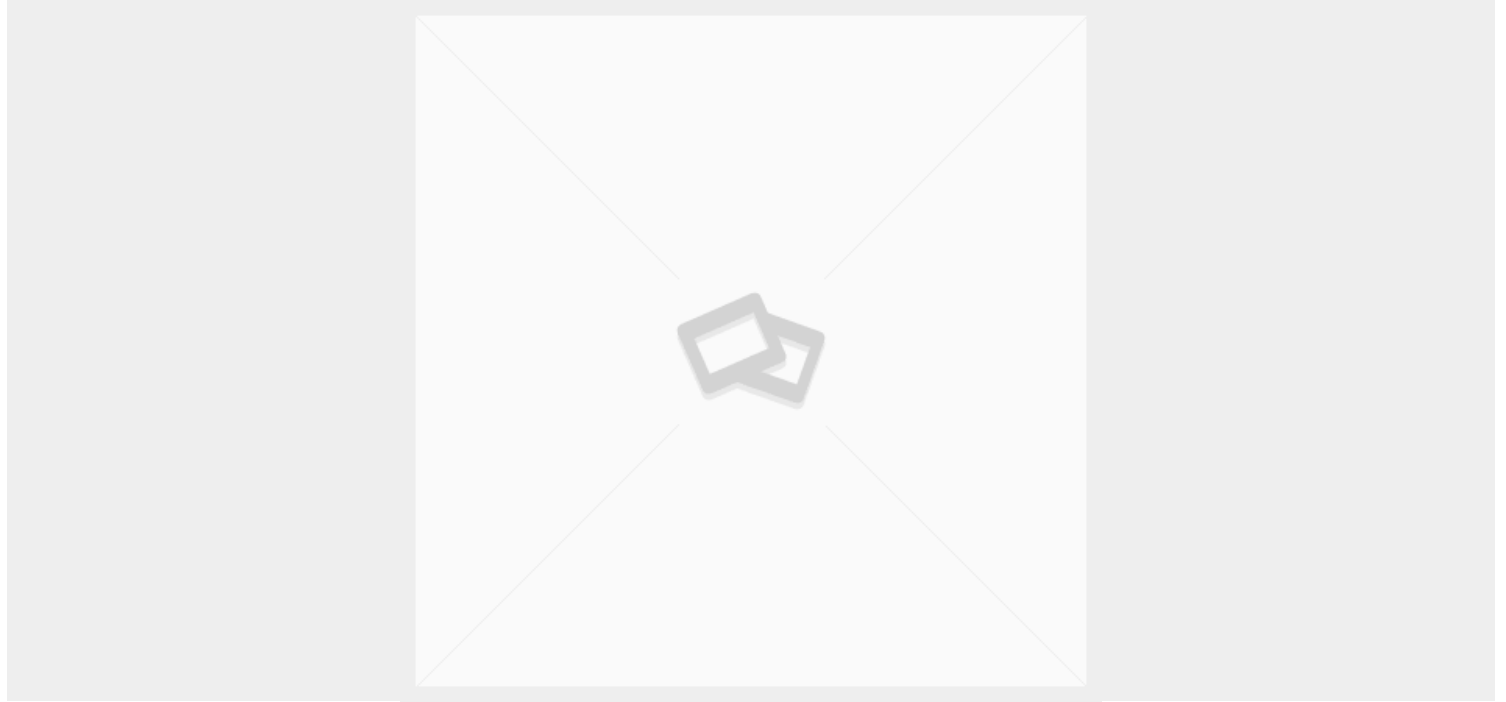


AN INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE WITHOUT KARABAKH'S PARTICIPATION WILL REMAIN FAULTY

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Bako Sahakian, President of Nagorno-Karabakh, 10 November 2008

YEREVAN (RFE/RL)--The President of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic has described the current format of internationally mediated peace talks faulty and called for restoring Nagorno-Karabakh's status as a party to the process currently involving Armenia and Azerbaijan.

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YEREVAN (RFE/RL)--The President of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic has described the current format of internationally mediated peace talks faulty and called for restoring Nagorno-Karabakh's status as a party to the process currently involving Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In an interview with RFE/RL, Nagorno-Karabakh President Bako Sahakian welcomed the latest efforts of the international community aimed at promoting dialogue and providing a better environment for negotiations, but warned that efforts to achieve an ultimate solution to the protracted conflict will remain unsuccessful until Nagorno-Karabakh returns to the negotiating table as a full party.

"We have always emphasized in our statements that a broad dialogue is needed. But at the same time we have repeatedly said that such a dialogue and efforts being made by the international community to find a solution to the problem will remain faulty without Nagorno-Karabakh's participation," Sahakian stressed.

Following talks earlier this month hosted by Russian leader Dmitry Medvedev, the presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia signed a joined declaration pledging to step up the prolonged search for a peaceful resolution of the conflict amid growing international hopes for a breakthrough in Armenian-Azerbaijani peace talks mediated by Russia, the United States and France.

The Moscow declaration became the first document simultaneously bearing the signatures of the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan since the two states signed a Russia-brokered ceasefire agreement in 1994. The 1994 truce deal also included the signature of a Nagorno-Karabakh representative.

Against the backdrop of intensified international efforts to promote an agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan regarding the principles of settling the long-running conflict, some observers perceived the declaration as a formalization of the reality in which Armenia has acted in the negotiating process on behalf of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Nagorno-Karabakh, a former region of Soviet Azerbaijan populated by indigenous Armenians, broke free of Baku's control in the early 1990s, prompting a military response from the latter that led to a full-blown war between Armenia-backed Karabakh defense groups and better-equipped Azerbaijani armed forces

After nearly three years of fighting, Karabakh Armenians managed to establish control over the majority of the ex-Soviet autonomous region's territory and deploy their forces outside Nagorno-Karabakh proper to form a security zone surrounding the area.

Nagorno-Karabakh was originally a party to the international negotiations conducted through the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). But Yerevan took over its representation after Robert Kocharian, Nagorno-Karabakh's former president, became head of state in Armenia in 1998.

"During all meetings, especially those with the participation of the Minsk Group cochairmen, we have asked and even demanded that they use their authority and powers and restore today's disturbed format and translate into action the decision of the OSCE Budapest summit of 1994 that recognized Nagorno-Karabakh as a full party to negotiations," Sahakian said. "We take the same approach in our contacts with authorities in Armenia urging Yerevan to make efforts to restore Nagorno-Karabakh's participation in the negotiating process."

Sahakian refused to give any evaluation to the principles of conflict resolution that the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan are said to be close to agreeing on.

He said that Nagorno-Karabakh has its own viewpoints and repeated that it can address "the whole package" only after returning to the negotiations as a full party.

"When we speak about one principle or another, whether it is the so-called Madrid principles or any others, we realize that all principles must first of all be agreed with Nagorno-Karabakh's authorities," Sahakian underscored. "Only in that case can we think about translating those principles into life."

