



საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობების კვლევის ფონდი
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Karabakh Peace Agreement

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The events that unfolded around the Nagorno Karabakh conflict in September-November 2020 significantly changed the previously existing status-quo in the South Caucasus. The importance of these developments clearly surpassed a regional scale. The new realities after military action, the roles of Russia, Turkey and the West in South Caucasus and the future prospects for Azerbaijan and Armenia became topics of discussion of the expert and political circles not only within our region but in various other countries as well.

Naturally, any, let alone, significant change to the status-quo in the South Caucasus is an especially notable development for Georgia as it directly influences our security environment. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a complex analysis of all of the important aspects of the new status-quo, including the roles of the powers within and outside of the region in terms of this new reality.

One of such aspects is the [statement](#) made by the leaders of three states, known as the peace agreement, which became the basis for a ceasefire and a de-escalation in the conflict zone. The review of the circumstances around signing this peace agreement and its provisions will give us a better understanding of what kind of a configuration we have gotten in the region and what we could expect in the future.

The New Peace Agreement

At the end of September, after the re-ignition of the armed conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, first Russia, then France and finally the United States attempted to shoulder the function of a mediator between the parties; however, these attempts turned out to be fruitless. Armed clashes in the conflict zone only stopped with Russian mediation on November 10, 2020. More specifically, the basis of the ceasefire in the conflict zone and the creation of a new status-quo in the region became the [statement](#) of the President of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of Armenia and the President of Russia, which is more widely known as the peace agreement.

One of the [versions](#) disseminated about the signing of this peace agreement is especially notable – that the text of the agreement was first worked out between Russia and Turkey and was only afterwards presented to the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia. This version may not describe the reality precisely; however, the fact that Azerbaijan’s strategic ally, Turkey, had an important role both during the armed confrontations as well as in achieving a peace agreement is reinforced by numerous pieces of direct or indirect evidence. This is also confirmed by the [statement](#) made by the President of Azerbaijan, I. Aliyev, after the signing of the agreement, in which he focused on Turkey’s significant role.

All-in-all, it can be stated that as a result of the events that unfolded around the Karabakh conflict, an entirely new reality has arisen in the post-Soviet area. Namely:

- 1) The West practically played no role in the de-escalation of the conflict, let alone being part of the new peace agreement. In terms of this, Karabakh is completely different from the Russian-Ukrainian (2014) and Russian-Georgian (2008) conflicts;
- 2) Turkey has revealed itself to be a strong and noteworthy regional power which actively participated in both the de-escalation as well as the peace agreement and will, in all likelihood, attempt to boost its future role in implementing the peace agreement and events around the Karabakh conflict in general.

Is the above described situation a preferred and beneficial development for Moscow? In order to answer this question, we must take several aspects into account.

First of all, it must be pointed out that Moscow sees the post-Soviet area as a zone of its exclusive influence and, therefore, it deems the participation of the West as well as regional powers in the developments to be unacceptable.

If we compare the West and the regional powers from Moscow's standpoint, on the surface it may seem that it should have been satisfied with the developments as it considers the West to be its ideological opponent; however, if we look at the processes around Nagorno Karabakh in the context of a development in the post-Soviet area, the image changes.

More specifically, the West remains the main partner in resolving the conflicts of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia with Russia. If these states do not refuse this on their own, it is unlikely that this situation will change as given Moscow's aggressive policies during the past several years, the discord between Russia and the West on a number of issues continues while relations grow colder. The clearest example of this is the recently growing discord between Berlin and Moscow given the fact that from the larger European states, it is precisely Germany that has traditionally been more friendly with Russia.

Taking this background into account, the strengthening of the positions of the regional powers in the post-Soviet area cannot be seen as beneficial for Moscow. Also, in this case Turkey is not an exception but rather a part of a trend as another very serious regional power – China, has been solidly represented in Central Asia for a long time now. Apart from this, China's activities in recent years have also grown in the South Caucasus (including Georgia), Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova.

As we touched upon Russia's influence in the post-Soviet area, we must also mention two of the most currently pressing political developments:

- The victory of a pro-European candidate, Maia Sandu, against the pro-Russian candidate, Igor Dodon, in Moldova's presidential elections in November 2020, has strengthened the expectations about Moldova's growing pro-Western political course in Russia itself;
- After the August 9, 2020 presidential elections in Belarus, the protest demonstrations against Lukashenko continue to this day. It is already known that the protests will, at the very least, be followed by constitutional amendments in Belarus which are also [supported](#) by Russia. There have also been talks that Lukashenko will no longer maintain his [position of President](#) after the constitutional amendments. Despite Russia's involvement in the processes in Belarus, the issue remains whether the new political configuration caused by the protests be better for Russia than the current one, which is maybe not very comfortable for Moscow, but Lukashenko is still opposed to the West during his governing period.

Review of the Provisions of the Peace Agreement

One of the most important points (3) of the peace agreement signed on November 10 concerns the deployment of 1,960 Russian peacekeepers in the conflict zone which was performed by the Russian Federation immediately after signing the agreement. A large part of the expert circle believes that the placement of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno Karabakh represents a new actionable leverage for Russia to influence Azerbaijan and Armenia. However, with regard to these arguments, it must also be said that the Karabakh conflict already was serious leverage for Moscow prior to this as well. Namely:

- Karabakh was one of the main reasons why Armenia ended up almost completely under Russian influence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union;

- Moscow became a much more notable power for Azerbaijan than it would have been in the absence of the Karabakh conflict;
- Karabakh was an additional hindrance for Turkey as well in normalizing relations with Armenia which Ankara tried to do in 2008-2009 through the activities referred to as “football diplomacy.”

It is also very important that before the changes in the status-quo (deployment of Russian peacekeepers in conflict zone), Moscow, as Armenia’s strategic partner, had only indirect responsibility for Karabakh’s security. Such a situation, in principle, was much more beneficial for Moscow than taking direct responsibility for Karabakh’s security after deploying its peacekeepers there as only Karabakh can be fully satisfied with this new status accepted by Russia.

If Moscow wants to maintain Karabakh as leverage for influencing Azerbaijan and Armenia, it must not allow changes to the new status-quo. Hence, Azerbaijan cannot be allowed to restore its territorial integrity. President Putin’s statement from one of the most [recent interviews](#) also indicated this when he said that Karabakh’s status remains unregulated – while the Azerbaijani side claimed otherwise after signing the peace agreement.

At the same time, Moscow also cannot allow Yerevan to implement a very popular idea in Armenia until recently that “Artsakh is Armenia.” Moreover, after the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh, the latter’s dependence on Moscow will increase not only in terms of security but also politically and economically as well, thereby reducing its dependence on Yerevan. The fact that Russian propagandist talk-shows on various Russian TV channels have recently stated multiple times that Karabakh, unlike Armenia, has always been starkly pro-Russian, is also likely no coincidence.

According to yet another important point (5) of the peace agreement, a ceasefire control peace center is being created in order to increase the efficiency of implementing the ceasefire by the opposing parties. The [agreement](#) on creating this center was signed separately between Russia and Turkey which is an additional indicator of Russia’s role in formulating the peace agreement. Given the fact that the Turkish side must be represented in this center according to the agreement, Turkey’s participation in regulating the Karabakh conflict increases. This agreement also represents a type of legal basis for Turkey to deploy its military forces on the territory of Azerbaijan which is also not desirable for Russia.

The last point (9) of the agreement is also very important as it concerns the unblocking of economic and transport connections within the region. More specifically, according to this point, Azerbaijan has a transport corridor opened to its exclave – the Autonomous Republic of Nakhichevan, which in turn has a border with Turkey. This corridor, as well as another important corridor connecting Stepanakert with Armenia (point 3), will be subject to Russian control which is serious leverage for Russia.

It must be pointed out that by opening the so-called Nakhichevan corridor, the preconditions for Turkey’s more active entry into the region have nonetheless been created. In terms of these new realities, Ankara will probably once again try to interest Armenia in establishing direct connections with Turkey. Especially since at the very least, Yerevan must not be entirely satisfied with Moscow’s actions during the escalation of the Karabakh conflict as well as the peace agreement which demands Armenia to withdraw its military forces from the Agdam, Kelbajar and Lachin districts, returning them to Azerbaijan unconditionally.

Conclusion

The new status-quo of the Karabakh conflict pushes both Moscow as well as Ankara to direct even more efforts towards strengthening their positions in the South Caucasus. It is important that Georgia has managed to avoid negative developments for itself during the military escalation of the Karabakh conflict. After the ceasefire, we must expect that both Ankara and especially Moscow, which has gotten the status of a peacemaker but has failed to bolster its geopolitical positions, would try to put forward in bilateral relations with Tbilisi the issues on the top in their priority lists in order to strengthen their position in the South Caucasus.

Baku will attempt to capitalize on its success in Karabakh and take decisive steps for donning the mantle of a leader among the South Caucasus states in which it was previously interested as well.

As for Yerevan, it now has an objective basis to seriously consider diversifying its foreign policy in order to better ensure its security. However, radically bolstered dependence on Moscow throughout recent years, as well as tense relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey, still significantly limit its room for maneuver.

Mobilization of more effort in order to deepen its partnership with the West - especially the United States - has no alternative for Georgia given the interest of ensuring its own national security on the background of altered status-quo within the region.