

The views of Armenian and Azerbaijani Political Parties on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and conflict resolution process

This study was conducted by LINKS in the framework of the European Partnership for the peaceful settlement of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh

ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARY FEDERATION - DASHNAKTSUTYUN



ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARY FEDERATION-DASHNAKTSUTYUN
(ARMENIAN SOCIALIST PARTY)

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The Armenian Revolutionary Federation – Dashnaktsutyun, was established in 1890 as part of the national liberation struggle against the Ottoman and Russian Empires. It was banned in Armenia during the 1990s but later emerged as part of a coalition government. The party left the coalition in 2009 over disagreements with the governing coalition on foreign policy. It has 16 members of parliament. www.arfd.am

Armenian Revolutionary Federation – Dashnaktsutyun

ARMENIA

The Position of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), popularly known as Dashnaks, on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and peace process, based on an interview with Bureau member Vahan Hovhannissyan MP, held in Yerevan on 14th June 2010.

■ Position on Nagorno-Karabakh and its future

The ARF believes that Nagorno-Karabakh is a historical part of Armenia and has belonged to Armenia for at least 3000 years. It has never been a part of independent Azerbaijan because such a state did not exist before 1918. Even after Azerbaijan emerged as an independent state it was only after one and a half years that the Bolsheviks gave Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan along with other Armenian territories as a way of punishing Armenia for continuing to fight against the Turkish Army and for resisting Bolshevism. Other territories were also given to Turkey. The bolsheviks carved the borders in such a way that no republic in the South Caucasus could move towards independence without the agreement of the others, thus laying the basis for the internal conflicts, one of which is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Compared to other Armenian territories that were given to Azerbaijan, where Armenians were cleared out, the people of Nagorno-Karabakh were more resilient, and since they had a tradition of their own statehood were anxious to keep their borders. The borders were consciously created in a way so that Armenia did not share borders with Nagorno-Karabakh. When the Karabakhi Armenians peacefully started campaigning to improve their social and economic rights, their financial situation and for developing their autonomous rights the answer from Azerbaijan was a classic Turkish response, namely bloodshed and attacks on

Armenians in Azerbaijan – not only in Nagorno-Karabakh but in other parts of Azerbaijan too.

Stepanakert was bombed and destroyed. The Karabakhi Armenians had no other choice but to liberate themselves and the territories around them. Some people call them occupied territories but the ARF thinks this is a security belt of territories that have always been Armenian and populated by Armenians who are the owners of these lands.

The ARF understands that resolving the disagreements with Azerbaijan must be based on mutual concessions and cannot be one sided. The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic can never be part of the Azerbaijani state. It can never have a subordinated relationship with Azerbaijan. Furthermore the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic must have a border with Armenia – not a corridor, but a wide common border. The status of Nagorno-Karabakh must include the possibility of self defence and sovereignty.

The ARF was mobilised during the Karabakh conflict which it considers a national liberation war. One in eight of its members died in the war, and whoever could carry arms was there. The ARF Nagorno-Karabakh branch lost many of its members.

The ARF has a special commission that works with veterans, but this work is mainly in the social sphere, not political. The party does not believe that veterans as a category should have a special involvement in politics. They can exert a moral influence but not a political one. The ARF is a federation and it has an affiliate in Nagorno-Karabakh which is autonomous.

■ Position on the peace process and international involvement

The ARF evaluates the work of the OSCE Minsk Group relatively highly, because in the last sixteen years they have collected a fantastic amount of material. The process is long but this is to be expected. The problem with the Minsk Group is that they are under pressure and sometimes they forget that one needs to not only deal with the consequences of the conflict. The OSCE Minsk Group should not only deal with the consequences of the conflict, by for example saying that Azerbaijan has lost territory and so we must give Azerbaijan territory and everything will be ok. The Minsk Group should deal with the root causes of the conflict, the reasons for why it happened. However the OSCE Minsk Group is working in the right direction, which is why Azerbaijan continuously talks about moving the negotiations to other fora, for example the United Nations. However the ARF believes that the Madrid Principals are very dangerous to the Armenian national interest and to Armenian security.

Russia, Iran, the US and the European Union have no fixed position on the issue but they

have different interests. Some are interested in routes, some in railroads, some in hydrocarbons and some in democracy. These difficult interests create a difficult and complicated picture. It is difficult to separate them from each other since all the interests of the different political parties are interconnected. It is not possible to please only one side, so maybe it is not such a good thing to have so many different players.

As regards Turkey, the ARF states categorically that Turkey can never have a part in the peace process or have any role in this matter.

■ On people to people contacts and civil society activity

The ARF is no longer convinced that NGOs could play an important role in terms of creating contacts between civil society in Armenia and Azerbaijan and to weaken the confrontation and hatred between the two nations. Despite shortcomings in Armenian democracy NGOs are relatively free. However in Azerbaijan, as well as in Turkey, NGOs are under direct government control and do the bidding of their government. Armenian and Azerbaijani NGOs therefore do not stand equally.

All the sides are in a difficult position and the Karabakh problem cannot be resolved in the near future. The ARF is in favour of small steps which are not connected to territory or war, environmental issues for example. It is in favour of border trading, as well as of the removal of sniper posts in the border area. It is also in favour of Armenia selling electricity to Azerbaijani regions which lack it.

The ARF supports people to people interaction that can change people's perceptions of one other. In Azerbaijan they even have fairy tales for children that portray Armenians as monsters. In that environment NGOs can do very little, but they can try! The ARF has no official position on free movement of people between Armenia and Azerbaijan prior to the signing of a peace agreement.

■ Other information

The ARF is a long standing member of the Socialist International, the global platform of centre-left parties. The Party has contested all elections since 1991. It claims to have 7000 members in its Armenia branch and an active youth branch.