

HUMANITARIAN AID RELIEF TRUST (HART)

NAGORNO-KARABAKH BRIEFING

AUGUST-OCTOBER 2014

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In a [HART blog entry](#) in August 2014 Kathryn McDonagh described the escalation of violence around Nagorno-Karabakh, thoroughly analysing the background and possible consequences of these developments. This briefing is going to give an overview of recent updates, and provide a historical context to current events.

August 2014- October 2014, regional update

- [Significant restrictions and deteriorating human rights situation](#), as well as increased military spending in recent years in Azerbaijan threatens cross-border initiatives and [could make the situation more explosive](#). Azerbaijan's defence expenditure [in 2013 was \\$3.7bn](#), more than Armenia's entire national budget, with [plans](#) to even further increase this in 2015.
- Tension at the front-line in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Azerbaijani-Armenian border seriously escalated in late July with [daily reports of fierce fighting](#).
- Biased reporting makes it difficult to picture the situation. Armenian news portals have continuously been reporting many cases of ceasefire violations along the Line of Contact ([11.10.](#); [04.10.](#); [29.09.](#); [20.09.](#); [19.09.](#)) between Karabakh and Azerbaijan by Azeris. The NKR Defence Army was reported to return the fire each time. Similarly, Azeri news portals have been ([Tue 28](#); [Mon 27](#); [Sat 25](#); [Fri 24](#)) publishing accusatory entries of Armenia violating the ceasefire, which were, according to the Ministry's press service, "silenced by retaliation fire". However, OSCE monitoring of the Line of Contact on 30 September did [not register](#) any violations.
- The escalation of fighting is [explained differently](#) by the opposing parties given the prevailing hostility on both sides. Azerbaijani sources argue Armenia, Russia's strategic partner, started the conflict to demonstrate and reinforce Russia's strategic influence in the region, while the Armenian side rather argues Azerbaijan started the clashes out of frustrations with the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process.
- The conflict is often referred to as a sleeping conflict, but as Chair of the Assembly, [Ashot Ghoulyan sees it](#) **"This is not a sleeping conflict, it can explode at any time." "If you keep the situation tense, you don't give people the chance to feel the peace and get used to peace. If people always keep their guns ready, it is much harder to think about and to keep or build the peace."**
- Increased armed incidents this summer meant the warring parties suffered their [worst combat fatalities](#) in over a decade. Between 1 January and 1 August 2014 in Nagorno-Karabakh 18 Armenians and 25 Azeris were killed on the frontline. [Since then](#) another 14 Azeris were killed, while there is no information about Armenian casualties.

August 2014- October 2014, international update

France – Nagorno-Karabakh

- Representatives of France, co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, have recently had a number of discussions with Nagorno-Karabakh representatives both to negotiate the [development of future parliamentary relations](#) and [cooperation between France and Karabakh](#). A [friendship declaration has been signed](#) between the French town of Bourg les Valence and Shushi, town of Karabakh. However, following these recent

negotiations the French Minister of Foreign Affairs [made a clear statement](#) assuring that despite these trends France did not recognize Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent state and as co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group it was fully committed to the search for a political and diplomatic solution to the conflict.

- Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan and President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev meet several times a year. The third [meeting](#) of this year initiated by French President Francois Hollande, was held on 27 October in the presence of the co-chairs of the Minsk Group. The summit was characterised as positive, with reinforced commitment to finding a peaceful way to settle the conflict and to continuing the dialogue within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairman and confidence-building efforts. The special importance of this most recent talk, in light of the recent escalation of fights, is that it finally [allowed to resume dialogue](#) between the two presidents.

European Union – Nagorno-Karabakh

- The first international [Nagorno-Karabakh Group was presented](#) in the European Union with the aim to bring together people with interest about Karabakh and support its democratic values and civil society. Mr Engel, the head of the group, explained: ***“We want to create awareness towards an unrecognized piece of territory, which, at the end of the day, is a Democratic Republic and behaves like that.”*** Soon after the chairman of Azerbaijani Delegation to Euronest Parliamentary Assembly has [sent a letter](#) to the European People’s Party, which both of them were members of, protesting against the introduction of a Nagorno-Karabakh group in the EP and suggested that the EPP distances itself publicly from the statements Mr Engel had made. Not doing so would threatened the relation of Azerbaijan with Europe, could support the escalation of tensions in the contact area of Nagorno-Karabakh, and could be seen as a signal of support for the violation of territorial integrity of other countries, he argued.

Eurasian Economic Union – Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh

- [Armenia’s accession has been finalised](#) and the country will be the part of the Eurasian Economic Union as soon as it launches on 1 January 2015, despite dropping (from 67% in April 2013 to 57% in 2014) domestic support for being a part of the union and, according to a [Gallup International Survey](#), 64% against the accession without Nagorno-Karabakh.

There are fears that membership in the bloc could exacerbate Armenia’s security challenges. There is particular concern about the consequences of the accession on Armenia’s relationship with Nagorno-Karabakh. An earlier draft this year implied that a customs post would be established between Armenia and Karabakh, which could not only paralyze Karabakh’s economy given its dependency on Armenian markets, but would also cut cultural ties with Karabakh, leaving both Armenia and Karabakh vulnerable to possible Azerbaijani aggression. Armenian officials have been [making promises](#) to consider all security concerns for both Armenia and Karabakh when deliberating membership, however, there is still no guarantee the outcome will not compromise either territory’s security.

At the same time, the Director of the Institute of CIS states [claimed](#) that Armenia’s affiliation to the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) would lead to the exclusion of a military solution to the Karabakh conflict, as Armenia would have closer relations to Russia and other EEU states.

To find out more about the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, please read HART’s most recent [visit report](#).

Brief history of the conflict

- The root of the conflict over the highly contested territory of Nagorno-Karabakh lies in a 1923 decision by Stalin that made Nagorno-Karabakh an autonomous enclave in Azerbaijan, despite the majority of population being Armenian.
- With the Soviet Union being in firm control, the conflict was not of significant intensity on the surface over most of the 20th century: Armenians and Azeris lived side by side in Nagorno-Karabakh, relatively peacefully.
- As the Soviet Union began to weaken, however, the unsolved conflict of identity and self-determination reappeared on the surface: In 1988 Karabakh Armenians organised demonstrations in Stepanakert and sent petitions for unification with Armenia, which found sympathy and support by Armenians in Yerevan.
- Shortly after this, the Karabakh Soviet of People's Representatives passed a resolution for transferring the region to Armenia. This was rejected by the Soviet Union and followed by a brutal reaction in Azerbaijan against Armenians.
- In 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and following a referendum boycotted by most Karabakh Azeris, the region was declared independent. This move led to full scale war between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the territory, which led to 20,000 people being killed, 60,000 being wounded and 1 million becoming refugees.
- During the conflict Armenians suffered a great deal: Azerbaijan carried out the deportation of entire Armenian villages, imposed cruel blockades of supplies in Nagorno-Karabakh, targeted civilians with GRAD multiple-missile rocket launchers, and mobilised aerial bombardments and ground-to-air missiles against the civilians of Nagorno-Karabakh, escalating the rate of casualties.
- In 1992 the OSCE set up a group of international mediators, the Minsk group, co-chaired by France, the USA and Russia, to prepare for a peace negotiation. A 1994, Russian brokered ceasefire largely brought an end to active hostilities, however, a formal peace agreement has still not been made.
- Nagorno-Karabakh is de facto independent, functioning as an independent country with strong support from Armenia, but is internationally still recognised as a part of Azerbaijan – which places severe limitations on its economic, political and social development.
- **The desire for independence was articulated clearly by Bishop Bagrat Galstranyan during HART's recent visit to the region: *"Our main desire is to have the free and independent rights of people who have chosen to live freely, so they can practice their faith and preserve their traditions."* *"Our entire history is the story of hope. It is in our blood."*** -[Bishop Bagrat Galstranyan](#)
- Many barriers still prevail to reaching an agreement and securing lasting peace. Politicians on all sides are entrenched in hostile rhetoric with little willingness to compromise ([Hopmann 2013:230](#)). The dilemma of reconciling the two widely recognised, but oft-conflicting norms of territorial integrity and self-determination is further complicated by shifting political relations among international actors, their pre-occupation with other international issues or having direct interests in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
- For more information and analysis on the conflict visit:
 - o <http://adst.org/2013/08/stalins-legacy-the-nagorno-karabakh-conflict/>
 - o http://www.mountainous-karabakh.org/book_16.html#.VEp3ilcjbFo
 - o <http://www.sais-jhu.edu/sites/default/files/CM%20Field%20Trip%20NK%20March%2029%20Final.pdf>
 - o <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/70341>