

Dubrovnik, 8 October 2011

Statement to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

by Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk,
Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office
on the Conflict dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference

The Co-chairs have provided you with an overview of recent developments in the conflict resolution process. I should like

- To complement that with a brief look at the mandate and activity of the Personal Representative; and
- To provide an update on the situation on the front lines, which this mandate uniquely affords me.

The OSCE Chairman-in-Office first appointed a Personal Representative in August 1995. I was appointed in July 1996 and have been reappointed by subsequent Chairmanships each year since then. I am supported by a team of five international staff, located in Baku, Yerevan and NK, and in our head office in Tbilisi – an arrangement on which the parties agreed following lengthy negotiation. Three members of staff, at present secondees from Bulgaria, Hungary and Lithuania, rotate between the first three of these locations on a monthly basis. International mission members from Hungary and the UK are based in Tbilisi.

The Personal Representative's mandate envisages three main areas of activity: support for the Chairman-in-Office and the Co-chairs; support to the parties; and reporting.

Support for the Chairman-in-Office and Co-chairs

The Personal Representative is, as you might expect, the eyes and ears of the Chairman-in-Office and the Co-chairs when they are not in the region. I meet regularly with representatives of the parties at the level of minister and head of state and endeavour to ensure that the Chairman-in-Office and Co-chairs have up-to-the minute information on the dynamics likely to have an impact on the negotiations.

In the case of the Co-chairs in particular, the Personal Representative is able to help with visits to the region. My team and I have facilitated six of these in the last year, including their field assessment mission a year ago – a week-long trip of more than 1,500km. Our monitoring activities have enabled me to lead the Co-chairs across the Line of Contact on two occasions in the last year.

Support to the parties

The mandate also envisages practical support for the sides. Perhaps the most important issue in this respect is support for confidence-building measures, including those which can mitigate mistrust, prejudice and hatred and so help all involved realise that peace is desirable and possible, and that compromises must be made to secure it; which can reduce the number of injuries and fatalities on the front lines; and which can improve the atmosphere in and surrounding the negotiations.

The mandate has allowed me, at one time or another, to facilitate political measures, such as visits by Armenian or Azerbaijani groups to Armenia, Azerbaijan and NK; military measures, such as support for communication between military officials; economic and environmental measures; and measures involving the media. More are surely needed. The presidents agreed on an additional measure at their meeting in Sochi in March, on which I shall touch in a moment.

In the meantime, the monitoring exercises conducted by my Office on the front lines remain the only sustained confidence-building measure in the military sphere. These exercises, which we conduct along more than 650km – the Line of Contact and two separate parts of the border – are only possible with the support and co-operation of the parties. My office, which is the sole international presence enjoying regular access to front lines, has conducted 16 monitoring exercises so far this year, and usually carries out two each month, thereby ensuring that the Chairmanship and Minsk Group members continue to receive information about the situation. Representatives of my office completed one such exercise on the Line of Contact four days ago. Since then, the sides have reported that three servicemen have been killed and two wounded in at least two separate incidents, on the border and on the Line of Contact. I have lodged requests with the Ministries of Defence in Baku and Yerevan to facilitate a monitoring exercise on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border on my return to the region next week, to the area of one of these reported incidents.

These exercises and, indeed, our field presence in general have other benefits, too. When serious incidents occur, I am in a position to convey to the Chairman-in-Office and the Co-chairs a fairly immediate picture of the situation and so help minimise the risk of escalation.

I should like to recall at this juncture the Co-chairs' reference to the agreement by the parties at the Sochi summit to pursue the possibility of investigations of potential incidents on the front lines. The sides have so far failed to develop this confidence-building measure. Yet, in light of recent reports of further casualties, its implementation has assumed a new urgency.

Progress in developing it will require the sides to overcome a number of challenges – just as they did in developing the monitoring process, which they have supported and in which they have participated for 15 years. The presidents have found the will for this latest initiative; we must work with them to find the way. The very process of working together to develop the mechanism will build confidence. Timely recourse to the mechanism, when properly established, will discourage violation of the ceasefire and mitigate the risks of reprisal and escalation associated with such incidents. As the presidents stipulated in Sochi, this mechanism will require the operational support of my office.

It may also be appropriate to touch here on humanitarian issues, which, when unresolved, not only cause misery to those directly concerned but all too often stoke resentment at a national level, feed tension on the front lines and have sometimes proved a serious stumbling block to progress in the negotiations, draining precious reserves of confidence.

My team and I are in close touch with representatives of the United Nations and other international organizations, such as the Red Cross, particularly in addressing shared humanitarian concerns such as the release of civilians, prisoners of war and dead bodies. I have been involved in one way or another in the handover of all detainees and dead bodies for the last 15 years, including in the series of handovers that took place following the presidents' agreements in Astrakhan and Sochi at meetings convened by President Medvedev.

At the end of last month, under the supervision of UNHCR, the sole remaining Azerbaijani serviceman in detention in Armenia was transferred to a third country. Three Armenian servicemen remain in detention in Azerbaijan, pending identification of a third country to which they may be released. A family of five, the father of which is under criminal investigation in Armenia, is also in Azerbaijan.

Reporting

Finally: reporting. As stipulated by the Personal Representative's mandate, I report on developments in the region and on our monitoring activities on a regular basis. Upon request, I also provide briefing for others with an interest in resolution of the conflict, including civil society organisations.

What, then, of the situation on the front lines this year? This has been stable for much of the last year. This is not to say that there has been no shooting or no casualties; there has been, however, no significant deterioration of the situation. Twenty people have been reported shot and killed on the front lines in the first nine months of this year; a further 36 have been reported shot and wounded. Three more have been reported killed and four wounded as the result of mine-related incidents or other explosive devices. Nine of these reported incidents have involved civilians. In comparison with the same period in 2010, the total number of those reported wounded is lower; the total number of those reported killed is much the same.

I hasten to add that, for now at least, I am unable to verify objectively the number or circumstances of reported casualties. When the investigatory mechanism mentioned earlier is in operation, I expect to be able to do this to a greater extent.

This, then, is an overview of the office of the Personal Representative, of its possibilities and limitations; and of the situation as seen from the unique perspective this office affords me.

Thank you for your attention.