



## **Summary of proceedings**

### **Round Table Discussion**

#### **The Corfu process, European Security and the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the South Caucasus**

**Athens, 30 November 2009**

A round table discussion on the topic “The Corfu Process, European Security and the resolution of conflicts in the South Caucasus” was organized by LINKS at the offices of the Foreign Press Association of Greece in Athens on Monday 30 November 2009 on the margins of the 17<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Council of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

The panel consisted of Ambassador Unal Cevikoz, Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs at the Turkish Foreign Ministry, Peter Semneby (European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus) and Dennis Sammut (Executive Director, LINKS). Attending the event were diplomats accredited to Greece and to the OSCE in Vienna led by the Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps in Athens, HE Ambassador of Chile Senora Sofia Prats, and including representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, as well as other guests.

**Dennis Sammut** welcomed participants and said that LINKS was organizing this event on the margins of the 17 Ministerial Council of the OSCE as part of its efforts to promote better understanding of the current debate on European security and its impact on the Caucasus region. It was important that a wider constituency of think tanks, NGOs and civil society engage with this debate Europe wide and in the Caucasus region itself and LINKS was committed to contribute to this process.

In his opening remarks Ambassador **Unal Cevikoz** said that over the last eighteen months the Caucasus region has seen three important developments: the Georgia-Russia War in August 2008 and fallout from that crisis, including the Russian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the signing of the Armenian-Turkish protocols and a new momentum in the negotiations on the Karabakh conflict. Turkey had reacted to the Georgia-Russia war by launching the Caucasus Security and Co-operation Platform initiative. This initiative is not meant to replace already existing mechanisms for resolving the conflicts in the region but rather to be an instrument that would address the lack of trust and dialogue between the countries of the region. Turkey also pushed forward the process for normalizing relations with Armenia. Turkey always felt that this would add momentum to the Karabakh peace negotiations. The speaker said that the Georgia-Russia war showed that the use of force fails to resolve conflicts. The subsequent recognition by Russia of Abkhazia and

South Ossetia has also changed the parameters in the region. Turkey's policy is not to recognize these entities however we have a new situation on the ground. **Ambassador Cevikoz** said that OSCE Ministerial meeting was discussing a text that would emphasize the importance of establishing trust and confidence in the conduct of relations on the European continent. This was what the Turkish CSCP initiative sought to do. There was a very direct relationship between European Security and the situation in the South Caucasus and Turkey was ready to contribute to the processes that are ongoing for further enhancing European security, as well as to the resolution of the conflicts in the South Caucasus.

**Peter Semneby** said that the European Union response to the Georgia-Russia War at the strategic level was to improve the instruments at its disposal to engage with the South Caucasus region. Together with the European Neighbourhood Policy instrument, the new Eastern Partnership initiative responds to the desire of the Union's neighbours to the east for ever closer relations. The European Union welcomed the process for normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia. This was a very delicate process and the EU needs to continue supporting it whilst also listening to the concerns that have been raised by Azerbaijan and in this regard the EU will work with Azerbaijan and with the people of Azerbaijan. Whilst we accept that there is no formal link between the developments in Armenia-Turkish relations and the negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan on Nagorno-Karabakh it was impossible to ignore the impact of one on the other. The EU was now looking at ways in which it could support the Karabakh peace process, including through work with civil society and this will be build on the experience that the EU has from work in other conflict regions. In this regard we must accept that we don't have unlimited time. Societies in each country have become increasingly alienated and perceive each other through stereotypical lenses. Speaking on the situation in Georgia **EUSR Semneby** said that there were regular incidents on the administrative boundaries with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Russian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia had created certain new difficulties. In the South Caucasus the longest borders remain closed and this in itself creates tensions. It was important that the Sarkozy Plan agreed at the end of the Georgia-Russia war be fully implemented, including on the level of Russian forces. **Peter Semneby** said that he hoped that more contacts would be possible across the administrative boundaries between Georgia and the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and that the EU had advised the Georgian government to be open minded in its approach to this issue. This without prejudice to the EU's continued support for the territorial integrity of Georgia. The speaker said that the EU supports the work of the OSCE and regrets that in the case of Georgia the organization was not able to fulfill its full potential. The OSCE Mission to Georgia had been an important instrument for support to Georgia's fragile democracy. For the EU the OSCE is the partner of choice in the Georgia context and the organization was uniquely placed to contribute to that country's democratic development.

The Chairman, **Dennis Sammut**, opened the floor to questions. **Mark Fawcett** (Council of the European Union) asked **Unal Cevikoz** if there was concern that delays in the ratification of the Turkish-Armenian protocols might lead to a loss of the historical momentum, especially since there have been some negative statement by Turkish MPs and the ratification process may be delayed due to upcoming elections in Turkey. In reply **Ambassador Cevikoz** said that the historic moment was 10 October

2009 because this was the day that Armenia and Turkey had for the first time agreed on their bilateral relations since the time of the Kars Treaty. It happened because the leaderships of the two countries had taken a courageous decision. Ofcourse in Turkey there was separation of power and parliament also needs to make up its mind. Elections are not due until 2011 but before that each Turkish parliamentarian would have to make up their mind. What they will decide will depend also on the situation around the Karabakh conflict, because if there are encouraging developments on that front it would be much easier for the Turkish parliament to ratify the agreements. **Ambassador Cevikoz** pointed out that in Armenia there was also some resistance to the agreements and that the problem was not unique to Turkey.

**Ashot Grigorian** (Armenian Embassy, Athens) said that the Turkish side should not connect its bilateral relations with Armenia with Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, in the same way that it does not connect its relations with Georgia with Georgia-Russian relations. This connection was not correct and would harm the development of relations. **Unal Cevikoz** said the reality of the situation was that all the processes in the South Caucasus were interlinked. The region needs genuine dialogue and good multilateral relations. This was not possible to achieve only through a Turkish-Armenian rapprochement. "Our understanding is that these are two separate processes but they impact each other. The presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan have met six times this year and this is because of the momentum that has been created by the Turkish-Armenian discussions. We have ignited the process" said **Ambassador Cevikoz**.

**Vugar Imamaliyev** (Azerbaijan Mission to the OSCE in Vienna) said that he wanted to remind everybody that Turkey had closed its borders with Armenia in 1994 after Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territory. It was therefore not possible to separate the re-opening of the border from the Karabakh issue.

Ambassador **Rytis Paulauskas** (Ambassador-at-Large, Lithuanian Foreign Ministry) said that Lithuania will assume the chairmanship of the OSCE in 2011 and they are already exploring what issues should be the priorities of the Lithuanian Chairmanship. He asked for the views of the panel on sub regional co-operation and how this could fit within the process of resolving conflicts in the region. **Unal Cevikoz** said that it was important to find configurations that would allow for co-operation between the countries of the South Caucasus, as well as between the countries of the region and other states. The Eastern Partnership also offered interesting new frameworks and there were synergies with other initiatives and processes. He emphasised that these initiatives should target the people of the region and they should be encouraged to find common ground and identify issues that are of mutual interest. The region needs a pool of confidence building measures and these can focus on issues that are of concern to everybody. **Peter Semneby** said that this was a good time to look at sub regional co-operation, and the EU was also interested in seeing how external partners could be brought in, for example Norway and Switzerland who had already shown a commitment to the region. For the EU energy, transport, and environment are priority issues but the EU was also keen on people to people contacts and co-operation between municipalities. **Dennis Sammut** agreed on the need for co-operation in the South Caucasus and said that the importance of having Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia working together should not be underestimated. Whatever other formations can emerge the trilateral contacts will always remain necessary given the overlaps

between the three countries. Georgia should be encouraged to reclaim its role as a regional actor and to make use of its good relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the fact that it is a multiethnic country with large Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities in order to promote co-operation between the three countries.

**Vugar Imamaliyev** (Azerbaijan Mission to the OSCE) asked the panel to comment on the proposal of President Medvedev for the adoption of a European Security Treaty. The panel agreed that this was an elaboration of previous Russian Initiatives that had already been tabled by President Medvedev and Foreign Minister Lavrov. The Russian Federation was as yet unconvinced that the Corfu Process was an adequate response to its previous calls for a new European security debate, but the OSCE Ministerial Council will be discussing this in Athens in these days. **Peter Semneby** said that the EU considered it important for the OSCE to take a leading role in the process to develop the debate on European security

**Dennis Sammut** said that Kazakhstan will take over the Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2009 and that this will be a defining moment for the organization. For the first time a CIS country and also Central Asian country will be the head of the organization. This was initially a controversial decision but many now think that Kazakhstan may bring a new perspective to the OSCE. He asked the panel what were their wishes to and from the Kazakh Chairmanship. **Ambassador Cevikoz** said that he wished them luck but also he was happy with this development because the OSCE could now truly say that it is an organization representing the space from Vancouver to Vladivostok and it was important to have a Central Asian country for the first time heading the OSCE. Kazakhstan was taking over the chairmanship at a time when the OSCE member states were trying to redefine their security needs and Kazakhstan could play an important role in this debate, and can bring to it a different perspective. The speaker said that Kazakhstan was also the initiator of the Conference on Confidence building measures in Central Asia (CICA). Turkey will take the chairmanship of this initiative in 2010 and this will allow it to work closely with the Kazakh OSCE Chairmanship. **Peter Semneby** agreed that Kazakhstan can play an important role, also in the South Caucasus where it has good relations with all the countries of the region. It represents another pole for security in the region and can make a useful contribution to the region during the time of its chairmanship.

**Dennis Sammut** thanked the panel and participants and the Foreign Press Association of Greece for providing the venue for the meeting and closed the meeting.

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