

# U.S. Minsk Group Co-Chair Assesses State of NK Negotiations

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Matthew Bryza Interview with APA Washington Correspondent Zaur Hasanov

**- How fundamental are changes to the Madrid Principles which you, co-Chairs of Minsk Group have made in Krakow, Poland? Are there any new elements in the future status of NK, force withdrawal from occupied areas, international peacekeeping mission, etc?**

- We didn't make any fundamental changes. What we did was to listen very carefully in the course of all the time that has passed since November 2007, when we presented the Madrid Document. We assessed what each president has been saying, what their needs are in negotiations, and we came up with our best suggestions for how to bridge the differences that remain between the Presidents as a result of all those negotiations, which have actually brought them quite close. So these are not fundamental changes, they are not just cosmetic changes either. They're an attempt again to resolve the differences that remain after now 13 months of intensive negotiations between Presidents Aliyev and Sarkisyan. I won't go into the specific issues in which we made our updates, but what you just mentioned, those are the key elements of the framework that outlined by the Basic Principles. So, obviously, anything we do, any update could touch any of these core elements of the Basic Principles but I'd rather not go into the specifics of which ones.

**- Why do you think, after G8 summit in Italy, the White House's Press Office released information with the basic points of NK settlement, which was done for a first time by any Co-Chair country?**

- I don't think that there is any sense speculating why they did it. The point is that Presidents of the United States, France and Russia have publicly announced that they themselves support the Basic Principles that the Minsk Group Co-Chairs have been able to help the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia negotiate. That's the point; that our Presidents personally are engaged and support the efforts of the Minsk Group and asked us, the Co-Chairs to do just what we did in Krakow, right, which is to update the proposal that we have submitted in Madrid, based very respectfully on the conclusions and views of the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

**- Throughout your professional career you have been dealing with Nagorno-Karabakh issue, do you remember such high level involvement from the top leadership of Co-Chair countries in an attempt to solve the conflict?**

- I don't remember that. I am very proud we have been able to secure that high level of involvement. I do think it's going to have a big impact in helping us move things forward. I think the Presidents are showing that level of engagement because they see that we are doing our

work and we are doing it well. I mean we, all the parties of the Minsk Group, are making significant progress. As Azerbaijani TV announced today, the Basic Principles provide a fair outline for a settlement. So, there's been a lot of movement and we have entered a new phase in the Minsk Group process which means getting close to finalizing the Basic Principles. That, what I just said, is the significance of the Presidents' statement: they're personally involved, they see we're getting close to finalizing the Basic Principles and they want to encourage the parties to carry out the rest of the work and get to that end point..

**- At this moment, is there any sense to add the Azeri and Armenian communities of NK to the formal negotiations?**

- There can't be a settlement that will be lasting unless all of the views of all of the concerned parties are taken into account. So, obviously, the views of Karabakhi Armenians and Azerbaijanis need to be reflected in whatever is finally agreed, or the agreement won't succeed. So that has to happen. Now it happens now in an informal way, already, when the co-chairs spend so much time consulting Karabkahi Armenians in Karabakh. I look forward to renewing my consultations with the Karabakhi Azerbaijani community when I am next in Baku. And the question of formal participation at the negotiating table is one that has to be agreed between by both Baku and Yerevan. People should remember than until 1998, the Karabakhi Armenians were at the negotiating table but the former Government of Armenia decided that it would negotiate on behalf of the Karabakhi Armenians. So that was the decision Armenia took, and to change that decision there must be mutual agreement by both Baku and Yerevan. So I hope that will happen in a relatively short time. I can't predict when, but for now, what we have to do is wrap up the Basic Principles but to make sure that we do so in a way that reflects the views of Karabakh's current and former residents.

**- In Armenia, the criticism of the government is mounting. The opposition is accusing the government on "unilateral concessions" to Azerbaijan. Did you witness something like that in the sequence of Presidents' meetings?**

- The quality of the discussion ensued in Moscow was better than any I have experienced to date. The Presidents were detailed and candid with each other, and I'd even say constructive. They are really looking for ways to bridge their differences, but that doesn't mean that they're being soft. The criticism, particularly in Armenia, that President Sarkisian or Foreign Minister Nalbandian are somehow making unilateral concessions, is ridiculous. I think that probably president Aliyev would love it if there were such unilateral concessions. But that's not how real negotiations works in real life. These are real negotiations that again have entered a new phase in terms of their intensity and level of give and take. But if you are going to give in negotiations you expect to take something in return. So this is give and take – there are no unilateral concessions.

**- Could you give us a percentage estimate on how many points of the Basic Principles are parties agreed and what is left?**

- I can't convey that sort of assessment, and that's not where we are anyway. What I can say is, number one, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. So I can't say what percentage has been agreed, because the way it works is like this: I want A ;and to get A, you want B from me. If I give you B, well you're going to want C. If I give you C, well then I want something else out of A. So you know, you negotiate a way forward. But then you have to go back sometimes to reconsider which was already partially agreed before. So, all the issues are interacting, they're all interrelated... Therefore, sometimes you have to move centimeter by centimeter, and that's what we have tried to do through our work in Krakow. [approximate]

So, to put it a different way, the Basic Principles, which provide the framework for a peace agreement, as reflected in the fact sheet issued with the joint statement by our Presidents, our co-chair presidents, I think, is more or less accepted by both President Aliyev and Sargsian. This is an outline that they more or less accept.. But to say that we absolutely agree, we will need to keep on going back and filling in the details of one issue, and then going back to fill in the details of another issue. But all the Basic Principles, just about all of them, in fact all of them, are agreed in a fundamental way. But the details require still some work.

**- On Turkey-Armenian rapprochement, you have said many times that those two separate process and they have to move parallel. But as it seems it doesn't work in this way.**

- It is not for me to answer why, Turkey is not moving forward or why Armenia is not. There was a "Road Map" with a timetable and a general sense of when steps need to take place. All I can say is that it's the policy of the U.S. Government to say we hope that that timetable will resume and the parties will begin moving forward again on the basis of that timetable even though some of the specific dates have already passed.

And we think that this sort of development will end up being very good for everybody in the region: for Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia and for Georgia as well. But it wouldn't be useful for me to speculate why Turkey and Armenia haven't moved further ahead because the U.S. is not a party to this agreement.

But I have talked about how these are separate processes. They are. And As one moves forward, we believe that the other process will then exist in a climate where the mood is better, where tension is lower; and that process can then also move forward.

**- Another speculation is your expected nomination as an Ambassador to Azerbaijan. Many in Azerbaijan will be glad to see you in this position.**

- Well first of all, thank you so much for that very nice statement saying that people in Azerbaijan would like what you said. That really makes me feel good. I don't know what exactly is going to be next for me. That really depends on our Secretary of State and the President. I will have a new assignment soon. And, as I've said before, I very much hope it will keep me connected to the South Caucasus. But I can't really comment on what is going to be. It's not my decision. I just have to be patient. And I am not done yet with the Minsk Group. I plan to come

to the region on behalf of all three Co-Chairs, by myself, in about a week and a half or so and try to pick up on our success in Krakow in coming up with the updated ideas of the Madrid Document, which we hope will lay the foundation for an agreement soon.