

# The Istanbul Summit

Fifty-Four Nations Discuss Regional Security and Conflicts



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By HRATCH TCHILINGIRIAN

**T**he much touted European security summit of the 54-nation Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was held in Istanbul in late November. President Robert Kocharian headed an Armenian delegation to the summit, where member heads of states and governments adopted a new Charter for European Security and a revised Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE).

For a few days during the summit, Istanbul turned into a diplomatic bazaar. On the sidelines of the gathering, numerous bilateral and multilateral diplomatic, security,

strategic and economic deals were made among various states. Most notable were the signing of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline agreement to transport Caspian oil to Turkey's Mediterranean seaport – without traversing either Russia or Iran – and the Russian-Georgian agreement whereby Russia would reduce or redeploy its weaponry in Georgia. The increasing US role in the region, too, was apparent.

President Kocharian met with several leaders, including US President Bill Clinton, French President Jacques Chirac and Turkish President Suleyman Demirel, and discussed

both regional and bilateral issues.

The 48-point Istanbul Summit Declaration made official statements on several major conflicts in the "OSCE area." In addition to noting the "humanitarian situation" in Kosovo, the "democratic shortcomings" in the former Yugoslavia, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the conflicts in Georgia, Moldova and especially Chechnya, the OSCE summit "applauded" developments toward the resolution of the Karabakh conflict.

The declaration stated: "We applaud in particular the intensified dialogue between the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan,

whose regular contacts have created opportunities to dynamize the process of finding a lasting and comprehensive solution to the problem. We firmly support this dialogue and encourage its continuation, with the hope of resuming negotiations within the OSCE Minsk Group. We also confirm that the OSCE and its Minsk group, which remains the most appropriate format for finding a solution, stand ready to further advance the peace process and its future implementation, including by providing all necessary assistance to the parties."

This was a far cry from the OSCE Lisbon summit in December 1996, where all reference to the Karabakh dispute was removed from the final document but where Azerbaijan's demands were included in a separate statement, drawn up despite Armenia's objections. The statement of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, attached as an annex to the Lisbon summit declaration, stated that a) the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan is inviolable; b) the legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh will be defined in an agreement based on self-determination, conferring on Nagorno-Karabakh the highest degree of self-rule within Azerbaijan; and c) the security of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh will be guaranteed, including mutual obligations to ensure compliance by all parties with the provisions of the settlement. Armenia rejected this on the grounds that the OSCE Chairman's statement, in effect, determined the outcome of negotiations, before such negotiations had even begun.

But, speaking about the Istanbul summit, President Kocharian declared, "I think that the bad consequences of the Lisbon summit have been corrected. I think it was a diplomatic success which allows us to make rather serious steps towards the resolution of the Karabakh conflict."

While the assassination of Armenia's top political leadership on October 27 set the negotiations process back, the OSCE Minsk Group's Russian, French and American co-chairmen will visit the region again by the end of this year in an effort to provide fresh impetus to the peace process. Foreign

Minister Vartan Oskanian said that the co-chairmen will not discuss "concrete peace proposals," but will "reassess the situation and look for ways to continue the Armenian-Azerbaijani dialogue." Since 1992, the OSCE has sponsored over two dozen different negotiation sessions among the parties to the conflict, but so far, the oldest conflict in the former Soviet Union remains unresolved.

New in Armenia's foreign policy was President Robert Kocharian call for the creation of a South Caucasus security system. "The present treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe does not appear to be sufficient in resolving the existing security problems in our sensitive and complex region," said Kocharian. "It is therefore necessary to devise a regional security system for the South Caucasus, in the wider system of pan

in flank regions, rather than the bloc-to-bloc limits agreed between NATO and the former Warsaw Pact. "The adapted Treaty will provide a greater degree of military stability... increased transparency and a lower level of conventional armed forces in its area of application," stated the summit's final declaration.

Nevertheless, regional stability is built on "normal" bilateral and growing multilateral diplomatic and security cooperation. Referring to Armenian-Turkish relations, which has been "hostage" to the resolution of the Karabakh conflict and the two nations' history, President Kocharian made a momentous statement to the world leaders gathered in Istanbul. "We are well aware that the evolution of regional stability and cooperation in the South Caucasus is not possible without having Armenian Turkish relations enter a phase. Our mutual willingness to open a new page in these relations cannot be based on selective memory and amnesia. We cannot forget the sad chapter of our nation's history and the trauma of the Genocide. But we are not willing to hold the evolution of our relations captive to contentious interpretations. We must search for the formula with which the problem can be resolved



Opposite page: President Robert Kocharian addressing the OSCE Summit. Above, left to right: Azerbaijani President Heidar Aliyev, Armenian President Robert Kocharian, US President Bill Clinton and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

European security, which will engage all the parties concerned and primarily those in the region itself. Today, it is our collective challenge to transform the Caucasus from a region of conflicting armies and senseless terrorism to an economic crossroad of peace and prosperity," he added.

Azerbaijani President Heidar Aliyev made a similar proposal. The security system would involve Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, plus regional players Turkey, Russia, and the US, Aliyev said and added that under such security arrangements all foreign troops should be withdrawn from the region. However, such a prospect leaves the issue of existing Russian military bases in Armenia in contention.

The landmark CFE treaty updates the armed forces and artillery equipment limits which were set in the final days of the Cold War in 1990. The treaty is designed to eliminate the risk of surprise attacks in Europe by setting national ceilings, with sub-limits

and we must therefore be able to discuss the underlying issues."

But, after his meeting with Kocharian, Turkish President Demirel reiterated the long-standing policy of successive Turkish governments that the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the two states depends on the resolution of the Karabakh conflict.

While official Turkish policy has not changed much in recent years, it remains to be seen whether increased US "engagement" in normalizing Armenian-Turkish relations will bear fruit in the coming year.

After three years of diplomatic effort toward political recovery subsequent to the Lisbon Summit – and despite the national tragedy in October – Armenia scored high marks in Istanbul.

More diplomatic challenges are ahead for Armenia in the new year, both concerning the resolution of the Karabakh conflict and with regards to Armenia's place and role in regional development. ■