has been superseded by the more pro-active Eastern Partnership Policy. After the events in Georgia it became clear that the EU's passive involvement can lead to unpredictable and dangerous results. However, there are several reasons why the EU has taken a less active role in the region, in particular over the issue of NK. These factors include:

- the difficulty EU members have in reaching consensus on foreign policy issues 'fatigue' caused by the on-going EU expansion
- the desire to avoid direct confrontation with Russia and a feeling that Russia has a greater understanding of the Caucasus
- problems caused by NATO's expansion to the east, many of which translate into the problem of Russia's growing intolerance of EU policies given the membership structure of both institutions
- the EU's ambiguous attitude towards Turkey and its potential membership in the EU, and the potential indirect consequences of this ambiguity for the South Caucasus region.

At the same time the EU will undoubtedly continue to increase its involvement in the South Caucasus because:

- the region provides an alternative transit route for energy supplies to Europe
- unpredictable and *force majeure* situations in the region threaten EU security
- the EU's 'younger' members have an interest in the EU's further expansion and the South Caucasus states are seen as potential candidates for such expansion.

Another factor is the large amount of trust in the EU held by the parties to the conflict, the US and Russia.

The United States

US involvement in conflict resolution in the South Caucasus has the potential to neutralize or even reduce Russia's influence in the region. The US has given considerable assistance to the South Caucasus states since their independence and was the only country apart from

Armenia to offer direct assistance to the NKR. The US, like the EU, sees the region as a potential transit route for energy supplies using existing pipelines and commissioning new supply lines. The region does not view the US as a 'soft power', both because of its current image and its ambition to create a unipolar world system. As with the EU, the US's understanding of the region is not as sophisticated as Russia's and in this respect its actions constitute both an attempt to access the Black Sea (indeed, why not have an alternative access to EU countries, even if this is controversial for Turkey?) and the Caspian Sea (based on huge US energy and military-strategic requirements), and an attempt to create a strategic relationship between Russia and Iran.

We should also bear in mind that as a result of its policy in Iraq and Afghanistan the US is no longer seen as simply 'a country over the ocean'. We should point out that the process of NATO's eastward expansion and the issues of Ukraine and Georgia's NATO membership which were mooted in that context for quite some time have exacerbated tensions between the US and Russia and have fuelled Russia's opposition towards US policies in the South Caucasus.

We conclude that although the US is a long-standing actor in the South Caucasus and, in particular, in the NK resolution process, it is premature to talk of America's role in the region as being comparable to that of Russia. The five-day war in Georgia was a case in point. However, there are currently some indications of growing US involvement in the region, in particular through its indirect brokerage of the Armenian-Turkish negotiations.

Regional and international factors which affect the NK peace process

This section will address issues which result from the parties' policies outlined in the first section, and from global processes in the rapidly changing world. These issues are or might become linked with the NK resolution process.

- Azerbaijan has been taking a tougher stance in negotiations, introducing such statements as 'we lost the first – the military – stage of the conflict, but we are winning its second, peaceful stage'. This statement contains several destructive elements: the emphasis is on the predicted increase in the country's economic development. It is also being stated quite openly that at some point Azerbaijan's military spending will equal Armenia's total budget and then the NK conflict will be resolved by force. Such behaviour justifies Armenian fears and adds to lack of confidence in the negotiations.
- The NKR has indicated that, because it is not part of the negotiations, it cannot be responsible for their outcome and so reserves the right to refuse to implement the final agreement. This message casts doubt over the effectiveness of the

negotiating process in its present format and there are fears that without the NKR's participation these negotiations could become pointless.

- Armenia may leave the negotiations because of the lack of perceived results, and/or recognize the NKR's independence. This could lead to a crisis of confidence in the negotiations. Turkey is trying to persuade Azerbaijan that there will be no progress in the Armenian-Turkish talks unless Armenia makes certain concessions over NK. This gives Azerbaijan a chance to toughen its stance in the negotiations. But there are also reasons for Azerbaijan to be apprehensive: Armenia has repeatedly stated that the NK issue is not discussed in the Armenian-Turkish talks, and there has been no evidence to the contrary.
- A plausible development in the Russian-Georgian relationship could have an impact on the NK negotiations. Russia's position and its policy would depend on whether it can 'see' Georgia as having any 'status' and can engage in a normal political dialogue with it, or whether Russia is going to 'ignore' Georgia in the South Caucasus configuration. This factor could lead to big changes and affect Russia's own influence on the NK talks.
- The change in the American administration and softening of the West's position on Iran could mean Iran will begin to pursue its own interests in regional processes and may protest any initiatives which ignore these interests. The Russian-Turkish dialogue will also have an indirect effect on NK. Depending on the content and the form of this dialogue it could either create a favourable atmosphere for the negotiating processes or, conversely, meet with opposition from the NKR, Armenia and Azerbaijan.
- The EU's Eastern Partnership Policy could have a major positive impact on the NK negotiations. But there is a danger that Russia will react aggressively to the policy and this may lead to a deterioration of the situation in the South Caucasus and have a negative impact on NK.
- It is unwise to expect the US to increase its involvement in the NK talks, given the new American administration's foreign policy priorities. However, the US has the chance to increase its influence over the talks and the region as a whole in its role as, albeit indirect, broker in the Armenian-Turkish dialogue. If the Armenian-Turkish dialogue breaks down, the country responsible would find itself in a rather unfavourable position.
- The partial recognition of Kosovo, Abkhazia and South Ossetia has set in motion international processes which could influence the NK conflict resolution process.
- The global financial crisis will also have an impact on the process. It casts doubt on the likelihood of international projects being implemented. These projects may seem to be predominantly economic, but are in fact mainly political in nature.

Nagorno-Karabakh in 2014

We need to consider three potential scenarios of the situation in NK in 2014:

- The resumption of hostilities. It makes no difference whether the war is planned and controlled by a particular party or whether it is the result of unplanned developments. In either case, the conflict would spiral out of control and turn into a regional crisis which would draw in countries other than those directly involved in the conflict.
- A continuation of the status quo. This scenario is preferable to the first one but it contains many challenges for each of the parties. We should bear in mind that the existence of lines of separation in itself hampers the natural development of processes.
- A peace agreement. This is obviously the best scenario and to discuss it we should establish some fundamental principles which would guarantee true peace or at least create a process which would bring us closer to that reality. For the peace to be lasting, the agreement must not create a situation with the potential to trigger fresh conflict. In our view these principles are:
 - a. establish peace with the participation of the parties and their full understanding of the importance of the process
 - b. ensure the peace brings with it prospects of development
 - c. provide guarantees of peace which contain the seeds of confidence and long-term cooperation.

Essential principles for achieving peace

The history of the negotiating process shows that the conflicting parties still lack real will to resolve the conflict. Hardly any attempts have been made to work with societies (in some cases, none at all). Moreover, we could claim that the reverse is true: societies experience constant pressure from propaganda and honest and open discussion is rare. The situation is particularly bad in Azerbaijan and the NKR. Especially worrying is the fact that at times even human suffering is politicized under the guise of protecting human rights and/or displaying a humane approach. Some of these approaches could torpedo the very process of resolution.

Let us start with the premise that the NK conflict resolution process must be based on the following hypotheses:

- It is unrealistic to try to go back to the situation which existed under the USSR. This must mean that any attempt to return NK to Azerbaijan is doomed to fail. In our opinion, all those who suggest this in public are more than aware of its hopelessness. The only solution is to be honest and to accept the situation as it is.

- It is unrealistic to try and equate the five districts which form a security belt around NK (with the exception of Lachin and Kelbajar) with the territory of NK itself. It should be made absolutely clear that it is impossible to have sustainable peace without a proper understanding that these five districts will only act as a security belt until there is a final resolution of the conflict and NK's status, and its residents are guaranteed full security. Both NK and Azerbaijan need to understand this.
- It is unrealistic to try to make Armenians and Azeris live together – in Baku, Sumgait, Yerevan, Stepanakert, Shushi or elsewhere – either by force or with the help of peacekeepers. The ability to live together can only arise from trust which develops over time and is the result of conflict resolution. It is impossible to make them live side-by-side and simply hope that this will not spark a new conflict. It would be a serious crime – against both refugees and the local population – if either side were to try to earn political dividends at the expense of their lives. It is unrealistic to expect refugees to return to NK. At best we could talk about the return of refugees to the five districts which form a security belt around NK, but even this would be subject to NK's final status. In addition, the districts would have to be regarded as a demilitarized zone at the very least. If, following all the processes outlined above and after the signing of a peace agreement, refugees from the five districts around NK are given the right to return, it is only natural that a peace agreement should improve the situation of Azeri refugees from Armenia, Armenian refugees from districts currently controlled by Azerbaijan, and Azeri refugees from NK, Lachin and Kelbajar. In our view there should be some general principles applied to those refugees who 'cannot return yet', and with the parties' consent it might be necessary to achieve a separate compensatory agreement on this issue. We should not rule out a scenario in which each side, with help from the international community, shares the difficulties and problems of their compatriot refugees, resident on their soil, by giving them substantial and well-managed assistance.
- It is unrealistic to think that it is possible to resolve the NK conflict and establish guarantees for stable and lasting peace in the region without making provisions for a functioning land communication between Armenia and NK. The issue of the Lachin district should be considered in this context given the fact that there are new settlers currently living in this district.
- It is unrealistic to discuss the fate of the Kelbajar district without discussing territories formerly within the administrative borders of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region but currently controlled by Azerbaijan. The issues of these territories and that of the Kelbajar district should be considered simultaneously at the very least.
- It is unrealistic to expect peacekeepers to maintain a lasting presence in the region following a peace deal. It would be more natural, with mutual agreement (so that neither side would suffer additional losses) to try and delineate Azerbaijan's and NK's borders along the most convenient ground lines which correspond to the geographical terrain/topography, which would minimise the likelihood of border skirmishes.

Conclusion

In our view the following actions could result in an agreement which offers the prospect of lasting peace in the region by 2014:

- Vital wide-ranging and thorough work with societies (especially in Azerbaijan and NK). The work should be carried out by local authorities both with the help of international (European) institutions and independently from them. International mechanisms that help prevent the creation and elaboration of an enemy image should be set in motion.
- Immediate and comprehensive engagement of the NKR's civil society and leadership - irrespective of NK's political status. The peace process is more likely to produce results if the NKR returns to the negotiating table as soon as possible.
- Establish direct NKR-Azerbaijan contact. This can be in any format.
- The NKR, Azerbaijan and Armenia should stop playing off different centres of power in the region against each other.
- If Armenia and Azerbaijan submit a joint application to the EU to give the NKR a place and role in the Eastern Partnership, this could improve the NK conflict resolution process.
- Turkey could play a positive role provided it does not make its relations with Armenia conditional on progress in the NK resolution process. Any step or statement by Turkey can cause a negative reaction in Armenia and NK, awakening painful memories of the past and radicalizing public opinion.

We do not share pessimistic assertions that there is no prospect of a speedy resolution of the NK conflict. We are even less inclined to accept the prospect of the long-term existence of lines of separation in the region.

However, we are concerned that there is a real 'deficit' of the honesty required for a lasting peace agreement in three key areas:

- a. within the societies themselves
- b. during negotiations with opponents
- c. in dealings with the international community.

Finally, we believe that democratization of the South Caucasus and its integration into Europe could make the most significant contributions to resolving the NK conflict.