

## **Armenia's 'Diplomatic Success' At OSCE Summit**

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With international attention focused on Chechnya, it would be easy to overlook some key pronouncements concerning Armenia which took place in Istanbul.

Resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, re-establishment of relations between Armenia and Turkey and the creation of a regional security system for the Caucasus were all key issues on the agenda in Istanbul. Armenian President, Robert Kocharian, appeared pleased that progress had been made on all fronts, but particularly over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group declared "the representatives from Nagorno-Karabakh must join the dialogue currently underway between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Without considering the interests of Nagorno-Karabakh it will be impossible to find a genuine solution to the Karabakh conflict".

Thus the Azeri position - that the conflict concerns only Armenia and Azerbaijan--was successfully undermined. Despite continued disagreement on this issue, however, OSCE Chairman, Knut Vollebaek, described the bilateral negotiations between Kocharian and his Azerbaijan counterpart, Heydar Aliiev, as "very good".

French President, Jacques Chirac expressed confidence that long-term peace in Nagorno-Karabakh was close. When peace is achieved, he added, considerable economic aid for the region would be forthcoming. The OSCE summit final declaration called for continued regular contact between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan within the Minsk Group framework.

Kocharian pointed out the Declaration indicated "a special attitude towards us [Armenia]". Indeed the Azeri delegation voiced some criticism at the Declaration's implications.

Nuraddin Mamedli, a leader of Azerbaijan's Democratic Party, said, "the territorial integrity of all the OSCE nations affected by such conflict is accepted by the Declaration, except that of Azerbaijan. The unwillingness of the OSCE to mark the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan implies that very soon we will finally lose Karabakh."

The problem of Armenian-Azeri relations spills over into the question of re-establishing relations between Armenia and Turkey. Following talks with U.S. President Bill Clinton, Kocharian confirmed the U.S. was trying to play "a positive role" in developing relations between the two nations. But after a confidential bilateral meeting between Turkish President, Suleyman Demirel, and Kocharian, the former reiterated that the normalisation of relations between Armenia and Turkey "depends on the normalisation of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan".

But Demirel went on to say that, should the Nagorno-Karabakh issue be resolved peacefully, Armenia may become involved in pipeline development projects in the region. Kocharian was clear, however, that Armenia's future involvement in such pipeline projects would not be used as a bargaining counter. "No one has any illusions that we may make concessions connected with that [regional development projects]", Kocharian said.

The Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan also addressed the issue of creating a system of regional security in the Caucasus. Kocharian pointed out that both Azerbaijan and Georgia have withdrawn from the existing Agreement of Collective Security in CIS, making the need to create a "regional or sub-regional system of security" all the more urgent.

"I think that this suggestion will be examined", he said. Kocharian is wary of a new division appearing in the region, with some countries moving into the NATO axis, while others, like Armenia, remain within the Agreement of Military Cooperation with Russia.

Aliev said he gave special importance to the project for a pact on security and peace in the region as proposed at the OSCE summit.

"The states of the South Caucasus must enter the 21st century safe from conflict and opposition and create their own pact for security and peace without looking over their shoulders at the ambitions of other countries", he said, adding that a necessary precondition for such a pact to work was the removal of all foreign troops and arms from the region.

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