



Center for Strategic & International Studies
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The Nagorno Karabakh Peace Process

Ashot Ghoulian
Chief Foreign Affairs Representative of Nagorno Karabakh

Russia and Eurasia Program
Caucasus Initiative

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On October 19, 2004, the CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program Caucasus Initiative hosted a seminar with the chief foreign affairs representative of Nagorno Karabakh, Ashot Ghoulian. The seminar was moderated by Dr. Cory Welt.

Ghoulian emphasized that resolving the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is critical for achieving stability in the South Caucasus. He acknowledged U.S. policymakers' concerns about instability in the region but asserted that Nagorno Karabakh seeks to establish normal relations with Azerbaijan as an independent state—not as part of Azerbaijan. Ghoulian also clarified in discussion that while unification with Armenia remains a “final” goal for Nagorno Karabakh, independence is a more realistic objective. Ghoulian also observed that the idea of a “common state” unifying Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh in a confederation is no longer a feasible one.

Ghoulian utilized both Azerbaijani and Soviet legislation to justify Nagorno-Karabakh's claim for independence. Ghoulian noted that when Azerbaijan declared its independence from the USSR in 1991, it did so as a successor to the independent Azerbaijani state of 1918-1920. Ghoulian asserted that at that time Nagorno Karabakh was a disputed territory and was not internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan. Thus, according to Ghoulian, Nagorno Karabakh's September 1991 declaration of independence did not contradict Azerbaijan's own declaration re-establishing independence on the basis of its earlier territorial boundaries.

In addition, Ghoulian noted that Nagorno Karabakh's declaration of independence was supported by a popular referendum conducted on the basis of Soviet law. This law [passed in 1990] allowed that should a republic such as Azerbaijan decide to leave the Soviet Union, autonomous entities and compactly settled national minorities, such as the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region and adjacent Armenian-populated districts, would have a right to decide their own political status via a referendum.

Ghoulian then discussed the peace process. Asserting that the subordination of Nagorno Karabakh to Azerbaijan was impossible, he bemoaned Azerbaijan's

renunciation of principles allegedly established in earlier rounds of talks, an increase in militaristic rhetoric within Azerbaijan, and a lack of direct representation for Nagorno Karabakh in negotiations. He asserted that negotiations will only be effective if Azerbaijan recognizes Nagorno Karabakh as a full participant to the talks.

Ghouljian noted democratic developments in Nagorno Karabagh, including competitive legislative and executive elections and civilian control over the military. He indicated Nagorno Karabagh's achievements in reforming its economy, its effective use of humanitarian assistance, and increased levels of foreign investment. He also mentioned Nagorno Karabagh's efforts to implement confidence-building measures, including the sharing of water resources, which have been rejected by Azerbaijan.

Throughout his presentation, Ghouljian emphasized the valuable and much appreciated role of foreign governments and international organizations in producing stability in the region, as well as a successful resolution to the longstanding conflict.