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Karabakh Conflict: Will the "Peace Talks" Bring Peace?

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Change of government in Armenia in 2018 created new hopes for resolution of one of the most important problems in the South Caucasus – the problem of occupation of Azerbaijani territories by Armenia (widely known as "the Karabakh Conflict"). Although contradictory statements of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on the Karabakh Conflict have hindered these hopes to some extent, the intensifying meetings between Azerbaijani and Armenian officials led to continuation of a positive atmosphere in mass media regarding this issue.

After the change of government in Armenia, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan first time met very briefly on 14 June 2018 in Moscow, during the opening ceremony of the FIFA World Cup. Later on, the two leaders had short meetings during the Summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) held in Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan, on 27-28 September 2018. Especially in these days ceasefire violations significantly decreased and in fact, it was reported that 28 September was "the most quite day in recent years" on the frontline between the two countries. Following these meetings, N. Pashinyan claimed that he has reached an agreement with I. Aliyev on creating "effective communication channels" between the two countries in order to provide sustainability of the peace talks.

Third meeting between the leaders took place on 22 January 2019, during the World Economic Forum in Davos. It was reported that details of peace talks and future plans regarding the Karabakh issue were discussed during this meeting, which, differently from

previous ones, lasted quite long – for one and a half hours.

A more significant and for now the last meeting between the leaders was held on 29 March 2019 in Vienna…

… Based on an agreement reached between the two leaders, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov and Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsaganyan met on 15 April 2019, with the mediation of Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation…

Developments that took place up to this point can be seen as the positive side of the general picture. But do they indicate that the peace is forthcoming?

As observed, while diplomatic atmosphere seems positive, these peace talks are still far from bringing the peace. History of peace talks clearly shows that periodic intensification of the talks does not mean that the peace is close. Up to now, about 250 meetings with the participation of leaders and foreign ministers of the two countries, co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group and leaders of the mediating countries have been held. Despite these meetings, one can frequently hear such statements as “if the process continues like this, use of military force for liberating the occupied territories will be the only option” from Azerbaijani officials, and “we are happy with the status quo” and “if the war resumes Azerbaijan will face a worse situation” from Armenian officials. There have been periods when more intensive and systematic meetings were held, but unfortunately did not yield any positive result.

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In order for the “peace talks” to produce a real peace, to bring about a sustainable

resolution to the Karabakh Conflict within the framework of international legal norms and to prevent the region from becoming a “hell of ethnic clashes”, it is necessary to restore the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, to provide guarantees supported by international organizations for the security of the Armenian minority living in Azerbaijan, and to attain development in social, economic, cultural and other fields. Any process that does not lead to these will not be peace talks in the real meaning.

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