

BRIEFING

regarding some amendments to:

The draft report – Recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the EEAS on the Eastern Partnership, in the run-up to the November 2017 Summit.

Scheduled in: Foreign Affairs Committee, scheduled for **September 9** in the afternoon (vote on the 10th).

Amendments concerned: Amendment Comp 22

Text of the amendment: In which the Council, Commission and EEAS are “**to call on the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijani to commit to genuine confidence - building and to dialogue between Armenian and Azerbaijani civil societies**”

This is an important amendment in the context of the Nagorno - Karabakh (NK) conflict, because:

- **There is currently no dialogue or confidence-building between Armenians and Azeris**
- **The EU can and must help establish a dialogue and confidence-building**

EXPLANATION

1. HOW CAN THE EU PROMOTE PEACE BETWEEN ARMENIANS AND AZERIS?

For all those who reject a military solution to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, the only solution must be negotiated agreement. This in turn can be achieved only with the help of **dialogue** (at the level of civil society) and **confidence-building**. As one European Peace Liaison Office report put it: “there is a need to focus on **conflict transformation** rather than on conflict resolution”.¹

Unfortunately, there is almost none of either happening at the moment. Furthermore, the conflict is no longer frozen, but simmering, with constant shooting across the contact line and occasional military offensives, and numerous casualties. If there is no change of course, it is very likely that war will flare up sooner or later.

2. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY DIALOGUE AND CONFIDENCE-BUILDING?

Dialogue is about engaging with the people and with the country on the other side of the conflict. It is indispensable to counter the conflict narratives and war propaganda and develop a positive vision of a common future. Confidence-building is more ambitious as it involves starting initiatives that will generate more trust through actual joint achievements, however modest. Both of these forms of engagement are urgently needed.

¹ European Peace Liaison Office, European Commission and EEAS. Civil society Dialogue Network Geographic Meeting: Nagorno-Karabakh: Continuing EU support for building peace – Gathering civil society input”. Meeting report, 12 May 2015
http://eplo.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CSDN_Geographic-meeting_Nagorno-Karabakh_Report.pdf

3. WHAT SHOULD OR CAN THE EU DO IN PRACTICE?

The EU must actively **pressure** the parties to engage in **dialogue** and **confidence-building**. Adopting appropriate wording in this EP resolution is a start. It should lead to more specific action on the part of the executive however.

Within the scope of its powers, the EU can contribute to dialogue and confidence-building in the following ways.

1. The EU leadership should make it quite clear that it is **their policy to encourage contacts between Armenians and Azeris**.
2. The EU should publicly and specifically **condemn instances of hate speech** coming from the leadership of any country that is guilty of such hate speech. The EU should in particular support the recommendation of the Council of Europe's Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) *"that the Azerbaijani authorities ensure that public officials at all levels refrain from hate speech towards Armenians."*²
3. The EU should insist with the authorities of Azerbaijan, (as well as with Armenia and Karabakh if necessary), that they **facilitate projects aiming to establish dialogue** and should ensure that participants are not harassed or jailed upon their return from a trip to the other side.
4. The EU should insist with Azerbaijani authorities that conflict resolution and prevention organizations must be **allowed to operate in Nagorno-Karabakh**.
- 5 The EU should make it clear that it expects its own citizens to be treated the same when they wish to travel to Azerbaijan or Armenia, regardless of their ethnic or national origin.
6. The EU should go beyond the low-level, low-impact EPNK project (see question 6 below) to propose and support genuine confidence-building projects.
7. The EU should prevail on Azerbaijan **to lift its ban on contacts with any Armenian from NKR**.

4. WHY ARE ARMENIANS AND AZERBAIJANIS NOT TALKING TO EACH ANOTHER?

Obstacles to dialogue

One key problem is that there are virtually no contacts between Armenians and Azeris. This prevents the development of a credible narrative for a peaceful future between neighbours and favours narratives of radical separation. It also allows fear, war propaganda and hate speech to dominate public discourse.

This absence of genuine contact is underlined by international NGOs. International Alert notes that *"There are no real mechanisms for dialogue between official and unofficial actors and processes."*³

² European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. ECRI Report on Azerbaijan (fifth monitoring cycle) Adopted on 17 March 2016 Published on 7 June 2016.

<http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Azerbaijan/AZE-CbC-V-2016-017-ENG.pdf>.

³ International Alert. Advancing the Prospects for Peace -20 years of civil peacebuilding in the context of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. IA, 2014.

http://www.epnk.org/sites/default/files/downloads/NagornyKarabakh_CivilPeacebuilding20Years_EN_2013.pdf

EPLO adds that *“there is currently little room for manoeuvre for CSOs [Civil Society Organizations] in the region and they are extremely dependent on government goodwill to be able to operate.”*⁴

If there is no contact between Armenians and Azeris, that is due in particular to the policy of the government of Azerbaijan **to prevent all Armenian** nationals – as well as ethnic Armenians with other nationalities – **from entering their country**.

Additionally, travelling to Nagorno-Karabakh is a crime for anyone in the eyes of the government of Azerbaijan, no matter their ethnicity. This naturally excludes the population of NKR from any dialogue.

Finally, Azerbaijanis travelling abroad are also dissuaded from associating with Armenians, particularly in public, and especially in Armenia. In its latest report, ECRI noted that *“the human rights activists Leyla and Arif Yunus, who worked inter alia towards reconciliation with Armenia, have been arrested and sentenced under controversial accusations to heavy prison terms.”*⁵ Such measures against those trying to engage in dialogue are powerful disincentives to dialogue.

Hate speech

In addition to these restrictions on travel, hate speech towards Armenians pervades the whole of Azerbaijani society. The numerous misconceptions that hate speech promotes naturally further hinder dialogue, even among well-intentioned individuals¹.

The ECRI analyses the phenomenon in detail, underlining that *“an entire generation of Azerbaijanis has now grown up listening to constant rhetoric of Armenian aggression.”*⁶

Adding that: *“concerning the many instances of hate speech directed at Armenians, it is obvious that they are part of a policy of hardening confrontation with regard to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. While it is not for ECRI to comment on this conflict, it is highly concerned about the resulting hate speech that affects the Armenians living in Azerbaijan [i.e. in Nagorno-Karabakh]. Given its harmful effects, ECRI considers, **just like the OSCE Minsk Group, that the authorities should put an end to this constant, mediatised use of hate speech and rather promote mutual understanding and confidence.** At the same time, this would give more credibility to the authorities’ policy to promote Azerbaijan as an example of tolerance and multiculturalism.”*⁷

6. ISN'T THE EU ALREADY PROMOTING CONFIDENCE-BUILDING BETWEEN ARMENIANS AND AZERIS?

No. The EEAS often claims to be contributing to peace through the EPNK, the European Partnership for Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh. This is a consortium of EEAS-funded projects run by international conflict prevention or conflict resolution NGOs. These projects consist in fact-finding on the impact of the war, small-scale educational, artistic and intellectual productions and exchanges between young people, journalists and academics.

Though constructive and well-intended, these projects are making **no impact** on the conflict – through no fault of their own. The limitations on contacts between Azeris and Armenians, the

⁴ EPLO, 2015, op. cit.

⁵ ECRI, 2016

⁶ ECRI, 2016

⁷ ECRI, 2016

restrictions on access to NKR by the Azeri government and the risk of reprisal against activists in general limit these projects to low-profile, low impact activities.

Until now, International alert writes diplomatically, *“the lack of long-term commitment or joint strategy by the international community makes progress piecemeal and staggered.”*⁸

In order to actually promote dialogue and confidence-building, the EU will have to **invest politically as well.**

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⁸ IA, 2013.