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Eastern Partnership

EU must engage for peaceful solution in Nagorno Karabakh

The European Parliament debated the current crisis in Nagorno Karabakh on Tuesday evening (12 April). In the context of the debate Green MEPs called for a renewed push to ensure a peaceful solution of the issue in the context of stalled international negotiations via the OSCE and urged the EU to proactively engage to this end. Green MEPs Heidi Hautala, Ulrike Lunacek and Tamas Meszerics outline the Green position.

The recent outbreak of violence around the line of contact in Nagorno Karabakh has returned attention to a frozen war that has been forgotten by the international community for too long.

Armenia and Azerbaijan, which are part of the EU's Eastern Partnership project in its eastern neighbourhood, are stuck in a conflict that for almost 30 years has cast a dark shadow on the South Caucasus making the lives of the people of the region fragile and uncertain.

The conflict is being exacerbated by the Russian Federation, Turkey and Iran, which have been taking sides or trying to pursue their interests by indirectly influencing the parties. The status quo is no solution. New and convincing efforts are needed to break this vicious circle that has hampered any progress on the way to a comprehensive settlement.

The Minsk Group of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which since the beginning has been mandated to mediate and facilitate the negotiations, must prove its effectiveness. The EU must push for this.

The only way to prevent a new outbreak of war around the line of contact and de-escalate the situation is to stop the military build-up and the arms race between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The region has become one of the most heavily armed parts of the world. Russia has been supplying modern weapons to both sides. The defence budgets of both countries keep on increasing despite the economic difficulties in the region. This must end.

The best way to achieve this is to deploy a robust UN peace-keeping mission around the line of contact with the demilitarisation of the area and the withdrawal of all heavy armaments to a distance of 15 or 30 kms away.

At the same time the parties, in the framework of the OSCE Minsk group, should develop and agree to an incident prevention and investigation mechanism in which eventual violations of the ceasefire can be

addressed.

Both parties agree that most of the conflict area belongs to Azerbaijan (the 7 provinces surrounding Nagorno Karabakh). Armenia, therefore, should return most of the occupied provinces to Azerbaijan as soon as is feasible. The OSCE Minsk group presidency should relaunch the negotiations on the final status of Nagorno Karabakh.

Instead of exchanging accusations on alleged war crimes, Armenia and Azerbaijan should sign and ratify the Rome statute on the International Criminal Court (Armenia has signed but not ratified, Azerbaijan neither signed nor ratified). This would pave the way for the application of an international jurisdiction to eventual infringements of international humanitarian law.

UN Security Council resolutions must be complied with and the OSCE Minsk Group basic principles fully respected. The ruling of the European Court of Human Rights on the case of "Chiragov and others vs Armenia" made Armenia accountable for property rights violations in the conflict area. Armenia should stop pretending it has no direct responsibility for what happened and is happening in Nagorno Karabakh. Most of the soldiers that died on the Armenian side in this endless war come from Armenia.

To succeed, any initiative must be accompanied by credible confidence-building measures. In this respect the leaders of the two countries must tone down their statements and stop inflammatory declarations that seed hate and resentment. The two sides must resume the dialogue at all levels including and above all between civil societies. Azerbaijan should remove all legal obstacles that ban Azeri NGOs from cooperate with Armenian NGOs.

Finally the EU should take its responsibility and engage more effectively in conflict resolution and this must take place by adopting a more coherent and consistent approach to all the frozen conflicts in the region avoiding double standards.

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