



“Russian Truce”: The Tense Future of Nagorno-Karabakh

Arkadiusz Legieć

The truce ending the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) constitutes the capitulation of Armenia and effectively divides the disputed territory on the terms of the victorious Azerbaijan. However, it does not end the Armenian-Azeri conflict, which is both territorial and ethnic. The truce is a diplomatic success for Russia, which forced both sides of the conflict to cease fighting and brought its own troops into the NK. The EU and Poland may consider increasing humanitarian aid for the victims.

Provisions of the Truce. [On 9 November, Armenia and Azerbaijan, under the auspices of Russia, concluded an agreement ending the armed escalation in the NK.](#) Azerbaijan will take control of about 75% of the territories previously controlled by the Armenians in the NK. It consists of the so-called “safety belt” ([seven Azerbaijani provinces occupied by the Armenians during the war in 1992–1994, not previously part of the NK](#)) and the southern part of the NK, occupied by Azerbaijan during the offensive. The “safety belt” territories are to be handed over to Azerbaijan by Armenia gradually until the end of December this year. The people (currently around 500,000) displaced from these areas in the 1990s to Azerbaijan, which lost the war at that time, will return. Azerbaijan is also to obtain a territorial corridor connecting the main part of its territory with Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, indirectly constituting a land connection with Turkey.

Armenia will retain about 25% of the existing territory of the NK, including the Lachin Corridor connecting the NK and Armenia. The status of these areas will be resolved in the future in line with the principle of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity, possibly without taking into account the Armenians’ right to self-determination in the NK.

The agreement is guaranteed by the Russian military (a contingent of about 2,000 soldiers), which are now deployed in the NK for five years with the possibility of five-year extensions. A ceasefire control centre will be established, possibly based in the Azerbaijani city of Barda. Apart from the Russians, Turkish soldiers will also participate in the centre’s operations.

The International Significance of the Truce. With the agreement, Russia has increased its influence in the Caucasus and strengthened its position as the only mediator in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict able to effectively influence both sides. Russia did not support Armenia militarily in the NK, as this would have prevented it from mediating in the conflict. It officially cited its non-involvement both on bilateral security guarantees and [multilateral security guarantees under the CSTO](#), binding on Russia and Armenia, that limits assistance to their state territory (so, excluding the NK). Under the conditions of the ceasefire, Russia will have even more opportunity to put political pressure on Armenia and Azerbaijan, as Russian troops guarantee the functioning of transport corridors between Armenia and NK, and Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, the security of the Armenians who remain on Armenia-controlled territory of the NK and the Azerbaijan territories to be rebuilt and re-inhabited. Russia maintains it will uphold bilateral security guarantees for Armenia itself.

The truce provides for Turkey’s participation in stabilising the situation in NK as an observer through the ceasefire monitoring centre. As a result of its [unprecedented strong support at the political and military levels for Azerbaijan’s offensive in NK](#), Turkey strengthened its policy instruments in the Caucasus towards Russia and Iran. In the long term, this will force Russia to consult with Turkey on all initiatives in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. This may lead to the creation by Russia and Turkey of a new mediation format to replace the marginalised Minsk Group and, consequently, further weaken EU and U.S. influence in the region. Turkey,

PISM BULLETIN

in exchange for its involvement on Azerbaijan's behalf in the NK conflict, may seek support from the Azerbaijani authorities in areas of foreign policy important to it, such as unification talks in Cyprus, and Turkish policy towards [Syria](#), [Libya](#) and [the Eastern Mediterranean](#).

For neighbouring countries, the change of status quo in NK is a threat. Azerbaijan's military success stirred up nationalist sentiment among Azerbaijani living in the northern part of Iran, and Turkey's stronger influence in the Caucasus and the introduction of Russian military infrastructure pose a challenge to the security of its northern borders. Georgia, inhabited by Armenian (2% of the population) and the poorly assimilated Azerbaijani (6%) minorities, also sees the change as a threat to its stability, for example, it raises the risk of an escalation of Azerbaijani-Armenian ethnic tensions on its territory. Also, the dislocation of Russian soldiers to NK poses an added threat to Georgia of increased Russian political pressure, for example, consent to military transit through its territory.

Conclusions and Perspectives. The agreement ending the military escalation in NK sanctions the success of Azerbaijan's military offensive. However, it does not end the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, as its basis is not only the dispute over the control of NK but also ethnic determinants. Both sides are likely to intensify legal disputes in the international arena, such as demanding respect for Armenian cultural heritage in the territories that have come under Azerbaijan's control, or the possible attempts by Azerbaijan to obtain compensation for the 26-year occupation of the NK territory by Armenia. Limited military escalations on the direct border of the two countries will also be possible. The military offensive by Azerbaijan caused significant human losses on the Armenian side (around 3,000 people), which further antagonised Armenians and deepened the ethnic basis of the conflict. As a consequence, incidents between Armenian minorities and Azerbaijani and Turkish minorities in other countries such as Georgia, Iran, France, or Poland are possible.

Azerbaijan's victory strengthens public support for its government and [relieves public discontent](#) with the now former status quo in NK, which had been unfavourable for Azerbaijan, and the economic problems in the country, [exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic](#). The reconstruction and development of the reclaimed territories will be a key element of Azerbaijan's domestic policy and provide an

opportunity to solve the problem of internally displaced persons who will settle the acquired territories.

Armenia capitulated, and although it is allowed to maintain control over part of NK, that probably would have been lost too had the Azerbaijani offensive continued. The agreement has been rejected by most of the Armenian public, which was not prepared to make any concessions in the conflict, and by the political opposition to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Politicians from the Karabakh clan, ruling Armenia in 1998-2018 and in conflict with Pashinyan, will try to take advantage of this situation to remove him from power and rebuild their influence. The desire to regain control of the lost territories will become a permanent element of Armenian domestic and foreign policy. Armenia, however, will not be able to change the new situation in NK given Azerbaijan's military advantage and the presence of the Russian soldiers there. The loss of the territories also resulted in the forced displacement of 100,000 people from NK to Armenia, which will add to social problems and decrease the standard of living of the population. The lack of support from Russia during the conflict will strengthen anti-Russian sentiment among Armenians, but Azerbaijan's military advantage will deepen Armenia's dependence on [Russian security guarantees](#).

The EU and Poland may consider increasing humanitarian aid to civilians (e.g., via the Red Cross) who have suffered from the armed conflict and displaced persons. The likely lower standard of living may add to migration pressure from NK and Armenia to Poland and other nearby European countries with an Armenian minority.

The OSCE Minsk Group has ceased to be the main form of international involvement in the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan and has been replaced by direct Russian mediation, with the acquiescence of Turkey. Poland, during its chairmanship of the OSCE in 2022, may propose to renew the mandate of the Minsk Group and strengthen the field mission of the OSCE Chairman's Representative for the Conflict over the NK (this function is performed by a Pole, Andrzej Kacprzyk). This representative could be involved in the work of the ceasefire monitoring centre, and its powers extended to, for example, control compliance with the ceasefire on the direct border of the Armenia and Azerbaijan, coordination of their working contacts, monitoring of the human rights situation, and protection of cultural monuments in NK.

