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## **Belgium working to end Nagorno-Karabakh conflict**

Euractiv (30.04.2015) - In his capacity as Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Didier Reynders visited both Armenia and Azerbaijan this week, with a focus on their ongoing conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Reynders, who otherwise serves as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium, led a delegation of 60 businessmen to the two countries.

Speaking in Baku on 28 April, Reynders said he was concerned about recent violence in Nagorno-Karabakh (see background).

"We have discussed the situation with the neighboring country, Armenia, and the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh, because we are concerned about the incidents on the frontline," said the minister. "We will be glad to see certain progress in negotiations with the two neighboring countries. Of course, the settlement of the conflict by military means is unacceptable, the problem should be solved within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group," Reynders added, according to the local press.

The [Minsk Group](#) spearheads the OSCE's efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It is co-chaired by France, the Russian Federation, and the United States.

Reynders visited the Alley of Martyrs in Baku and paid tribute to the 126 victims, killed by the Red Army in January 1990, when the Soviet authorities deployed its forces, under the pretext of "preventing ethnic violence". Mikhail Gorbachev, who was the the USSR's leader at that time, offered excuses to Azerbaijan in 1995, saying that this move had been "the biggest mistake" of his political career.

Reynders is reported to have been impressed by the situation of the displaced persons in the country. The occupation by Armenia of Azeri territory, and the tensions between the two neighbours, created a million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

"This is my first visit, and I know that you have about one million people who came from Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh," said Reynders. "I believe that it is important to meet with refugees and IDPs while visiting the country. It is good to understand the scale of this problem. Because when we accept refugees in Europe, we have big debates. If you have one million displaced persons, I understand that this is a completely different situation."

"We adhere to the position of settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the territorial integrity of the country," Reynders reportedly said.

In Baku, Reynders also discussed bilateral cooperation and democratic values. He said that the energy sector is one of the priorities of Belgium in bilateral relations with Azerbaijan.

In Yerevan, official statements made it clear that ministerial level contacts in Paris were preparing another opportunity for the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia to meet over Nagorno-Karabakh. Their last talks were held last October, also in Paris.

In Armenia, Reynders said that Belgium would continue to work for the normalisation of relations between Yerevan, and Baku and Ankara. Armenia and Turkey have no diplomatic relations due to their differences over the events in 1915, which the European Parliament and several EU countries now call a "genocide".

In Armenia, Reynders visited the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex to pay tribute at the memory of the victims.

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## **OSCE Chair, in Baku, calls for intensified peace talks on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, welcomes establishment of OSCE Project Co-ordinator's Office**

OSCE (02.06.2014) – The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Swiss Foreign Minister Didier Burkhalter, started his official trip to the South Caucasus today with a visit to Baku, where he discussed with President Ilham Aliyev new aspects of co-operation between the OSCE and Azerbaijan, and called for implementing tension-reducing measures regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The visit also included meetings with Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov, the Speaker of Parliament Ogtay Asadov and representatives of political parties and the civil society. Speaking about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Burkhalter encouraged President Aliyev to move step by step towards a peaceful settlement. He would welcome intensified negotiations and a next presidential meeting as a starting point of a structured process leading towards a peaceful solution, Burkhalter said.

Burkhalter expressed his regrets that 20 years after the 1994 ceasefire, violent incidents at the Line of Contact and the international border remain a frequent phenomenon. He called on the sides to strictly adhere to the

ceasefire agreement, to implement an incident investigation mechanism, to encourage people-to-people contact and to agree on further confidence-building measures.

Burkhalter reiterated the full support of the Swiss Chairmanship for the work of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs and his Personal Representative, Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk, in facilitating the negotiating process.

The work of the newly-established Project Co-ordinator's Office in Baku was another key subject of the discussions. Burkhalter said he hoped for close co-operation between Azerbaijan's government and the Project Co-ordinator which will take full account of the needs and priorities of the country and cover all three security dimensions: the politico-military, economic and environmental, as well as the human dimension.

The Chairperson-in-Office was accompanied by his Special Representative for the South Caucasus, Ambassador Angelo Gnaedinger, his Personal Representative for the conflict dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference, Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk and by the Project Co-ordinator in Baku, Ambassador Alexis Chahtahtinsky.

Later today, Burkhalter will depart for Georgia where he will hold high-level talks tomorrow. He will conclude his visit to the region on 4 June in Yerevan.

For PDF attachments or links to sources of further information, please visit: <http://www.osce.org/cio/119395>

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## **Resettling Syrian Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh could provoke war**

Sundays Zaman (12.08.2012) - As the Syrian crisis reaches the level of a civil war, it is not only Syria's neighbors who are being negatively affected by the continuing violence in the country but other nations as well.

While a number of concerns have emerged, especially over the flow of Syrian refugees to neighboring countries including Turkey, it is Armenia's impulsive offer to resettle Syrian Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh -- Azerbaijani territory controlled by ethnic Armenian separatists with the support of the Republic of Armenia -- that has become a nightmare for Azerbaijan, Turkey's closest ally in the region, and that threatens to damage peace negotiations in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

"Resettlement of Syrian Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh is a highly provocative plan on the part of Armenia, and [aims to achieve] nothing more than gaining a dividend [in the conflict settlement]," said Rasim Musabeyov, Azerbaijani deputy and political analyst, in an interview with Sunday's Zaman on Thursday.

Politicians from both Armenia and separatist Nagorno-Karabakh have recently offered a helping hand to ethnic Armenians escaping the raging violence in Syria, welcoming their settlement in the Armenian-backed breakaway region Nagorno-Karabakh.

"Nagorno-Karabakh is ready to accept Syrian Armenians and provide them with an opportunity to study in Artsakh [the word used by Armenians for Karabakh] free of charge, as well as providing them with accommodation," authorities of separatist Nagorno-Karabakh have reportedly said in an address to Armenian youths.

Speaking to Sunday's Zaman, Mehmet Fatih Öztarsu, analyst for research portal Strategic Outlook for the Russia-Caucasus region, remarked, "Resettlement [of Syrian Armenians in the region] is one of the most influential and important steps for changing Nagorno-Karabakh's demographic structure, and it will substantially affect the status quo [in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict]."

According to Öztarsu, bringing ethnic Armenians from foreign countries and resettling them in Nagorno-Karabakh is of great importance to Yerevan, as the adaptation of the newly arrived Armenians to these territories and provision of their basic needs, encouraging them to settle into the area long-term, would strengthen Armenia's claim in peace negotiations in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. "Even if the resettlement project is not successful, the initiation is already a resolute step."

Nagorno-Karabakh, an enclave located within Azerbaijan and predominantly populated by ethnic Armenians, together with seven Azeri-populated adjacent territories, was occupied by Armenian forces under the command of Serzh Sargsyan, now president of Armenia, in a bloody six-year war (1988-1994), leaving 30,000 dead and nearly a million displaced. Since then, negotiations to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have been ongoing under the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, established in 1992. The conflict, however, remains stalemated, as there has been no progress in negotiations. Azerbaijan and Armenia are each insisting on conditions that are unacceptable to the other: Armenia demands the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh and refuses to withdraw its troops from the occupied territories unless the full sovereignty of the region is ensured, while Azerbaijan insists on upholding its territorial integrity, promising that it will be open to discussion and possible redetermination of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh after the withdrawal of troops from its territories.

Speaking in an interview with Sunday's Zaman, Elnur Soltanov from the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy has said that Armenian settlements established in the wider Caucasus region from the neighboring countries in the Middle East over the last two centuries could easily become a source of friction between immigrant Armenians and local Azerbaijanis, as the demographic balance begins to change.

Discussing the rise of Armenian nationalism that led to the outbreak of armed warfare in Nagorno-Karabakh in late 80s, Soltanov said, "Therefore, continuing on this sensitive path is unwise from a historical perspective."

Armenians themselves have attributed their revolt of the 1980s partly to the changing demographic balance in Nagorno-Karabakh, favoring Azerbaijanis. After warfare ceased in 1994 with the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven adjacent territories, Azerbaijanis were expelled from the territories, leaving them empty. For a long time the Armenian government has been striving to increase the Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding regions.

Promising to accommodate Armenians fleeing the Syrian violence in Nagorno-Karabakh is an extension of a set strategic course aimed for emergence of tension in the region, Azerbaijani political analyst and editor-in-chief of Caucasus International Zaur Shiryev has said in remarks to Sunday's Zaman.

Arsen Kharatyan of Voice of America's Armenian service, who has previously lived and worked in Syria, says, however, that the process of resettling Syrian-Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh "should be viewed as a wider regionalization of the Syrian crisis, involving Armenia, [separatist] Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan in the ongoing proxy war." Kharatyan, however, expresses doubts that it could become a cause of renewed armed conflict between the parties.

For the Armenian government, as well as certain groups within the Diaspora, says Kharatyan, the priority regarding the Syrian Armenian community is "to provide them with basic security."

Explaining the controversy both in Armenia and among the Syrian Armenians as to whether the community should resettle in Armenia or stay in Aleppo, and other cities of Syria, and become part of the ongoing civil war Kharatyan said, "If the conflict continues to escalate, Armenia, a country of 3 million, may have an influx of 60,000 refugees in a short period of time," Kharatyan said.

Analysis in the Armenian media suggests that without sufficient international support for the resettlement of the growing number of refugees, Armenia is not free to shelter them where and how they please.

Shiriyev notes, however, that the Armenian government will be incapable of effectively implementing the resettlement process.

"Only after many challenges to Armenian society did the Armenian government amend the citizenship law, on July 26, allowing Syrian and Lebanese citizens of Armenian origin to obtain passports from the country's embassies abroad," Shiriyev said. He also claimed that Syrian Armenians who are living in relatively good conditions reject the notion of resettling in Armenia as an economically tougher situation. "In this case, the propaganda of resettling Syrian Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh might just be a tool in the campaign of self-recognition," Shiriyev noted. Furthermore, he stated, it will not negatively affect the continuing conflict resolution process as there has been no progress anyway -- but Baku should be persistent in continuing these efforts within the framework of international organizations, particularly the OSCE Minsk Group.

Azerbaijan calls the resettling of Syrian Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh illegal. For more than two decades, since the end of the bloody conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1994, it has struggled to regain its lost territories through the negotiations within the OSCE Minsk Group.

Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry has expressed concerns over Armenia's offer to settle Armenian families fleeing Syria in Nagorno-Karabakh, calling on international organizations -- including the UN Security Council, OSCE and Minsk Group co-chairs -- to remember the monitoring of illegal settlements carried out in Nagorno-Karabakh by the Minsk Group, and urging sensitivity on this issue.

"The monitoring [conducted by the OSCE Minsk Group] concluded that Armenia is employing an illegal settlement policy in Nagorno-Karabakh and other occupied territories of Azerbaijan. The international community must prevent the continuation of this policy," a statement from the Foreign Ministry reads.

OSCE Minsk Group co-chair nations regularly express their commitment to a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, emphasizing that only a peaceful negotiated settlement will allow the region to move beyond the status quo toward a secure and prosperous future.

"Armenians are well aware of the growing consensus that the status quo in Nagorno-Karabakh is not acceptable," Soltanov said, adding that when the international community repeatedly invokes the notion of "moving beyond the status quo" they don't mean a change for the worse. "It is utterly provoking that the current unacceptable consensus created by Armenia's demands, involving the ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijanis, is now made worse by plans to settle more Armenians from Syria, possibly in the homes

of expelled Azerbaijanis," Soltanov concluded, underlining that the issue of resettlement of Syrian Armenians is a threat to the negotiation process.

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## **Armenian authorities must protect free speech and ensure safety for Azerbaijani film festival organisers**

Amnesty International (25.04.2012) - Following violent attacks on civil society activists attempting to hold a festival of Azerbaijani films in Armenia, Amnesty International has called on the Armenian authorities to carry out a prompt and impartial investigation into the attacks and to bring those responsible to justice.

The organisation is deeply concerned by the Armenian authorities' failure to protect festival organisers from attacks intended to prevent them from showing the Azerbaijani films, and is urging the authorities to make appropriate arrangements to ensure the organisers can safely go ahead with the festival.

"Stop" film festival is intended to educate Armenians about Azerbaijani culture in an attempt to start bridging the divide between Armenia and Azerbaijan, who have been in dispute over sovereignty of the Nagorno-Karabakh since a conflict in the early 1990s. Both governments regularly stoke nationalist sentiment against the other country for political reasons.

On 12 April the festival was cancelled in Gyumri, north-west Armenia, after dozens of protesters blocked the festival venue and physically assaulted Giorgi Vanyan, the festival organiser and chairman of the local Caucasus Centre for Peace Making Initiatives. He was prevented from leaving the city by protestors and forced to publicly announce the cancellation of the festival. On the same day, Giorgi Vanyan published a statement in which he said he had received threats from the local Armenian authorities.

Following the cancellation of the film festival in Gyumri, the organisers announced plans to hold the festival at the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (HCA) office in Vanadzor, northern Armenia, on 17 April.

However, one day before the festival, approximately 200 people including students, political activists, former military personnel and representatives of the local administration gathered in front of the HCA office. The protestors were reportedly led by Yerkarapah, a union of veterans from the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, and shouted, "traitors", "shame" and "Turks". They demanded the cancellation of the event.

Some protestors then forced their way into the HCA office. Artur Sakunts, director of the HCA, told Amnesty International that protestors vandalised office equipment and shouted threats and abusive language at staff.

HCA staff informed the protestors that organisers had postponed the festival. However the protestors demanded the cancellation of the event and threw eggs and rocks at the office. Several office windows were broken and one of the employees' was injured when a rock hit his leg.

Several police officers accompanied the protestors and were present throughout the protest, but did not take any action to intervene to ensure the safety of the staff members or to stop acts of violence. Artur Sakunts told Amnesty International that employees of the local administration and at least four police officers were present at the scene, but they simply watched as the attacks on the HCA office continued. The

organisation also telephoned the Vanadzor Police Station as soon as people gathered outside the office asking for an increased police presence, but additional police officers only arrived several hours later, after the crowd had dispersed.

Local police have started an investigation into the 16 April incident; however the organisers have concerns regarding the impartiality of the investigation given the political nature of the case and the prejudicial statements made by the authorities in charge of the investigation. On 17 April the Lori regional prosecutor was quoted by the press as saying "throwing stones and eggs is a form of civic protest" and that the attack on the NGO did not constitute public disorder or an action that would merit police intervention.

Amnesty International reminds the Armenian authorities that they have a positive duty under international human rights law to protect those seeking to peacefully exercise their right to freedom of expression from attempts to disrupt them by those who object to their messages. By failing to protect film festival organisers from attack the Armenian authorities have failed in their international obligations to guarantee freedom of expression to all citizens, even when such expression is perceived as controversial.

### **Background**

The Caucasus Centre for Peace Making Initiatives, based in Yerevan, had in the past made several attempts to organise Azerbaijani Film Festivals in 2009, 2010 and 2011. Each time, the event was cancelled because of security concerns and allegations that pressure had been applied on organisers and venue owners. The 2012 festival consisted of four short films made in Azerbaijan in 2007 and 2008 of a non-political nature.

Armenia and Azerbaijan remain locked in a dispute over the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Following the collapse of Soviet Union the simmering conflict with Azerbaijan exploded into outright war resulting in the deaths of thousands and displacement of hundreds of thousands of ordinary civilians. Local authorities in the Nagorno-Karabakh region declared unilateral independence in 1991 and have maintained de facto autonomy with a fragile cease-fire coming into effect in 1994.

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## **Joint statement by the heads of delegation of the Minsk Group Co-Chair Countries and the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan**

OSCE (06.12.2011) / HRWF (06.12.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - On the occasion of the OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Vilnius, the Heads of Delegation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries (Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergei Lavrov, Secretary of State of the United States Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Minister for European Affairs of France Jean Leonetti) and the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov and Foreign Minister of Armenia Edward Nalbandian reaffirmed the importance of reaching a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Recalling the November 2008 Moscow Declaration, as well as their countries' statements at the OSCE Ministerial Council meetings in Helsinki (2008) and Athens (2009) and at the OSCE Summit in Astana (2010), the five Heads of Delegation agreed on the need to continue the negotiating process in the format of the OSCE Minsk Group and to improve the climate for making progress towards a peaceful settlement. As one of the steps in this direction, they agreed that further efforts should be made to work on the details of the mechanism to investigate ceasefire violations, which resulted from the

joint statement of Presidents Aliyev, Sargsian, and Medvedev at the March 2011 Sochi summit.

Noting the May 2011 statement of their Presidents at Deauville, which urged Armenia and Azerbaijan to finalize the Basic Principles for the Peaceful Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, the Heads of Delegation of the Minsk Group Co-Chair Countries expressed regret that the parties have been unable to take this decisive step. The three Heads of Delegation reiterated that there can be no military solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and that the United Nations Charter, the Principles of the Helsinki Final Act, and the elements outlined in the joint statements of their Presidents at L'Aquila in July 2009 and Muskoka in June 2010 offer the way for all sides to move beyond the unacceptable status quo to reach a peaceful settlement. In light of the intensive negotiations conducted since the 2007 OSCE Ministerial Council in Madrid, including at the highest level, the three Heads of Delegation urged the parties to give further careful consideration to the proposals that the Co-Chair countries have provided to them.

The Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia expressed their appreciation for the efforts of the Co-Chair countries, including the personal engagement of Presidents Medvedev, Obama, and Sarkozy, in assisting their countries to reach a framework for a comprehensive peace settlement. They informed the Heads of Delegation of the Co-Chair countries that their Presidents are ready to meet again jointly in the near future under the auspices of the Co-Chair countries to continue their direct dialogue, building upon recent experience, on how to bring peace, stability, and prosperity to their peoples.

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## **'Frozen Conflict' between Azerbaijan and Armenia begins to boil**

By Ellen Barry

The New York Times (31.05.2011) / HRWF (01.06.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - BAKU, Azerbaijan — In a mostly empty Soviet-era building here on a recent morning, a 29-year-old woman pressed her eye against the scope of a sniper rifle, brown hair spilling over her shoulder, and took aim at virtual commandos darting between virtual trees.

Gathered around her were fellow students — a decommissioned soldier, teenage boys with whispery mustaches, a 34-year-old communications worker in Islamic hijab. When sniper training was offered here in April, by an organization that provides courses on military preparation, the classes were a sensation, attracting three times as many students as the instructors could handle.

The logic behind this can be traced to a grievance that festers below the surface of everyday life, permeating virtually every conversation about this country's future.

Since the early 1990s, Azerbaijan has been trying to regain control of Nagorno-Karabakh, a predominantly ethnic Armenian enclave within its borders, and secure the return of ethnic Azeris who were forced from their homes by war. A cease-fire has held since 1994, and officials remain engaged in internationally mediated negotiations with Armenia, a process that will receive a burst of attention this month when the two sides meet in Kazan, Russia.

But the window for a breakthrough is narrow, and people here say their patience is gone.

"I'd rather go to war than wait another 20 years," said Shafag Ismailova, 34, a student in the sniper course, who fled the Zangelan region outside Nagorno-Karabakh, one of seven

adjacent territories that are under Armenian control. Asked about war, her friend Shafag Amrahova, a recent law school graduate, did not hesitate.

"War is bad for everyone," she said evenly. "But sometimes the situation demands it."

It is tempting to forget about the "frozen conflicts." The enclaves of Nagorno-Karabakh, Transdniestria in Moldova, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia are among the most headache-inducing legacies of the Soviet Union. The Soviets granted them a sort of semi-statehood, a status that ceased to exist just as nationalism flared in the ideological void. But the 2008 war in Georgia serves as a reminder of how quickly and terribly they can come unfrozen.

One of the reasons Nagorno-Karabakh has not is that neither party has an incentive to fight. Armenia controls the territories, so it is interested in maintaining the status quo. Azerbaijan sees little way forward: though it could easily drive out Armenian forces, Russia could send its army to help Armenia, its ally in a regional defense alliance, just as it did in South Ossetia.

But conditions have been shifting, slowly but surely, in a dangerous direction. Negotiations mediated by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe faltered last year, leaving a "basic principles agreement" that was five years in the making unsigned by either side. Both countries are engaged in a steep military buildup; Azerbaijan, by far the richer of the two, has increased defense spending twentyfold since 2003, according to the International Crisis Group.

With frustration building, threats of war have become so entwined with negotiations that it is difficult to say where one begins and the other ends.

"There is no guarantee that tomorrow or the day after tomorrow a war between Azerbaijan and Armenia won't start," Ali M. Hasanov, a senior presidential aide here, said in an interview. "It's peaceful coexistence that we need, not a war. We need peaceful development. But nothing will replace territorial integrity and the sovereignty of Azerbaijan. If necessary we are ready to give our lives for territorial integrity."

He said Baku had been bitterly disappointed by international mediation efforts. "The United States, France and Russia do not do what they promised," he said. "America now thinks Afghanistan and Iraq are more important — and North Africa, and the missile defense shield in Europe — than such regional conflicts as Nagorno-Karabakh."

Among the forces driving Baku are refugees who have spent nearly two decades in limbo. The United Nations says there are 586,013 — 7 percent of Azerbaijan's population, which is one of the highest per capita displacement rates in the world, according to the International Displacement Monitoring Centre.

Though conditions vary widely and some resettlement is now taking place, a visit to a dormitory in Baku found children growing up in squalor. Roughly 100 refugees were living along a dank, fetid hallway, on one floor of a former office building. Three rough, foul-smelling holes in the concrete floor served as toilets for 21 families, residents said. The hallway was open to the elements, exposing residents to bitter cold in the winter. In the summer, mosquitoes breed in stagnant water in the building's basement, rising in a cloud to the floors above them, they said.

"They cannot stand it anymore, they want war," said Jamila, 41, of her neighbors. "They don't believe the promises anymore."

Just then, a man took her aside, rebuking her for speaking to Western journalists who could, he warned, be pro-Armenian. "Our children look at other houses, they see that

other people live well, and they are ashamed," she said when she returned, refusing to give her last name. "Write that the cursed Armenians are guilty of this."

In this charged atmosphere, Nagorno-Karabakh has become "the one issue on which there is total social consensus," said Tabib Huseynov, a political analyst based in Baku. A visitor here a few years ago would have heard "Karabakh or Death," a rap anthem that accuses the United States, Russia, Turkey and Iran of turning a blind eye, exhorting the world to "either put an end to this, or stand aside."

Cease-fire violations — every year, snipers kill roughly 30 people on either side of the so-called line of contact — can take on huge proportions. In March, Azerbaijan announced that an Armenian sniper had killed a 9-year-old Azeri boy, Fariz Badalov. Though Armenia's president denied that his forces were responsible, Azeri television featured the boy's pitiful life story. One broadcast noted that the single bullet that crossed the line of contact that day was the one that lodged in the boy's head.

The story inspired Valid Gardashly, a publicist for the Voluntary Military Patriotic Sports-Technical Association, which offers military training from a headquarters in Baku that is reminiscent of a V.F.W. post. The organization sketched out a plan for a 45-day course that would include sniper training, free of charge for about half the students.

"We thought we had to do something," he said. "We are not preparing for war. But this was a poor boy — what did he do wrong? He was not a soldier. He was just watching cows."

The course touched a nerve — both in Armenia, where some expressed outrage at the idea, and in Azerbaijan, where an overflow crowd was winnowed down to the 32 most promising marksmen. One who made the cut, a 15-year-old boy, offered his own reason for taking the class: "I am getting ready to fight in Karabakh." Ms. Ismailova, one of the students, looked anxious as she listened to him. She, too, grew up among Karabakh refugees. But the younger ones are much more ardent, she said.

"These young guys, they have been waiting their whole lives," she said. "We had a genocide, and no one helps us. Not America, not Russia."

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## **Joint statement on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, by the Presidents of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair Countries at the G-8 Summit**

OSCE (26.05.2011) / HRWF (30.05.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Joint Statement on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict by Dmitry Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, Barack Obama, President of the United States of America and Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic

At the Deauville Summit of the Eight, May 26, 2011

We, the Presidents of the OSCE Minsk Group's Co-Chair countries -- France, the Russian Federation, and the United States of America -- are convinced the time has arrived for all the sides to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to take a decisive step towards a peaceful settlement.

We reiterate that only a negotiated settlement can lead to peace, stability, and reconciliation, opening opportunities for regional development and cooperation. The use

of force created the current situation of confrontation and instability. Its use again would only bring more suffering and devastation, and would be condemned by the international community. We strongly urge the leaders of the sides to prepare their populations for peace, not war.

As a result of efforts by the parties and the Co-Chair countries at all levels, significant progress has been made. The latest version of the Basic Principles, as discussed in Sochi on March 5, lays a just and balanced foundation for the drafting of a comprehensive peace settlement. This document, based on the Helsinki Final Act and elements outlined in our joint declarations in L'Aquila in July 2009 and Muskoka in June 2010, provides a way for all sides to move beyond the unacceptable status quo.

We therefore call upon the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to demonstrate their political will by finalizing the Basic Principles during their upcoming summit in June. Further delay would only call into question the commitment of the sides to reach an agreement. Once an agreement has been reached, we stand ready to witness the formal acceptance of these Principles, to assist in the drafting of the peace agreement, and then to support its implementation with our international partners.

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## **Three Armenian soldiers killed in Nagorno-Karabakh**

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) (03.05.2011) / HRWF (04.05.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Three Armenian soldiers were killed in skirmishes along the main Armenian-Azerbaijani "line of contact" around the breakaway Azerbaijani region of Nagorno-Karabakh, military authorities in Stepanakert say.

Karabakh's ethnic Armenian Defense Army said on May 1 that one of the soldiers, Vazgen Bakhshian, was shot dead on April 29, while the other two died the next day at unspecified sections of the front line.

The other victims were not identified. A statement from Karabakh military officials said the deadly shootings were the result of cease-fire violations by Azerbaijani forces.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry was quick to condemn the deaths and accuse Baku of torpedoing international efforts to bolster the shaky cease-fire regime in the conflict zone.

"This behavior deserves the most severe condemnation by the international community," a ministry statement issued on April 30 said.

Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry rejected the accusations on May 2.

"Twenty percent of Azerbaijan's territory is occupied by the armed forces of Armenia, and the Armenian side's accusations are therefore inappropriate," ministry spokesman Elman Abdullayev said.

Citing unnamed military sources in Yerevan, the tert.am news service reported on April 30 that the Armenian and Karabakh-Armenian militaries had been ordered to launch retaliatory "punitive actions" against Azerbaijani troops.

Davit Jamalian, a military expert close to the Armenian Defense Ministry, said on May 2 that three Azerbaijani soldiers had been shot and killed in recent days.

But the Azerbaijani military has reported no casualties from the Karabakh front line recently.

Deadly exchanges of fire at various front-line sections appear to have become more frequent in recent years, prompting growing concern from the international community.

During their most recent visit to the region, the U.S., Russian, and French mediators co-chairing the OSCE Minsk Group presented the conflicting parties with what they called a "draft mechanism for investigation of incidents along the front lines with the participation of all sides."

No details of that draft have been made public.

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## **Azerbaijan threatens to shoot down Karabakh planes**

Yerevan (16.03.2011) / HRWF (17.03.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Azerbaijan has threatened to shoot down civilian planes flying to Nagorno-Karabakh if the sole civilian airport in the disputed region reopens as planned.

The Karabakh Armenian leadership dismissed the threat, saying that the first commercial flights between the territory and Armenia in two decades would start as planned in May.

Arif Mammadov, the director of Azerbaijan's Civil Aviation Administration, said the Azerbaijani government warned the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) last October that it did not authorize any flights to Karabakh.

"We notified that the airspace over Karabakh is closed," Mammadov said, according to the APA news agency. "The law on aviation envisages the physical destruction of airplanes landing in that territory."

Mammadov said Baku sent another letter to the ICAO recently warning that the disputed region's airspace was closed and "at the disposal of Azerbaijan's Air Force."

"We asked the ICAO to notify the opposing side in order to prevent negative incidents," he said, adding that the Montreal-based body forwarded that letter to Armenia.

Bako Sahakian, the president of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh republic, condemned the threat and warned through a spokesman that any attempt to thwart the planned flights would meet with an "adequate response" from the Karabakh Armenian military.

"If Azerbaijan resorts to such actions, it will trigger unpredictable developments," Sahakian's press secretary, Davit Babayan, told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

"Such threats do not scare us, they only discredit Azerbaijan," Babayan said. "We will go ahead with exploiting our airport as planned."

Flights to and from the airport, located 8 kilometers east of Stepanakert, were discontinued in 1991 amid intensifying armed clashes in and around Karabakh that degenerated into a full-scale Armenian-Azerbaijani war.

Transport communication between the territory and the outside world has since been carried out by land, via Armenia.

The Karabakh government decided in 2009 to reopen the airport, severely damaged during the 1991-94 war. Its \$3 million reconstruction is now nearing completion.

A regular flight service between Stepanakert and Yerevan is scheduled to be launched on May 9, a public holiday in Karabakh that will mark the 19th anniversary of a major military victory over Azerbaijan.

Dmitry Atbashian, head of the local civil aviation authority, assured journalists earlier this year that flight security "will be ensured 100 percent," despite the airport's proximity to the heavily militarized "line of contact" separating Armenian and Azerbaijani forces.

Atbashian also announced that the Stepanakert-Yerevan flights would be carried out by a newly established Karabakh airline, Artsakh Air. He said its fleet of aircraft would consist of three Canadian-made CRJ200 passenger jets.

Nagorno-Karabakh is an Armenian-majority enclave located inside Azerbaijani territory.

Armenia and Azerbaijan fought a six-year war over the territory that ended with an uneasy cease-fire in 1994. But its final status has never been resolved, and frequent skirmishes are reported between Armenian and Azerbaijani troops.

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## **Karabakh conflict still awaits its breakthrough moment**

By Alman Mir Ismail

Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume 8, Issue 46 (08.03.2011) / HRWF (09.03.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - The March 5 meeting in Sochi between the Armenian, Azerbaijan and Russian presidents, Serj Sarkysyan, Ilham Aliyev and Dmitry Medvedev, respectively, resulted in a joint declaration, but once again failed to produce the much-expected breakthrough on the resolution of the Karabakh conflict. This was the eighth meeting of these state officials in such a trilateral format.

The joint declaration merely referred to the previous agreement between the two sides, reached in Astrakhan on October 27, 2010 regarding the full exchange of all prisoners of war. The document urged both sides to speed up and complete the exchange process and solve all other disagreements through peaceful means, as well as investigating possible ceasefire violations under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk group.

After the end of the trilateral meeting the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, met the co-chairs of the Minsk group to discuss the Karabakh conflict and further steps towards its peaceful resolution.

It is evident that President Medvedev, who has been closely involved in this conflict's peace process in the past two years, has put his personal reputation on the table. Many observers believe that the keys to the resolution of the conflict are in the Kremlin. In fact, the close military alliance between Russia and Armenia provides hope that at some point Russia can indeed play a constructive role in the resolution of the conflict and urge Armenia to make certain compromises. This would break the deadlock, which appeared in this 22-year old conflict, earn Moscow certain political dividends and image of a peacemaker as well as further drawing Azerbaijan closer to Russia.

Yet, despite the proactive participation by President Medvedev in this process, no significant results have been obtained. Armenia still refuses to accept the so-called "renewed Madrid principles," a proposal made by the Minsk group in 2009 on the basic

principles of the resolution of the Karabakh conflict. Azerbaijan has already expressed its general consent with this document, which envisages the gradual return of the occupied Azerbaijani territories to Azerbaijan, return of the displaced persons to their homes, resumption of trade links, guaranteeing of the security of the local population and eventual determination of the status of Karabakh by the free expression of the will of the population.

The absence of any reaction from Yerevan towards this document frustrates both the mediators and official Baku. During the OSCE summit in Astana in December 2010, mediators urged both sides not to delay and take urgent steps towards the resolution of the conflict. All mediators are trying to save the peace process from becoming a complete fiasco by organizing new meetings of the presidents and foreign ministers and making new creative statements which establish an appearance that the peace process is still alive. In many ways, the Sochi meeting resembled an attempt to rescue the patient rather than treat him.

Meanwhile, many in Azerbaijan are convinced that Armenia is not interested in peace and the Minsk group is dragging out the process. Baku's frustration with Yerevan's refusal to agree on the Madrid principles translates into more military spending, harsher rhetoric from Azerbaijani politicians and anger among the general public with the international mediators. This week, President Aliyev visited several new plants which produce equipment and technology for the military and launched the construction of several more. Azerbaijan also participated in the IDEX-2011 military-industrial exhibition in the United Arab Emirates which displayed 71 types of new military products (APA, February 23). Generally, the Minister of Military Industry of Azerbaijan, Yaver Jamalov, stated that the country will increase the number of new products from the current 413 to 480 and some of them will even be exported (ANS-TV, February 23).

Thus, the military buildup by both countries is increasing, but Russian mediation seems to focus on strengthening the ceasefire rather than a complete resolution of the conflict. President Aliyev evidently places much hope on the Russian role in the mediation. If this process fails and Russia is unable to pressure Armenia to make compromises, it is unclear what other peaceful means will remain on the table. Frustration in both capitals can lead to new escalation of the conflict, including a full-scale war.

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## **Nagorno-Karabakh: OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs issue statement**

OSCE (09.03.2011) / HRWF (09.03.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> – The Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, Ambassadors Bernard Fassier of France, Robert Bradtke of the United States, and Igor Popov of the Russian Federation, released the following statement today:

"The Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group (Ambassadors Bernard Fassier of France, Robert Bradtke of the United States, and Igor Popov of the Russian

Federation) are deeply concerned by reports of cease-fire violations along the Line of Contact before and after the March 5 Sochi Summit. Such senseless acts, if confirmed, would contravene the commitment of the parties to refrain from the use of force and to seek a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The Co-Chairs have asked Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk, the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson in Office, to carry out an immediate investigation with the

participation of all sides, as agreed in the March 5 joint statement issued in Sochi by Presidents Dmitri Medvedev, Ilham Aliyev, and Serge Sargsian. The Co-Chairs will travel next week to the region, where they will call upon the parties to cooperate fully with the investigation.

The Co-Chairs strongly condemn any loss of life, and urge all sides to exercise restraint, respect the 1994 cease-fire, and fulfill their obligations undertaken in Astrakhan in October 2010 and Sochi earlier this month."

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